Royal Affairs

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Summary

The Clone Wars have stretched on far too long, and both sides are eager to see an end to the violence and the start of a new time of peace across the galaxy. Despite those who would sabotage any attempts to end the war in the name of their own personal gain, peace negotiations finally bore fruit and the end of the war is finally within reach. In order to cement the end of the war, terms of a set of arranged marriages between key Republic planets and key Separatist planet royalty. Among them, Queen Padmé Amidala of Naboo is arranged to be married to Prince Anakin Skywalker of Mustafar, adopted son of the Mustafarian King. However, when the prince arrives to meet his future wife for the first time, it is a member of her royal guard that captures his heart’s attention.

Notes

Disclaimer: We do not own any recognizable characters, we only explore the possibilities.
The war was growing to be too extensive to continue on any longer. It seemed foolish to keep on fighting, yet still there was conflict. The galaxy was growing tired of the war, yet no one seemed to want to stop. It was all anger, hate, and rage that fueled the fighting more. It seemed there was nothing that could be done to stop it for good. No amount of effort towards ending the war went noticed by most parties of both sides. It was a disaster, as the war had spread like a virus through the entire galaxy and had blinded the minds of those who fought. It was a terrible circumstance to be put in.

Despite the failed efforts in the past, there were still a few who wanted no more war. These few gathered together and negotiated, trying to suggest ways to bring peace. Their leaders seemed to agree on most things, but the others that had joined in were not so easily agreeable. It looked like a private meeting was needed between the leaders, and it was at a private meeting that they came to an agreement.

Senators for key planets on both sides met on a neutral planet to negotiate terms of peace. Important points each side insisted upon seeing through to the end being addressed and worked into a treaty. However, it had become apparent to those at the meeting to represent their planets that they all had a common enemy when it came to peace. There were groups and individuals who were profiting from the war and they wouldn't let any hope of peace take root before. They needed a way to work around those people, set up a way to ensure peace and keep those who would sabotage their attempts at bay.

After the initial discussions and a short recess so that each politician could contact their home planets to update and discuss their willingness of the proposal, they gathered once more to confirm which of their planets' monarchies would be participating to ensure peace between the war-torn galaxy.

With each participant known, they began to assign the political unions between planets, and which would travel to which. Among them, it was decided that one of the princes of Mustafar would be chosen to travel to Naboo where he would marry the Queen.

The prince to be chosen was an adopted one. He was handsome, popular with the ladies, and caring, all qualities that a future king would need. It was no surprise when he was chosen to be the one to marry the queen of Naboo.

However, he had yet to learn of the news. He was simply enjoying his day on Mustafar, looking out at the boiling hot magma that flowed in rivers past his home. The castle was elaborate, dark, almost threatening, but that was almost to be expected from the palace of a Separatist king. Appearance was power, and with the show that the castle on Mustafar put on, the kingdom was very powerful and very rich. It would have been foolhardy not to accept gifts that were given from the king of Mustafar.

Anakin Skywalker, Prince of Mustafar, sighed as he looked out the window of his personal chambers. It was a day like any other day. Sitting around, looking handsome, and pulling out the charm when necessary. It was all the same to him. Same routine. Same day-to-day business. Never changing. Always standing.

The door opened and his mother slipped inside. Her son was from before her own marriage to the king, and they were both quite human, which made them stand out wherever they went inside, and out of the castle. But they had a good life, and the king was very fond of the woman he took as his wife—and her son, raising him as his own among all his other sons. But unlike them, he was not eligible to become the Mustafarian King once it was time to pass on the crown. In that aspect, it
was easy to choose the son to send to Naboo—and Shmi understood that. But still, she would be seeing her son go, unknowing on when they would be reunited again.

"Ani." She walked over to her son, placing her hand upon his shoulder.

Anakin turned to his mother and smiled. “Hello, Mom. Is everything alright?”

"Of course," she smiled and moved to lean in the window next to him, "But something has happened."

“Something happened?” Anakin tilted his head slightly, his silver crown gleaming in the light of the magma.

"With the war." She nodded, taking her son's hands in her own, "They are trying to negotiate peace—to bring an end to all this fighting. But…it involves you."

"How does it involve me? I've only fought in one battle. I'm insignificant in this war."

"Not anymore." She sighed and led him over to sit on the edge of his bed, "Your father has chosen you from among all your step-brothers to carry out a very important political mission."

"He knows I don't like politics. Why has he chosen me?" Anakin sat down beside his mother with a worried look.

"Because you are his son—but not by blood. You are not eligible to become king—here." She sighed again, "You're being sent to Naboo where you are to ensure that the peace treaty will be cemented in place by doing your part. Many will be doing the same all over the galaxy."

Anakin's eyes widened. "I'm being put into an arranged marriage?!"

His mother nodded, "With the Queen of Naboo."

"Do I at least have time to get to know her before I marry her?" Anakin never liked the idea of arranged marriages. He honestly hated them, yet here he was, being forced to stare one in the face.

"The date is not set, so you will have time to travel and get to know her. I hope you will find love, regardless of how your marriage has come about."

Anakin fell silent, having mixed feelings about him being thrust into a marriage that he didn’t want. However, he was glad that if he was being forced to go through with it, at least he was given time to get to know the Queen. And who knew? Maybe he would fall for her, and the marriage would be a happy one.

“Are you going to come with me, Mom?”

She shook her head, "My place is here."

“But Mom, I have no idea what I’m even doing! Yeah, I’m twenty-three years old, technically an adult, but I’ve never been in a romantic relationship before, let alone be involved with anyone royal from another system. I’m going to fall flat on my face if I don’t have you with me.” Anakin grabbed his mother’s hands and squeezed them.

"Just be your usual, charming self and you'll be fine. If this works and the war ends, I'll be able to travel to visit you."

“So I’ll be staying on Naboo? No returns back home to Mustafar before the wedding?” He looked
out the window at the fiery planet he had called home.

"Naboo will be your home, just like Mustafar became mine when your father made me his bride." She nodded before pulling him into a hug, "But this will also always be your home. When the war is over and there is peace—you will be able to return for visits, just as I will be able to visit you."

Anakin’s gaze never left the window. “When am I to leave for Naboo?”

"…Tomorrow morning…"

“I should pack then.” He stood up with a sigh. “I have a long trip to make tomorrow."

She nodded, "I will miss you."

There was a sadness in Anakin’s eyes that had not shone before. Loneliness. “I’ll miss you too, Mom…”

She stood up and cupped his cheek, "You'll be fine, I know it." She smiled before planting a caring kiss to his forehead.

“I hope you’re right. I’m not quite sure I can go through with this. I mean, it’s an arranged marriage. You know how against those I am. They make me uncomfortable. I feel like I’m being turned into a slave…”

"I'm sorry…you know I have always just wanted you to be happy, but…sometimes sacrifices must be made, and this is yours if the war is to see its end."

“I’ll do what I have to, as a duty to the kingdom and to the galaxy. We have been stuck in war for far too long. I want this to end."

"You're a good boy, Ani." His mother approved, standing up. "I'll leave you to start packing, and I'll see you at supper."

Anakin nodded as he moved closer to his wardrobe. He had to do this for the sake of his people, and for his mother. He would never want any harm to come to her, so he was going to go through with the marriage for her. If that was his only reasoning for doing it, then so be it. He didn’t want to do it, but he would for his mother.

Her grandmother used to preach that life was unexpected and one always had to be prepared.

"Roll with the punches, Padmé.” she used to say. "It may be a burden, but it's what you're given."

*If only that were true Grandma*, Padmé thought woefully to herself, staring out at the sparkling Naboo sea outside her balcony. At twenty seven years old, she’d had more than enough rocks thrown at her by life’s hand, some harder than most. The death of her parents at fourteen, spurring her into becoming Queen at too early an age, was by far the worst. However, with the news she’d gotten only the night before and with little time to prepare, she felt it may come up close with a tie-breaker.

"Marriage." Sabé had said, her best friend’s face anxious as she delivered the unsightly news. Padmé had stared at her and laughed out loud.
"Sabé," she breathed between chortles, "I don't believe I heard you right. Did you say-"

"Marriage, yes." Sabé's crestfallen face was too much to handle. Too much considering the days and nights they'd spent together, curled up on the sands of the beach with no one but the stars above to keep them company, and each other's eyes to say more than words ever would. Padmé felt her breath hitch and her world crumble all at once. The next bark of laughter was brittle and she all but dismissed her handmaiden without another word for the rest of the night.

Marriage; the word brought an ill feeling to Padmé's stomach. It wasn't as if she blamed Sabé - this was hardly her fault, and no doubt the other woman shared her shattered heart, never mind that Padmé rudely sent her away on what would have been a final night between friends. But the truth remained that her world was changing and there was little she could say or do about it aside from refrain tears and screams and curse the galaxy as a whole for leaving her with such a fate.

It wasn't as if she hated her husband-to-be either. Quite the opposite; she hadn't met the man yet, and therefore had no grounds upon which to hate him. Frankly, she told herself in attempted optimism, he could actually be rather charming and handsome. Though not to say that looks and a smooth personality made for a wonderful spouse - she knew many marriages where the one person perfect the image of polite and poised but later revealed to be ravaged, ruthless monsters. Hellish divorces led to some ugly faces being lifted from pretty masks, and more than she would like to admit she'd seen someone go completely insane and become an animal over possession.

And to be truthful, that is what frightened the twenty-seven year old Queen of Naboo the most.

There was a polite knock at the door, followed by a pause waiting for permission to enter the private chambers of the young queen.

Without moving, Padmé called out. "Enter."

The door opened and one of her royal guards stepped just inside the door respectfully. With a bow of his head, he spoke with a strong, authorities voice, "My Queen, the Mustafarian ship is arriving. I am here to escort you to greet it."

Padmé resisted the temptation to scowl, instead slowly rising to her feet and brushing the skirt of her dress off. "Very well. As you were, Captain."

The redheaded man allowed himself to relax his posture as she approached, and he held out his arm for her.

She took it, staring up at him with dull, unfeeling eyes. Here it was - the moment where everything changed. Life itself, as she knew it, would never be the same. It was with all her hope that it would be smooth sailing.

He looked at her and sighed, "I'm sure the Prince will be a very kind man." He tried to comfort her.

"So I have been told." she chose her words carefully, keeping a political front to hide her insecurities.

He fell silent, not wanting to upset her as it seemed she was already on edge. Guiding her, they arrived at the landing platform just as the large ship touched down. It then opened and a line of Separatist battle droids marched out, clearly as a safety precaution for the prince who followed them and then walked down the line of droids towards those gathered to greet his arrival.

The Captain of the guard withdrew from his Queen's side and stepped forward with a small bow, "Greetings, Highness. May I present, her highness, Queen of Naboo; Padmé Amidala."

The prince stopped before the queen and bowed deeply. “It is my honor to be in the presence of your majesty. I am Prince Anakin Skywalker of Mustafar.”

Anakin stood upright, his navy colored cloak hanging gracefully off his body. Many dark colors were incorporated into his outfit, but a nice balance of white was also added in for contrast. His hair was slicked back, save for one stubborn strand of hair that popped out form the bottom of his crown over his forehead.

Padmé, similarly, was decked out in ornate clothes and gems, the white make up of her face contrasting with the red of her dress. Her crown, as it could be called, sat a headdress upon her put-up hair, giving her the overall appearance of a goddess rather than a queen. Even so, she was beautiful, though the neutral look upon her face as she bowed and regarded her future husband with boredom ruined the magnificence of her image.

Anakin cleared his throat before he spoke again. “It seems that we are to be wed in the near future. I’m glad to have this time to get to know you a little before the ceremony.” The prince’s gaze wandered from the queen to her guard, and Anakin had to do a very small double-take. He hoped it wasn’t too noticeable, but he had not expected to have been graced by the presences of both the queen and her guard. He was rather surprised, if that was the description of the feeling he suddenly had. He wasn’t entirely sure what he felt at that moment.

If Padmé noticed the interaction, she gave no indication of it. Instead, she merely dipped her head to Anakin, reluctantly holding out her arm to him. “Shall we then?”

Anakin nodded and cradled her arm, leading her away so they could take a walk together. Before the guard was out of his sight, he gave one last glance, hoping that the guard would look back with those eyes. Oh, those eyes were glorious at only a glance. Were they just as breathtaking when full attention was given to them?

The guard moved to the side to allow the two royals to lead the way, glancing at the number of battle droids by the ship. It made him uneasy to have so many standing freely so close to the palace, but there wasn’t much he could do, and he had a few guards in the area should they try anything. So, without a word, he turned to follow Padmé and Anakin. That’s when it caught his attention; how the prince was looking at him, and for a moment, their gazes locked. It threw the guard off if only for a moment before he tore his gaze away by closing his light blue eyes and fell into step behind his queen.

Padmé showed Anakin around the small vacation house - small being a loose term, the place was enormous - pointing out various pieces of art and artifacts that the Naboo government had collected over the years from various partnerships and good relations with fellow planets and systems. In the corner of her eye, she could see her guard following behind them, and Sabé watching from around the corner even further down. The hurt look in her eyes, though well hidden, were enough to make Padmé swallow uncomfortably.

Anakin’s heart beat rapidly in his chest, his mouth going dry and his tongue locking up in his mouth. He only hoped that when he was able to speak again that it wouldn’t come out with a crack. His life would end right then and there if it did.

“You have a nice place,” the prince commented, silently thanking the universe for being kind to him in that moment.

The guard suppressed a sigh; the atmosphere was getting increasingly awkward, and he felt an anxious need to try to ease the situation. "And what of your home on Mustafar? I have never been there, are there many humans? I had the impression that it's a very unforgiving climate that
disagrees with many races."

“My mother and I are the only humans. We were introduced to royalty by marriage.” Anakin shrugged. “I’ve lived with the heat and fire of Mustafar for most of my life. It’s a little comforting after you get used to it. I find that most places are cold compared to my home.”

"We’ll see what we can do about at least warming your chambers to be a little more comfortable while you adjust to Naboo." The guard nodded, taking note to speak with those who were preparing Anakin's room.

“I would appreciate that, thank you.” Anakin smiled at the guard, making a mental note to get his name before the next time they met.

Padmé kept quiet, letting the two speak while she busied herself with sorting out her own thoughts. This was no time to be conflicted, she scolded her fickle heart, not when their entire system was at stake and peace rested on the shoulders of her and her new marriage. Even so, she sent a small quick apologetic glance back to Sabé, memorizing as much of her face as she could in that single moment.

"If you need anything, please just ask. We will do what we can to make you feel comfortable." The guard promised.

"That will do Obi-Wan." Padmé interjected lightly, nodding to her guard. "Anakin and I have many things to discuss before the wedding. If you please, Captain."

"Of course, my Queen." The guard, now known to Anakin as Obi-Wan, bowed, his heels clicking as he did so before turning to leave the two alone.

He sighed as he rounded the corner, losing his professional stance as he slumped his shoulders and rubbed his eyes, wondering why he got such a strange, fluttery feeling in his stomach every time the Prince looked him in the eye. Maybe he needed to eat. He had been busy all morning and hadn't had the chance to take lunch.

Looking up, he spotted Sabé, and he blinked at her and how out of place she was in that area of the palace. Taking the distraction, he smiled at her, "Would you join me for lunch, milady?"

Sabé looked up at the man, her reddened eyes wavering nervously. But when she sensed no hostility from Obi-Wan, she smiled and took the offered hand. "I would love to, thanks."

Ever the gentleman, Obi-Wan escorted her towards the common dining hall.

Meanwhile, back down the hall, Padmé continued with the tour, slowly leading her betrothed to her - their, a small voice reminded her grimly - private dining room. She didn't use it often, resorting to only business meetings and important dinners to even step foot in the room. Instead she often ate in the normal - and still elaborate - dining hall, often with Sabé or her other handmaidens. Even thinking about it now, reminded that she would no longer have that opportunity to sneak away and enjoy a nice simple meal with her friends broke her heart and left her gulping against frustrated tears.

Anakin looked around the room with wide, curious eyes. One could say he still had the heart of a
“Child, being easily excited over small things, so the grand room was a large excitement for him. It was clear by the smile on his face. Naboo was so different that Mustafar. On Mustafar everything was dark, black, and hot. But on Naboo, it was quite the opposite; light, cool, and pleasing to one’s mind. Anakin only wished he could take a piece of Naboo back to his mother on Mustafar.

“I’m continually impressed by this place,” he commented. “The atmosphere is so much more inviting than back at home.”

"This isn’t our home." Padmé corrected him gently. "This is the vacation house. Tomorrow we will be traveling to Theed Palace. That’s where we’re living."

“Then it must be grander than this place. I honestly don’t think I can comprehend anything finer than this.” Anakin looked at Padmé with a smile. “I’ll be looking forward to it.”

"I hope it will suit your expectations." Padmé returned the smile, moving to take a seat at the table. "I wasn't certain what you would prefer, so I allowed the chefs to make up the courses."

“I’m not picky. Food is food to me. Especially on Mustafar.” The prince allowed himself to laugh in an attempt to feel comfortable around the queen of Naboo.

Padmé offered another weak smile, pushing herself into the table. "Then I will assume you won't be disappointed. We have the finest cooks in Naboo here with us. I had them accompany me from Theed."

“It sounds like I won’t go hungry.” Anakin sat down and leaned against the table in a rather unprincely manner. At least if anyone was being honest, he wasn’t born into royalty. He didn’t have to act like he was all the time.

Padmé held back a blink of surprise, focusing instead on the Prince's face. He was quite handsome, she had to admit. A sharp face with a cleft chin, sky blue eyes and wavy brown locks of hair, he was the type of man she'd expect to see on the cover of holozines and billboards. But aside from looks, she was mildly surprised more to find his attitude very lax, even a tad too friendly for someone born of royalty. At least, she assumed he was, as she hadn't paid much mind to his conversation with her guard.

Anakin returned to gazing around the room. Truth be told, he wasn’t actually focusing on anything in the room. His mind was far away from that room, far away from his betrothed. No, his mind was wandering back to Obi-Wan, the guard who had accompanied Padmé. If Anakin was being truthful to himself, had would have had to say he was more impressed with the guard than the queen. He hated to admit it, but it was true. For the first time in his life, he considered doing something that was against what he was supposed to do. And in his case, in his position, that wasn’t the best thing for him to be considering.

Obi-Wan leaned back in his chair, absently playing with his plate of food as he found himself thinking back to the arrival of Prince Anakin. Not to the battle droids now stationed nearby as a potential threat should things go bad, but to the Prince himself. The handsome young man he would be serving and protecting along with his Queen from that day on. He hadn't known what to expect from a Separatist Prince, but Anakin seemed a lot more relaxed and kind than he had assumed. But then again, the only Separatists he had come across before had been droids which
were programmed only to follow orders.

Across from him, Sabé was quietly picking away at her food without really eating anything. It was a big moment, and she was proud for Padmé, but also sad. Sad because Padmé's life was changing without her control or say, to the point where Sabé wondered if it would really be her life anymore. She knew how Padmé felt about the marriage, and tried to keep a stiff upper beak for her friend's sake, but nothing could withhold the shared feeling of disappointment she shared with her Queen.

Obi-Wan glanced across at his companion, "You seem distracted."

"Hm?" Sabe's small noise was little more than a gesture of acknowledgement to the Royal Guard Captain than an answer, eyes still glued to her plate.

"Is there something on your mind?"

"I... No, nothing in particular." Sabe sighed, burying her feelings and finally beginning to actually eat. "I'm just distracted today."

"Are you worried for the Queen? I know you two are very close, and having her alone with a Separatist is a bit…nerve-racking to say the least."

"I am a tad worried, yes. Her Majesty is... concerned about the marriage. I cannot say I blame her."

"I would not, either, but to end the war…" Obi-Wan shook his head, knowing that just about everyone would do whatever they could to bring back peace. "But the Prince seems to be a decent young man. My first impression of him tells me he will treat her right, even if they do not find love in this union."

Sabé could only nod, words failing to form as the familiar sinking feeling welled up in her stomach and her appetite was quickly lost again. Sighing, she pushed her plate away, shifting out of her seat.

"Thank you for the meal, Captain. Forgive me; I have many things to attend to."

She bowed briefly before turning and swiftly exiting the dining hall, her gait slightly shaky.

Obi-Wan watched her leave and sighed, turning back to his own meal. "...As do I..."

To be continued…
That evening Padmé retired to her chambers a little early, eager to relax and be just Padmé rather than Queen Amidala. With her makeup and fineries removed, hair down, and just out of a warm, scented bath, most of her handmaidens had left her to herself for the rest of the night—all but one. Sabé sat in the window, looking out over the water and forests as Padmé stepped out of her private bath. She didn't move when she heard the queen enter, not even to look over at her or give a respectful bow of her head. Instead, her brown eyes stayed fixed upon the view outside the window.

Dressed down in a fine silk nightgown, the lace fiddled between her fingers in slight nervousness, Padmé quietly came up behind her most trusted friend.

"Sabé?" she inquired softly, reaching out to touch the other woman on the shoulder. "Is something the matter?"

"I hate him," she muttered, her own hand moving to cover Padmé's, "I can't help but hate him, even if I have not met him…"

Padmé repressed a sigh, moving to sit opposite Sabé on the windowsill. "He... isn't that bad. Charming and even handsome... but he is strange. A strange young man. I don't think I'll be getting used to him any time soon."

At her friend's crestfallen look, she gave a weak smile and touched Sabé's knee.

"We are victims to our fate and role in life, Sabé. You know this well."

"Doesn't make it easy." She shook her head, "I wish we could take fate into our own hands…"

"It cannot be helped." Padmé echoed her with a sigh of her own again, glancing out the window at the sea. The calm water barely rippled in the night, undisturbed by any intruding pebble breaking the surface or fish bursting from below, changing serene to chaos. She envied it, the unbothered waters, and wished for her own freedom to be as attainable.

While the sea slept, she would lie awake that night, staring up at a blank ceiling giving her no answers to questions she couldn't bring herself to ask (for they were taboo). Instead of dreams, awake nightmares would gallop around her head, trampling over her nerves and dragging her helplessly about as she struggled to grab the wild horses' reins and pull herself upright in this newfound life she'd been –'blessed' with. A husband could offer his hand and tame the beasts, but she worried it was his hand who sent them wild in the first place.

"I know, but even for a moment—!" Sabé reached out a familiar hand, touching Padmé's soft cheek and letting her fingers caress the Queen's jaw. Only behind doors did she ever dare to touch the Queen in such a way, to give in to her secret desires to touch and hold what was forbidden.

Padmé closed her eyes, warmth spreading from the tips of Sabé's fingers upon her soft skin, sending a spark of pleasure down her spine. In the privacy of her room, where no eyes could see, she allowed herself this privilege. To let loose and drown in the ocean of emotion that drifted between Sabé and her. She refused to swim, to tread the waters. Instead, she sank willingly, letting the mermaid before her - a siren of beauty - drag her down and hold her until her breath was all but
extinguished and numbness took hold of her limbs, leaving her limp as a jellyfish.

Outside, the sea continued to sleep.

"Padmé," Sabé whispered, leaning in closer, her eyes fully focused on the beauty before her, "does this Prince have to end so much? Even our secret? Is it wrong of me to wish that we keep this one pleasure we have shared behind locked doors for so long?"

Her pink lips brushed over Padmé's, silently begging for permission to keep their relationship as it was before Padmé's marriage was arranged.

Padmé wanted to - damn all the Heavens, she want to - but knew her want was a miniscule over her duty. So, instead of lips, she twisted heavily heartedly out of the way and pecked Sabé's cheek.

"For tonight." she whispered into her ear. "If only for tonight, please be mine..."

"I'll always be yours." Sabé whispered back, her hands sliding down the silk sleeves covering Padmé's arms.

Padmé shivered, carefully drawing her most trusted, most precious, friend into her arms. And held her, tight and close, because she knew when she let go, it would be forever. So she kept her hands on her, never once letting go, for the eternity for the night.

Before they knew it, they were on the bed, Sabé looking down at Padmé. It didn't need to be said; she knew Padmé understood that after that night together, she would not come to Padmé again, but should Padmé call for her—no matter when or where, she would be there to hold her close once more—to share her bed once more.

They both knew that this day would come, the day they would have to face the possibility of ending what they shared. But they had both dreamed of a forever, of being lovers in secret until only death could keep them apart.

But her they were, in reality, and Sabé knew she had to fall into the part of loyal servant.

But Padmé was no wife, yet. There was no harm in expressing her true feelings before it was too late.

"I love you, Padmé. I love you..." she whispered as they slowly began to remove their clothing.

"And I you, my dear Sabé." Padmé murmured, eyes half-lidded as she took in her lover's soft form, the gentle curves so much like her own - and yet not. No, Sabé was not like her at all. They looked the same, acted the same, Sabé acting as her decoy on more occasions than she could count. But underneath the mask of polite demeanor and perfected imagery of the Queen's double, Sabé's was a different creature entirely.

A goddess of beauty, whom Padmé worshipped with every fiber of her being. A light untouched by the dark hands of tainted men, women without respect, and beings of the bleakest Hell where no daylight broke through the overbearing night. With her own glow penetrating the room - and Padmé's own chained heart - she was the equal to the Sun. And in her warmth, upon the soft satin of the bed sheets, Padmé sank.

Sabé's lips locked with Padmé's, soft moans of pleasure filling the room, but expertly quiet enough not to penetrate the door so that they could be found out. Soft hands sliding over silky skin, and in a tangle of long legs, they made love like they had so many times before, but with an added desperation to keep each other within their arms, for once dawn cut through the dark, starry sky,
they would once again be only a queen and her handmaiden.

Obi-Wan completed his duties for the day, dismissing the day guards and staying to fill in the night guards on any important information before sending them to their assigned positions. That evening he made sure to stress that there were, in fact, battle droids standing guard of the Separatist Prince, and that while they were to not engage them, to keep an eye on them to make sure they truly were just a safety precaution and not a secret plot to attack the Queen. As such, he did station two extra guards along the hall leading to the Queen's chambers. Her safety was his main concern.

After all that was said and done, he started towards the Guards' quarters where he had a small room to sleep and dress in. He didn't know what possessed him to, perhaps it was to ease his own mind before bed, but he found himself taking the long way around. Taking a path that caused him to pass through the droid-lined hall outside the room Prince Anakin had been given. He strolled down the hall slowly, eyeing the seemingly innocent droids.

The droids had empty stares, but they turned their optics to stare at Obi-Wan as he passed. An odd silence had fallen over the area, save for the sharp and quick "Kriff!" that came from behind the doors of the prince’s room. None of the droids seemed to notice the outburst, keeping their optics trained on Obi-Wan alone.

Obi-Wan glanced at the door, confused by the outburst. He moved to the door and knocked, "Your Highness, are you alright in there?"

There were a few crashing sounds following the knock, and a little more time passed before the doors opened to reveal a rather ruffled looking prince. He was holding his hand gingerly. “Obi-Wan… yeah, I’m fine… I think.” He looked back at the pile of droid parts he had scattered on the floor. Gods only knew where he got those and how he managed to get them inside.

Obi-Wan looked past him to the mess, "…friends of yours?"

“Uh, well… no, not really. I’m just messing around with things right now.” As princely as he may have seemed earlier in the day, he in no way resembled that man now. He was in a long nightshirt, dark trousers that were not too tight but not too loose that tied off just below his knees, and absolutely no shoes or stockings to be seen. Barefoot. A far cry from the elaborate outfit he had had upon his arrival to Naboo. Even his crown was off, probably set haphazardly on the dresser or the bed.

"I see. Well then, sorry to bother you." Obi-Wan straightened and gave a small bow before starting to turn to continue on his way.

“Ah, wait! I…” Anakin sighed and looked down at his blackened hand. “I may need some help… See I burned my hand pretty good. I mean, it’s not terrible, but it stings, and I… maybe could I get some cool water or something to put it in?”

The guard sighed, "I could escort you to our medical droid. I'm afraid I, myself, do not know much about first aid other than the very basics."

“Okay, uh… I guess it’s okay if I walk around like this.” Anakin stepped out of the doorway, closing the doors behind him and stepped closer to Obi-Wan. “Sorry if I was bothering you when you walked by. I honestly didn’t expect the parts to explode on me.”
"I'm not on duty, but you have to admit such sounds do raise an alarm."

“Yes… sorry about that.” Anakin chuckled lightly.

"Are you building a droid, or dismantling one for research?"

“I tinker with things. Takes my mind off of being a prince all the time.”

"You should be more careful while doing such things, then, Sire." Obi-Wan suggested, guiding him around a corner and down some steps.

“Please, just call me Anakin. I can’t stand being called ‘Sire’ or ‘Your Highness’. Makes me feel uncomfortable.” Anakin sighed, glad he was pretty much in his pajamas and not his royal clothing.

"It isn't proper—soon you will be my King and I will be in charge of protecting your life as I protect my Queen's."

“Right…” Anakin’s voice sounded disappointed, his expression noticeably falling. “Out of all the people in the galaxy they could have picked, it had to be me.”

"You weren’t the only one chosen. Many marriages were arranged to keep this peace treaty strong, and I have no doubt that on a personal level most of those chosen are…disappointed that they no longer have a chance to marry for love. But they all—including you and the Queen—must find a way to make it work."

“I know. We can’t have everything we want, can we? Otherwise we wouldn’t have sad moments to make the happier moments more enjoyable.” The prince shook his head. “Things always have to be difficult…”

"No, not always. Try to find the silver lining in these kind of things. You are here on Naboo, now…look for something here that you will enjoy that you never would have had should you have stayed on Mustafar."

He hadn’t meant for it to really happen, but Anakin couldn’t stop himself from looking at Obi-Wan and smiling when he had said to find a silver lining. Even the words that came out of his mouth seemed unstoppable. “Yeah, I may have found something already, actually.”

Obi-Wan gave him an approving and encouraging smile, "That's good." He opened the door and held it for the prince, "In here, they can fix you right up."

“Thank you. I’ll try not to make any more sound when I’m messing around with those droid parts in the future. Don’t want to get you too worried.” Anakin chuckled, then snapped his fingers.

“Also… could you maybe not tell the queen about that? It’s a hobby I’d like to keep to myself, if you don’t mind.”

"It's not my place to gossip with the queen, I believe that is what her Handmaidens are for."

“Still, if it’s all the same to you, I’d like to keep it a secret.”

"It doesn't matter to me unless it puts the Queen or anyone else in danger."

Anakin was silent, then nodded after a bit. “Thanks again for bringing me here.” He turned and went into the room the medical droid was located at.

"Well then, if that is all, I'll be on my way—unless you need an escort back to your room?” Obi-
Wan added, remembering the Prince likely didn't know his way around yet.

“Uh… yeah I’ll need to be escorted back,” Anakin called over his shoulder, and then his full attention was on the medical droid that had immediately taken his hand to look at. All the while, the prince’s heart hammered in his chest. How stupid was he to ask the queen’s guard to keep a secret from her? He could get in trouble for that, royalty or not! Anakin mentally beat himself up for even suggesting the secret keeping.

"I will wait here, then." Obi-Wan said, taking a seat and crossing one leg over his knee.

It didn’t take long for Anakin to be looked over and to have his hand treated. He was in and out in little time, and when he came back out, he looked more exhausted than when he went in. He just wanted to go back to his room and forget the conversation he had with Obi-Wan, but he knew that was going to be impossible to do. Everything just had to go wrong in such a short amount of time, or at least it all went bad in Anakin’s mind. He was sure that Obi-Wan thought he was weird for tinkering with droid parts. Back on Mustafar, it wasn’t looked at as odd, and he could tinker with droid parts all day long if he so desired. Now though on Naboo, he had to keep it a secret. He should have just not opened the doors to his room when Obi-Wan had knocked.

"This way, Prince Anakin." Obi-Wan said, standing up and holding the door for him once more.

“Thanks, Obi-Wan…” Anakin avoided eye contact, his only mission to get back to his room and to sleep. “About what I said earlier, the keeping the secret thing and whatnot. Just… forget I said anything. I was foolish to say those things, and to ask that of you. I hardly know you, and it wasn’t right of me to be so demanding.”

"You are entitled to your privacy, Highness, though an interest in droids is anything but strange."

Anakin turned his head to look at Obi-Wan. “Really? You don’t think it’s weird?”

"Of course not. Where would the Galaxy be without droids and those interested in learning about them and developing them?"

“Well, I mean usually royalty isn’t interested in droids unless they need assistance, and I’ve been put into that stereotype so many times that I just started hiding my fascination with them. I wasn’t born into royalty, and as a boy I didn’t want that to show.”

"People are people, royal or not. We all have our interests regardless of our upbringing. You could have been born a King, Jedi, or even slave and still have interest in droids."

That word… it was a nasty word, one Anakin never wanted to hear in his life again, and yet here it was slapping him in the face like a brick. “If only I was born a King or a Jedi…”

Obi-Wan gave him a questioning glance.

Anakin swallowed. “I said I wasn’t born into royalty… Instead, slavery.”

Obi-Wan halted his step, "I'm sorry, I didn't know…If what I said upset you…"

The prince waved his hand. “You’re fine… I just hadn’t heard the word… slave… in a long time. I thought I had escaped my past, but it seems I can’t escape it.”

"Though…to become a prince…that is quite a jump up in class…"

“The King of Mustafar found something he liked in my mother and I, and he took us in and wed my
mother. Ever since then, I’ve been the prince. One of many but singular as the only human prince.”

"I would think that such a past would make you a good king. You won’t be blind to the needs of the poor; that you would strive to ensure that all people would be treated as well as the next, and that slavery never touches them.”

“But I don’t want to be a king… I never have. I just want to be free, and being a royal just feels the same as being a slave to me. Always a strict set of rules to follow.” Anakin sighed and rubbed his face.

"It has responsibilities, but all positions in life does. No one is truly free from that."

“I’m tired of the responsibilities I’ve had since the day I became a prince. They’ve been the same kriffing things the whole time. It’s never changed.” Anakin realized his hands had curled up into fists, and he slowly relaxed them.

"What would you do if you could stop being a prince?"

"Fix droids, speeders… be a pod racer maybe.” The prince shrugged. “Settle down with someone I actually like.”

"Ah, we all wish we could be free to settle down with a special someone…” Obi-Wan nodded, his mind going back to an old spark he’d once shared with a woman untouchable to a commoner like himself.

“Yeah…” Anakin didn’t notice the way he was looking at Obi-Wan. The way that the two of them just stood there in silence and neither of them moved to do or say anything more. They just stood in each other’s company.

"…Is there someone special you had to leave behind to come here?" Obi-Wan asked

Anakin blinked. “Just my mother. Mustafar doesn’t exactly have very compatible partners for me.”

"You didn't travel?"

“No. The king didn’t allow my mother and I to really travel much after the marriage.”

"That's unfortunate… Travel is a great experience."

“I wouldn’t know. The only travel I’ve done is from my home planet to Mustafar, and now from Mustafar to here on Naboo.” Anakin laughed dryly. “You could say I don’t get out much.”

"Well, maybe you will more now that you are here. The Queen has done some travel of her own every so often." Obi-Wan then smiled, "There you go, a silver lining!"

Anakin’s heart fluttered in his chest. Force, if he could keep that smile in a jar…

“You’re right. Maybe being here with Queen Amidala won’t be so bad after all.”

"Naboo—at least the land portion of Naaboo—is run primarily by the Queen. Her King assists her when he is needed. As Queen Amidala's husband, you will have plenty of time to be yourself.”

“That’s good to know.”

I can be myself around you, Anakin wanted to add.
Obi-Wan caught himself somewhat lost in the Prince's gaze, and he shook himself free, "We should get you back to your chambers…it's getting late."

"Right… It’s a bit foolish to be standing in a hallway in the middle of the night and just talking.” Anakin let himself be led back to his room, a feeling rising up in him, an ache in his chest that Obi-Wan would have to leave for the night. Anakin couldn’t just ask the guard to stay up all night with him and just talk, as much as he really wanted to do that. The prince felt that Obi-Wan was the one person he could talk to on Naboo and not feel uncomfortable. It was a shame the guard was only that; a guard.

"Yes, you have had a long day of travel, and I need to rest for tomorrow."

"Please tell me I don’t have to wake up early.” Anakin chuckled.

"No, but I do. It's part of my duty as Captain." They arrived at the hall lined with Anakin's Battle Droids, "You can find your room from here, I suspect?"

"Yes, I can.” Anakin turned to Obi-Wan and smiled. The dim lighting in the hall was not helping to ease the growing empty feeling he possessed. “Thank you for leading me around. I’m sure I’ll learn the layout in a few years.”

"Sooner than that, I hope." Obi-Wan chuckled, "Good night, Sire."

"Please, just call me Anakin. I'd be more comfortable if you did."

"I could get into trouble for being too familiar with you…"

"Then just call me Anakin when we're alone."

Obi-Wan was silent for a moment, "…When we are alone, hu?"

Anakin flushed hard. "I mean like moments like this, when it's just us! Like when we're together! Oh kriff..." He covered his face with his hands, groaning slightly.

To say that Prince Anakin was unlike any other person of nobility that Obi-Wan had met would be an understatement as he watched the young prince of Mustafar mentally beat himself for every other thing he suggested that night. He sighed, deciding to humor the Prince's unusual request, "Very well, Anikin, when there are no others around, I will be less formal with you."


His response was a small nod as Obi-Wan turned to head to his own small room, his gaze lingering on the prince over his shoulder, "Excuse me for saying so, but you truly are unlike any other person of nobility I have ever come into contact with…wanting a simple guard calling you by your name as if we were old friends…"

“I come from a simple background. I’m a simple man who just wants to be looked at as that. This is just one step towards that goal.” Anakin shrugged, his smile getting wider.

Obi-Wan nodded again, "Goodnight, Anakin." He said before strolling along down the hall away from the prince.

“Good night, Obi-Wan…” the prince remained standing in the hallway for some time, watching the space Obi-Wan had once occupied before he sighed and headed back into his room for the night.
To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

SO sorry about the 15 month wait for an update on this one. It shouldn't happen again. Work on this fic is being resumed. However, UnknownPaws has decided to drop out of working on this, and it will only be BigWolfPup and TiBun working on it from here on. No drama or anything like that lead to this development, and we three are still very close friends. Paws just lost interest and decided to step back. It took us a while to decide on what to do with this project, but it's figured out now and more regular updates should start soon.

To our readers who came with chapter one, thank you for sticking with us. And to new readers, welcome!
"Will you be wanting to travel with your fiancé?" Obi-Wan asked Padmé as he escorted her to the transport they would be taking back to Theed Palace, "Or would you like to ride accompanied by your Handmaidens and have Prince Anakin ride with the guards?"

As much as she wished to be with Sabé and the rest of her trusted friends and bodyguards, she knew had a duty to fulfill. A duty as Queen.

"With Prince Skywalker. It is important he learns the history of the land and its people as we travel." she answered, keeping her face polite and neutral. As a Queen should.

"Of course." He bowed, "I will have him join you when he arrives, then."

Within a short time of the words being out of Obi-Wan's mouth, Anakin and his small army of droids approached the queen and the guard. "Sorry to keep you guys waiting. I'm a little slow this morning."

Obi-Wan turned to regard the Prince, "You will be joining Queen Amidala in her transport. I suspect your droids will be fine walking?"

"If they know where to go, yes." Anakin showed no emotion towards Obi-Wan, no hint of their small adventure the previous night. He didn't even look excited for the promising trip ahead. He just looked tired. And his hand was still blackened a little and being cradled gently.

"Well then, as long as they are able to follow our lead, they shouldn't have a problem." One of the other guards stated as he walked up to Obi-Wan. "Sir, we are all ready to depart.

"Very good. Then, on the Queen's command?" Obi-Wan turned to the two royals.

Anakin barked something in Binary towards his droids, giving them instruction to follow the royal guards of Naboo. Then he turned himself back towards Obi-Wan and nodded. "I'm ready."

Obi-Wan then turned to look at the Queen.

She nodded, though her eyes remained focused elsewhere, mind adrift in a sea of lost thought.

Obi-Wan nodded and guided them into their seats before hopping down and hurrying to the lead transport where he would be riding and keeping an eye out for any danger that may present itself. Before much longer, they were all on their way.

Anakin found his place next to the queen, relaxing a rather uncivilized way but still maintaining his royal quality about him. He was silent, keeping his gaze at his shoes, and he swallowed. "I'm not entirely used to sitting out of the pilot's seat in a ship," he muttered.

"You fly?"

It wasn't a question out of curiosity but necessity, the simple gesture of starting conversation. Truthfully, as it were, Padmé would prefer to be any other place but here and now. But Queen Amidala, as it were, was needed at her fiancé's side.
"I do when I'm alone. Which is hardly ever. I'm not really able to slip out much, but when I can go flying. Calms my nerves." Anakin shrugged, keeping his gaze on the floor.

"Ah, I see."

She forced herself to look at him.

"...Is something the matter?" she inquired, sensing an internal discord within the young man.

"It's nothing you need to be worried about. Don't worry, I'm fine." He looked up at her and smiled.

"Are you certain?"

Now she was attempting concern, looking him straight in the eye.

"Yes, I am. It's just personal matters. Being homesick and things like that," he lied.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

He hesitated. "Maybe...at a later time."

She said nothing more after that, turning back to the window.

Anakin bit his lip out of nervousness. He wanted to go to the cockpit and fly the ship, but he wasn't so sure Obi-Wan would approve of that, especially since he was a prince and he wasn't supposed to do all the hard work. So he sighed and rubbed the back of his neck.

"Sorry if I seem a little unapproachable... I don't mean to be, but I haven't been around other people for a while. It's an odd experience for me."

"I can believe it. Were I living on a volcanic planet with social interaction a rarity, I think I'd be nervous too."

She tried to offer a comforting smile.

He returned the smile. "Life is a bit different here on a colder planet where I'm not surrounded by lava all the time."

Naboo was the last place she'd label as 'cold', but coming from a volcanic planet, she guess this was considered 'cold' to Anakin. So she merely smiled and nodded, watching a couple of birds - free and unconfined - fly by the window of their coach.

Anakin fell silent as he watched the hills and wildlife of Naboo go by. He missed Mustafar greatly. The heat that he would absorb willingly, the lava rivers, the dull roar of the lava passing by and hissing, it was all missing from Naboo. Anakin wasn't sure he could stay on Naboo as the king for very long. He'd want to return home as soon as possible, and yet Naboo was his home now. He was home, and he didn't feel at home. He suddenly had the worst case of homesickness ever.

The day had been filled with travel, and the evening filled with Padmé introducing Anakin to the members off the court and other important people he needed to know. But finally, he was given a basic tour—which he'd get more in depth the following day—and showed to his room, which had a
warm fire crackling away in the hearth, despite the warm night that had settled over Naboo.

A figure was still crouched before the flames with a poker in hand, the fire's red glow illuminating his pale face. The man stood up when Anakin entered, soft blue eyes sweeping up the prince's body before settling on his face and bowing. "I thought you would feel more at home with some added warmth." Obi-Wan explained himself.

Anakin smiled at Obi-Wan and chuckled. "Thank you, I do appreciate it. Naboo hasn't been up to my standards recently in warmth, so this helps." He moved closer to the fire and closed his eyes as he absorbed the warmth.

"I'll make sure your rooms, at least, are warmed for you until you get a little more adjusted to our planet."

"Thank you, again. I can't thank you enough, really." Anakin sighed and opened his eyes again to look at Obi-Wan.

"I'm just... doing my job... Anakin." Obi-Wan tried to brush it off as he bowed and moved to take his leave, "I'll leave you to your evening."

With a quick hand, Anakin grabbed Obi-Wan's shoulder, preventing him from leaving. "Won't you stay with me for a bit?"

Obi-Wan blinked back at him, "You wish me to stay?"

Anakin flushed a little. "Well, if you have other things to attend to, them you should do those, but... I'd like you to stay for a little bit."

"I... My duties are finished for the day unless I am needed in protecting the Queen and yourself."

"Then you can stay? I feel like I've only connected well with you since I arrived here on Naboo..."

Obi-Wan hesitated as he looked up into his future king's eyes. It was improper, but then again, he should know his King just as well as he knows his Queen so that he can better protect them both. He sighed and gave a small nod, "As you wish."

Anakin's eyes lit up in excitement. "Great! I want to get to know you better, since we'll be spending the rest of our lives around each other." He chuckled and let go of Obi-Wan.

"Well, for as long as I hold my position here, that is." Obi-Wan chuckled.

"Yes I suppose that's how it works... Let's sit down. It'd be more comfortable than just standing here talking." Anakin moved closer to the fire once more and pulled up two chairs that had been sitting against the wall. He sat down in one of them and motioned for Obi-Wan to sit in the other.

The guard moved over and took the seat he was offered, glad it was one a little further from the fire than the one Anakin sat in. He, after all, felt the evening was warm enough without the need of fire.

"So... I guess just tell me about yourself," Anakin began. "You say something, then I do, we alternate or something like that."

"Alright." Obi-Wan paused to think, "Well, I never really had a home before I came to Naboo."

"Really? Where did you come from before Naboo? If you don't mind me asking."
"All over. I was born on a nomad's ship, and raised there. Then I left and held a number of jobs around the galaxy."

"Wow. I bet you were relieved to finally have a proper home here on Naboo. I know I would be if I were in your situation." Anakin shrugged and sank into his seat.

"It is nice to feel like I belong someplace."

"You can say that again..." The prince sighed and leaned his head against the back of the chair. "I don't think I could ever truly call a place home, though. Yeah, Mustafar has been my home for most of my life, but I've never really called it home."

"Maybe in time you can feel Naboo is home." Obi-Wan suggested.

"Perhaps... but that may take quite a while. I still don't quite consider Mustafar my home. Tatooine has always been my home, and I feel like nothing will ever compare to it, though there are bad memories tied to it." Anakin shook his head. "Forgive me for seeming so down. I don't mean to be, but talking about Tatooine always gets me that way."

"I have never been to Tatooine." Obi-Wan said, "But I hear some unpleasant things about it."

"It's run by the Hutts, and it's a terribly hot place. Though compared to Mustafar, Tatooine is a comfortably chilly planet. Mustafar is quite literally hell, with all the fire and lava..."

"But you seem to have a nice tan to your skin from the exposure to heat." Obi-Wan smiled suddenly.

Anakin chuckled and looked at his exposed arms, the loose shirt he had been wearing also showing off a nice amount of his chest. "Well, Mustafar doesn't get much sunlight. On the rare occasion that my mother and I get to go to Tatooine again, I take the chance to soak some of the sunlight in."

"Sounds almost like a trip to the beach—only without the cool water."

"I suppose it does, yes. My only dislike is the sand." Anakin shuddered a little. "So much sand."

"Sand? But it's warm and soft..."

"No, no, no. It's course and rough, extremely irritating, and it gets everywhere. You can't control it. It has a mind of its own."

"Maybe you should try a real beach sometime, instead of a sandstorm." Obi-Wan smirked.

"But there's still sand there... and I really don't like sand."

"You won't even try to see it the way I do?"

Anakin hesitated, looking into the fire and wishing with all his being that he could be back on Mustafar with his mother. "I guess I could try some time," he said quietly.

"I have a day off for rest coming up, if you aren't busy with the queen, we could go out to the countryside. I know of a nice relaxing area with a small private beach."

"If you really want to spend your day off with the man you're supposed to protect, knock yourself out." The prince chucked.

"Isn't it easier to protect you if I get to know you?"
Anakin looked at Obi-Wan with a smile. "I suppose you're right…"

"At least I know that if I need you to run for safety and if you refuse I can get you running by throwing sand in your direction." The guard joked.

"Okay, yes that will get me running. I really hate sand." Anakin chuckled and sighed. He stared at the fire in silence, thinking of what that day might be like.

"What else would you like to know about me?" Obi-Wan asked.

"How about a hobby? You know mine is working with droids and fixing things, so what about yours?"

"I…enjoy reading and watching animals." He said after some thought.

"Reading? I haven't done much of that… and animals are okay I guess. Most of the animals I've come into contact with are large and not fun to handle." Anakin shrugged, clasping his hands together and fidgeting a little.

"I like the large animals, too." Obi-Wan shrugged.

"Smaller animals I could probably deal with better. They're closer to droid sized, unlike a bantha."

"Do larger animals intimidate you, Prince?" Obi-Wan teased.

"They're just so large, and they can trample you if you're not careful! Tatooine had some pretty large animals that would turn on a dime if you didn't know how to handle them properly." Anakin sighed. "Banthas were the worst, let me tell you. I always ended up wrestling with them just to get water."

"That's why you respect their space." Obi-Wan shrugged.

"I do, most of the time. But you have to remember, on Tatooine, there isn't as much water to go around as one might hope. You have to fight for it sometimes." Anakin shrugged, sinking into his seat.

"What about on Mustafar?"

"There's some water, but it's mainly imported. I was lucky I was royalty there. Otherwise, my mom and I wouldn't be alive. Water is expensive, and not all can afford it on Mustafar."

"That—is horrible, frankly speaking."

"It is. I wish it wasn't that way, but it is, and there's nothing I can do about it."

"No one should be without basic living needs." Obi-Wan's shoulders slumped.

"Unfortunately, there are worlds in this galaxy that believe life's necessities only belong to those who are on top of society. Sad bantha herders those people are."

"I just—don't agree. Here on Naboo, if there is a food shortage, food is distributed evenly amongst the people, rich and poor alike."

"I would love for laws like that to be put in place on Tatooine and Mustafar. But Tatooine, again, is run by Hutts, and Mustafar has so few people on it compared to other planets that to the king, it almost doesn't matter."
"But it should matter."

"Maybe an opportunity will arise that allows you to help a little more than you think you can." Obi-Wan said, leaning forward in his seat towards the prince.

"I hope so. I do want to do some good as king of Naboo, even though I may not like the position."

"I think you and my Queen will get along just fine." Obi-Wan smiled, "She has a strong pull to help as many people as possible, not just her own people."

"I'm not worried about if we'll get along or not. I just have a feeling that our marriage won't bring love."

"Arranged marriages... rarely work out to be full of romance. I can't imagine either of you being happy about the news that you will be in one."

"I know I wasn't terribly happy. I left the morning after I knew."

"You should speak with the Queen about this. I'm sure you both would benefit from it, and at least understand each other. A good friendship is better than a completely loveless marriage that can breed only contempt."

Anakin shrugged. "I just hope we aren't expected to... have kids or anything like that. This is just a marriage to unite the Republic and the Separatists."

Obi-Wan shifted uncomfortably, "Well, one heir is expected..."

The blond looked at Obi-Wan for a few seconds before looking at the ground. "You know, I figured that would be expected... I just hoped that if I said something out loud, it wouldn't be true."

"Don't want a kid?"

"It's not that I don't want a kid, but I don't want to have one in a relationship that isn't built on love. The child doesn't deserve parents like that."

"Your situation is complicated, but even if you and Queen Amidala don't end up falling in love, the child you have... you both will love that baby girl or boy more than anything. I'm sure."

Anakin nodded in agreement. "Still, I don't want my future kid to think bad about their parents just because they don't love each other."

"I'm sure you and the Queen will figure things out."

"I'm sure as well, but kids are the last things on our minds with the upcoming wedding. Ours is probably one of the more popular ones in the galaxy."

"Perhaps." Obi-Wan nodded.

Sighing, Anakin ran a hand through his hair and sank into his seat. "I don't want to keep you from sleep with my worried nonsense. We can talk more later I'm sure."

"As you wish." Obi-Wan stood up and bowed, "You'll find how you fit in here, I'm sure. Good night, Anakin."

"Night," the prince responded with a smile. He sat far a few minutes after Obi-Wan left, going over thoughts before he got ready for bed and turned in for the night.
"I'd like for it to be by the lake—where my parents were married." Padmé said, reclining back across the chaise, her brown eyes moving to look at Anakin.

"That'd be a nice spot. I'm glad it has a little meaning to you as well.' Anakin smiled. He had been adjusting rather well to living on Naboo, though the marriage was still something he wasn't necessarily in favor of. Nevertheless, he was still going to discuss the details of the wedding with his fiancée.

"I'm glad you think so. Is there any traditions your family has?"

"Well most traditions involve fire and a lot of chanting. It's a lot of stuff I would rather not have involved in the wedding." Anakin shrugged. "Mainly because most of those traditions aren't safe for humans."

"But—you are human…"

"Yes... I am human. So I don't want those traditions of Mustafar used in the ceremony, so no one gets hurt."

"I didn't necessarily mean Mustafarian traditions. I meant your family…your mother?"

"Oh, well... Mom and I haven't really made our own traditions. We just sort of fell into the traditions of whoever we lived with at the time."

"I see..." She sighed and shrugged, "Alright, then I suppose no changes from the traditional Naboo wedding will have to be made for ours."

"Sorry if you wanted something different. Mom and I never really attended any weddings before. I would say I want her to come to ours, but I don't know if I really want her to come." Anakin shrugged.

"Why wouldn't you? Family is important, Prince Skywalker." Padmé said, leaning forward with a frown.

"I know it is, and my mom is really the only family I have. The king and his offspring back on Mustafar, they're nice, but they're not blood family. I can tolerate them, but I avoid them most of the time."

"Then why wouldn't you want your mother here for our wedding?"

"Just in case we don't work out… I don't want her to see me unhappy. Not that I'm saying our marriage won't work!"

"Skywalker, you are being ridiculous. There are many ways to make a marriage work, not just one. We obviously don't have the advantage of getting a choice in marrying each other here, but that doesn't mean we'll not find a way that works for us—whatever it is. I'm not thrilled about an arranged marriage, either, but I'm not going to assume we won't be happy once we figure out how this is going to work out."

Anakin slouched just a little. "You're right. I apologize. I'm not looking for the silver lining here."
She sighed and looked to the conference of wedding planners sitting and standing around the room, "Give us a moment, please?"

She waited for them to file out of the room and close the door behind them, leaving the two royals alone. Only then did she get up and moved over to sit in the chair directly next to Anakin. She said nothing for a moment, studying him and waiting for him to make eye contact with her.

Anakin looked up at her with a questioning expression. "I'm sorry if I said something wrong…"

"If this wasn't happening…if we were still free to choose…would you have someone else in mind, or an idea of what you'd be looking for?" Padmé asked slowly, carefully.

Anakin flushed a little. "Well… I don't know. I'd maybe…look for a man instead."

"So, you lean towards other guys." She nodded, "Fair enough. I've dated men before, but I found that I prefer women."

"So that doesn't make you upset then. That's good." Anakin sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Well then, I guess we're both in a bit of an odd situation."

"Yes, it does…" she glanced over at the door, knowing that Sabé was on the other side along with the wedding planners. She sighed, "I won't lie to you. You are my future husband, and it wouldn't due to…start out with secrets. I do have a lover. She is aware of our situation and is standing back out of respect, but I—I love her."

"Why take the offer to marry me then? Surely you had to have had some sort of say before the announcement was made that we were getting married."

"I didn't, just as you didn't. This was set by those given the power to negotiate ending this war by any means necessary. None of the planets' royals got a say in this."

Anakin nodded. "Well, if I could, I would have the wedding be for you two, not between us."

"That's not possible, but…" She sighed and nibbled her lip in a very non-queen-like fashion, "Maybe…if we agree completely on this… What I mean to say is as long as we are both discreet and agree not to be upset at each other over it—maybe we can each be granted a lover on the side in our marriage? I'll be able to stay with the woman I love and you will be free to see someone as well, as long as he agrees to being discreet as well."

Padmé had tried giving up on what she felt in her heart, but after everything, she still couldn't come to terms with what she told herself she would have to do. But if her husband would agree to having their cake and eating it too…

Well, there was hope for love, yet.

Anakin smiled. "I can agree to that. As long as we keep up the image of being together, I won't mind you keeping your relationship with your girlfriend."

A wide, genuine smile graced her lips and she yanked him into a hug, "Thank you." She released him and pulled back, "See? We are able to figure out this marriage and keep happiness in our lives."

Anakin's eyes were a bit wide, but he smiled even more. "At the very least, I think we can be good friends. And since we're telling secrets now… I may have taken a liking to your personal guard…"
"Oh? She laughed, "Well, he is quite handsome, and is sweet and loyal. Though I'm not sure of his preference when it comes to dating. He's never seemed interested as far as I have noticed."

"That's what I was afraid of. I haven't had the chance to talk to him about relationships much yet. The most we've talked about relationships was about you and I."

"Maybe you should get him on one of his days off. When he isn't head of the royal guard, but is able to relax and fully be himself." She suggested.

"Do you know when he might have a day off? I mean, I assume you would know, considering he is your body guard."

"Not off the top of my head. I know he is due for one soon, though."

"I suppose I can ask him the next I see him then." Anakin nodded.

"That's the only way to get to know him—step up and talk to him. Turn on your charm." She smiled and stood up, "But for now, we need to get back to planning the wedding—and I do hope you invite your mother. I'd like to meet her."

Anakin blinked, then shook his head with a smile. "Of course. I will invite her for you to meet. I'm sure she'd love to meet you."

"Good." She moved to the door to let everyone back in, flashing Sabé a happy smile as she passed into the room.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

OK, we have created a backlog of chapters for this so you should get pretty regular updates from here on. Sorry again for the wait while we built up the backlog!
Obi-Wan sighed, his eyes closed as he leaned back against the trunk of a tree, face upwards, and legs stretched out in the soft grass. It was nice to take advantage of such a nice day when there was some down time from his busy schedule.

Quietly, Sabé approached him, a smile on her face as she brought news with her of the marriage between Anakin and Padmé. She sat next to Obi-Wan and sighed happily.

"Nice little quiet spot you have here, Obi-Wan."

"It's nicer with the company of a good friend." He chuckled, opening his eyes and gesturing for her to join him. "You seem to be in a better mood than you have been."

"I'm in a fantastic mood," Sabé said. "I just talked with Padmé, and apparently Prince Skywalker prefers men over women when it comes to relationships, so they both agreed that as long as they keep up public appearances with their marriage, they'd both be okay with the other having a relationship on the side."

Obi-Wan smirked and nudged her playfully, "I had a feeling you and our Queen were closer than you let on."

Sabé flushed a little. "Well, what can I say? Padmé is an amazing woman. I love her so much, and now we can still be together!"

"Congratulations, Sabé." His smile softened as he reached over to give her arm a gentle squeeze.

Sabé quickly pulled the redhead into a hug as she laughed. "I almost don't believe this is real!"

"I'm happy for you. I'm glad you didn't have to face the heartbreak that could have happened because of this arrangement for the greater good."

"I'm just glad Prince Skywalker is ok with Padmé and I being together. He's a wonderful man."

"He is certainly a good man from what I have seen. I honestly didn't expect it from a Separatist Royal."

"Me either, but maybe it's good that he's marrying our queen. He will show the galaxy how a decent person is supposed to act, I'm sure."

"I thought I'd be worried about leaving our Queen alone with him—but the reality is, I'm more worried that Naboo is too cold for him. He's used to very hot planets, and Naboo is on the mild side temperature-wise. Glad he didn't get sent to an ice planet—I'm sure he wouldn't have survived."

"I never thought I'd see you care about a Separatist prince," Sabé giggled.

"He's a good guy." Obi-Wan repeated with a shrug, "And soon to be my King. His safety is just as important as the Queen's, now."

"You know, when I've caught glances of him in conversation with you, he looks far more interested in you than Padmé."
“You're imagining things.” Obi-Wan immediately brushed off the observation, sure that the Prince wasn't interested in him at all.

Sabé raised an eyebrow. "You're really that oblivious? It's obvious he likes you."

"I'm just a royal guard, Sabé." Obi-Wan insisted. "His safety is in my hands, and he is just grateful for that. After all, he traveled here, to an enemy planet, with only a handful of droids. It is understandable to be frightened in his situation."

"Obi-Wan, he's not frightened of anything now. He really does like you, I can see it in his eyes."

"I'm old, Sabé. He wouldn't want someone like me. He'll be looking for a younger man if he really is interested in men more than women. Plus he may not be interested in human men."

"Oh come on. You are not that old and you don't know his preferences, so you should ask him! You'll see what I mean. He really is interested in you." Sabé smirked.

"The last time any person was truly interested in me was when I was a teenager still. And if you think I'll walk up to my future king and ask him if he wants me to be his bed warmer at night, then I think you have lost your mind."

The woman shrugged. "Whatever, but if he ends up confessing, don't come to me for advice. After all, you don't think he's really interested in you."

"No, I don't." Obi-Wan admitted, "And even if he is—I've never—with another man, that is…” He sighed, rubbing his face, "During my little fling with Duchess Satine, the most we did was kiss. That's about the extent of my experience with actual romance. I doubt I'd be able to sweep a prince off his feet."

"You never know. He hasn't seen another human besides his mother for years apparently. And with you being the first male he's come across that's even a little bit compatible, you may be impressive to him."

"Maybe he's not into humans because of the fact that he's not used to being around other humans."

"Or maybe he is and you were in the right place at the right time." Sabé smiled, leaning close to Obi-Wan and looking for all the galaxy like a child knowing her opinions were the right ones.

"And you assume I'm interested in men, knowing my only experience in the past was with a woman?"

The woman blinked, then sat back. "Ok well, to be fair, I have seen your face when a particularly handsome young knight comes through every now and then. But if you say you're not interested in men, then I'll quit bothering you about Prince Skywalker."

"I flirt lot, you know this. It doesn't make me interested—I…” He sighed, "Truthfully I don't know what I'm interested in…it's all in the personality, I think…”"

"I see. Well, regardless, you still have to get to know him since he'll be the future king. So maybe once you get to know him, maybe something will spark."

Obi-Wan flashed her an amused, but doubtful look. After all, he already was getting to know the Prince.

"Well, I've got things to attend to still. It was nice talking, Obi-Wan.‖ Sabé got up and waved
before she headed back to finish the day's chores.

He smiled and waved before leaning back against the tree again with a sigh, his gaze turned upwards to watch the light filter through the leaves.

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After a long day of wedding planning and getting to know the queen, Anakin settled down in his room, freshly showered and in clean clothes to sleep in. He grabbed his holocomm and made a call back to his mother on Mustafar.

"Ani?" His mother's image flickered into view with slight interference that suggested Mustafar was having a heat flair storm, "Oh, Ani, I have missed you."

"I've missed you too, Mom." Anakin smiled as he sat down on his bed to relax. "How have you been since I left?"

"A bit lonely, but I can't complain. What about you? Have you met your future wife?"

"I have. She's quite nice actually. We'll at least be good friends."

"Oh good." Shmi smiled, "I was worried you two would hate each other and not get along."

"Well it was a bit rough at first, but after we did some talking we're getting along a lot better now."

"So, how is Naboo?"

"Really cold, actually. The servants here had to warm up my room so I wouldn't go into shock or something." Anakin shrugged. "I'm a little used to it now, though my room is still warmed up."

"Well, you have always been on warm planets." She smiled, "Tell me more. I want to know everything"

"It's really pretty here. Trees and lakes everywhere, as far as you can see. Not a single volcano or lava pit in sight. It's so nice to see actual lakes of water." Anakin sighed dreamily. "It's like those make believe worlds you used to tell me about in stories."

"Those are actual worlds, Ani." Shmi laughed, "I didn't always live on Tatooine before I had you, you know. I had traveled a bit."

"But you never came here to Naboo? I remember you telling me of worlds that were very similar to this one."

"No, Naboo was not one I have visited. But I know it has a mild climate, and I have been on others that have mild climates."

"This is mild? Doesn't feel like it most of the time. Feels more like what I imagine Hoth would feel like. Though Hoth is covered in snow and ice… both of which I have yet to see here on Naboo."

"I would suggest a visit to a planet like Alderaan if you want to see snow. They don't have a lot in most areas, and it is still in the mild range for planetary climates. Hoth would be too extreme for you unless you adjust more to mild planets first." She suggested.
Anakin nodded. "Currently Hoth has no appeal to me if it's colder than it is here. Naboo is still too cold for me."

"But do you like it, apart from the temperature?"

"I do. I like it more than Mustafar, if I'm to be honest."

"Good. I'm glad you are happy with your new environment."

"It'll be perfect for the wedding." Anakin sighed lightly. "Which I wanted to talk to you about something… I want you to come to the wedding."

"Of course, my beautiful boy, I want to be there, too. I have been discussing it with your Stepfather. Is there an official date, yet?"

"Right now, no, but soon. Probably by the end of the next standard month."

"Do keep me informed so I can get to Naboo in time to see you become a king." She smiled; her pride and happiness for him obvious.

Anakin chuckled. "Don't worry. I'll let you know in plenty of time. You will be here in time for the wedding."

"Good. Oh I miss you so much. I miss you crawling into my bed at night because you had a bad dream…how we'd cuddle until you were asleep again…you were such a cute little boy."

"I do miss getting hugs from you every morning." The prince sighed and leaned against the headboard of the bed. "Mom, there's… something else I want to talk to you about. It involves me being around humans again…"

"Yes?"

"Well… I know I'm supposed to be marrying the queen… but we had a talk. I won't give all the details, to keep ourselves safe mainly, but to sum it up, we both agreed that even when married, we can see other people. She's already got someone, and we're both happy that she gets to stay with her girlfriend. But, um…" Anakin fidgeted a little. "I haven't really taken an interest in women recently…"

"That's fine, if your wife is fine with an open relationship like that, then you have nothing to be ashamed of."

"I didn't know if you'd approve of my interest leaning towards guys instead of women."

"I just want you to be happy, Ani. That's all I have ever wanted for you."

"I know, Mom." Anakin smiled. "I'm really lucky to have you as my mom, you know."

"So, I'm assuming that a young man has caught your eye if you are telling me about this?"

Anakin flushed. "There is one, yes. I'm pretty sure he's older than me. But he's really good looking."

"If he's younger than your mother, then he is a young man." She pointed.

"He's definitely younger than you."
"Then he is a young man who has…brown hair?" she took a guess to prompt him into talking about this crush.

"Nope. Lighter color." Anakin smirked.

"Oh come on, Ani, tell your mom about your crush!"

"Alright, alright," he said with a chuckle. "He's got red hair, steely blue eyes, he's shorter than me actually. And he's...captain of the royal guard."

"He sounds absolutely dreamy."

"He's really nice to talk to, that's for sure." Anakin chuckled. "But I haven't really gotten to talking about relationships with him yet, so my crush may be a fruitless one."

"All potential relationships run that risk in the beginning." Shmi reassured.

"I guess I'll have to be the one to bring up the subject. I just hope he won't be too upset by it."

"Mhm, and if he is the captain of the royal guard, as you say, he would never bring up such a subject on his own out of respect for you as royalty. And at the same time you need to let him know that he has an equal choice in starting such a relationship. It's important to be equals, even if in public he serves you as you will be his king."

"Of course. I don't want a relationship with him to be built on the illusion of equality. Equality has to exist between us, even with me as king and him as Captain of the royal guard."

"Make sure he knows that when you breach the subject with him, is all I'm saying. You don't want him agreeing just because he thinks he has to."

Anakin sighed. "I've wanted to tell him about my crush, but I haven't built up the courage to yet. I feel like I need to wait a bit longer before I even tell him I have a crush on him."

"Do what feels right. And waiting until after the wedding may be right for you. Get yourself settled into your new life before taking that step."

"Yeah, probably better to wait. Don't want people to get the wrong idea before the wedding."

"Your wife had her lover already, but you are looking, so yes, after the wedding would be best."

"I do hope I find someone. I'm sure the queen will be a nice friend, but with her having a lover already, I'm sure at some point I'll start to want one."

"And I will want to meet him."

"Of course. He will have to meet the best mom in the galaxy."

"If he wants to hold my baby boy close at night, he will!" she smirked.

"Mom," Anakin groaned slightly with a smile.

"What?" she grinned, "You aren't a little boy anymore. I know what your sleepovers will entail."

"Cuddling and hugging, yeah."

"Holding each other close, just as I said." She chuckled.
Anakin smirked, rolling his eyes. "You're great, Mom. I hope you know that."

"Oh, I do. I'm glad you realize it." She smiled and sighed, "But it's near supper time here, I should get going—call me again when you can."

"I will. Sleep well, Mom."

"You too, Ani. Goodnight, and good luck."

"Thanks." Anakin blew a kiss to his mother before hanging up and sighing.

Obi-Wan straightened his shoulders as he walked rigidly along the courtyard path, trying a little too hard to look professional in front of the nobility that had gathered to attend the marriage of the Queen of Naboo, and the Prince of Mustafar.

It was a lot of pressure, to uphold the good reputation of Naboo's royal guards, and ensure the safety of everyone in attendance. So much was riding on the success of the marriage, and his men were the first line of defense against anything that aimed to interfere.

Hardly anyone had moved to their seats yet, more focused on conversing with fellow royals and nobles. The day was certainly busy with things other than the wedding, but the wedding was the main attraction, and as such may of the guests talked nonstop of the prince and the queen.

And then Anakin decided to join the guests outside, mostly to find his mother and maybe Obi-Wan, though the prince didn't want to distract the redhead too much from his job. Still, Anakin found himself surrounded by guests, which he was sure was distracting enough on its own.

"I heard that Mustafar is home to giant bug people." A youngling guest was saying to others her own age, "Queen Amidala's marrying a giant bug!"

"Ew!"

"No she isn't! I heard he was adopted and something more humanoid…a Chiss, maybe?"

"I don't care what he is, I just hope he's nice!"

"He's not! He's a Separatist!"

Anakin sighed lightly, moving to a different group of people. He knew bad things were being said of him, and he was hardly able to stop them. But he knew he was a good guy, and he hoped he could prove to the Republic that he was a good, worthy guy.

"You should be getting ready, Prince Anakin, not out here where your nerves can get the best of you." An older man with hair turning white from grey said, a droid projecting his holo as it hovered over to Anakin, hands folded in front of him. They had met briefly before on a holo call, as the old man was Naboo's Senator representative for the Republic Senate.

Anakin turned to the man and smiled. "Well I had wanted to find my mom before the ceremony started. I haven't had any luck so far."

"Hmm, I believe she would have been escorted to your rooms to assist you in getting ready emotionally." Senator Palpatine said.
"She hasn't been there yet. I just came from there and she never came." Anakin shrugged and sighed. "Oh well, it's not like I won't see her after the wedding."

"You must have just missed her; her ship only just arrived not long ago."

"I see. I guess I should go back to my rooms then. I have no real need to be out here anyways. No one knows who I am."

"Not no one, but yes, my boy, you should be back getting ready rather than wandering around, looking like a cornered tooka in a wolf's den."

"Well I'm mostly ready. I just need to change and put my crown on. Everything else I needed to do is done."

"You'd be surprised how fast time flies by on your wedding day. You may not have as much time as you think to get ready...unless you are planning a get-away?"

Anakin shook his head. "No, I'm here to marry the queen. It's my duty to do so, and I'm not running away from my responsibilities."

"Well, that is good to hear." He hummed, "The peace of the galaxy is at stake, after all. Though the forced marriages happening seems extreme to me."

Anakin shrugged. "If it brings peace to the galaxy, I'm happy to do it."

"How noble of you. Ah, excuse me, I believe I spot the Duchess of Mandalor, and I have yet to greet her. You should get back to getting ready for the ceremony." He said with a bow before having his droid move away to greet the pretty young blonde who had just joined the party.

The prince watched for a bit before deciding to head back inside.

"Ani!" As soon as he stepped in the door to his rooms, he found himself swept up into his mother's arms, her embrace tight and loving.

Anakin stumbled backwards a bit, but he chuckled as he regained his balance and hugged his mother back. "Hi Mom. It's good to see you again."

"Oh, I've missed you so much." She pressed a kiss to his cheek then stepped back, looking up at him and reaching up to try and tame a few curls back behind his ear.

"I've missed you too. Have you been treated well back at home?"

"Same as always." She shrugged, "Lonelier without you, but you know how they can be. They don't have a good grasp on human's social needs."

"Sorry I couldn't call you more. I was very busy preparing for today. Still am, actually." Anakin shrugged as he moved past his mother and grabbed the outfit he was to wear for the ceremony.

"It's not your fault, Ani, and I have always known you'd stretch your wings and leave the nest. I'm just trying to get the king to agree to letting some humans settle on Mustafar."

"Maybe I can help after the wedding. I will be a king then, and negotiations between kings are always important ones. Maybe he'll be open to letting more humans on Mustafar if I ask him as a king."

"Maybe, I'd appreciate the effort." She smiled, "But for now we need to make sure you look your
best for this wedding. Sit down; I'll work on taming your hair."

Anakin smiled as he sat down. "Make sure I look pretty," he joked.

"Hmm, that could be difficult with your big head." She joked back, carefully pulling a comb through his curls.

"My head isn't that big," he countered. "It's average sized."

"It would be if it wasn't for your ego." She nudged him knowingly. He was a rather handsome man, and he knew it, even as a young teenager who wasn't exposed to many humanoids.

Anakin chuckled. "I'm glad you were able to come, Mom. I'm not sure I could have gotten through today without you."

"You're my baby; nothing could have kept me away from this moment."

"Not even the fire storms of Mustafar…" Anakin turned his head to look up at his mother, and he gave her a loving smile.

"Not even the cursed sands of Tatooine." She confirmed gently.

After his hair had been fixed, Anakin stood once more and moved off to change into his outfit for the wedding. When he returned, he had his crown in hand. He handed it to his mother, intending on her putting it on him for the ceremony.

"You are far too tall, young man." She chuckled, motioning for him to sit back down.

Instead, he knelt. "It's only proper I give my mother the respect she deserves. I really should start to kneel more for you. You're certainly worth it."

"Oh, Ani…" she smiled and shook her head before placing the crown upon his head. Then she pulled a single white flower out of her bag and smiled, knowing he knew what it was as she carefully weaved it into his tamed hair.

A blessing from the desert gods of Tatooine.

Anakin smiled. "Thank you, Mom. The right touch to complete my outfit."

"Keep moving forward in your life, Anakin, but don't forget where you came from, and that I'm very proud of you."

"I'll never forget it." He stood back up and hugged his mother long and hard.

"I guess we should head to the gathering," Anakin said after the hug. "The ceremony will start soon."

"Yes. I'll try not to cry." She chuckled, linking her arm with his. "Please lead the way."

The two made their way to the lakeside court, helping his mother to her seat as other royals and nobles began taking their seats. When she was seated, Anakin kissed her cheek and took his place in front of the thrones.

Shmi smiled as the guests all settled into their seats, glancing around at the beautiful lake-side scenery. At the back of the rows of seats stood a redhead guard caught her eye and she paused to wonder if he was the young man her son had confessed to crushing on. But it wasn't the time to
Anakin glanced around as the bridesmaids and groomsmen came up to the thrones, and then small children scattering flowers around as they too made their way up to the thrones. His eye caught Obi-Wan's for a split second before Padmé finally arrived, as cued by the change in music. Though the love between queen and prince was not as one might have hoped for a royal wedding, Anakin still managed to smile at his bride. She was still a lovely woman, even if he was not romantically attracted to her.

She smiled, moving down the isle until they met and she took his arm. "Here goes nothing." She whispered as they turned to the Twi'lek who would be marrying them.

The ceremony went on as planned, the two speaking their vows as their guests watched on. Towards the end of the ceremony, Anakin was instructed to kneel before the Twi'lek. His old Mustafarian prince crown was soon replaced by a crown fit for the new king of Naboo. He rose back to his feet with a feeling of dignity, looking at Padmé with a small smile.

Then the final part of the ceremony took place. The two royals gave their I Do's, and as they turned to face the crowd of guests, they were met with applause, both for their union and for the new king of Naboo.

"I guess we're married now." Padmé said, leaning into him to speak as they waved and started back down the isle as husband and wife—as king and queen of Naboo.

"Yeah… You know, you don't have to spend tonight with me if you don't want. I'd understand." Anakin smiled at his mother as they passed her. He noted the glimmer in her eyes of fresh tears.

"It's expected of us, tonight, but after that we can return to separate rooms. But first we have this party to attend."

Anakin nodded. "I just want you to be happy tonight. I know all we'll be doing is talking until we go to bed. Didn't want to bore you on your wedding night."

"I can take a nice soak in the bath, and you can relax by the fire, and we both get in bed when we are ready to sleep." She suggested.

"I do like the sound of that. Sitting by a fire sounds fantastic actually."

"Then that's our plan to spend our wedding night." She confirmed.

"At some point I would like to talk about… relations with Mustafar. We don't have to talk about it necessarily tonight, but I would like to talk soon. There are some concerns I want to make known."

"Tomorrow is for official business, tonight is for celebration. Please enjoy yourself, Anakin."

Anakin nodded as they made their way to the party set up for their wedding. "Right, today is a celebration day. No worries about anything," he reminded himself, glancing at Obi-Wan once more as they passed him.

"And, we are allowed to dance with other people after our first dance." She hinted.

Anakin flushed a little. "Right, yeah, dancing. I'll definitely want to dance with my mom some tonight."

"Her too, but you know…if there was anyone else you were interested in sharing a dance with, I'm
sure you could pull him away from his post for a song, at least."

"I don't know who you're talking about," Anakin claimed while trying not to let his face grow any redder.

"Uh-hu, right." She chuckled and shook her head, "In any case, I will be sharing a dance with Sabé at some point."

"Of course. Dance with her as long as you wish."

She led him to the center of the dance floor, waiting for the guests to finish following them, and for the music to start before she took it upon herself to sweep him into their first dance as a married couple.

Together they danced, mostly silent, mostly emotionless. It couldn't have been expected of them to be fully happy with their marriage, considering it was one out of peace and not love. Still, they kept up a tolerable appearance for their guests, and it seemed to satisfy everyone for the time being. But eventually their dance ended and they drifted apart from each other to speak with guests, friends, and family. A few more dances were shared between the two, but they had little more contact with each other.

As the ceremony soon drew towards the end, neither Anakin nor Padmé had gotten to dance with the special person they had spoken of earlier. Anakin for sure had wanted to wait until there were less people to notice that he was dancing with someone other than his wife and was actually enjoying it more. So he ended up standing to the side, watching the guests and letting his gaze move back every once in a while to Obi-Wan standing guard on the opposite side of the room.

"You're staring." A teasing voice cut into Anakin's thoughts and made him aware of his mother's presence beside him. "Come on, Dance with your mother for another moment."

Anakin turned his head and smiled, taking his mother's hand and guiding her to the dance floor. "Sorry, I was a bit lost in thought. Going over this whole day and all that." He shrugged as they began to dance.

"Oh, I know. It's a big day for you, regardless of how you got here." She hummed, starting to dance with her son with skill. Letting him feel like he was leading, all while guiding him over closer to where Obi-Wan was positioned. It was slow, and she noted with satisfaction that Anakin hadn't noticed, distracted with their light chatter and keeping his footing so that he wouldn't step on her toes or skirts.

"…But even as an adult, don't forget that you sometimes could use a little help from mom." She continued before giving a sudden gasp, her ankle giving out.

Obi-Wan, being on alert for anything that could happen, was quick to respond, moving closer to assist her back to her feet, even as Anakin scrambled to do so worriedly.

"Are you alright?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Oh, yes, I just need to rest my ankle a bit. Forgot my brace I normally use for dancing. Silly me. Do me a favor and finish this dance with my son?" Shmi smiled, pushing the two men together before disappearing to the sidelines to find a seat.

"Are you alright?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Oh, yes, I just need to rest my ankle a bit. Forgot my brace I normally use for dancing. Silly me. Do me a favor and finish this dance with my son?" Shmi smiled, pushing the two men together before disappearing to the sidelines to find a seat.

Anakin flushed as he watched his mother disappear, leaving him alone with Obi-Wan. "She really just did that," he muttered as he turned to face the guard. "I'm so sorry about that. I… I think I should just go back to Padmé now…"
"She's currently getting up the courage to drag Sabé to the dance floor, and a queen just requested I finish entertaining you for this song, so if you wouldn't mind, my king, I'd rather not disappoint the queen of an allied planet." Obi-Wan said after shaking off the confusion of what had just happened so quickly. He held out his hand and bowed.

Anakin took a small step back, a bit unsure and nervous about the situation. He shook his head though, and slowly he took Obi-Wan's hand, feeling his face grow hotter. He was glad the room was relatively dark. "Okay… let's dance then."

"Would you prefer the lead, or shall I take it?" Obi-Wan asked.

"I can lead," Anakin replied a little quickly. He recovered just as quick by starting the dance, hoping Obi-Wan didn't notice too much.

"Of course." Obi-Wan fell into position to allow the king to lead the dance, though he kept a professional distance between them.

The dance was vey stiff, clearly awkward. Anakin kept his gaze anywhere but on Obi-Wan, afraid to show too much interest. That was how he noticed Padmé and Sabé dancing together, looking quite happy. For a moment Anakin felt a bit jealous.

"Are you feeling alright, my King?" Obi-Wan asked, a small frown tugging the corners of his lips.

"I…Y-yeah, I'm fine…" Anakin finally looked directly at Obi-Wan and felt his heart beat speed up. "Just watching Padmé and Sabé, that's all."

"Don't worry; Obi-Wan lowered his voice, "They know how to be discreet."

"I'm sure they do. I'm actually happy for them, you know. Too bad the situation couldn't be in their favor."

"You feel…as if you don't belong here?"

"A little bit, yeah…" Anakin sighed. "It's not in my place to complain though."

"You belong." Obi-Wan reassured, "You just haven't settled in yet. It'll take time for you to find where you fit."

"I wish it wouldn't take so long, to be honest. I want to be happy here, but I just end up missing home and feeling alone."

"It took me well over a month to feel like I belonged here when I first got my job as a guard. Just… make friends. It helps."

"I know, I'm trying a little." Anakin shrugged, then dared to smile a little. "Getting to know you a little has been nice though. Like, as a friend, not… yeah…"

"Not?" the guard raised an eyebrow.

"Not like how Padmé and Sabé are. You know, as a couple…" Anakin shook his head, getting flustered. "Sorry, I'm making this awkward. I really think I should leave now."

"If…that is your wish." Obi-Wan stepped back and bowed before returning to his post, his blank expression hiding his confusion over the King's strange words. Sabé had to be wrong. There was no way the Prince was interested in him, and their dance proved it.
Anakin groaned and rubbed his face before returning to his spot against the wall, away from the dance floor and from other people. He couldn't wait to get into bed that night.

To be continued…
Laughing, Padmé gave her girlfriend's hand a loving squeeze before they parted and she moved over to Anakin, "Ready to turn in for the evening? It's late and you look tired."

Anakin looked at Padmé and nodded. "Yeah, ready for that fire we talked about earlier."

"Then let's go, husband." She linked her arm with his to lead him to their shared room—which she had Sabé and a few other closely trusted handmaidens set up a second bed in during the wedding ceremony itself so that the newlyweds would both feel more comfortable.

Anakin smiled when he saw the separate bed, instantly going to it and laying on top of the covers with a sigh.

"I thought you'd appreciate that as much as I." Padmé smiled, moving over behind a modesty screen to change out of her gown and fineries, and into a much more comfortable nightgown. Then she moved to her own bed and slipped into it with a sigh.

"It even has tons of blankets on it," Anakin said as he stretched out, admiring the fine bedding. "I bet it's even more comfortable than the bed I've been sleeping on."

"If we can't sleep with who we'd prefer tonight, at least we can be spoiled in comfort of our own beds." She giggled. "I do hope you enjoyed yourself this evening."

"Well, I tried at least." Anakin sighed as he sat up, starting to work on getting his tunic off.

"You tried?"

"I just felt a little out of place, that's all. It has nothing to do with us getting married."

"I saw you dancing with a particular guard earlier. That had to have been fun, at least."

"It was more awkward than anything. He didn't really change his expression the whole time I was with him. " Anakin tossed aside his tunic, shivering a little.

"He was technically on duty, and the man takes his job very seriously. It didn't mean he didn't enjoy the break, it just meant that he was constantly reminding himself that he was working and shouldn't openly enjoy himself."

Anakin shrugged. "I just wish he would have shown a bit more emotion if he liked the dance."

"Next time he's not working, ask him for another dance. I'm sure he'll be more open to showing his enjoyment."

Anakin shrugged. "I guess. I just may avoid him for a while though. That conversation was… really awkward."

"How so?" she asked, curiously.

"We talked about you and Sabé, and then about how I should make friends to feel more at home, and then I said I was happy I was getting closer to him, and then it kinda fell apart and went awkward after that."
"I don't see how that would make it awkward, really."

“I mentioned that I liked getting to know him, and he sort of asked how, and I said like a friend and not like a couple and I… made myself feel awkward and broke up the dance.” Anakin groaned and fell back on the bed. “I feel bad now because my mom set up that dance between us and I ruined it.”

Padmé was quiet for a long moment before she finally broke the silence, "…Wow, you are incredibly in over your head when it comes to flirting and approaching a potential relationship, aren't you?"

Anakin chuckled sheepishly. “Yeah… spending some 20 odd years on a volcanic planet with no chance to flirt really doesn’t do me any good, does it?”

"I'd say go to Obi-Wan for flirting advice, but seeing as he's the one you are interested in…" she trailed off, humming in thought.

“I guess… maybe you can give me some advice? You know Obi-Wan well, seeing as he’s one of your guards.”

"I don't know him on a personal level. He's a private man. All I can say is just…be charming?"

“Be charming. Well, I can do that if I wasn’t so embarrassing around him.” Anakin rolled onto his side and shivered a little. “Hey can we get that fire going? If you don’t mind that is.”

"Go ahead. I admit I have never really done it myself." She sighed, studying her husband, "You know, you are rather attractive…maybe try smiling at him and giving him a wink to grab his attention?"

“Just…smile?” Anakin looked confused as he got out of the bed and went over to the small fireplace out on the open balcony. "I’ve heard that working in fairytales, but in real life? Does it really work that way?"

"Worked for me. I looked Sabé in the eye, smiled, and told her that her 'lipstick looked ravishing today', and that got her attention in the way I was hoping to.”

Anakin chuckled. “Wow. Okay, well I guess next time I see him I’ll smile and… compliment his appearance.”

"I'd suggest his hair or boots. He always has great hair—and he has a lovely collection of boots, I have noticed."

“I’ll compliment one of those then. Thank you, really. I honestly had no idea how to recover from that disaster.” Anakin set up what little fuel there was for a fire in the firepit with a smile. Soon there was a blaze keeping him warm as he sat down by the pit.

"I'm sure it wasn't as bad as you think. You just lacked the smoothness that you had hoped to have during that dance. Now," she dimmed the lights, "I think I'm going to turn in. Turn the lights all the way off when you decide you are also ready for bed." Padmé smiled and rolled over on her side, pulling her blanket up over her shoulder.

Anakin nodded, staring into the fire well into the night as he kept himself warm and thinking of Obi-Wan.
Morning came quickly for everyone who had been involved in the wedding the previous day. Anakin dressed and left the room before Padmé even woke up, his stomach growling quite a bit as he left and wandered about. His main path led him to the dining hall for breakfast, but he wandered a bit more than usual. He couldn’t exactly say if it was because he wanted to find Obi-Wan or not. Part of him wanted to see Obi-Wan as soon as possible, the other part wanting to stay as far away as possible. Either way, he would eventually end up talking to Obi-Wan, so he decided that if he met Obi-Wan on the way to breakfast, then so be it.

Anakin did not run into the guard on his morning venture, and he was partially glad for it. His walk had proven to be a bit cold for him, and he wanted to put on more layers as soon as he had his food. So with his breakfast in hand, Anakin made his way back to his and Padmé’s room, snacking along the way.

"I want a full report on what happened outside the east wall in my hand before I finish breakfast." Obi-Wan's voice spoke up, catching Anakin's attention before the captain of the guard rounded the corner with one of his men. He looked as sharp as ever, though there were slight bags under his eyes hinting that he didn’t get as much sleep as he would have liked, or that he had woken very recently. In his hand he carried a fruit with a few bites taken out of it.

"Yes sir! I'll have it sent to your datapad right away!" the guard saluted before turning and hurrying away.

Anakin looked up mid bite, and his eyes went wide. He thought of hiding, since he probably looked ridiculous eating off a plate with no utensils.Quickly he glanced around and found no places to hide. He groaned inwardly.

"Good morning, King Anakin." Obi-Wan said, bowing his head as he approached. "I trust you and the Queen slept well?"

Anakin swallowed the bite of food he had and nodded. "Yes, we slept fine. I believe Padmé is still sleeping."

"Very good. You both deserve this day to simply relax after everything yesterday."

"I honestly wanted to sleep more, since I was up later, but my stomach woke me up." Anakin gestured with his plate of food.

"Well, you are free to eat and then go back to bed if you wish." Obi-Wan gave another bow and turned to continue on his way towards the kitchens to get a proper breakfast.

"Thank you... Oh, hey." Anakin turned his head to look at Obi-Wan, and he smiled. "You look good today, by the way."

Obi-Wan stopped, blinking as he turned back to look at the king, the fruit in his hand up to his lips as he’d been in the middle of taking another bite. He lowered the fruit and quickly chewed and swallowed, his cheeks slightly pink above his beard, "Oh, uh, thank you…"

Anakin smiled again before turning and hurrying back to the bedroom, his own face red and his heart beating rapidly in his chest.

When he returned to the room, he stayed quiet, noticing Padmé was still in bed. He set his plate on the edge of his bed before pulling on another tunic, then he went to sit by the fire with his food.
Obi-Wan was left, shuffling to the kitchens to get his breakfast to take out into one of the courtyards to sit and enjoy the morning sun while eating. Though he found himself distracted by Anakin's sudden compliment.

What did it mean?

When he would smile like that and toss out a compliment it was usually due to his tendency to flirt with most anyone he interacted with…but certainly the new king of Naboo wasn't—was he? No, not after last night's dance disaster…

"Thinking hard, Sir?" A man with white hair tied back in a tail and golden eyes sat next to Obi-Wan with a small plate of food. He wore a mostly white uniform, a member of Naboo's cavalry.

The redhead jumped a bit, looking over at one of the first friends he had made after getting a job on Naboo. "Oh, Arlan…yeah…I guess." He sighed, distracting himself by taking a sip of blue milk he had in his glass.

"Heard there was a commotion along the east wall earlier. How's that coming along?" Arlan took a bite of his toast after he asked his question.

Obi-Wan shrugged, "It happened when I was off for the night, and I haven't read the full report yet."

"Hopefully it's not something big. I would hate for a riot to break out because of our new king."

"If it was something very serious, my men who work the night shift would have alerted me sooner."

"Still, with a new King around, who knows what might happen. The cavalry is on high alert, so we're keeping an eye out with you."

"I doubt any citizens would be an issue. It's more saboteurs to the war's peaceful end that I worry about. Those with a profit made from war. They off course would pay a professional to make the hit. Corrupt bounty hunters and assassins. It's important to keep a close watch on air traffic and tighten security the closer anyone gets to the royal family. At least until the war has finally ended and warmongers have accepted that they must return to making money without war."

Arlan nodded. "I'll have my men keep an eye on the skies for extra measure. I believe there's a group riding around the perimeter today, so they should be able to get a better view around."

"Good…good…" Obi-Wan sighed, looking down at his plate, thoughts drifting back to Anakin. "How's your wife been?"

"She been great recently. We got her some new clothes recently, and she's been very happy since then. I'm glad she's happier now." Arlan smiled while thinking of his wife.

"So the surgery went well? I know you were nervous about it."

"Yeah, the surgery went very well. Dixti and I are both glad for that."

"We're eager to have her back in ranks once she's fully recovered." Obi-Wan smiled, then paused
again, "…So who was it that made the first move between you two, anyway?"

Arlan raised an eyebrow at Obi-Wan, smirking. “You’re quite interested in my relationship
suddenly. Someone catch your eye, Kenobi?”

"N-No, nothing like that!" Obi-Wan defended a little too quickly, "But I…am starting to suspect I
may have caught someone's eye, and I'm… unused to such attention beyond people hoping for a
one-night stand… But at the same time they don't seem interested at all and I'm left… confused."

Arlan chuckled. “Well you are the best looking man on the royal guard. I’m not surprised another
person has taken interest in you.”

"Only if you're into redheads." Obi-Wan laughed, "Point is… I know how to flirt… I don't know
how to… handle flirting that's seriously directed at me… and with the awkwardness that it comes
out as… I think it may just be serious if it is indeed flirting."

“Oh boy, you’re dealing with someone who doesn’t know how to flirt? Man, that’s rough, buddy.”
Arlan sighed and thought for a bit. “Well, all you could really do is flirt back, unless you don’t like
them.”

"It's adorable how bad at flirting he is." Obi-Wan laughed, "But that's not the awkward part… if I'm
wrong about it… Oh Force… that could be bad…"

“Just go easy on him, and I’m sure if you flirt back a little, he might improve his skills. You never
know.”

"No… you don't understand… If I'm wrong and he's not flirting or interested… well, I'm pretty sure
I'll be off Naboo and looking for work far, far away."

Arlan lowered his eyebrows. “Well… then ask him if he’s flirting with you?”

"That's embarrassing… for us both… If I'm wrong then it's me admitting I'm misreading things… if
I'm right then he'll know he… isn't that great at flirting, and…"

“He’d stop trying to flirt with you. Man, this is a tough situation you’re in.”

"So what do I do? Last time anything was near serious was with my fling with the Duchess of
Mandalore… and I was just a teenager, and we knew nothing could truly come of it.”

“I guess… if he is flirting with you, just wait for him to confess his attraction. That’s the only way
I can think of without you getting in trouble… somehow.”

"And if he does? If he doesn’t? I wish I had time to think on all this without it distracting me from
doing my job…"

“I wish I could help you out more.” Arlan sighed and stood back up. “I’ll leave you to your food
and your thoughts. I need to make sure the cavalry is ready to ride out today. Good luck with the
flirting.”

"Yeah, I could use it… you already got your wife and know where her feelings for you are.” He
pouted teasingly.

“Don’t worry, Kenobi. You’ll figure this out,” Arlan called over his shoulder before disappearing
to take care of the Naboo cavalry.
Obi-Wan sighed, "Yeah…maybe…" he used his fork to poke his breakfast around.

"Excuse me," a softer voice spoke up, rather close. The voice was accompanied by several small mews of tooka kittens.

Obi-Wan started before turning around and leaning over to peer around a flowering bush, finding none other than Queen Shmi sitting cross-legged on the ground with seven of the castle's tooka kittens playing in and around her lap.

"Your highness—I apologize, I wasn't aware you were there. How is your ankle?"

"Oh my ankle is just fine. I only needed to sit a while." She chuckled lightly. "I'm sorry, but I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation with that other man. I take it the dance with my son didn't go so well."

Obi-Wan slumped his shoulders, "I kept things professional and appropriate but then he started saying some odd things before running off."

"Silly boy. He has issues when it comes to expressing his feelings. Before, he had restrictions put on him, and as a boy, how cruel is it to demand him not to show emotion, especially in times that demand emotion?" Shmi shook her head and sighed, scratching under the chin of one kitten. "He struggles, yes, but he tries so hard. I hope at least you were able to pick up something from his mixed signals."

"He wasn't allowed to show emotion?"

"Anakin was born into slavery. Growing up he was always told to silence his crying or to not look like he was having too much fun with the other slave children. Slavers said it was bad for business. I'm so glad we were given the opportunity to escape when we did. The Mustafar king has been merciful to us."

"He…has mentioned being a slave before—but I had no idea slaves are forced to be so….stunted emotionally…"

Shmi shrugged. "Slavery is cruel. Forcing someone to act like a droid in order to be sold is cruel."

"It's more than cruel, it's inhumane. The whole idea of owning another sentient being is…" he shook his head.

"It’s disgusting, I know." Shmi stood up with several kittens in her arms. "But I’m not here to talk about slavery. I wanted to talk about my son."

"Please, feel free to join me at the table."

"Thank you very much." She made her way up to where the guard was and sat down with him, letting the kittens wander on the table. "I have to say, Naboo is very lovely. Just a bit cold for my liking though."

"For your son as well. I do hope that the servants lit a fire in your room last night. It seems to have helped your son sleep better to have a fire."

"Yes, I did have a fire last night. It was quite wonderful." She leaned forward with a smile. "Now, let’s talk about Anakin. You know I set up that dance between you two last night. I hate seeing him like someone and then not do anything about it. Drives me up the wall."
"So he does—but are you sure? He is my king, and married to my Queen and if he doesn't actually…well, I could be in trouble, even if he and the Queen have an understanding as long as they stay discreet…"

"Trust me, he does like you. He wants to find someone to love, and the queen isn’t exactly his type, though I do see them becoming good friends at some point."

"And you think I'm his type?"

"Well you are certainly someone he’s shown interest in, so I’d say you’re his type."

The guard sat back, letting out a breath between his lips. "So I'm not imagining that he's trying to flirt with me…” he looked over at the Musafarian queen, "And if I decide I wish to return his feelings and explore what may come…how should I go about it? You're his mother and his past is complicated so I'm not sure regular flirting would be my best option…"

"You could at least try it. You never know. Anakin is a smart boy, and a charming one. He’ll figure things out if you show him a way."

"But how? If he struggles with expressing emotions, then do I have to be—forward with him? Or should I let him come around in his own time to take that step?"

"Maybe a bit of both. Let him learn, but also guide him. If he struggles to show an emotion, help him by improving the moment. Take him to do something, have fun with him, whatever he needs. Oh, and of course don't feel shy to kiss him. He’d be the shy one and likely won’t initiate it."

"What if he's not ready for that?"

"You will definitely know if he’s ready or not." Shmi took Obi-Wan’s hands in her own and squeezed them. “I know it may be difficult at first, but Anakin is a sweet man. If you allow him to, he can reach amazing heights in a relationship. Trust me."

"It…just seems strange to me that he'd be interested…that I may end up as the King's…paramour…"

"I know it's strange, especially since he's married now, but I know he's interested in you, and I also know he'd be much happier if the person he liked started to show they like him back."

"I do like him…he's just…my king…my job is to protect him, not kiss him…"

"You know, you don't have to think like a droid around him all the time. He's a human, just like you. There's nothing different. He may be a king now, but he's still Anakin."

"It's still…unexpected. I thought I'd die alone in some corner of the galaxy."

"Looks like the Force has other plans for you." Shmi smiled. "Well, I really should be getting ready to head back home. As much as I love it here, Mustafar still needs me. It was lovely chatting with you, Mister Kenobi."

Obi-Wan stood up to help her to her feet. "Shall I escort you to your ship?"

"I think that would be wonderful, yes."

Ever courteous, the guard offered the Queen his arm to guide her safely to her ship.

She took it with a smile and let herself be led by the man she hoped her son would get to know
better.

To be continued…
The roar of the falls was a new sound to Anakin. He had seen lava flows before similar to the waterfalls before him. But so much water, he had never seen so much before. It brought a smile to his face, though he felt colder the closer he and Padmé rode to the falls on their Guarlaras.

"Will you swim?" Padmé asked, steering her mount to take a slight lead ahead of her husband.

Anakin shook his head. “I don’t think so. It’s still a bit chilly for me here.”

"It's one of the hottest days of the year!" she exclaimed, "And besides…even Obi-Wan goes for a swim when we come here."

“Ah, well…” Anakin glanced back at the guard following them on his tusk-cat, several other guards and handmaidens following him. “Maybe I’ll swim for a little bit.”

"That's the spirit." She grinned at her pining husband.

Anakin flushed a little as he looked back at the falls. "So this is really one of the hottest days you have here?"

"Yes. We're in the mid summer months on Naboo."

"Amazing. Mustafar never gets this cold."

"Mustafar is made of fire and melted rock." She pointed out.

"You're correct." Anakin smiled. "Although, I do believe I'm getting used to this climate. I haven't felt as cold as I did the day I arrived."

"That's good…but if you do get cold…ask Obi to cuddle you." She winked. "Now, race you!" she laughed, flicking the reigns and speeding off ahead.

"Hey!" With a very red face, Anakin snapped the reigns of his Guarlaras, urging it forward as he raced to catch up. Something in him came back from his past, something deep inside from the few podraces he participated in as a child. A smirk came across his lips as he pulled up right beside Padmé.

"Don't think I'll let you win, Ani!" she laughed, urging her Guarlaras to go faster.

"Your highnesses, please!" Obi-Wan's voice called out after them, "I know this is a royal vacation spot, but my job would be much easier if you didn't run off!"

"Good, I like a challenge!" Anakin laughed as he matched Padmé's speed with ease. Of course it had nothing to do with the skills of either rider. Their mounts were rather large animals, and weren't as fast as others, but it still made Anakin feel alive when he raced, even on the back of a Guarlaras.

"Why?" Obi-Wan groaned before urging his own mount forward at a much quicker pace so the King and Queen wouldn't get too far ahead.

Anakin managed to make it to the beach just a bit ahead of Padmé. He raised his hands in victory
while his mount began grazing on the beach grasses. "I knew I would win," he boasted as both his wife and Obi-Wan arrived.

"Win what? Honestly, the two of you becoming close friends was a horrible decision for your safety." Obi-Wan smirked as he hopped off his mount and moved to help his Queen down off hers.

"What can I say, I'm competitive by nature." Anakin chuckled as he dismounted.

"I'd call it reckless."

"It's so sweet of you to be so worried for him." Padmé giggled, making Obi-Wan flush.

"He's got a perfectly good reason to worry about me. I am the new King after all, and someone is bound to not like me." Anakin shrugged.

"It's…my job to worry—about you both, My queen."

"Yeah, yeah…" she giggled and moved over to the water's edge.

Anakin smiled as he too moved to the water, crouching and sticking his hand in to test the temperature. He shivered. "It is nice for someone to care enough to worry…"

"It's a paycheck." Obi-Wan smirked as he unloaded packs containing the group's lunch and belongings for the trip as the others in the group finally joined them.

Anakin rolled his eyes. "Right, money… Honestly I don't care about the wealth that comes with this life. As long as I'm with a person who cares about me, all the other stuff doesn't matter."

"Credits allow me to pay bills." Obi-Wan pointed out, "I'm no where near being a rich man."

"But you're the captain of the royal guard right? Are you being paid enough?"

"Enough, yes. I do live comfortably. But you do realize my comment about a paycheck was teasing, right?"

"I..." Anakin flushed and looked away from Obi-Wan, starting to take his boots off and roll up the legs of his trousers. "Guess I didn't..."

"If I wanted to ask for a raise in pay, it wouldn't be on a vacation." Obi-Wan shrugged before handing Anakin a cooled drink.

Anakin took the drink with a quiet "Thanks," in reply. He sipped it while he stepped into the cool water.

Obi-Wan smirked before shedding his layers until he was down to only a pair of shorts. He then climbed the rocks with ease and stood at the top of one of the shorter falls before jumping, hitting the water with a splash.

Watching him with a blank expression, Anakin had to fight back some of the thoughts that entered his head as he eased deeper into the water.

"It's better if you do it fast." Obi-Wan shouted as his head popped back up out of the water, shaking red hair away from his face. "…And if you take off most of your clothing." He teased after a pause.

"I'm still getting used to the water," Anakin called back. "This water is way colder than I
"That's why faster is better. You adjust faster."

"Told you he'd swim." Padmé said, passing by Anakin, holding Sabé's hand as both women wore swimwear. Then they ducked under, swimming a ways before popping back up.

Anakin groaned and gave in, moving back out of the water to strip down to shorts. He went back into the water the same way as before, though he forced himself to get in so his whole body was covered. He shivered quite a bit as he stood there, water up to his shoulders.

Obi-Wan popped up behind him from under the water, "It also helps to swim around and move to get your blood flowing so you don't just get cold." He said gently.

"I'm finding it a bit hard to move around right now," Anakin said through chattering teeth.

"Come on." Obi-Wan coaxed, touching Anakin's arm, "I'll help."

Anakin flushed but let Obi-Wan lead him deeper into the water. His shivering lessened the longer he was in the water, and he smiled knowing he was getting used to the water."

Obi-Wan smiled, his cheeks flushing as he leaned in, "I'll let you kiss me if you can catch me." He whispered before swimming away.

Anakin made a huge splash as he desperately tried to catch Obi-Wan. His face was very red, but there was no one around to judge him that cared enough. Obi-Wan had literally just offered him the opportunity to kiss, so of course he did all he could to catch that teasing redhead.

Obi-Wan laughed as he swam around, careful not to go too deep in case the desert boy had never learned to swim.

However, as the chase went deeper into the water, it seemed that Anakin could swim much better than one would have thought. He kicked his legs powerfully and propelled himself close to the redhead. He reached out, almost able to grab a pale shoulder.

Anakin dove down as well, continuing to reach out for Obi-Wan. He had to surface for air much quicker however, and he coughed a little once he was able to breathe again. Still, he kept a watchful eye on the blurred shape of the underwater guard. He kept above the water, following, stalking like a predator, waiting for the right moment to strike.

Obi-Wan swam on, cutting his way through the water until he had to surface again for air.

With a quick kick, Anakin surged forward and slapped Obi-Wan’s shoulder as he surfaced. “Got you!”

"I suppose you did." He smiled after filling his lungs with fresh air. "Are you feeling warmer now that you’ve moved around?"

"Yeah, I am. Though a bit chilly still, much warmer than before." Anakin smiled.

"Good. Now you should be able to enjoy yourself."

"I should... But I believe I was promised a kiss," Anakin said as he lowered his voice. "Not here
though. Away from the other guards and handmaidens."

"It's your prize to claim. You can do so whenever you wish—before we leave the falls, that is."

"Ah... Right. Um..." Anakin looked around, then pointed to an outcropping of rocks stacked high and away from prying eyes. "Let's go over there. We can get out of the water for a bit and dry off."

"Alright. Race you." He smirked, kicking off in the water.

Anakin smiled as he followed close behind. When they reached the rocks, he pulled himself out of the water and ran his hands back through his hair, sighing as he settled on a flatter rock. "Seems like everyone is interested in racing me today."

"Everyone wants you to have fun today." Obi-Wan shrugged.

"I guess. It's working too. I'm actually enjoying the day so far." Anakin looked over at Obi-Wan and smiled. "The sun really brings out your hair color, even after swimming."

"You're getting better at flirting." Obi-Wan flushed.

"Am I?" Anakin chuckled. I've been getting tips from Padmé, actually. She's been really helpful."

"Has she, now?" Obi-Wan hummed, lifting himself half onto the rock next to Anakin, his waist and legs still in the cool waters.

"Yeah..." Anakin started a bit at Obi-Wan, eventually smiling and patting a spot on the rock right next to him. "You know I can't kiss you if you're so far away from me."

"I'm enjoying the cool water."

“And I’m enjoying the warm sun because the water is still cold to me.” Anakin smirked.

"And you won't lean over to meet in the middle?"

“Oh I guess I could lean down a little.”

Obi-Wan lifted himself up a little more, tilting his head so that his lips could meet with Anakin's. Anakin leaned down like he said he would, and gently, their lips connected. The king felt his cheeks heat up slightly.

Obi-Wan pressed a little more firmly into the kiss, his eyes closed as he simply enjoyed the feeling. Then he slowly sank back down into the water.

Anakin followed Obi-Wan slightly as the kiss ended, but he straightened back up quickly, clearing his throat. "That was... Rather enjoyable, actually."

"I would have hoped so." He smiled, leaning back to float in the water.

“T’ve never kissed anyone before, so yeah.” Anakin chuckled.

"Well, other than your wife at your wedding." Obi-Wan pointed out.

“Oh, yeah…” The younger man seemed to slouch a little. “My wife…”

"Who is a very understanding woman to let you do this." Obi-Wan pointed out, taking the king's
hand and pressing a kiss to it.

Anakin’s face grew much redder, and he almost wanted to pull his hand away. “Yes, she is. I’m glad she is.”

"Can I ask what made you choose me?"

“I don’t know. I guess I just felt comfortable around you. More than around Padmé at first.”

Obi-Wan looked a little disappointed at the answer. "Oh…"

Anakin winced. “Sorry, that was a bad reason wasn’t it?”

"Yes." Obi-Wan said simply.

“Well, to be fair I’ve never felt comfortable around women my age, and I’m more attracted to guys, so naturally I was more attracted to you than Padmé… I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to mess this all up right after we kissed.”

"If…it’s all the same, I’d rather not just be a ‘well he’s a guy so he’s a better option’ lover." Obi-Wan muttered, feeling a little hurt as he turned to swim away back over to the rest of the group.

“What? No, that’s not what I meant!” Anakin jumped back into the water, gasping at the sudden cold. “Obi-Wan, you wouldn’t be that kind of lover. It’s not just attraction that I like you. I like you for you, your personality that I know so far.”

"Then why didn't you say that?"

“I… don’t know, actually. Kinda dumb that I waited to say that.” Anakin sighed. “The point is, I do like you, and I want to get to know you more. You’re not the better option because you’re a guy. You’re a better option because you’re you.”

"I just don't want this to not work out because you rushed into it just so that your wife wasn't the only one with a lover warming her bed. I don't want to set my heart up for an inevitable heartbreak if I let this attraction grow into something more on my end."

“I don’t want to rush things. I want us to take it at a speed that’s comfortable for the both of us. I’ve been single this long, I can be single a little longer if I have to.” Anakin offered a smile.

"I want you to be sure about me. I want you to really want me because of who I am, and you can see yourself with me." Obi-Wan sighed and pushed wet hair back behind his ear, "Call me a romantic, but I'd want you to think my eyes are beautiful, want to hold my hand, talk with me for hours…I want romance, not be just the King's bed warmer."

“Well, I did say your hair looked nice today, even if it’s wet.” Anakin grabbed Obi-Wan’s arm and tugged a little. “Come on, let’s get back on the rocks.”

"And I did like that…" Obi-Wan sighed, "You're sure you're serious about wanting me? You won't drop me as soon as someone you're actually attracted to comes along?"

“What do you mean by someone I’m actually attracted to? I’m very much attracted to you, Obi-Wan. I’m just terrible at expressing it.” Anakin chuckled a little. “And I’m serious about this. I want to try this thing between us.”

"You're out of my league, Anakin, you could have anyone. Me? I'm a nobody, and I'll always be a
nobody. Just a guard working to protect the royal family of this planet.”

“You’re incredibly handsome and I’m honestly surprised you don’t have anyone now. Good looking and a great personality, why wouldn’t someone want you?”

"Plenty do—for a single night. Then they move on. That’s why it’s so important that I know this is more substantial for you…”

“Well, for starters I have clearly shown interest in you for more than just one day. I know you meant that they want to sleep with you, but still. All they do is flirt and don’t make any attempts to get to know you. I at least have made that attempt.”

"You also needed a friend when you first came here, so…” he shook his head, "Sorry, I don't have quite the confidence I need to just overlook what gives me doubts right now.”

Anakin shrugged. "I understand. But can we at least not pretend like that kiss didn’t happen? Because it absolutely did, and I liked it a lot actually.”

"I did too.” He admitted.

"Then maybe we should do it again,” the king suggested with a smile.

"I…suppose we can try it if you're sure on your feelings.”

"Right now, I’m really sure about my feelings, so yeah, we can try it again.”

"Then, I suppose…” Obi-Wan pulled the king towards him in the water.

Anakin closed the distance between them and connected their lips once more, wrapping an arm around the guard and keep him closer.

"Finally! Force, you two took forever. Hey Padmé, you owe me fifty credits! They kissed!” Sabé smirked.

Anakin pulled away quickly, looking around until he spotted Sabé, and then he flushed dark red. "I thought this place was secluded…”

"It is, that's why I peeped.” The girl laughed. "Oh, and Obi? I told you he liked you! Next time believe me!"

Sighing, Anakin pushed further away from Obi-Wan. "I guess we couldn't have privacy for long out here anyways."

"You know, everyone here is trustworthy to keep things hushed.” Obi-Wan muttered.

"I know, but still.” Anakin shook his head and looked back up at Sabé. "Does this mean we are done swimming for the day?"

"Only if you want to be done.”

"Well I assume you're done since you came looking for Obi-Wan and I.”

"I was just curious as to where you two disappeared to."

Anakin nodded. "Well I would like to dry off in the sun before getting ready to head back.”
"I packed a warming towel for you, actually." Obi-Wan shrugged.

"Oh, well that would go nicely with sunbathing."

"I'm afraid I won't be joining you in the sun. I burn easily and like to keep to the shade when I'm not swimming."

“Fair enough. I guess I could join you in the shade with the warming towel, if you wouldn’t mind that.”

"Do what you want to. This is a vacation day." Obi-Wan said, kissing Anakin's knuckles once more before starting to swim towards shore.

Anakin smiled, then glanced back at Sabé briefly before getting out of the water and climbing the rocks back to their mounts. He returned to Obi-Wan shortly with the towel around his waist, and he found a shady spot on the rocks where he and the guard could both sit comfortably. Anakin sat first, watching Obi-Wan swim around more as he dried himself off.

Obi-Wan swam slowly, enjoying the coolness of the water a bit longer before he got out and toweled off. Then he went to join Anakin in the shade.

Anakin had his knees brought up to his chest, the towel now around his shoulders as he took in its warmth. His eyes were closed.

"Drowsy?" Obi-Wan asked, sitting down next to him.

Anakin opened his eyes and smiled at Obi-Wan. “Maybe a little. A nap sounds really good right now, actually.”

"Go ahead." Obi-Wan nodded before pausing. After a moment's thought he shifted his legs and offered his lap as a pillow.

Yawning, Anakin laid down, his head in Obi-Wan’s lap, and he closed his eyes once more. It wasn’t long before his breathing changed slightly, signaling that he had fallen asleep.

Obi-Wan's face softened as he played with a drying curl that had been clinging to Anakin's cheek.

The day went on; the sun beginning to set by the time Anakin finally woke up. He first yawned, then stretched a little before he finally opened his eyes and looked around, remembering where he was and what he was doing.

“Guess I slept longer than I intended,” he said to no one in particular, his voice slightly rough from sleep.

"You must be starving." Obi-Wan chuckled.

“I could eat, yeah.” Anakin sat up and stretched his arms, yawning once more. “At least we’re dry now. Riding back to the castle will be more comfortable.”

Anakin stood up as well, admiring the sunset and the light breeze that blew through his blond-streaked hair. For a moment, he wished the days were longer and warmer, not so much like Mustafar, but more like Tatooine, his original home. Though he very much could have done without the sand. He shivered a little.

"Hey, Anakin, you want bantha cheese on your sandwich?" Obi-Wan called back over his shoulder
as he slapped meat and condiments on bread for the both of them.

"Sure," Anakin replied, climbing up the rocks to the highest point.

"If you think I'll be carrying your food all the way up there for you, you're in for a surprise." Obi-Wan chuckled before he smiled at Padmé who had gotten up to get a drink.

"You two were hiding in the shade a long time." She commented.

Obi-Wan only shrugged.

"I was sleeping," Anakin said as he hopped down, looking almost like a child while coming down. He landed close to Obi-Wan with a smile.

"So were my legs." Obi-Wan snickered.

"You could have woken me up. I really didn’t need to sleep for that long. I’ll be up forever tonight."

"I tried; you are a very stubborn sleeper, my king."

Anakin shrugged. "I usually don’t sleep that hard, even for a nap, but oh well."

"You told me 'five more minutes, mom' three times before I gave up."

"Oh… Sorry I called you Mom. I guess… I miss her again."

"Wow, calling your boyfriend 'Mom' is really embarrassing." Padmé teased light-heartedly.

Obi-Wan flushed, "I'm not—that is…we're taking things slow, so…"

Anakin flushed as well. "We’re not dating," he stated clearly, as if the point hadn’t already been made.

"Sure you are. You've been dancing around each other for months. Now you've finally taken the next step. Boyfriends. Not lovers, certainly, but boyfriends."

"But we don’t know each other well enough! We… we’re talking. Not dating."

"That's what dating is all about. Spending time together, getting to know each other, things like that." Padmé shrugged before pointing at the two men, "Boyfriends."

Anakin groaned and hid his face. “Call us boyfriends if you want, that’s not what we are.”

"It's not a bad thing, you know. In fact, it's a good thing. It means you two are one step closer to happiness."

“I… guess, yeah.” Anakin shrugged and waved his hand. “But I’m hungry, so can we eat our sandwiches now?"

"Will you two join the group now if I let you eat?" she asked.

“Yeah, we’ll join the group,” he replied.

"Good. We need our boys spending time with us a little more on this outing." She smiled, turning back to return to Sabé's side.
Obi-Wan held up Anakin's sandwich, "Let's go—'boyfriend'." He smirked.

Anakin rolled his eyes but took the sandwich with a smile, taking a bite out of it. "At least I'm not being forced to swim again."

"Who forced you? You seemed to have fun and stepped in all on your own. I only coaxed you into doing more than shiver."

"I was still cold when I got out of the water." Anakin chuckled. "And I was joking about being forced to swim. I don't want to get back in though."

"It's getting too chilly to do so." Obi-Wan shrugged as he led the way over to the group, munching on his own sandwich.

"You know, I've not done much swimming in my life. Living in places where water was scarce prevented me from learning how to swim until I was in my teens. My mom had the opportunity to teach me when we were on a diplomatic mission on Mon Calamari. I swam in pools thankfully."

"I wasn't sure you could swim at first but you did surprise me." Obi-Wan nodded as he sat down across from Sabé.

"I can swim enough to survive if need be." Anakin shrugged, sitting down as well.

"Good to know."

The two men settled into a new conversation with the girls and other guards who had escorted the royal family to their day's vacation, whom also each had enjoyed themselves with swimming and other such activities. Everyone had started to relax and let their guard down throughout the day.

Blaster fire rid the moment of any happiness quicker than anyone could blink, the shots aimed towards Padmé.

"Get down!" Obi-Wan sprang into action, quickly falling into place of the royal guard captain. He leapt forward, his food falling into the dirt as he shielded the queen with his own body.

"Get into position! Protect your Queen and King—and the handmaidens!" he shouted as the other guards scrambled for their weapons and took a stance to protect. One tossed him his own blaster.

Anakin suddenly panicked as he was shoved behind some rocks with Padmé, Sabé and other handmaidens. He tried to see what was going on as blaster fire rained down on the guards. He had never experienced an attack on his life before.

"Locate the assailants!" Obi-Wan commanded, making his way forward, "You two, with me, the rest of you keep here as backup!"

"Do things like this happen a lot?" Anakin asked Padmé in a distressed tone.

"Not-not usually…" Padmé said, her voice shaking as Sabé took her hand and gave it a comforting squeeze.

Anakin nodded, and taking a breath, he grabbed her other hand. "I hope this doesn't last long...We're far safer at home than we are here."

The girls all huddled into Anakin, hoping they were safe from any stray bolts as blaster fire sounded, drowning out the shouts of the guards protecting them—
Until a scream of pain cut through the air.

Anakin looked up with wide eyes, knowing exactly who had screamed. "Obi-Wan!" He struggled with himself, not knowing if he should stay behind the rock or grab a blaster and fight his way to Obi-Wan.

"Stay down, Highness, we'll take care of it!" one of the guards shouted.

Anakin, Padmé, and the handmaidens all were unable to see anything as the blaster fire continued.

More screams of pain came from different guards, and the more he heard the more Anakin itched to get out there and fight whoever was attacking. Deciding he was fed up, he turned to the girls. “Stay here, stay out of sight.”

With that, he ran out from hiding and scooped up a blaster into his hands, aiming at the attackers and shooting. Out of the corner of his eye he spotted his Guarlaras trotting around in agitation. Quickly he made his way to the animal and mounted it, riding into the blaster fire and shooting surprisingly accurate.

"Anakin, don't!" Padmé cried out, "You're a target just as much as I am!"

Anakin didn’t listen, continuing to charge at the attackers, and when they saw that he was not going to slow down his mount, they quickly moved from their spots and ran in different directions. All their blaster fire was suddenly aimed at him, but he seemed to have little problem with that. He shot continuously, landing several shots on the attackers until there were only a handful left. Still they continued to shoot at him, clear that they had a mission to kill one of the monarchs that day.

Then one shot lodged itself into his shoulder, sending him tumbling off his frightened mount. He landed hard on the ground with a grunt, and soon he found himself surrounded by the remaining attackers. In his time of desperation, Anakin made a quick decision to act upon, even if it made those around him look at him differently.

An explosion of energy shot out of Anakin, sending the attackers flying in all directions. His blaster that had flown out of his hand suddenly came back as if it was possessed by something. One attacker was raised into the air and was shot by Anakin’s blaster. The dead body fell to the ground with a thump, and the attackers were suddenly made aware of who they were up against.

"Shit, he's a karking Jedi or some shit!" an attacker shouted out, though it was obvious to the remaining attackers that that was seemingly the case.

Anakin gained a menacing expression. “Get out of here before I do more damage. I don’t want to see you or any of your friends here again!”

"We have a job—Jedi or not, the pay's worth the risk!" a female weequay shouted, pointing her gun at Anakin's head and taking a shot.

Anakin easily dodged the shot, glancing quickly at Obi-Wan on the ground. He let his anger grow and used the Force to pull the Weequay towards him, his hand wrapping around her throat. "I said I don't want to see you here again." He squeezed just enough for her to panic a little.

She sputtered and kicked out, her boot getting him sharp in the side.

Anakin grunted but stood his ground. "Do you understand me? I will destroy the rest of you if you return. Do I need to make that clearer?" He squeezed tighter.
"Your highness!" The uninjured guards hurried over, one taking out a pair of cuffs, "Let her down, we can take her for questioning."

Anakin let go of her as soon as she was cuffed, then he turned and hurried over to Obi-Wan. "Obi-Wan? Are you okay?"

The guard didn't respond, didn't move, and if it wasn't for the labored heaving of his chest, it'd be easy for the panicked King to think the man was dead. Burns peppered his body from hits and exposure to the blaster bolts that had been flying, the man having nothing more than swim shorts on to protect himself.

Anakin gently touched one of the burns and grimaced. "We need to get back to the castle immediately," he declared to all those around. "Pack up and mount as soon as possible."

The group got to work, gathering their things, helping the girls up onto their mounts, and one guard coming the castle to have the royal medics ready for them as others gathered the injured.

Anakin managed to chase down his Guarlaras and calm it before mounting once more. He instructed a lesser guard to assist in getting Obi-Wan up on the animal with Anakin. Then when everything and everyone was packed and ready, he led everyone back to the castle at a moderate pace.

To be continued…
Padmé frowned as she watched her husband stare blankly at the man floating in bacta, the tank shedding blue light into the dim corners of the otherwise dark room. She sighed and pulled her shawl tighter around her bare shoulders before stepping into the medical ward and approaching Anakin.

"It's late; you should be in bed, Ani." She touched his shoulder lightly.

Slowly Anakin looked at Padmé, dark circles around his eyes. "But what if I leave and something happens?"

"The royal healers are just down the hall, and the medical droids are right over there in their charging ports and ready to spring to action the second something happens. Come on, you need sleep."

He sighed, too tired to fight his wife. "Okay... I'll sleep a little."

"Do you want your private bedroom or our shared one so you have comfort should you need it?" she asked, holding out a hand to help him up. Normally they slept in their own private rooms, but their shared room did still have two beds, and hadn't been used since their wedding night.

Anakin shrugged. "I guess the extra comfort would be nice."

Padmé nodded, "I'll be right across the room in my own bed should you need me." She promised, leading him out of the medical ward and down the halls.

"I know we haven't slept in the same room together since our wedding, but I hope it won't be too odd for you."

"We're friends. It'll be like a sleepover."

Anakin smiled. "When you put it that way, it sounds a lot better."

She smiled and soon they were in their shared bedroom.

"Should I call for one of the night staff to come build a fire for you, or will your blankets be enough?"

"I think I can go without the fire tonight. I don't particularly care for it right now."

She nodded and squeezed his hand before moving to her own bed and slipping into it.

"I hope Obi-Wan is okay," Anakin said to no one in particular as he slipped into his bed. He sighed and pulled the covers up by his head.

"I'm sure he'll be back on his feet in no time." She reassured.

"...Ani, why didn't you tell anyone here that you could use the Force like a Jedi?" she asked after a long pause.

There was a long moment before Anakin replied. "I got in trouble when I was younger... When I
used the Force, I was punished without my mom knowing. I didn't want her to get hurt because of something I could do and she couldn't. So I hid it from her and the rest of the galaxy. I kept denying myself the ability to use the Force when I needed it, because I really didn't want to be Force sensitive. I still don't. So I've hidden it since I was young."

"But why would anyone…using the Force is a gift that few are granted in the grand scheme of the galaxy. It's an amazing ability that can be used to protect…"

"If a Jedi would have found me, I would have been taken away from the slavers who owned me. Of course they didn't want to get rid of me. I was a product to them. Just something to be sold and kept. They lose a slave, they lose money."

"Did you want to be a Jedi?"

"No. I wanted to stay and protect my mom, and I did. Now we both live happily away from the slavers."

"How did you get away from slavery—let alone end up part of a royal family?" she asked.

"The king was passing through and spotted us. He liked my mom and I, and he bought us and gave us freedom, making us part of the royal family. Nothing special happened, he just bought us and accepted us into the family."

She frowned, "He gave you freedom, but did your mom have the choice to marry him or take you to start a life elsewhere?"

"What else were we to do? We had no money, nothing to the Skywalker name. We had no choice but to stay and be part of something that was far better than our old life."

She shrugged, "I just feel a better choice presented would have been offer the choice to go and supply your mother with enough credits to get a life started for the two of you. Offering a former slave their freedom that comes with the condition of marriage or starting out with nothing doesn't exactly sound like real freedom or options to me. Your mother was thinking of your wellbeing when she chose what she did, I'm sure. I'm not saying your step-father is a bad man—I just don't think he had thought it through completely. And then the fact that he chose you for the arranged marriage…that wasn't your choice, either."

Anakin sighed. "Whatever the case… I'm here now, and you know I can use the Force. I don't want to use it unless absolutely necessary."

"It's up to you, but no one will punish you for it."

"I know… I've just kept it hidden for so long that I fear I will be punished for it some day."

"You're protected here." She reassured, "And it's up to you if you use the Force or not. But I suggest you tell Obi-Wan when he recovers so he's aware of it. Seeing as it's his job to protect us, it seems like that should be something he is aware of so he can be ready for it should you need to use it again or he must act fast and choose what to do."

"Yeah… I'll tell him in the morning if he's awake."

She paused, "And I'm glad I know now, too… One day we will have to have a kid, and with you being Force Sensitive, there would be a higher chance at our kid being so as well…" She said awkwardly.
Anakin pulled the covers over his head, ending the conversation there. He really didn't want to think about having a child with Padmé, even though he knew it was expected at some point in the future.

"Sorry, I don't want to think about it either, but…it is important." She muttered with a sigh, "…I'm turning off the lights now…"

"Good night," Anakin replied, his voice muffled by the blankets. He took a shuddering breath before shifting to get more comfortable.

"Night." She muttered back before the lights dimmed until they were completely off.

Anakin was awake and back in the medical ward the next morning before Padmé had even woken up for the day. He sat by Obi-Wan's side, keeping himself busy with a datapad in hand, sending a message to his mother telling her of the previous day's events, including the attack. He left out the part that he was Force sensitive.

The healer on the morning shift walked in, a cup of coffee in one hand and a breakfast pastry in the other. She stopped, blinking at the King sitting next to the bacta tank before sighing, "I hope you didn't stay here all night, Highness."

Anakin looked up. "No, I just woke up really early, so I decided to come here and write a message to my mom."

"As long as you got proper sleep. She took a sip of her coffee before setting it down and moving to check on Obi-Wan's status.

"I did. I slept quite well, actually," he lied.

"Good." She typed some things in on a pad and bubbles started in the bacta. "I'll be taking Captain Kenobi out shortly."

"You will? Is he awake then?" Anakin shifted to the edge of the chair he sat in.

"No, but he's having a reaction to the bacta or something that is putting strain on his heart rate. I need to check on that."

"Oh… okay. Will I be in your way if I watch?"

"I was actually telling you in case you wished to help. You seem strong and while the droids can lift him, I feel in his condition softer arms would be better."

Anakin flushed a little. "I can help lift him. Just tell me when and where I need to hold him up."

"The lift will get him out of the tank, but you'll need to move him onto the examination bed." She explained as the lift was activated and Obi-Wan was slowly lifted out of the tank and lowered down next to it instead.

"Got it." Anakin grabbed Obi-Wan and gently carried him over to the examination bed.
Meanwhile, the healer grabbed a towel and wheeled over a scanner, handing Anakin the towel to dry off the bacta that had gotten on him. Then she set up the scanner to read what was causing the strain on Obi-Wan's heart, and let it do its programmed job.

Anakin watched Obi-Wan as he dried himself off, careful not to look too worried in case he accidentally hinted at something between the two of them. He didn't want to ruin his royal image so soon after the wedding.

"He'll pull through; this isn't his first stay in a bacta tank after playing hero." The healer said, glancing at the king. "Attacks don't happen a lot, but he does jump in to save anyone in need. One time when he was new here he got beat up pretty bad by a gang when he stepped in to save some kids from being mugged."

"Well, at least he does his job," Anakin said with a shrug. "He's very loyal too."

"He is, we are fond of him, but he visits these halls too much."

"Let me guess, he's the most regular patient here." Anakin chuckled lightly.

"Very much so." She nodded, "So if you plan to always be here when he is, you may want to rethink it to short visits."

"Thanks for that heads up. I'm sure I'll be in here many more times, as much as I hate to say that."

"Once a month at least, though that is counting small injuries that can be healed quickly." Anakin whistled low. "Wow, how is he still alive even? How long has he been here?"

"About ten years, I think?" she hummed as she went about her job.

"Wow, and he comes in here once a month?" Anakin shook his head. "He must be good at his job, despite getting hurt all the time."

"Oh yes, he earned his position." She agreed.

"Good man... I'd say we're lucky to have him here."

"Yes, but I wish he was better at saving himself when saving others." She shook her head.

"Maybe I can have him learn some better self-defense. I've found it's helpful at times."

"I don't think that's the issue, really. He tends to lean towards self-sacrifice at times." She said as she injected Obi-Wan in the arm with something.

Anakin sighed. "I know I haven't known him as long as everyone else here, but I still hate to see him this hurt. It's a noble thing he does, sacrificing himself like this, but it still hurts to see."

"We all have a theory that he has low self-worth." She admitted.

"Oh... really? He hides that well if that's the case."

"He does, until you look at his medical records."

"He's taken medicines to help with mental health?"

"I can't comment on that directly, but I can comment on how many times he's been in here when it
Anakin smiled and nodded, giving Obi-Wan one last glance before he left the room and let the healer work with no distractions.

Obi-Wan moved through the halls between the medical ward and his own private room, eager to get a proper shower to wash the smell of bacta off his—everywhere, as well as change out of the medical gown he'd been given. It wasn't that bacta smelled bad, he just had grown to dislike it in such vast amounts over the years.

Along the way, Anakin was wandering the halls, admiring his home and taking a break from royal duties. He was simply looking out a window with a relaxed expression, unaware of the approaching guard.

Obi-Wan paused, spotting the King. "Anakin?" he asked, his voice tired.

Anakin looked away from the window with raised eyebrows, then he relaxed when he saw the redhead. "Hey. They finally release you—or did you escape?" he added with a glance to the medical gown the redhead was still supporting.

"Yeah, I got the okay to leave just now. I smell overwhelmingly like bacta."

"I assume you're headed back to your room then. Would you care for some company?"

"If you don't mind me being out of it...I still have some of that sedative in my system and not much energy. But I finally convinced them to let me go relax in my own bed."

The king nodded. "Then I won't stay too long. You'll need as much rest as you can get."

"So I was lectured." Obi-Wan sighed, shaking his head as he continued his slow pace down the hall, "I was told I took a particularly nasty blast to my bare chest which caused some heart rate issues. Not allowed to return to work until they clear me of that mess completely. Afraid I may relapse or something."

Anakin blinked. "Wow... You were very hurt by that attack then... That's scary, actually."

"Well, if I remember, I had replaced my armor with swim shorts and a towel." He stopped in front of his door and used the key pad to unlock it, gesturing Anakin in first.

Anakin stepped inside with a sigh. "Well, yes, but I guess I didn't realize just how injured you were."

"You, the Queen, and her handmaidens were unharmed, and my men only suffered small injuries if any at all, so it was worth it." Obi-Wan shrugged, moving to collect something to change into from his wardrobe.
"But you could have died," Anakin said flatly.

Obi-Wan shrugged, "If I die so that others may live, then my life was a meaningful one."

"You should want to have at least some self-preservation, right? I get that you have to do your job, but you still want to keep yourself alive."

"I don't want to die, Anakin." Obi-Wan reassured, "But I do not fear dying."

Anakin sighed. "I guess I do just a bit. Mom and I had it rough before the Mustafar king bought us and gave us our freedom. I never knew where my next meal was coming from or if I was going to be beaten that day. It was… a dark time."

"I know, and if I can prevent you from dying so you can continue to live in the light and see your mother, then I will." Obi-Wan smiled before slipping into the refresher. "I'll keep the door cracked so that we can continue talking while I try to scrub out the smell of bacta from my everything."

"I do appreciate how well you do your job, but… after that attack and after what one of the healers told me, I'm worried about you. Not that I want you to stop doing you job. I just want you to be safer…You know?" Anakin leaned against the wall, closing his eyes with a sigh.

Obi-Wan frowned, looking down as he discarded the medical gown and stepped into the sonic. "I wouldn't be missed…"

"You absolutely would be missed, Obi-Wan. I would miss you, and so would Padmé and you friend in the cavalry."

"I'm expendable, always have been. Easily replaced and forgotten."

"No you're not. You're not replaceable. No one else can be Obi-Wan, captain of the Naboo Royal Guard. You've been here, what was it, ten years now? You've left an impact on several people here, including me, and I've been here the least amount of time."

"It's happened before. I think I've found a place where I'm needed, wanted… cared for… only to find myself replaced with someone better as I find myself homeless. I'm not going to hold my breath."

"Then I'm going to do all I can to keep you here. I'd hate to see you leave, whether that be because someone else took your job or you died. I don't want either of those to come true," Anakin turned to face the door, looking down at the floor for a bit. "This crush I have on you is too important to let you just slip away from me…"

Obi-Wan paused in his washing himself, "I hadn't just dreamt that you liked me? I thought all that was a fever dream while in the tank…"

"Not a dream. I do like you… we did kiss after all. Then we were attacked and you got hurt, so I'm not surprised you thought it all was a dream…"

"…We kissed? Kark…I'm sorry…you must have been in a panic…"

"I was panicked when you were shot, yes…"

"…Thank you for not running into danger because of it." Obi-Wan muttered.

"Uh… I actually did… You were unconscious before I fought off the assassins." Anakin flushed lightly.
There was a thud as Obi-Wan dropped the soap bar, followed by a few quick slapping of feet on the
tile floor and the door springing open the rest of the way to show a dripping, nude Obi-Wan
looking at the King with wide eyes, "You what?!"

Anakin stepped back in surprise, eyes wide as he was given a full look of the guard he had a crush
on. He quickly his his face as it grew very red. "I... I fought the assassins," he started, his voice
squeaking almost. "I had to help somehow! I wasn't just going to sit and watch your men die."

"That—that's dangerous! You were a target! You could have been killed and—"

"I can use the Force," Anakin suddenly blurted out.

Obi-Wan stopped, looking at him, "You...can?"

"Yes... I can." Anakin looked past Obi-Wan and held his hand out slightly, a towel coming out and
wrapping around the redhead's waist.

Obi-Wan's cheeks pinkend as he moved to hold the towel in place, "...Sorry for exposing myself
to you..."

"It's fine... You're covered now, that's the important part." Anakin cleared his throat.

"...How long have you been able to do things like that?"

"Pretty much my whole life. I've kept it a secret for personal reasons."

"Fascinating... and you can use it to fight? Were you trained by a Jedi?"

"Yes I can fight with it, no I wasn't trained by a Jedi. I tried to keep this a secret for a long time, but
when you got hurt, I had to jump in and fight."

"And...you weren't hurt?"

"Not seriously, no."

"Not seriously?" Obi-Wan frowned, reaching up with one wet hand to cup Anakin's cheek.

"Got shot in the shoulder, a few ribs minorly bruised, but other than that, no injuries."

"Oh Ani..." he shook his head "Do I need to request that you start training with my men if you are
going to start stepping into danger?"

"I was injured before I used the Force. After that I was fine. I know how to protect myself." Anakin
fell silent for a bit. "However, I wouldn't be opposed to some training."

"I'll have our training schedule forwarded to you."

"Thank you. I will look forward to joining you and your men."

"It's hard work." Obi-Wan cautioned, "And none of us are Force Sensitive, so we can't help you
with that unless we request the help of a Jedi or something."

"I'd rather we didn't call a Jedi here... very few people know I'm Force sensitive. Not even my
mom knows, and I don't want to worry her."

"The Jedi can keep secrets. But it's up to you."
Anakin shook his head. "I don't want to risk it."

"Alright, but I hope you have good control. Don't want you getting hurt trying some stunt you haven't trained for or something."

"I'm more prepared than you might think. Growing up as a slave and then a prince not of royal blood toughened me up quite a bit."

"Yes, but you were never taught the ways of the Force. I don't know much about it, but I know all the Force-user cults undergo intense training to learn to safely use it. Both the light and the dark sides."

Anakin shrugged. "I've survived well enough without that training. I think I can go the rest of my life without proper training."

"It's your choice... personally I'd want to learn what I could... At least give it some thought before you refuse." He turned back to finish his shower, "I'll be out in a bit."

Anakin nodded, moving to sit in an empty chair as he waited. "The thing is... I feel like my ability to use the Force is much stronger than a normal Jedi. I don't know why, I just feel more... powerful."

"You can't know that for sure, Anakin. Especially if you have never been evaluated by a Jedi."

"I've seen holorecordings of Jedi. They don't act like me. Their fighting styles, their attacks, they're all so much weaker than what I can do. I know because I've performed the same moves with stronger outcomes."

"They could have restraint." Obi-Wan pointed out. "I'm not saying you aren't stronger, just that we can not tell for sure. I'm certainly not an expert."

"Yeah... I guess we'd have to find an actual Jedi to find out." Anakin sighed. "I'd rather not be found though."

"You're too old for them to try and take to the Temple." Obi-Wan shrugged as he finished up. Once dried off he changed into a pair of comfortable blue pajamas and stepped out of the refresher to make his way over to the small sofa he had in the center of the room looking towards a window with a view. He flopped forward onto it with a tired groan.

Anakin smiled. "Feel better?"

"Yeah, smell better, too." He sighed and rolled onto his side to look over at Anakin.

"Good. I should probably leave you to rest then." Anakin stood up from the chair.

"You can stay... unless you're busy..." Obi-Wan mumbled into the throw pillow his head was supported by.

"I'm not really busy... I suppose I can stay if you want me to."

"We kissed... I'd like to make that feel more like a reality than a dream, if that's alright."

Anakin flushed. "You want to kiss again," he stated bluntly.

"Oh my, do I?" Obi-Wan asked, though the smile curling his lips gave him away.
Anakin chuckled. "Well at least I want to kiss you again. Would you allow your king to do that?"

"Well, if it is the request of my king…” Obi-Wan propped himself up, his gaze steady on the handsome blond before him.

Anakin leaned down, closing the distance between them and kissed Obi-Wan gently, his hands cupping the redhead's face.

Obi-Wan pressed into the kiss, keeping things more on the chaste side, but welcoming the kiss warmly.

Anakin smiled, pulling back after a bit. "That's even better than last time. Plus we don't have some girls interrupting us this time."

"I would hope not—we're in my private rooms." Obi-Wan smiled, reconnecting a smaller, shorter kiss.

To be continued…
Anakin bent over with his hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath after sparring with several of the training guards. He had defended himself much better than he had in the past, and he was pleased with his own progress. He let himself smirk as he stood back up, wiping the sweat from his brow with a gloved hand. His tunic was dripping with sweat already, so it would have done little good to use that to wipe his face dry.

"Working up a good healthy sweat, I see." Obi-Wan's approving voice sounded as the redhead moved to join the group, freshly cleared by the healer's to return to work as normal. He started to remove the outer layers of his uniform, "Who'll be my first opponent to make sure I haven't gotten soft these past weeks?"

One of the younger guards stepped up to Obi-Wan, making the challenge towards his superior.

Anakin looked at Obi-Wan, noting how much healthier and healed up he looked. He folded his arms to watch the sparring.

Obi-Wan and the guard squared off in the center of the training grounds, the other guards, and Anakin all standing in a circle around to observe. Obi-Wan was baiting his time, watching his opponent with hawk eyes. Then the opponent made the first move, striking out quick, which Obi-Wan blocked with ease and threw in a series of counter-blows. The younger guard was quickly brought into submission.

Obi-Wan straightened up with a sigh, "I don't want you to go easy on me just because I was recently on medical leave. Who'll take this seriously?"

"I will," Anakin said as he made his way to Obi-Wan, a smirk on his face.

"I don't know, Highness, you already look warn out." Obi-Wan teased as he shook out his arms and got into a starting stance.

"I can still fight. I'm a long way from my limit." Anakin chuckled as they started circling each other.

"Lets hope so; I'd hate to send you to the healers."

"I doubt you will." Anakin made the first move, lunging forward with a fast fist towards the redhead's face.

Obi-Wan blocked by knocking the attack to the side where it struck harmlessly at the air next to Obi-Wan's ear, then he followed up with a kick to Anakin's side.

Anakin grunted slightly but bounced back quickly, pouncing to the side and shoving Obi-Wan's shoulder roughly to throw him off balance. "How challenging do you want me to be?"

"Don't hold back." The redhead said, leaping back to regain balance.

With that permission, Anakin rained down attack after attack on Obi-Wan, mostly being blocked but landing a few punches here and there. There was no clear victory he had, both were evenly matched, and it was what drove Anakin on until he had to jump back, chest heaving and sweat
dripping off his chin as he looked at Obi-Wan with a focused expression.

Obi-Wan also stepped back to catch his breath, his eyes on the King before him, and sweat dripping down his face and into his eyes.

"...What just happened?" a voice spoke, though neither man cared to find out who has spoken. Both focused on each other before they launched into a second round.

On and on they fought until they were both completely spent and fell to their knees, facing each other and panting heavily. It was over. They both agreed wordlessly that there would be no winner this time.

"Water." Obi-Wan gasped out and two guards grabbed canteens and rushed forward to hand them to both men.

Anakin greedily took a long drink, gasping slightly once he lowered his canteen and looked at Obi-Wan with an intensity that couldn't simply be described as pride or success, or any sort of emotion that would come after a fight. No, his look gave off a different vibe, something that no other guard understood.

Obi-Wan was chugging water, a dribble having escaped and ran down from the corner of his lips and along his throat until it soaked into his sweat-dampened undershirt.

Once he'd downed half the canteen, Obi-Wan finally let up and lowered it, glancing over at Anakin, "Most impressive, my King."

"I can say the same for you," Anakin replied, taking another drink.

"Did you train in physical combat on Mustafar?" Obi-Wan asked, letting himself drop onto his butt in the dirt, his legs spread out in front of him.

"Very little, but I did train some. I was considered the weakest back home." Anakin paused, frowning. "Mustafar, I mean... My home is here now."

"Wouldn't want to square off against a Mustafarian native, then." Obi-Wan chuckled.

"They're brutal." Anakin also sat back, then eventually laid down on his back, sighing heavily.

"We should move to the sidelines...so the others can train without stepping on us."

Anakin stood up, then offered his hand to help Obi-Wan to his feet. "We should probably clean up as well. I've got that meeting with some of the galactic senators this evening."

"Ah yes, it wouldn't due to offend the senators' noses." Obi-Wan scoffed as he was hauled to his feet.

"I have a higher reputation to maintain now than I ever did back on Mustafar." Anakin shook his head as he and Obi-Wan made their way back to the castle to clean up.

"Which is important, yes, but sometimes those stuffy old senators could really get a dose of the reality of the people. Particularly Naboo's senator. Senator Palpatine really rubs me the wrong way. I'd be cautious around him, I think."

"Oh yeah? He just seems like a man who wants to get things done with good quality. I think he's doing a good job honestly."
"He does get things done, yes, but something about him seems…off. I just get a bad feeling about
him."

Anakin shrugged, running a hand through his hair. "I'm sure you have good reason to feel that way.
Not all politicians are as great as they seem on the outside."

"Queen Amidala says I'm just paranoid." Obi-Wan sighed, "But it's my job to protect, and I can't
help the feeling of unease I get when he's around."

"Like you said, it's your job to protect. If anyone ever questions why you feel this way, just tell
them it's because you're doing your job."

"Which is why I caution you, as I did the Queen."

Anakin nodded. "Thank you. I'll keep an eye on him. Besides, if he acts up, I'm sure Padmé can do
something about it without causing too much commotion."

"And hopefully my gut feeling is wrong." Obi-Wan said, taking a swig of his water again.

"I hope so too…" Anakin fell silent, focusing on the castle as his mind wandered a bit.

"And it is good to see you again in person, my Queen. I regret that I was unable to attend your
wedding in person, but the Galactic Senate has been quite a mess, no thanks to the current
chancellor and his ideas for creating peace." Senator Palpatine said as he escorted Padmé along the
path of one of the castle gardens, his aging hand patting hers in a grandfatherly way. "I spoke
briefly to your husband through the Holo, he seems a nice enough lad for a Separatist, but are you
sure he's trustworthy?"

"Of course he's trustworthy," Padmé said with a smile. "He's one of the nicest men I've met. I think
Naboo is lucky to have him as its king. We could have had a person who was much worse."

"The war is only at a stand-still, Majesty, it's not declared officially over. There is still room for
betrayal. And now that he is your husband, if you were to die…the planet would be in his hands to
switch sides against the will of the people. I shutter to think—"

"I know he wouldn't do that. He's much too kind a person to think of doing something like that. I
know it's taking a while for Naboo to warm up to him, but I trust him with my life, as should you.
Anakin isn't your stereotypical Separatist."

"I just worry about you, is all. You are like a granddaughter to me."

"I know, but you really don't need to worry about me. I couldn't have asked for a better spouse in
this situation."

"If you're sure, my lady." He smiled at her, "But I would like to see for myself in person that I can
trust him not to have you assassinated."

"Well then you'll just have to wait a little longer. He should be ready for our meeting in a couple
minutes."

"Of course, we do have business to discuss."
"I hope the meeting will go smoothly with the other senators." Padmé sighed, knowing most likely that the meeting would go anything but smoothly.

"It's the senate. It rarely does."

"Unfortunately. But with Anakin here now, I'm hoping it'll be at least a little better."

"One can only hope, Force be willing." Palpatine chuckled.

"Yes." Padmé checked the time and sighed. "Well, shall we head to the meeting?"

"Only if we must, my dear." He chuckled.

"It wouldn't do to keep the others waiting."

Queen and senator made their way back inside and to the meeting room, a grand hall that was probably used for feasts a couple times a year. When they arrived, Anakin was already there, chatting with some of the other senators that had come a long way to attend the meeting. Of course when Padmé entered the room, all attention went to her, and everyone bowed, except, of course, Anakin, who approached her and took her hand, kissing it gently as he too then bowed for his queen.

"I believe we are ready to begin this meeting," he said once he led Padmé to her seat.

Padmé sat down and nodded, watching as the room full of senators all followed suit. "Now, down to business."

The senator representing Mustafar spoke up first, eager to start diplomatic conversation. "I believe our first order of business should deal with the future of Queen Amidala and King Skywalker, more specifically, peace negotiations."

"I had assumed we were peaceful with each other as soon as the marriage was legalized." Padmé smiled, taking Anakin's hand, "But if Mustafar wishes to discuss it further, Naboo is quite happy to cooperate."

"We do wish to speak more. Our great King demands that he has a hand in his son's diplomatic negotiations, and he demands it peacefully. No violence will be tolerated as a response to this demand."

Anakin blinked. "He does know that I'm a king myself now, right? And he has no right to have a hand in the royal affairs of Naboo. My adoptive father or not, he doesn't belong anywhere here in Naboo's private affairs."

"Naboo has always striven to be a planet of peace. No violence will meet your king should he visit. However, my husband is right. He is now King of Naboo, and my partner on the throne. Such involvement in Naboo's affairs would have to be negotiated directly so that there is no mistaking what it is your king desires."

The senator tightened his jaw. "The King of Mustafar isn't willing to negotiate this request. He is demanding a part in Naboo's affairs, and in a peaceful manner too. There's no need for any violence to arise with this, only Naboo's willingness to comply."

"We are willing to discuss this with he and his queen, personally." She responded, her tone nothing but a strong, unmoving professionalism. "Whatever he is after, be it resources or closer alliance, it can be reached if discussed properly between both ruling parties."
"You may let him know that he is welcome here on Naboo," Anakin started. "But we are not agreeing to his terms. We will need to speak with him… and his queen… first."

The senator seemed to think for a bit, then nodded. "He will come right away."

"The queen as well," Anakin reminded sternly.

"Of course," the senator sneered.

Padmé nodded, though under the table she nudged Anakin's leg with her own, knowingly. Any excuse to get her husband's beautiful mother to Naboo for a visit.

Anakin glanced at her briefly before taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly. "Now then, next item of business… The recent attack on the queen and I. We still have yet to figure out who organized the attack and why. We don't want to accuse anyone here." He paused, looked around the room. "We do, however, want to know if similar attacks have happened across the galaxy, or if we are the only ones experiencing these attacks."

"There have been others, some stopped in the act, some stopped before it started… evidence uncovered points to it being hired work from an organization not wanting the war to end." The Senator from Corellia stated.

"So this isn't anything against Republic and Separatist royalty marrying," Anakin stated. "But if it's not for that reason, why want to keep the war going? Both sides are growing short on supplies, or at least the Separatists are. I don't know the Republic situation, but the Separatists are tired of war."

"Money. Some companies and their owners make a fortune in war time by producing weapons and supplies."

"There is also power to be gained in that aspect." Two other senators pointed out.

"I honestly don't care what power there is to be gained, this war needs to end, and it won't unless we do something about these attacks soon, or both sides will start blaming each other and extend the war, which none of us are prepared for."

"Precisely. Which is why the Senate has enlisted the help of the Jedi in tracking down those responsible. The Jedi are now acting as a completely neutral party with investigators helping them from both the Republic and the Separatists." The Alderaan senator, Bail Organa, stated.

"Why do the Jedi have to get involved," the Mustafar senator asked. "This is none of their business. They've always been outside the loop of war. They fought for the Republic and devastated hundreds of Separatist homes, including part of Mustafar. I see no reason the Jedi should deem themselves neutral now and try to help both sides."

"Why should they not?" Bail countered, "The Jedi have always been peace keepers since their humble beginnings. War is not their place, though the Republic Senate did force them into the roles of Generals by way of majority vote. This is more their style. To stay neutral and fight to bring peace back to the Galaxy."

"I'll only believe it when I see it. They did nothing to keep the peace during this war."

Anakin sighed, rubbing his face with a hand as the bickering continued between senators. He really wished he could just escape and go watch the sunset with Obi-Wan.

"If you need more trust in them, Mustafar is free to send one of their own investigators to assist the
Jedi and report back should they suspect favoritism on the Jedi's part." Bail countered.

Palpatine sighed, "This is why I voted against charging the Jedi with this investigation…"

"Neutral they may be now, but I will not trust the Jedi," the senator from Mustafar declared.

"Enough," Anakin said with an authoritative voice. "There are still many issues between us, clearly. Let's take a break from this meeting and come back with clear heads, alright?"

"If you'll think it'd help with the stubbornness some Senators seem to have a problem with." One person sighed.

"I do," the blond responded, giving a strong look to the senator. "Come back in thirty minutes."

The senators stood and wandered out of the room, Anakin staying in his seat and sighing as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Welcome to the stressful part of being a ruler." Padmé teased him.

"Thanks," he said with a smirk. "We haven't even met for that long yet and already they're all at each other's throats."

"Are all Mustafarians like that Senator?"

"Some, though I didn't think my adoptive father would be that way... But I guess he is."

She sighed and shook her head, "We'll work with him, but he asks too much if what the Senator said is accurate. An alliance is mutually beneficial, and one can not just barge in on the other's rule."

"I just don't understand why he suddenly acts like this. He was always kind to my mom and I, but if that treatment has changed…" Anakin grew angry at the thought of his mother being hurt by the man who took the both of them in.

"This is why such things are discussed in person between royals. Senators sometimes let their power get to them and they make decisions that their planet and ruling party would not agree to. We will send word to Mustafar ourselves to invite the king and your mother."

Anakin nodded, sighing to calm himself. "I just hope what the senator has said isn't true."

"This marriage was for Peace and that senator certainly is acting more like Naboo surrendered to Mustafar rather than an alliance was born."

"Maybe that's how Mustafar saw our marriage… Naboo surrendering."

"If that was the case, I would have had to abandon my throne and married one of your brothers—likely whichever one is in line for the throne, while your father would be able to place his own ruler here in my place. Not send you, his stepson who has no claim to his throne, here to marry me."

Anakin shrugged. "I was the best fit for marrying another human I guess. You saw that senator from Mustafar. Looked more hellish than human." He smiled lightly.

"Certainly not pretty to look at by my standards." She sighed and leaned back in her chair.

"Be glad you got paired with the only male human on Mustafar."
"A handsome one, too. We do look good together." She chuckled, "And you're understanding."

"I try to be fair. I came from a bad background, but that doesn't mean I have to act like it."

"Of course not." She patted his hand.

"I wish there was some way I could fix the galaxy and have no more slavery, no more kids growing up in bad environments. It's just not fair to them. They're too innocent to know what's going on."

"Once the galaxy settles a bit in peace, maybe you can do something to help them."

"I hope so, but I'm not a senator... But I'm the king, so why shouldn't I be able to go to the galactic senate if I want to?"

"You're able to." She nodded. "But right now we need this peace agreement to work, so it's best to wait. You'd have better luck convincing the Senate should you wait."

"Of course. Figuring out this mess with the attacks is important right now. If we don't find out who is behind this soon, we'll have much larger issues to worry about."

"Exactly." She sighed, "So, how is Obi-Wan fairing? He's back on duty today, isn't he?"

"I'd say he's as good as new. We sparred earlier."

"Not rusty at all?"

"Not that I could tell. Our sparring ended in a draw."

"That's either impressive or sad, and I don't know which." She giggled. Anakin shrugged. "I'll give him credit, he's a good fighter. He just needs to stop getting hurt all the time."

"That I'll agree with." She shook her head, "His methods are effective but...extreme sometimes."

"Though he did make a point to say he had no protective armor on him when we were attacked. Still, from what I've been told, he visits the medical ward far too often."

"Yes, in this case I don't think it was avoidable. He needed to jump in to protect us and didn't have time to get dressed for battle."

"Lucky for him I was there to finish the fight..."

"Lucky for us all." She smiled.

"I guess so. As long as no one mentions the fact that I'm... Well, you know."

"We won't, Ani. You've asked us not to."

"I know, but sometimes people get chatty and say things they're not supposed to say."

"The guards would answer to Obi-Wan if they chatter about it; the handmaidens would answer to me."

"But what about the surviving attackers? Who knows who they have talked to."
"She's in Jail, Anakin."

Anakin sighed. "Maybe I'm just paranoid something will happen and I'll get caught."

"Even if that does happen, you're protected here. You are the King of Naboo."

"Yeah… I shouldn't be so worried about this. It's dumb, really." The blond shook his head. "Now is not the time to worry about me being Force sensitive. We need to focus on the attacks and figure out how to stop them."

"Before anyone else gets hurt or worse."

The break in the middle of the meeting soon drew to a close, the senators returning to their seat with somewhat clearer minds, ready to talk through the issue of the attacks on royals across the galaxy. The discussion went long into the night, exhausting Anakin to the point where he caught himself nodding off multiple times as the senators spoke. He was relieved when the meeting finally came to a close, and he was sure the others were just as relieved.

Everyone made their respective good-byes and bid each other good night, leaving the king and queen standing alone at the grand entrance of their home. Anakin let out a sigh, a very tired one at that, and he rubbed his eyes.

"I feel we are no closer to a solution," he commented as he and Padmé made their way back to their bedrooms.

"Best get used to that feeling when dealing with the Senate." Padmé sighed, "Come, let us retire to our beds and…maybe the waiting arms of our special someone's?" she winked.

"Maybe for you. I have no idea where Obi-Wan is right now." Anakin looked around, not seeing the redhead he was interested in.

"His shift ended hours ago." She shrugged, "He's likely relaxing with a good book somewhere….or sleeping…or nodded off on his book…"

Anakin chuckled. "It wouldn't surprise me if he fell asleep on a book."

"If he has, you should make sure he gets to a bed."

"Are you saying I should go find him before I go to bed?"

"I'll see you at breakfast." She gave a little curtsy and turned to head to her own rooms where she knew Sabé would likely be waiting.

Anakin sighed as he was left alone, and despite being extremely tired, he headed to the one place he could think Obi-wan would be, his personal quarters. Before he knew it, Anakin was at the redhead's door, knocking to see if anyone was home.

There was a tired grunt to allow entrance.

With a yawn, Anakin entered. "Obi-Wan? You awake?"
"…No…" came a sleepy reply that implied that he was at least half asleep.

Anakin found Obi-Wan curled up on a couch with a book, looking as tired as Anakin felt. "Want some quiet company tonight?"

"Only if that company is warmer than my forgotten tea." Obi-Wan smiled, nodding at the cup of tea that was no longer putting out little streams of heat.

"I'm definitely warmer." Anakin took his shoes off and shed a few layers, letting them drop to the floor in a pile before he crawled into the couch and snuggled up to Obi-Wan.

Obi-Wan shifted so that he was leaning against Anakin's chest, "…Meeting run late?"

"Very late. I'm exhausted." To prove his point, Anakin yawned and closed his eyes.

"Don't envy you…being surrounded by bickering politicians all afternoon and evening." He shifted again to fully cuddle in with the King, ignoring how his personal datapad dropped from his lap and onto the floor.

"I don't think I'll ever like politics now. They argue so much, and it's so unnecessary." Anakin rested his head on top of Obi-Wan's, yawning again.

"It's okay…you're safe from the headache now." Obi-Wan chuckled, the sound deepened by the need for sleep.

Anakin simply smiled, wrapping his arms around the redhead. "You don't mind if I stay the night here, right"

"I assumed that's why you knocked."

"Just thought I'd ask before I assumed I was welcome."

"Of course you are welcome." Obi-Wan smiled, "But I think we should move to the bed if you are. This couch won't be comfortable come morning. Would you like to borrow a some pajamas? I wear them baggy so they should fit you…well, may be short in the leg and arm length…"

"Only if you want to run the risk of getting an accidental rip in them." Anakin chuckled as he stood up, offering his hand to Obi-Wan to help him up.

"I know how to fix a seam." Obi-Wan shrugged and reluctantly heaved himself to his feet before moving to his wardrobe to pull out a pair of green pajamas very similar to the blue ones he was wearing.

"Well if you're sure. I suppose I can try wearing pajamas for once. Usually I don't wear any."

Obi-Wan's cheeks flushed deeply, "O-oh…"

"I won't make you uncomfortable by not wearing any." Anakin took the pajamas Obi-Wan had pulled out for him.

"….Isn't sleeping in the nude cold?"

"Oh, I didn't mean I slept in the nude. I do wear underwear still." Anakin chuckled.

"Still…isn't that cold?"
"Having a fire has helped, but lately I haven't needed it." Anakin moved over to Obi-Wan's personal refresher room and closed the door, leaving a crack as he changed into the pajamas.

"You're adjusting to Naboo's summer, then. That's good." Obi-Wan said as he moved to his bed and slipped under the thin blanket he used in the warmer months. He paused, "But will you need my thicker blanket tonight?"

"I doubt it. I haven't needed one in about a week." The blond emerged from the refresher room adjusting the top of the pajamas he was given.

Obi-Wan giggled, "Well, they certainly are short on you...but are you comfortable?"

"I may end up losing the top somewhere in the night."

"Then you don't have to wear the top."

"Good." Anakin quickly shed the top off, letting it hang off the edge of the bed.

"Now come on, your chest was comfortable, and I'd like to use it in substitute of my pillow." Obi-Wan grinned, lifting the blanket so that Anakin could slip under.

Anakin smiled, climbing into the bed and under the covers with a happy sigh. "Much more comfortable with the company of another person."

"Mmhmm," Obi-Wan hummed as he curled up against Anakin with a relaxed smile, "specifically the right individual."

"You know, I'm really glad that Padmé and I decided we were okay with seeing other people. Makes me feel a lot better about this whole situation."

"It made me a little less lonely, as well. Still can't believe you were interested in my old ass over—anyone else."

Anakin shrugged. "Not often do I find someone I find attractive in both looks and personality."

"You already have me in your arms, you don't need to flatter me." Obi-Wan chuckled with a yawn.

"At least it shows I'm getting better at flirting." Anakin smirked.

"Awe, but you were adorably awkward in your attempts." Obi-Wan pinched Anakin's cheek before having the lights dimmed.

Anakin pulled his cheek away with a scoff. "They were very awkward, that's for sure. I still have no idea how my flirting worked at first."

"Your cuteness factor outweighed your awkwardness. Now come back here." Obi-Wan reached up to pull Anakin down into his lips.

Anakin melted into their kiss, a soft noise of contentment escaping. After a bit, he pulled back. "Just out of curiosity, have you ever been in one of the beds in Padmé and my shared bedroom?"

"Of course not. I've never even entered the royal chambers."

"Would you like to one night? I can inform Padmé and she can spend the night with Sabé in her private bedroom."
"I wouldn't want to intrude. Plus my men need to know where to find me in case of an emergency."

"Come on, you can spare one night for your King, can't you?"

"It'd...have to be on a night we know I won't be randomly needed..."

Anakin sighed. "Have one of you higher ranked guards be the go-to guy for the night."

"You really want this."

"I think it would be nice to treat you one night to sleeping in ultimate luxury. My bed is so soft; you just sink into it and never want to get out of it."

"Sounds dangerous to put your royal protector into a bed he'll never want to leave." Obi-Wan chuckled.

Anakin shrugged with a smile. "It'd be worth the risk."

"What if I get stuck and never leave?"

"Then I would stay with you."

"I'm sure your absence would be noticed."

"As would yours."

"Not as much. The people would just assume I'm on holiday."

"I wouldn't assume that. I'd probably think the worst had happened before I thought you went on holiday."

"Well, you also have full access to my work schedule and would know for sure." The redhead pointed out.

"I know. Still, if for some reason I didn't know one day and you were gone, I'd worry a little."

"How cute, you care about me." Obi-Wan cooed.

"Of course I do. If I didn't, I wouldn't be in your bed right now." Anakin chuckled and kissed Obi-Wan's cheek. "Now, we should probably sleep some before we both have to get up early. We don't want to be caught."

"We are talking way too much for two men as exhausted as us."

"Yeah we are. But I'm going to stop now so I can sleep. I suggest you do the same, though I wouldn't be opposed to falling asleep to the sound of your voice." Anakin yawned and closed his eyes, pulling Obi-Wan close.

"Maybe some other time when I'm more awake than you." Obi-Wan muttered, shifting with the movement to fall into a comfortable position. "Goodnight, Anakin."

"Good night, Obi-Wan."

To be continued…
As the morning light began to filter into Obi-Wan's bedroom, Anakin was busy putting his boots back on as quietly as possible. He wanted Obi-Wan to know he was leaving, but at the same time he wanted the man to sleep as much as possible.

Obi-Wan rolled over with a sleepy sigh, his arm falling off the edge of the bed along with a good portion of his blanket.

Anakin paused, looking up to gather any more signs the redhead was awake. He went back to dressing himself, and when he was ready, he moved over to the bed and gently stroked Obi-Wan's cheek.

Obi-Wan breathed in heavily and rolled towards the touch, his eyes cracking open, "...'ni?"

"Morning," Anakin said softly, his voice deep from sleep. He kissed Obi-Wan's cheek. "Just wanted to let you know I was leaving."

"'kay..." Obi-Wan shifted to push himself up, rubbing the sleep from one eye before leaning forward to kiss the King's cheek.

"I'll see you later." Anakin made his way out of the room as best as he could without being seen. Luckily, it was early enough in the day that hardly anyone was out and about yet.

"Well, that's an unexpected section of the castle to find you leaving so early in the morning." A voice said, "That's where most of the guards who live in the castle have their private rooms, isn't it?"

Exiting the kitchens, Senator Palpatine stepped towards the king, a cup of hot morning tea in hand.

Anakin jumped slightly, eyes wide. "Senator... I was just talking with Captain Kenobi about security..."

"Talking...before the sun has breached the horizon?" The older man stopped before the king, bowing his head slightly.

"I had woken up earlier with an idea for our security and I had to tell him as soon as possible. Surely that's a reason good enough to satisfy your curiosity."

"It would be, if you weren't lying." The man gave a small chuckle, "Oh don't worry, I'm not out to accuse you of anything serious, my king. I just have an enhanced ability to read people. You hide them well, but your emotions betray you. Panic and guilt at being caught by me. And before that... contentment, satisfaction, and adoration."

Anakin lowered his eyebrows. "I thought you were a senator, not a Force user."

"And I could say that I thought you were a king, not a Force user." The man countered knowingly. "Oh and strong in the Force you are. I've really never experienced anything like it. You're like a super nova going off constantly. It's hard not to notice your presence in the Force."

He sighed and smiled at Anakin, "Not everyone who is Force Sensitive is found by the Jedi at an
early age, my boy, and we both are examples of that. When I was young enough to have been found and taken to the Temple on Coruscant and trained as a Jedi, well, Naboo hadn't yet joined the Republic and was not very welcoming to the Jedi. The Jedi in turn never found me as they did not search Naboo. Instead I was found by a Wise Munn who also happened to be Force Sensitive, and he took me under his wing and taught me everything he knew, and I in turn could teach you. Handy little tricks like being able to read emotions which would help you assess if a debate is at a dead end and needs a break to let people calm themselves, or if pressing forward is the best option. I also could teach you to hide your presence from other Force sensitives such as the Jedi. I had done so for years until I slipped up in my…frustration a number of years ago when running for the seat of Supreme Chancellor, and the Jedi discovered me. I haven't been particularly fond of their order since."

Anakin looked skeptical. "I'm fine with the training I'm getting under Captain Kenobi. I don't need any Force training, and no offence, but especially not from someone I don't know that well."

"It's an open offer, my boy. You know how to contact me should you change your mind."

Anakin nodded slowly. "Yeah... You didn't see anything this morning, okay?"

"I saw you out for a morning walk near the kitchens, perhaps to grab something." The old man suggested.

"Yes, I am hungry. I should probably eat before my day starts."

"Well, don't let me keep you from your early meal, my King." Palpatine bowed ushering him past towards the kitchens.

The king cautiously moved past the older man, glancing at him before making a bee line to the kitchens, his heart pounding in his chest at being caught sneaking out of a room that wasn't his.

A few of the kitchen staff looked up as the King entered and one of the chefs smiled, "What can I get you, my King?"

"Something light for now. My stomach isn't cooperating with me this early in the morning."

The Besalisk hummed, rubbing his chin with one large hand in consideration before nodding to himself, "I think I have something for you. Just the thing to help settle an uneasy stomach. Humans seem to think it tastes good, too." He moved to start making the single serving of a dish.

"I don't care if it tastes good, as long as it makes my stomach settle, I'm happy." Anakin sighed as he leaned against a nearby wall.

"It'll be right up." Came the promise.

"Thank you... You know, I've seen you and Obi-Wan talking a lot. You two good friends?"

"Old friends. He got me this job. I met him when he was a scraggly little thing only as tall as my hips!" he laughed. "I owned a diner on Coruscant, but sadly gang activity spread to the area I had it and, well... I lost it. That's when Obi-Wan got me this job here until I get enough saved up for a second chance at my own diner. I'm Dex, by the way."

Anakin smiled. "Nice to meet you, Dex. A very nice little history you and Obi-Wan have. I like it."

"Oh I have stories about him. Wild little youngling he was. Always getting into trouble and working up quite an appetite for my greasier food."
"Wild? Well, he grew out of that just fine." The king chuckled.

"Did he? Not from what I've heard." Dex chuckled.

"Okay, except for maybe in battle, he doesn't seem wild to me."

"In sport, too. The castle staff holds some sports competitions every year for fun. We split off into teams and compete. The queen—and I suppose you, now—is the judge as we compete in a series of sports and physical games. The team with the most wins in the end gets an extra week of paid vacation at any point of their choosing for the year."

"Maybe I want to compete, just for fun. I can take a vacation whenever I want." Anakin smiled. "But I love the idea of the competitions."

"Well, it's not for me to say you can or can't, sire." Dex plated the food and slid it across the counter to Anakin.

Anakin stepped forward, taking a good look at the food set before him. "Well, it does smell good at least."

"Try it, it won't bite." Dex chuckled again, having a droid take dishes to be cleaned so he could get back to work on what he'd been mixing up before Anakin walked in.

Anakin sampled the dish, and deciding he liked it, proceeded to eat the rest. Slowly, his stomach, upset by being caught and being up so early, began to feel better, leaving him happier and more awake.

"How'd you like it?" Dex asked as the cleaner droid moved to get the dishes.

"Absolutely fantastic. Many Kudos to you, Dex."

"Food is my passion, though I prefer making the greasy stuff to the fancy stuff this kitchen normally puts out." He chuckled, pleased that the King enjoyed the meal.

"Force, something greasy sounds really good now," Anakin practically moaned out.

"I'm busy getting breakfast for the castle finished, but if you can wait until later I could cook you up something."

"I would love that." Anakin sighed as he stepped away from the counter. "Thank you for that light breakfast. I'm feeling better already."

"Of course, always happy to serve the best way I know how." Dex smiled before his eyes shifted behind Anakin, "Obi-Wan! Your breakfast is almost finished, old friend."

Obi-Wan chuckled, "Morning, Dex. Good Morning, King Anakin."

Anakin quickly turned around, face turning slightly red. "Obi-Wan! I-I mean, Captain Kenobi… Sir… Hi…Morning." The blond looked at the floor ran a hand through his hair with wide eyes.

Obi-Wan moved forward and clasped the King on the shoulder in a familiar way, "We are friends enough for you to call my by my first name in front of staff."

"Sorry, I… panicked after I… I panicked." Looking back up, Anakin shook his head.

"Why would you panic?" Obi-Wan teased, moving over to help himself to a glass of juice as he
waited for his breakfast.

"Uh, well, it's something I need to talk to you about in a more private setting."

"Alright." Obi-Wan waited for a droid to bring him his plate and then he nodded, "After you."

Anakin lead the way out of the kitchen with a sigh, his heart rate going back down once more. "I about had a heart attack this morning after I left."

"My morning breath isn't that frightening, is it?" Obi-Wan asked.

Anakin chuckled, lowering his voice. "No, that's not the reason. I… got caught leaving you room. By Senator Palpatine."

Obi-Wan frowned, "Why was he lurking in the hall outside my room?"

"He just happened to be walking by… he knows I'm Force sensitive."

"He does? You weren't floating things, were you?"

"No, I literally just walked out the door and he was there, and he knew… he says he's Force sensitive as well."

"Now that you mention it, I do remember hearing about a scandal involving him and the Force… Accusation of him using it to manipulate votes in favor of himself in an election…"

Anakin hummed. "Well, I still don't see anything bad about him. I mean I made sure he wouldn't tell anyone, and he seems pretty trustworthy to me. He's a galactic senator after all. If he wasn't trustworthy, he wouldn't have been elected."

"Part of it was his birthright. But there was no proof of what he was accused of, so really it's just a caution more of a warning about him. But when it comes to who could have caught you…he is far from the worst. He is, at least, loyal to Naboo."

"True. It could have been someone who would have ratted me out as soon as they saw me. That would have been a disaster."

"Well now we know to be a bit more careful."

Anakin nodded. "It was early enough in the day, and I didn't think anyone would be up, so he surprised me when I stepped out."

"When guests are in the castle, let's not have sleepovers." Obi-Wan suggested.

"I agree." Anakin sighed. "My offer from last night still stands though. If you want to experience extreme luxury, just let me know."

"Make it my life day gift." Obi-Wan smiled.

Anakin smirked back at the redhead. "Deal."

"It's at the end of next month."

"I'll make sure to mark it in my calendar. We'll celebrate the royal way."

"I'll look forward to night of being spoiled with a bed fit for royalty."
"Just sleeping in the bed alone is so good. Anything else that happens is a bonus, of course."

"Well, I'd prefer a warm boyfriend next to me."

"Well, I did hope to share my bed with you, not have you be the only one in the bed." Anakin chuckled.

"Then it's a promise." He smiled.

Anakin brushed some stray dirt off his tunic as he walked the halls of the castle. His mind continued to wander back to Obi-Wan and his Life Day, and Anakin kept remembering he was going to share his bed with the redhead. He also had to remember to talk to Padmé about that night so he and Obi-Wan wouldn't be disturbed if they decided to do more than just sleep. That thought alone made Anakin blush slightly.

He found Padmé standing stiffly by a fountain in the garden as she looked wide-eyed at the gathered nobles accompanying her.

"I'm not sure this is an appropriate subject." Palpatine said; his hands on Padmé's shoulders, fingers twitching ever so slightly as he also looked at the three nobles.

"It is an important one. The future of Naboo depends on it." A rather stout duke announced loudly.

Tilting his head, Anakin approached the small group. "The future of Naboo depends on what? Tighter security? More armed forces?"

"Anakin—I don't—" Padmé tried to warn her husband but one of the lords cut in.

"Why, you giving the Queen an heir, my King. A young prince or princess running around. We are wondering why there has been no announcement of a royal pregnancy yet. You have had more than enough time."

Anakin paled very quickly, stepping back with wide eyes. "W-what? I... We..." He struggled to come up with words as he was suddenly in the middle of a conversation he hoped to never have with someone other than Padmé.

"You both are young." The duke nodded, "The best time to have a child is now."

"I... Don't want to," Anakin responded quietly, sounding much like a child.

"You must. You don't have a choice. The Nabooian royal bloodline must be continued."

"It won't be a hassle. A royal nanny will be helping with much of the raising of the child."

"And so to you it'd be just like your wedding night when you consummated the marriage."

Padmé's face was red as she hid in her hands.

Anakin glanced at Padmé, desperate for help that he wasn't going to get. "But... I mean if... Having a child is only looked at as a hassle, why have one? If you don't want one, don't have one, and I don't want one, and we haven't talked about having a kid once since we were married. And besides,
we're dealing with a galaxy wide threat right now! Our lives are at too great a risk to even consider having a child now!"

"All the more reason to have a child, in case something does happen."

"When you are the crown, you have no choice but to have at least one child."

"You can't be selfish."

Anakin groaned, covering his face. "I'm finished with this conversation. Come on, Padmé." He grabbed his queen's hand and led her away from the older men who seemed to think they were required to have a child.

"Sorry…I…I tried to warn you…" she muttered as she was pulled along by her husband. Her voice was so small, so vulnerable compared to any other time she spoke.

"It's okay... I had no idea I was going to be walking into that conversation." Anakin led her all the way to their bedroom to hide away from the demanding elders. "Are you okay?" he asked once they were behind closed doors.

She shook her head and turned into his chest for comfort. "I know they are right, but for them to think they have the right to bring up such a subject… It's so personal…"

"It's extremely personal. They have no right to know everything about our lives. That's not how this works." Anakin sighed and hugged her. "I don't want to do this, Padmé..."

"I know, I don't either." She looked up at him, "No offence but the thought of doing that with you instead of Sabé is..." she wrinkled her nose.

"I'm so unqualified for this," Anakin sighed. "I haven't even done it before, and now they're forcing me to when I don't want to and when I'm not ready."

"What do we do, Ani?"

"I... I don't know. We can't do this!" The blond started to panic a little.

"There are artificial ways to conceive a child between us, but few medical experts know how in the Galaxy…certainly none who are on Naboo."

"Of course there are none here," Anakin muttered. He pulled away from Padmé and went to sit on the edge of his bed. "Which means we have to...

"...I think we should have our lovers here for this conversation…so they know…and have their say."

Anakin nodded. "Should we call them up now?"

"Yes. I could use more familiar arms hugging me." She said, moving to get her personal comm out.

"Sorry," he apologized weakly as he grabbed his own comm to call Obi-Wan.

"Hugs between friends are nice, don't get me wrong, but given the situation…I just…I want my love, as I'm sure you do as well." She sent Sabé a message to have her drop what she was doing and rush to the royal suite.

"It's preferred in this situation, yes..." Anakin tossed aside his comm once he sent the message to
It wasn't too long before there was a knock on the door, followed by a muffled "Oh move over!" and the door opened, Sabé rushing in as Obi-Wan was left in the doorway, brushing himself off from what the royals could assume had been Sabé pushing him over.

"Padmé, what happened?" Sabé asked, taking the Queen's hands into her own as Obi-Wan entered and closed the door behind him.

"Is everything alright?" he asked.

Anakin shrugged as he looked up at Obi-Wan. "We need to talk, all four of us."

Obi-Wan frowned, looking a bit pale, "Is this about what happened this morning?"

"What happened this morning?" Sabé asked.

Anakin shook his head. "No, we're still safe with that." He turned to Sabé. "I spent the night with him last night, snuck out this morning and got caught by Senator Palatine, but he's agreed to keep things quiet."

Sabé looked at Padmé. "Ok, well if that isn't the problem, then what is?"

"I—well, we were approached about the whole heir thing...they are waiting for an announcement..." Padmé admitted, pulling Sabé down to sit on the bed with her.

"Already?" Obi-Wan asked, glancing over at Anakin.

"We don't want to do it," Anakin said firmly. "But... It looks like we're being forced to."

"But why don't you do anything about it," Sabé asked gently, holding Padmé's hands. "There has to be another way."

"We could hunt down a medical expert that knows the whole artificial way to make me get pregnant with his baby, but that would take time, and likely a good deal of credits. And with how they were talking just now, well...it's clear they think we are already late in making a baby."

Anakin slumped his shoulders and huffed as he sat back on his own bed. "They were so... Demanding that we have a baby. It's like they were more concerned for a future they won't even be around for than the royals running the planet now."

Obi-Wan moved to guide Anakin over to a chair and had him sit so he could rub the tension from his shoulders. "We all knew this would come, and no matter what, we knew it'd come too soon...but not this soon..." he sighed.

"It's not that I don't want a baby..." Padmé sighed, "I just don't want to do the thing that would give me that baby."

"Can you just... Avoid it? Avoid the people asking? I mean, come on! You haven't even been married a whole year yet and they're already demanding you have a kid?" Sabé sighed.

"Everyone just assumes that we're happy and want to start a family right away," Anakin grumbled as he relaxed under Obi-Wan's hands. "I don't even want a kid now, and besides I... Haven't had sex with anyone yet..."

"And they came out of nowhere. They were enjoying their lunch in the gardens and I was speaking
with Senator Palpatine about an issue he's been having with the Senate and wanted my input on how to handle it in the best way for the people, when suddenly they were surrounding me asking about an heir." Padmé sighed.

"So I guess long story short, we have to have a baby... And we wanted you two to know." Anakin looked up at Obi-Wan with a sad expression.

Sabé sighed. "Does it really have to be this way?"

"Too bad Sabé can't just use our strap-on to..." Padmé muttered.

"If you two do... try for a baby..." Obi-Wan spoke up. "I think Sabé and I should wait. Sabé in the Queen's personal room, myself in Anakin's... and ready to comfort and distract as needed afterwards. Have nice baths drawn up, and other such aftercare needs."

"I do like that idea," Anakin said, looking at Padmé.

"It would certainly help everyone feel better," Sabé agreed.

"The best of a bad situation." Padmé agreed. "And I want girlfriend time before it happens, too."

Obi-Wan moved to rub along Anakin's arms as he leaned in close to his ear, "You'll have me before if you need it... and I know we haven't hinted at being ready to go that far yet, but if you want your first time to be with me... well, whatever you feel is best..."

Anakin shivered a little. "I... I don't know." He turned so he could look up better at Obi-Wan. "I want my first time to be with you... But I wanted to wait until your life day. We'd have this whole room to ourselves, we'd be in the most comfortable bed ever, everything perfect for my first time... But now that this issue has come up, it seems that it needs to be taken care of well before your life day."

"I want it to be for us, not forced, but if you'd be more comfortable with me first... then... we can try. Think on it and let me know." He whispered before kissing Anakin's cheek.

Anakin leaned into the kiss, turning his head to catch Obi-Wan's lips. "Maybe we can try some things... Maybe not go all the way..."

"Then that is what we will do." Obi-Wan vowed.

"Thank you... I hope you won't mind me being nervous. I haven't done anything like this before. It's all new to me."

Obi-Wan nodded, "For me as well..."

"Really? Well... That makes me feel a little better." Anakin chuckled lightly. "So... Tonight? My private room?"

"Tonight." Obi-Wan promised, "Though while there are Senators still here I shouldn't stay the night after this morning."

"Yeah... Some other night you'll stay." Anakin reached up to run a few fingers along Obi-Wan's jaw.

Obi-Wan smiled and turned his head to kiss Anakin's fingers.
He was nervous. He'd deny it if anyone asked, but he really was nervous as he paced outside the door to Anakin's private rooms. He'd gotten off duty and made his way to meet with his boyfriend as planned, but he couldn't help but take pause outside.

They weren't planning on going all the way that evening, but…it sort of felt like they were. To take a step towards it…to do more than the small kisses and hand-holding…

Well, Obi-Wan was nervous.

Anakin was also nervous, doing some pacing himself. He was in comfortable clothes, and he hoped Obi-Wan was in something somewhat similar. Either way, both men were nervous for this night, and Anakin was beginning to wander if his partner had chickened out on him.

There was a small thump on the door as, on the other side, Obi-Wan had dropped to the floor, leaning against it as he closed his eyes and took slow, deep breaths to try and calm his nerves.

Anakin looked up, moving to the door. "Captain Kenobi?"

"Obi-Wan..." came the correction. "I'd rather this not be so formal."

Anakin opened the door and looked down. "Just being safe. Come on in."

Obi-Wan pushed himself up and entered the room, glancing around. He'd been there before with Anakin, but it felt different this time—it was different.

"Just make yourself comfortable," Anakin said as he closed the door behind Obi-Wan.

"Are you nervous?" the redhead asked, removing his jacket and sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"Yeah. I know we're not going all the way tonight, but I'm still super nervous."

"Between just us two…I am too…I was probably outside your door for fifteen minutes..."

"Fifteen? Man, you didn't have to wait that long, even with nerves."

"I just want everything between us to develop in a healthy and loving way and this is a pretty big step for us."

"It is." Anakin moved over to sit next to Obi-Wan, grabbing his hand and squeezing it gently. "But I think we're ready for this, despite our nerves."

Obi-Wan's fingers trailed along Anakin's cheek and into his curls, "There is only one way to find out."

Anakin leaned closer, kissing the redhead gently and slowly.

As they kissed, Obi-Wan's hand moved to rest on Anakin's thigh.

They drifted closer to each other, Anakin's hands settling on Obi-Wan's hips. After a bit, he pulled
back to pause and remove his tunic, leaving him bare-chested. "This isn't moving too fast for you is it?"

"Let's just not remove pants yet." The older man suggested.

Anakin nodded. "I can keep my pants on." He chuckled lightly.

"Mine too." Obi-Wan smirked.

Smiling, Anakin leaned in for another kiss, making an effort to encourage Obi-Wan to get close and into his lap if he wanted.

It was slow and sensual, the two kissing deeply as their hands explored, all clothing being lost other than their slacks. At some point Obi-Wan was coaxed into straddling Anakin's lap, and that's where he was when he slowly pulled back to look into his eyes.

Anakin let his hands settle on Obi-Wan's thighs as he looked up into steel blue eyes. His heart pounded as excitement ran through his body. "Nervous still?"

"No. You?" the redhead breathed out, his forehead resting against the blond's.

"No." Anakin moved a hand up to Obi-Wan's chest. "Want to go further?"

"If you do." He nodded.

Anakin nodded. "Okay... Is it alright if I touch you? Like... Lower?"

"You might find it a bit hard, if you do."

Anakin chuckled, the hand on Obi-Wan's chest moving lower to his waist. "That's how it's supposed to be in these situations, right?"

"Perhaps." He smirked.

The blond raised an eyebrow, fingers gripping onto the edge of Obi-Wan's slacks. He was shaking a little.

"Relax, my love, I won't bite unless you ask me to."

"Sorry, I guess I am still a little nervous." Anakin tugged at Obi-Wan's pants gently, swallowing as his eyes moved down the redhead's body.

"We aren't going all the way tonight, Ani." Obi-Wan reminded him, "We are only going as far as we are comfortable with as we familiarize ourselves with each other.

"I know..." Opting to not say more, Anakin kissed Obi-Wan once more as his hand abandoned the pants and instead rubbed Obi-Wan through his pants.

Obi-Wan gave a soft moan, his head falling forward onto Anakin's shoulder, "May I touch you in return?"

"Please," Anakin whispered, nuzzling into red hair.

"Well, if you insist." The redhead whispered, moving his hand down between them to press and then stroke the hardened length he found between Anakin's legs.
Anakin gasped, his own hand halting for a few seconds before continuing. He stroked harder and faster, building up friction that he knew would make Obi-Wan feel good.

Obi-Wan's breathing grew deeper yet and he slumped forward, "If you do it like that I might…I—I have an idea, if I may?"

When Anakin nodded, getting the hint of what the redhead had planned, Obi-Wan moved, undoing each of their flies to finish themselves off together.

Sabé sighed as she picked at her food, uninterested in the meal before her that day. Her mind was other places, and because of that, her stomach had no tolerance for much food. Already she felt like she was going to be sick with what little she had eaten for breakfast earlier.

A cup of calming tea was suddenly set down in front of her, followed by Obi-Wan slipping into the seat across from her with a tea tray.

"…For your nerves." He muttered as he picked up his own cup for a sip, "Should help…"

"Thanks," she muttered back, taking the cup and sipping lightly. "Been feeling like sithshit recently…"

"…Well, it's happening tonight so I think all four of us are… We can only hope that tonight will be all they need…The queen…she's been to the healers to do everything she can to help the success rate of what they do?"

Sabé nodded. "She's certainly excited to have a baby, she's just upset that there's only one way available for her to have one so soon."

"Yeah…I can't imagine what she and Anakin are feeling right now… if the tides were turned and it was you and I who had to…" he shivered and shook his head. "I miss it when things were simple and you were trying to convince me that Anakin liked me and I didn't believe you…"

"I miss those times too… things were much better before Anakin came here." Her tone was a little bitter towards the end.

"Hey, you knew this day would come, and Anakin isn't pleased about it either. No need to take it out on him." Obi-Wan huffed.

"Sorry, I just…" She sighed and rubbed her face. "I'm worried for the queen. I'll be glad when tonight is over. She's going to be hugged by me until morning."

"Prepare something special for the two of you to do together when she gets back to her private room. Something where you can give her all the comfort she needs and can remind you that she is still yours and in your arms—your Padmé, not your Queen. I know I'm planning something like that for Anakin and I."

"Of course. We're going to have a wonderful night together, and I'm going to make sure she remembers that I'm the one that loves her."

"Just a nice, soft, romantic night for two."
Sabé sat back in her chair. "Do you think they'll both be happier once the baby is born?"

"The queen, I'm sure. She openly wants a child. Anakin...I hope he warms up to the idea of being a father. He's so unsure right now, and I know parenthood isn't for everyone."

"Well either way I want to help raise the child. Be a nanny of sorts."

"How about 'Aunty Sabé'?" Obi-Wan chuckled, "I know I wouldn't mind being 'Uncle Obi' to the little prince or princess."

"Aunty does sound nice. I think I much prefer being called that over nanny."

"It's more personal, and kind of includes you as part of the family." Obi-Wan nodded.

"Yes it does. I hope...this won't affect our relationships with the Queen and King."

"The baby or tonight? Because I think both will. But is that so bad a thing? A little change? A child running around will bring joy into the dynamic we have with the king and queen, and tonight, well, it can only bring us closer as we comfort them."

"I suppose you're right. I just need to not worry so much. Padmé and Anakin will be happy if we comfort them."

"They need us to be there for them, so as long as we do that, everything will be fine."

Sabé nodded. "I feel a little better about tonight. I do hope they're successful. I'm ready for a little baby to run around the halls while happily screaming." She chuckled.

"What are you hoping it'll be? Boy or girl?"

"Girl of course. I can brush her hair and put her in cute dresses if she likes."

"Girl or boy, I'll be teaching the little one how to defend themselves, and then how to enjoy a proper cup of tea with a little tea party." Obi-Wan hummed.

"You'd better invite the whole family to those tea parties. Everyone can use a good tea party."

"Well, not all of them, but most." He chuckled.

"I'm sure the queen and king will both want a break from politics to spend time with their child and partners. I know I would, and I don't even get into the politics part."

"Politics are a rather dry subject. I don't envy those who are in that world."

"Me either. Kudos to our monarchs who tolerate it at least." Sabé sighed and sat back up, deciding to eat a little more. "Now, I think we should both spend this afternoon getting ready for tonight, and before you protest, you really should take the afternoon off of work so you can make sure Anakin will be comfortable afterwards. Let Arlan or someone take your job for the rest of the day. He is a rather good guard after all."

Obi-Wan had opened his mouth to speak when she cut him off before he could utter a syllable, and he closed it, flushing lightly, "I already have taken the afternoon off... Titum's filling in for me."

"Fantastic! Plenty of time to make the perfect night for Anakin."

"I'm starting him out with a nice hot bubble bath paired with a massage by yours truly." The guard
smiled.

"So you're going for a de-stressing approach. I like it. I'm going make sure she's all clean and taken care of properly before we crawl into bed with warm blankets and snacks and watch her favorite holodramas."

"Hmm, maybe Anakin and I could paint each other's nails and eat junk food…" Obi-Wan joked.

"If that's what you're both into," she said with a smile.

"I've never tried it before, what colors would you suggest?" he smirked.

Sabé laughed. "Well for him I might go for a dark color. Blue maybe. Or even a wine color. He does wear darker colors, and he pulls them off quite well. As for you, a royal blue would look very nice, with maybe some gold glitter."

"Royal blue, really? I was thinking some pastels." Obi-Wan chuckled.

"Oh well if you're wanting pastels, definitely baby blue with white accents. And the glitter. You'd look dashing with the glitter."

"I'm a guy that needs sparkle, hu?"

"Absolutely." She wiggled her fingers at him with a smirk.

"Hmm," he chuckled and sipped his tea, "You know, this started out as a joke, but do you have time before getting ready for a little pampering?"

"For you, I will make time." Sabé chuckled as she took another drink of her tea as well.

"Great. We'll pamper ourselves just a little so we are more relaxed for when we turn all our attention on our uneasy lovers."

After finishing their tea, Obi-Wan gathered up the dishes and offered Sabé his arm to escort her. She took it and let him lead her to her private bedroom where she had all the necessary items she and Obi-Wan were going to need. "If you think the king might be interested in this, let me know and bring him to me, and I will fix him right up."

"I'll see what he thinks tonight when he sees my nails." He said, sitting down on the stool that sat at Sabé's vanity.

"In fact, you should have him come here and let me give him a royal makeover. He'd rock some eyeliner for sure." She smiled as she pulled up another chair and pulled out the nail polish. "Alright, let's get to work on making you pretty for your boyfriend tonight."

"I'd help you, but I'm not so great with this kind of thing. Your nails would end up a mess." He chuckled.

Anakin sat on the edge of his bed with a sigh, waiting for Padmé to get herself ready. The king wasn't exactly nervous, just… worried. Worried that one, he wouldn't make his queen feel good,
and two, he would make the situation worse by saying something stupid.

The door opened and Padmé stepped out, looking nervous and wearing a silky night gown with pearls on the sleeves. She took a deep breath and moved over to Anakin, sitting down on the bed next to him. "I…guess it's time…" she muttered.

"Yeah. You look beautiful." He smiled lightly, attempting to lighten the mood if only slightly.

"Thanks…" she gave him a small smile and sighed, "I've never laid with a man before—or anyone other than Sabé…so just…be gentle and lets try to finish quickly."

"Don't worry. I know neither of us really want this… but I do want you to feel good." He pulled her into a gentle hug.

She sighed and nodded before turning into him as they lay back on the bed, her fingers hesitating as they touched the buttons of his shirt as she reminded herself that this was for their future child, and Force willing, it would be the only time they had to lay together in their marriage bed.

Sabé paced along the length of Padmé’s private room, her slippered feet making nary a sound as she did so. Everything was ready, but waiting was the hardest part. Worry as to how badly Padmé would need her or worse, if Padmé decided she didn't want her anymore after experiencing her husband…

It wasn't long before Padmé entered, not looking disappointed, which was a fairly good sign, given the situation. When she saw Sabé, she smiled and rush to her, hugging her tight. "Oh it's so good to be with you," she sighed.

"Padmé." Sabé smiled, holding her girlfriend tight. "How are you fairing?"

"I'm alright. I'm just glad I get to be with you now." Padmé squeezed Sabé before stepping back a bit and kissing her.

Sabé hummed, "I'm glad you're back in my arms, too. I drew you a nice bath to get cleaned up—girlfriend optional. And then I have snacks and your favorite holodrama queued up—girlfriend mandatory."

Padmé laughed. "Well I certainly would like to have my girlfriend for the bath. Sounds wonderful, my love."

"Perfect. This way," Sabé gestured, leading Padmé into the refresher where relaxing-scented candles were lit and the bath was drawn, warm, and ready for them with soft music playing.

"My goodness, Sabé, you really went all out for this." Padmé smiled and looked at her girlfriend as she began stripping her robes.

"This is all for the woman I love who had to do something she didn't want to do." Sabé said, slipping out of her clothes and hanging them up, "You deserve nothing less."

"Thank you," Padmé said as she stepped into the tub. "I couldn't ask for a better girlfriend."

"Well, you could, but the best girlfriend happens to be taken by me." Sabé laughed, slipping into
the heated, oil-infused water along with Padmé and taking her into her arms.

Padmé giggled. "Smooth. I love you so much." She sighed happily and rested her head on Sabé's shoulder.

"I know, I love you too, Padmé." She hummed, nuzzling the Queen's cheek with her own.

Together they remained in the tub until the water grew cold, forcing them to move on with their night's activities. It didn't take long for Padmé to crawl under the blankets of her bed and grab one of the snacks while she waited for Sabé.

"Getting warm again?" Sabé chuckled as she moved towards the bed, "If so, I want in on it."

"You better get in on it. It's cozy, and I want a warm body next to me tonight, preferably the one belonging to my girlfriend."

Sabé slipped in next to Padmé and snuggled in close before reaching out to start the holodrama and dim the lights. "You have me all night, and well into the morning." She promised.

"I'll have you as long as you want to stay here. I won't complain if you stay until tomorrow afternoon."

"If left up to me, it'd be just us two for weeks." She chuckled, coaxing Padmé into a kiss.

"Two weeks with no one else but you sounds like Heaven." Padmé gave Sabé the kiss she wanted, snuggling in close.

Anakin opened the door to his private room with a yawn and a hand running through his hair. His clothes were put on rather sloppily, but he didn't mind much. He found Obi-Wan slouched on a chair, his eyes closed as he lightly dozed off while waiting for the King's return.

The blond chuckled. "Hey, you awake?"

"Yes," Obi-Wan opened his eyes and smiled, "welcome back."

"Thanks." Anakin moved closer and leaned down to kiss the redhead.

"Ready to be pampered?"

"Absolutely." Sighing, Anakin buried his face in Obi-Wan's chest for a bit. That was when he glanced at the redhead's hands. "Are your nails...painted?"

"Sabé and I had a little self-pamper session as we exchanged our ideas for comforting you and Queen Padmé tonight. Do you like them?"

"I love them." Anakin grabbed Obi-Wan's hand and kissed his knuckles.

"She offered to give you a makeover if you were interested." He chuckled, straightening up.

"Only if you also go."
Obi-Wan chuckled again and stood up, taking Anakin's hands, "Okay, but for now, let's get you into the nice hot bath I have drawn for you."

Anakin already started to strip as he made his way to the refresher. "I'm so ready for a bath."

"I figured you would be." He opened the door to show off the romantic bath that had been drawn for the king. Lowly candle-lit, soft music, the soft scent of flowers, heated waters and a ton of bubbles.

Anakin paused to take in the scene, smelling the flowers mixed with the warmth of the water. He sighed slowly. "This is beyond perfect."

"I hoped you would find it to be." Obi-Wan kissed his knuckles, "Would you like me to stay and rub your shoulders, or shall I wait in the next room for you?"

"Well I would like for you to join me in the water, but if you'd prefer giving me a massage, I wouldn't be opposed to it." He said as he disrobed.

"I can do so while sitting in the bath with you, you know."

"Well, I think that sounds like a grand idea. Care to join me?" He stepped into the water and offered his hand to the redhead.

Obi-Wan paused only to remove his clothing before taking Anakin's hand to step into the bath, lowering himself at the back so Anakin could sit in front of him.

Anakin sat down carefully, then he let his eyes slip closed as he leaned back into Obi-Wan.

"Lean forward just a little. That's it." Obi-Wan hummed gently as he began to rub Anakin's tense shoulder muscles.

Anakin groaned lightly. "Didn't know how tight my shoulders got..."

"Sometimes all it takes is a good rub-down to realize how much you needed one."

"Apparently I needed one desperately. Good thing I have you to take care of that."

"Mmh." He agreed with a hum as he kissed Anakin's shoulder.

Anakin breathed slowly as his shoulders were worked loose, relaxing him and making him sleepy. "I wish the water would stay hot longer. I could stay here all night."

"There is always the bed we can switch to if the water's getting too cold."

"I… don't really want to be in a bed right now, if that's okay. We can get our blankets and pillows and cuddle on the floor for a bit."

"Whatever you want." Obi-Wan kissed Anakin's cheek.

"Thanks…" Anakin turned to look at Obi-Wan. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"Are you okay that Padmé and I did this? I mean I feel terrible that my first time wasn't with you…"
Obi-Wan chewed on the side of his tongue as he took a moment to gather his thoughts. "I don't know." He finally admitted, "I try to be—I know it wasn't your choice, nor was it behind my back. You two are married and it is expected of you to have a baby, but...I can't help the part of me that wants to be greedy..."

Anakin sighed. "If it helps any... I did think of you the whole time."

"That might help a little." Obi-Wan said, his arms wrapped around Anakin's middle as he rested his cheek on the back of his shoulder.

Anakin leaned back to rest against Obi-Wan. "Honestly that was the only way I was going to get through that. As beautiful as Padmé is, she just doesn't cut it for me."

"So you imagined she was me?"

"Well... yeah," he admitted.

"Do you often imagine me being on bottom then?" he smirked against Anakin's shoulder.

"I... do..." Anakin flushed.

"Fair enough. We'll try it like that when we are ready."

Anakin perked up. "Really? You're not opposed to being on bottom?"

"I don't see why I should be opposed."

"Well, I guess you did seem pretty submissive the other night... But I didn't think you'd jump right into being the bottom."

"Really, and I thought I was being very forward and dominate when I took us to getting off together with that shared hand job..." Obi-Wan laughed and sighed, "I'm fine with trying the bottom if that is what you want. If I like it, then we're good. If I don't, and you don't, then we can continue with what we have already done together and know we like."

Anakin nodded. "I think you make a good bottom," he said quietly.

"You mean you hope I do. We won't know until we try and see if I like it and if I can make you feel good from the bottom. Don't worry, we'll try it." Obi-Wan promised.

"Right..." Anakin shifted slightly, then he sat up. "I hope I won't disappoint."

Obi-Wan sighed, "I didn't want to ask about it, as I know it was probably unpleasant over-all, mentally, but...did the queen seem satisfied? If she did, then there's a good chance that I would be as well when I'm the one under you."

"As uncomfortable mentally as it was, I'd say we both were left very satisfied."

"Then I wouldn't worry about disappointing me."

Anakin smiled back at Obi-Wan. "It'd at least be nice to hear you moan out my name again."

That got the redhead to smirk mischievously, "Ohhh, Aniiii..." he moaned out in his most wanton tone.

Anakin's face went red, but he laughed. "Jeez, I didn't even do anything to you and you're already
"You wanted to hear it again." He chuckled before pulling back. "Come on, the water's getting cold."

"We need to warm back up," Anakin said as he stood back up, shaking off some of the water that dropped off his body.

"I set the towels over there."

The blond stepped out and grabbed one, beginning to dry himself off. While he did that, he grabbed another and offered it to Obi-Wan.

Obi-Wan stood up and took it to pat himself dry. "Are you hungry?"

"I could eat, yeah."

"Good. I had Dex make us something nice and greasy."

"Oh Force yeah! I love his greasy stuff the best. Some of the best food I've ever had."

"It's great comfort food, too." Obi-Wan stepped from the bath and dried his legs before slipping into his pajamas, "You get into something comfortable—whatever it may be, and I'll call to have our food delivered."

"You bet." Anakin wrapped his towel around his waist before he walked out to pick up his discarded clothes and exchange them for pajamas.

"You do own pajamas, hmm? I thought you only slept naked." Obi-Wan teased, glancing at his boyfriend as he sent word to Dex to have the late night meal delivered.

"I sleep mostly naked. Shirts are usually optional. So are pants but I keep those on more." Anakin shrugged.

Obi-Wan chuckled and moved to the door. A moment later a droid arrived with the trey of food. He took it and thanked the droid before turning back to Anakin, "Eat on the floor or at the table?"

"The floor is fun. Let's also get the blankets to keep us warm while we eat."

"Alright." He set the food on the table so that he could help drag the bedding over to the plush rug, setting them up in a comfortable nest shape before bringing the food over.

Anakin settle down into the makeshift nest then grabbed some food and dug into it. He groaned. "Force this is so good. We are so lucky to have Dex here."

"Shame. Every kid deserves a nice greasy bantha burger and fries…I suppose you never had ice cream, either."

"No... At least I don't think so. I went from slavery to royalty. Hardly any food to food make for kings, and never included any burgers or ice cream."
"Well, it's a good thing that I have ice cream ready to be delivered after we finish the burgers."

"You are amazing." Anakin leaned over to leave a kiss on Obi-Wan's cheek.

"I did warn you I intended to spoil you tonight." Obi-Wan grinned before shoving a few thick fries into his mouth.

"I am indeed spoiled tonight. Thank you for doing this for me."

"You deserve it." The redhead smiled. Moving back to his burger.

Once they finished eating, Obi-Wan went to the door once more and exchanged their dishes for a single bowl piled with ice cream and toppings, two spoons on the side.

"So ice cream is cold," Anakin concluded as the dessert was set before him.

"Yes, don't eat it too fast or you'll get a very intense, but quick headache called brain freeze. It's over quickly, but it's not at all pleasant. This is a treat to be enjoyed a little more slowly."

"Slow is good." Careful not to let the treat drip onto the blankets, Anakin took a bite, shivering a little.

"But at the same time not too slow or it'll be soup." Obi-Wan chuckled as he picked up the second spoon. "What do you think?"

"It's very cold… but very sweet. I like it."

"There are many flavors and toppings, I got us the basics."

"Other flavors? Oh, now I have to try a lot of them."

"Many others. An adventure for another date, I'd wager." He chuckled, "But for now, this is what we have to enjoy."

Anakin nodded, took another bite. "I agree. We should have a date that we just taste tons of ice cream flavors."

"A good way to get to know each other's favorites." He agreed.

"I didn't think I'd like food that was this cold because of where I'm from, but I actually love this. I think I want to have my mom try some of this when she comes here next."

"The hotter the weather, the nicer this treat is to enjoy." Obi-Wan smiled, "In the colder months, ice cream parlors close for the season."

"I would try to get a place that sells ice cream on Mustafar, but I'm afraid all the ice cream would melt before it had a chance to be sold." Anakin chuckled.

"They would need a top of the line cooling system and a place to eat inside, I think."

"Something like that. But probably not now. They're more interested in political and royal affairs than ice cream."

"Any word from your mother on her next visit with the King?"

Anakin shook his head. "Nothing yet. I hope soon. I do miss her."
"We can try calling her again together if you want."

"I think she'd like that just as much as I would."

"Use your Force magic to bring your com over and we'll give her a call while we share this sundae."

Anakin laughed as he reached out, bringing the holocom to the both of them. "That's the only time I will use the Force to get an object."

"Oh I doubt it. In the privacy of your own room? I'm sure you do it once in a while when you are feeling lazy."

"Okay, yes, I do, but I try to use it as little as possible. I still don't like that I'm Force sensitive that much..."

"It's our secret...besides; it could be fun to test out in bed." He winked.

Anakin flushed. "It...is..."

"We'll discuss it another time. For now let's see if your dear mother has time for a chat."

"Yes..." Anakin cleared his throat as he picked up the frequency to contact his mother.

"Does she know we are together now, or will this be a surprise for her?"

Anakin smiled. "It'll be a surprise."

"You know, she's the one that told me you for-sure liked me. We'd still be awkwardly sending mixed signals if it wasn't for her."

"She... She told you? Well, that would explain a lot." He chuckled. "Well, she'll be thrilled to hear we're together."

"The morning after your wedding, yes. I then took time to evaluate my own feelings before deciding I'd tempt you with that offer of a kiss." He chuckled right before the holo image flickered and Shmi appeared.

"Ani?"

"Mom!" Anakin greeted Shmi with a big smile.

"Oh Ani, it's so good to see you again. Oh, and is that Captain Kenobi I see?"

"I hope you are well, Queen Skywalker." He bowed his head with a smile.

"Oh I was doing quite well, and now my day has been made!" Shmi giggled. "What an honor it is to see my son and the captain of Naboo's royal guard."

Anakin smiled at Obi-Wan, then back at his mother. "Yeah, we were just finishing up our dinner with some ice cream for dessert."

"Sounds like a date." She teased.

"Well... You'd be right, actually." Anakin flushed lightly.
"About time! I really didn't want to have to twist my ankle again to get you two to dance."

"Don't worry, your ankle is safe now." Anakin leaned over and kissed Obi-Wan's cheek. "We're officially dating."

"I'm so glad to see you happy." She smiled as Obi-Wan's cheeks heated.

"It's all thanks to you, actually. Thank you for talking to me about your son." He said.

"And thank you for loving him back. He's needed someone for a while, and you happened to be the right guy that came along." Shmi smiled. "So, have you just called to tell me you're dating? Or is there another matter?"

Anakin sighed. "We were wondering if there were plans yet for you to return here. There's lots of security issues that needed to be discussed still."

"We're trying, Ani. But a lot of eruptions have been happening lately which is making ships coming in and out of the atmosphere very unstable. You know how it can be. We're getting very low on imports like water again because of it, too."

Anakin was instantly worried. "Is everyone okay? How much more water does Mustafar have?"

"My being human and queen puts me at top priority for water as humans need it much more than Mustafarians. I'm fine, Ani. And I'm making sure it stretches out until ships can land with resupply."

"I hate the volcanoes' activity. They do more harm than good, even to people who are designed to live there."

"The planet's been unstable for years, you know the history…how it used to be a green planet before the volcanic activity went out of control. But no one wants to leave their home planet, so we're stuck here dealing with it as it comes."

"Just be safe, okay? I do want to hug you again."

"I'm fine. I stay inside the castle where the cooling systems work the best."

"You know I always worried the explosions would hit one of those cooling units and break the whole system. I'm still worried about that, and then there's the lava flows that are unpredictable most times in where they flow, and"

"Ani, I'm fine. You know the cooling units are located in a secure location and that there are back-up cooling units in an even more secure location."

Anakin sighed. "Yeah, I know…I'm just scared one day I'll wake up and you won't be around anymore. I mean, I know we all die one day, but I don't want you to die early."

"Just because you aren't here with me doesn't mean I'm going to be in danger."

"I know. Sorry, you know I get carried away when I worry."

"I know." She chuckled before looking at Obi-Wan, "He'll worry just as much about you if you are ever separated from him, you know. It's in his nature to worry for those he loves."

"I'll try to not wander far then." He chuckled back.
"I can't help it. With our past... I worry about what would happen to you." Anakin sighed, once again unwilling to share with his mother that he was Force sensitive.

"I'm pretty sure we have time before you have to worry about me. And I'll be back visiting Naboo again as soon as we can safely get off planet."

"Let me know as soon as the volcanoes let up, okay?"

"Of course I will."

"Thank you." Anakin turned his head to look at Obi-Wan. "Don't suddenly disappear, okay?" He smirked.

"Now why would I do that? I have you to kiss, and the queen to protect, though she's just as good with a blaster if given one as you are with hand-to-hand combat... Maybe I'm not as needed as I thought..." he teased.

"You are very much still needed," Anakin pouted, hugging the redhead close.

"For kisses at least." He hummed, kissing the king gently.

"And much more than that. Like for times like this."

"I did say 'at least'." He chuckled.

"You two are too cute." Shmi cut in.

Anakin smiled. "I would hope we were cute together."

"Shall I let you two love birds enjoy the rest of your evening?"

"We've talked about all that I wanted to, so unless you have anything else, I think we're good to end this call."

"Enjoy your evening together." She smiled, "I'll see you again soon."

"Love you." The call disconnected, and Anakin sighed as he leaned into Obi-Wan. "Why do I have to be so worried about her?"

"She's your mum." He shrugged, snaking his arms around Anakin, "That's all the reason you need."

"I guess. Still doesn't keep me from worrying though"

"Of course not, but for now I think we should worry about our melting ice cream." Obi-Wan said, dipping his spoon into the slowly melting treat.

Anakin got another spoonful of ice cream and ate it. "I'll be glad once she's back here, safe and sound."

To be continued...
After tucking Anakin in and placing a kiss on the sleeping man's lips, Obi-Wan slipped quietly out of the King's suite and started down the corridor with a smile on his lips. It was later than he planned to return to his own room, but he was satisfied with his nice evening with Anakin. He didn't want to leave, but they both knew he needed to as Senators were still staying in the castle and would be up and about come morning.

He turned down another hall that would lead to the staircase when a voice caught his attention. It really was late, and only the night staff should have been up, so the guard in him grew curious and he followed his ears towards the sound, of only to confirm that it was two of his night guards exchanging information.

"Sidious doesn't like how kind Skywalker is. Says it's unnatural for a Separatist to be this kind," one guard spoke in a low voice. "He wants to get rid of him, but now it's harder because of Kenobi being attached to him."

"Attached?" the other guard asked. "Like they like each other? That's blasphemous against the queen isn't it?"

"It is, but I don't think Skywalker realizes that. So Sidious has a plan to take care of him. He's going to My lord!" The guard quickly ended the conversation, bowing as a cloaked figure approached them. "I… I didn't know you were awake and about."

Obi-Wan frowned, stepping back behind a pillar to keep from being detected. He didn't like the sound of the conversation between two of his own men, and who was this 'Sidious' person?

"It's easier to work out my plans without the distractions that the daylight often presents." Stated a low, gravely voice from the cloaked figure. "You have the proof I asked you to get for me, I suspect?"

"Yes, of course." The first guard—Titum, Obi-Wan realized—handed over what looked like printed stills from a holorecording. "We got these the other night. The two were as oblivious as a newborn."

"And tonight?" The man asked, flipping through the stills. "I went through a lot of trouble setting up this night's activities between the Queen and King. I need to know if it lead to anything sneaky on the King's side of things."

"They weren't so touchy tonight, but there were lots of affectionate actions taking place, especially during a call they made to Skywalker's mother. Also, it appears that she doesn't know he can use the Force." The guard shifted on his feet. "We… didn't get any shots tonight. Too many other people around to sneak some in."

"Disappointing. I need proof of these things. If you want that promotion to Captain of the Guard, you'll need to take better advantage of these situations. My plans with keeping this galactic war going are already failing. I don't need your incompetence hindering my new plans for gaining power over this galaxy."

"Yes, my Lord." Titum bowed, his voice shaky. "I won't let you down again. I promise."
"See that you don't." the figure moved to the window nearby, looking out with his arms behind his back. "Skywalker is powerful, so each step in my plan needs to be executed perfectly. Use caution around him, or I fear he'll strike out at our beloved queen."

"He won't get that far. I'll strike him down before he even lays a hand on her." Titum gained a cocky attitude as he stepped closer to the figure. "I look forward to getting that captain's position. You better hold up on your end of the deal. I'm going through all this trouble for you. I better be getting Kenobi's title out of this."

"The Separatist has Kenobi wrapped around his finger. We'll remember he can't be trusted. He's one of them, now." The other guard, Juris, stated.

"I always uphold my end of deals. You just make sure you do yours." The man seemed to hiss.

Obi-Wan swallowed. His own men were plotting against the king—against Anakin. Against even him. But why? He trusted his men with his life and always treated them fairly as well as with kindness. But now—now it seemed he had to arrest these men and investigate his own team for further traitors… his hand moved to his hip, only to find nothing. He hadn't brought his blaster, and why would he? He'd spent the evening with Anakin in the safety of the castle…

The hair on the back of his neck suddenly prickled in warning and he straightened up, eyes wide.

"We have an eavesdropper." The cloaked man suddenly said before he spun around, wrinkled hand outstretched.

Obi-Wan turned to flee and alert—someone else to the plot he'd just overheard, only to gag on his breath, an invisible hand wrapping around his throat and pulling him up off his feet and towards the group that had been previously unaware of him.

The first guard had his blaster pulled out, ready to attack. However, upon seeing Obi-Wan, he chuckled and sheathed his blaster. "Looks like I'm getting that title a lot sooner than anticipated. Hope you had a nice night with Skywalker, because you're not going to see him ever again."

Obi-Wan could only struggle for a single breath, black spotting his vision and a ringing starting up in his ears as his fingers clawed at his throat in attempt to remove the pressure cutting off his air supply.

The man wielding the Force sighed, "Seems I'll have to adjust my plans. I need you to arrange for my other apprentice to be allowed inside and then back out. I'll send this former guard with him off-planet so he can't become a problem."

He clenched his fingers and Obi-Wan's world went black.

Anakin woke up alone in his bed. He knew he was alone when the felt Obi-Wan's presence within the Force muted, which it usually was when he was a distance away from Anakin. He sighed and sat up, yawned, stretched. Though he had a fantastic night with Obi-Wan, Anakin still felt a bit sad when he didn't wake up to his lover curled up beside him, sleeping still.

The blond rolled out of bed and stretched again, flexing his fingers and toes, feeling each muscle and tendon move in all four limbs. He looked up at his hands for a bit, rolling them before letting
them fall back to his sides. He felt… strangely normal. Not a king, a former slave, not a human. Simply himself. One person out of quadrillions in a galaxy.

Anakin frowned.

Eventually, after cleaning up and dressing himself, the blond left to find food, taking a slow walk to the kitchens to receive his breakfast.

"Good morning, sleep well?" Padmé asked, slipping into step next to him.

Anakin looked over at her. "Yes. You?"

"Much better than I thought I would thanks to Sabé. She's perfect and knew just what to do to comfort and relax me."

"Good. Obi-Wan did a good job comforting me as well. He didn't stay the night though."

"Considering there are guests in the castle, I'm sure it was for the best." She smiled at him. "I'll be setting my appointment to get tested for pregnancy next week if you want to be there for the results."

"Yeah, I'd like to be there." He managed a small smile at her.

"Then I'll let you know the exact time after I make my appointment. Sabé hopes it'll be a girl, but I'm hoping for a boy…what about you?" she asked, her hands on her belly.

Anakin shrugged. "Boy I guess. Haven't really thought about it too much."

"Oh come on, Ani, the baby is the exciting part of what we had to do."

"I know, I'm just a little down I woke up alone this morning. That's all."

"Well, cheer up. Obi-Wan's around here somewhere making sure everyone in this castle is safe. You'll see him and I bet if you smile he'll flush shyly as he tries to pretend he's focused only on his job."

That got Anakin to genuinely smile. "I hope I see him today. We did have a rather nice night. I had ice cream for the first time in my life and loved it."

"First time? Really? But ice cream is a childhood staple!" she gasped in surprise.

"To be fair, I did grow up on planets that were far too hot for ice cream to even stay frozen."

"That may be true." She sighed and shook her head, "We have more meetings with the Senators again, too. Think they'll notice if we skip out and go for a ride around the countryside instead?"

"They can handle themselves. Senator Palpatine can take over for us I'm sure." Anakin nodded. "Let's go for a ride today."

"Meet me in the stables after breakfast, then?"

"Deal." Anakin grabbed his plate of food that had been prepared for him and started to head off to eat. "See you in a bit."

"I'll let Sheev know." She smiled, grabbing her own plate.
Breakfast flew by as the both of them ate separately. Anakin went up to his room and changed into something more comfortable for riding. It was a rather form-fitting outfit on him, but he liked it. He felt less like a king and more like a person.

Anakin quickly made his way down to the stables, a slight bounce in his step as he looked forward to escaping the bickering senators for the day.

"We're in so much trouble for this," Padmé giggled as she was saddling up her mount, "so worth it."

"Then we'd better hurry out of here." Anakin laughed as he ran to grab the tack for his mount.

"Before Sheev finds the note I slipped him." She agreed, pulling herself up onto her mount and waiting for Anakin.

"Oh my god, you only left him a note? We're in trouble for the rest of our lives." Anakin jumped up on his mount and snapped the reins quickly, urging his Guarlaras forward.

"He would have stopped us otherwise. Come on, I haven't played hooky since I was a little girl!"

"I'll race you to the falls!" Anakin roared into the lead with a laugh, sounding carefree and actually happy after having woke up alone in his bed.

"First we gotta race past and lose the guards outside the gate, then the race begins!" she shouted, taking chase.

"Let's hope we're faster than the guards," Anakin shouted back as they raced past the gate, shocking the guards as they flew past.

"Y-Your highnesses!" shouts began to call after them, a few trying to pursue on foot. "Come back! It's not safe without—WAIT!"

Anakin looked over his shoulder with a wide smile. He laughed at the guards trying to catch them on foot, but soon came members of the cavalry ridding after them, and the blond shouted to urge his mount to go faster.

"Faster, Ani! It's over if they catch us! A day with the senators as punishment!" Padmé laughed out to urge him on.

"Sounds like terrible punishment!" Anakin howled as he went even faster, the cavalrmen falling behind quickly as the royals thundered on.

"This way! I know a hiding spot and they'll over-shoot us!" Padmé said, turning suddenly.

Anakin followed quickly, glancing one last time at the cavalry chasing them down.

Padmé led him into a cave, hidden by hanging vines and surrounding trees.

He ducked as he went though the vines, though he still was hit by tons of leaves. He blinked as he caught sight of Padmé again and followed her to hide. "Do they really not know this is here?"

"Yeah, this is where I hid to lose them when I was younger." She nodded, lowering her voice.

Anakin halted his mount, saying nothing as the cavalry could be heard coming closer, and then they grew further and further away. A smile graced Anakin's lips as he realized they had officially escaped the guards of the castle gates.
"And now we are free to be just two normal friends out for the day." She smiled.

"This was a fantastic idea for the day." Anakin chuckled as he exited the cave at a walk on his mount, glancing around to see if the coast was clear.

"I suggested it as a joke, didn't expect you to take me up on it, but you're right. This is so much better."

"You were seriously joking about this? Well, I'm glad I didn't take it as a joke."

"We can't make a habit out of it, but once in a while…” she laughed and pulled ahead, "Come on, let's go where they won't think to look."

"So the falls are out then. Is there maybe a small village nearby? Because we'll need food eventually."

"There is, and we can go to the falls later. They'll move on to other areas and we can go enjoy the obvious places."

"Awesome." Anakin gestured for her to take the lead. "So you mentioned you wanted our kid to be a boy. Why'd you choose that option?"

"I've always wanted a little boy. When I was a kid, I wanted a brother, but I never got one, so as I grew older it turned into wanting a son."

"That's interesting. Usually mothers want to have daughters, but I think you're the first I've known who wanted a son."

"What about you? Now that you are in a little better mood, what would you have our baby be if you got to choose, and why?"

"Well I did say I wanted a son, but I think I also want a daughter. Both have their ups and downs for sure, but I'd love one just as much as the other."

"Of course, no matter what we'll love our child whole-heartedly. But most people have a preference for one reason or another. Like wanting to play with a girls' hair or something."

"Whatever we have, I'm just glad they're going to be born into a better situation than I was. No child should deserve to be born into slavery." Anakin sighed and shifted in his saddle.

"I can't believe slavery still exists at all." She sighed.

"Again, I'm glad our baby won't be born into it."

"Is Obi-Wan excited? About the baby, that is."

"I think so. We haven't talked much about it yet, but I'm sure he's excited."

"He and Sabé will be like second parents to our little one, so I hope he's excited."

"I'm even excited now. I'll admit, last night I really wasn't that excited, since it almost felt like we were being forced to do it... But today I'm excited." Anakin looked at Padmé. "You're excited, right?"

"I've always wanted children." She chuckled, "Of course I'm excited."
Anakin smiled. "Are you scared any?"

"A little. It's a big step, and it'll change our lives forever. I don't want to mess up."

"I doubt we'll mess it up. We have lots of time to research and get ready."

"We do, but a lot of it will be experience."

Anakin nodded. "It's not like we're raising our child by ourselves. We have help from basically everyone in the castle."

"Yeah, but I want to have a good part in our kid's life. My parents basically let the nanny raise me until I was old enough for them. I don't want that for our kid."

"I don't either. Not having a parent around sounds sad and a bit scary."

"It was. And I didn't like my nanny. She wasn't very fun. Never wanted to play games."

"That nanny sounds like she had a stick up her rear. Kids want to play, not sit around and wait for their next meal."

"Now you know why I used to sneak out of the castle for a day of fun like this. Often gave those in charge of my safety heart attacks, but hey, it was fun." Padmé laughed. "It's also how I started making friends. A few of my handmaidens, including Sabé, were friends I made after sneaking out. Once I was older and I began needing handmaidens, I offered my friends a chance at the positions. Some took it, some didn't. But it was nice having friends in the castle. Promise me that we'll let our child have friends so they don't have to run away to make them like I did. I'd worry so much!"

Anakin chuckled. "Of course they can have friends. They should have some to play with, especially since I didn't have much when I was growing up, and you had to run away to find your friends."

"Glad we agree. Oh!" She reached over to tap his shoulder repeatedly, "What will your mom think of the news of us giving her a grandchild? Excited? Think she'll come visit for at least a few months when the baby is born?"

Anakin had to take a moment to realize he would have to break the news to his mother eventually. "Yeah... I think she'd love to spend a few months with us. She might insist on coming in the middle for the pregnancy and staying until the baby is born."

"That would be lovely." Padmé approved.

"We both could use her guidance through this, if I'm to be honest. Plus, having her around always makes me feel better."

"And your mother is a lovely woman. I really enjoyed getting to know her when she visited for our wedding."

"She's charming for sure. She twisted her ankle just so Obi-Wan and I could dance at the wedding." Anakin chuckled. "I'll be glad to have her around again."

Padmé gave a giggle, "Cute."
"What about this scarf? Does it suit Obi-Wan's style better?" Anakin showed Padmé yet another scarf, the blond debating buying one for his lover.

"The blue would bring out his eyes, I think." She nodded with a smile, "Much better than the red one."

"Yeah, I think you're right." Anakin folded up the scarf neatly. "You think he'll like it? I know it's summer here, but I'd love to see it on him once it starts to get colder."

"I'm sure he'll love it." She grinned.

"I hope so. I hope he's a scarf person."

"Well, it's a gift from you, so I'm sure he'll be a that scarf person."

Anakin chuckled. "You're right. Besides if he holds our baby any time he's outside this winter, he can keep the baby and himself warm."

She smiled and nodded before grabbing a bracelet and holding it up so the light glinted against its surface, "Oh, Sabé would adore this."

"It does look like something she'd wear. It's quite nice to look at too."

"I'm getting it for her." Padmé decided with a nod, moving to get the vendor's attention.

"Now we both have gifts to give. I call this a successful shopping trip."

"Pay for these, grab lunch, maybe look at baby things, and then I think we can try going to the Falls."

Anakin nodded. "Sounds good to me. Think the guards are still trying to find us?"

"They won't stop until they do, or we return on our own." She smiled, transferring the credits for the purchase before tucking the bracelet into her bag.

Anakin tucked the scarf into a pocket on his belt. "Let's hope they stay away until we want to go home. I'd rather not be forced to return back."

"Even if they do catch us, we got a good portion of the day to ourselves." She shrugged.

"That's true. I've enjoyed it quite a lot actually." Anakin smiled at Padmé as they left the shop in search of food.

"So what do you feel like eating?" she asked, linking their arms together.

"Well, Obi-Wan and I had burgers last night, so I think I can skip a day before I eat another one of those. We did have some of Dex's burgers after all." Anakin thought for a bit. "Maybe something authentic, straight from Naboo's farms."

"I know just the place. All local Nabooian food. Produce fresh from the farms and fish fresh from the Gungans' lakes."

Anakin tilted his head slightly. "Gungans? Other natives I presume."
"Yes, they live mostly in cities they built on the floor of some of Naboo's largest lakes, and they govern themselves separately. They like to keep to themselves but we have peace treaties with them that allow us to share the planet and its resources."

"Interesting. Do you see them often?"

"No, only when I have to meet with their High Council members to discuss any business that will affect their cities. Things like when we joined the Republic, when bad weather causes a food shortage on land, things like that. Though business owners likely see them more often to trade for fish and other aquatic resources."

"Were they informed of our marriage when the news came?"

"They were, though they had little interest in it."

"So they're not a huge part of the monarchy up here?"

"No. They just want equality and to be left to their own form of government, which we of course respect. They have been unaffected by the war, even."

"Wow, how is that even possible? Surely they have been affected in some way, like depravation of resources. They live underwater, and they have some stuff from the surface. How were they not in short supply of at least one thing?"

"The resources Naboo supplied for the war effort were both things the Gungans need little of, and are mined from the land." She shrugged.

"I guess they're better off than most of the galaxy. Lucky." Anakin sighed.

"From what I've heard, Naboo as a whole has been pretty lucky. No battles have touched our soil, no devastation."

"Well I'm glad our baby will be born here then. Peaceful, mostly safe. Perfect place to raise a kid."

"And with any luck, the war will officially end within the next nine-or-so months."

"Force, I hope so. It's gone on long enough now."

"Things are settling, it's just uneasy with the assassination attempts."

"Yeah. I wish this situation was easier to handle, but apparently just using a bit of the force on our attackers doesn't cut it."

"In here." She said, pulling him into a small restaurant.

Anakin glanced at the sign outside before he was pulled in. "Looks like a cozy place."

"Yeah, I've always liked it." She said, leading him over to a table to sit down at. Shortly after, a waiter came over to hand them menus and take their drink order.

After placing an order for his drink, Anakin began to look through the menu, food items he'd had never heard of grabbing his attention and making his stomach growl, along with the smells of fresh food being prepared.

"If you need anything described, let me know." Padmé said, glancing over her menu at him.
"Thank you. I... Think I need most of this menu described to me." Anakin chuckled as he turned his menu and pointed to a few to have them described for him.

She chuckled and started to explain each dish, giving her personal favorites an extra recommendation as she went down the list of dishes.

After having several dishes explained to one, Anakin picked on that suited his tastes, and he set down the menu. "Okay, I think I know what I want."

"Good, then we can order as soon as the waiter comes back." She smiled, already knowing what she wanted.

"So random question," Anakin said after a bit. "Have you done any space travel before?"

"No a ton, but yes. I've visited other planets before."

"I've always liked space travel. Seeing all those stars in the galaxy fly by, it's really something beautiful..."

"When I was little I used to imagine grabbing a hold of one and letting it shoot me far away. Of course I didn't quite understand how stars work." She chuckled.

"I never got to travel much. The most travelling I did as a kid was from Tatooine to Mustafar. Other plants I happened to visit weren't as far away, but it didn't help that Tatooine was all the way out in the Outer Rim." Anakin sighed dreamily. "Still... going into hyperspace for the first time, seeing those stars fly by even faster, it was all so... exhilarating. Life changing, really."

"Seems if you weren't a king, you'd be a pilot." She observed.

"Force, I would love to be a pilot. I just want to soar through space, travel to planets and see everything in the galaxy. If I was a pilot, I would be the first person to see all the planetary systems this galaxy has to offer."

"Best I can offer you would be the opportunity to be the pilot any time we need to travel off Naboo for something."

"I would love that. Put me at the controls any day, I'm ready to fly."

"We'll keep you in mind for any future trip." She promised.

Anakin nodded as their waiter came to take their food orders. Once their orders were placed, he picked up the conversation again. "Maybe we should go on like a space cruise or something like that soon. Us and our partners on like a week vacation through space before the baby is born."

"Uh, how soon before the baby is born? Most pregnant women don't do well in space travel. I wouldn't want to spend the vacation making best friends with the refresher."

"No, I wouldn't want to make you go through that. Maybe in a couple weeks. I know that's really soon, but it'd probably be the best time for us all to go, especially you."

"We'll have to see how business goes first. Get these senators satisfied."

Anakin groaned. "I really don't want to go back to them. They're such a pain when they don't agree on a single thing."

"I know, but we have to. Taking today off is really all we get to do if we want them to leave."
"Which they might not leave for a while now, now that we've gone and run away from them."

"We're likely a day behind if Sheev wasn't able to get everyone talking despite our not being there."

Anakin sighed. "I hope he was able to get something done without us."

"We'll know once we go back and he corners us to give us an earful like we are misbehaving younglings." She chuckled.

The blond chuckled as well. "I can't wait to see the looks on everyone's faces."

Padmé paused then got a smug grin on her face, "Obi-Wan is going to be hard on you for this." She giggled, "Downside to dating the guy in charge of your safety I guess."

"Oh he's going to be so upset with me... Still, I hope I actually see him when we get back. Waking up to him gone this morning was kind of a downer, even though I knew he wasn't going to spend the night."

"I suggest you drag him to a private corner and kiss him until he forgets why he's upset." She laughed.

Anakin smirked. "A fantastic idea. I might do just that when we get home."

"I'm sure he'll be at the gates, arms crossed with worry written all over his face."

"He so going to lecture me tonight about running off without any guards."

"Only if you stop distracting his lips."

"He'll end up lecturing me at some point I'm sure."

"Only because he loves you."

"He does, and he worries too. I'm actually starting to miss him a bit..."

"We can go back at any time—after we eat of course."

Anakin nodded. "Well, I do love and miss Obi-Wan, but my desire to go back still doesn't match my desire to be away from all those senators."

She chuckled, "Thought so."

To be continued…
"Sir! They're returning!" a guard called out from his look-out post, his eyes trained on the two figures riding at a comfortable pace along the road leading to the castle gates. "They look safe and unharmed!"

The man the guard called out to below grunted. "Finally. Took them long enough…" He turned to a couple of guards standing behind him. "Take their mounts and look over them. I'll escort the royals back to the castle."

"Of course, sir." They said before hurrying to meet the royals at the gate to take their mounts.

Anakin sighed as the guards rushed to him and Padmé. He didn't fight back against their urging for the two royals to dismount, but he did look around for Obi-Wan. Slightly confused that he did not see the redhead, Anakin did take note that another guard was barking orders, one that he didn't know much of other than his name; Titum Curshar.

"Maybe he left with the search party." Padmé whispered to him as he helped her down so their mounts could be taken back to the stables and taken care of.

Anakin shrugged, feeling like something was off, but he didn't let it get the best of him. Instead, he nodded to the guard who took his mount and approached Titum with Padmé. "I assume Senator Palpatine is wanting to speak with us."

The older man nodded. "I'm to escort you to him," was all he said in a rich accent similar to Obi-Wan's, only thicker.

"And now for the boring part of the day." Padmé muttered. "Is Captain Kenobi out with the search party I assume was sent after us?"

"He is busy. You will not see him around for the rest of the day."

Anakin repressed his sigh he had been wanting to let out. So he wasn't going to see Obi-Wan that day… No matter, he could entertain himself with other things, such as listening to the lecture he and Padmé were sure to get once they retuned to the senators.

"Follow me," Titum said before he turned and headed back inside.

"We do know the way. This is our home, after all." Padmé huffed, "We don't need a guard escort to meet with our own Senator."

"You will follow me," the older man replied with a more commanding tone. "Senator Palpatine wants no opposition."

"And who are you to be the one giving orders around here?" Anakin questioned. "You are talking to the royals."

"My command doesn't matter when your lives are on the line, now follow me."

Padmé halted and reached out to take Anakin's shoulder so he'd stop as well, a stern look hardening her soft features. "We are both safe within the castle, and our lives are not in danger. You do not
have the position to order us to do anything. We will go without you, or not at all."

Titum turned around to face him, his eyes gold rimmed in red. "These orders are not mine. They are Senator Palpatine's. If you don't like these orders, take it up with him when you return to him."

"We will see him on his request but we will not cave to such disrespectful demands from—what was your position again? I'll be discussing that with Captain Kenobi as well."

"Kenobi is not involved in this affair. He will hear nothing of this." Turning again, Titum did not look behind to see if the royals followed him. Inside himself, he fought the urge to correct them that he was the captain of the royal guard now.

Anakin glanced at Padmé with uncertainty. "As disrespectful as he is being…we really should get back to Palpatine. I'm sure he's only getting more upset the longer we keep him waiting."

"Not with that man." She insisted, "I have a bad feeling about him."

"Do we really have a choice? He knows we have to see Palpatine, and he's heading right to the senator."

"And I know other ways around the castle." She said, pulling him with him, "I have a guess as to where Sheev is waiting."

"If you're sure… I really don't want to be in more trouble than we already are."

"I'm not going anywhere with that man." She huffed, pulling him behind a pillar and then looking around to make sure no one was around before she opened a hidden door and pulled Anakin in. "Only the royal family and our most trusted know about these passages throughout the castle." She said as she began leading him through the maze of stone. "Kept meaning to show you, but we haven't had time when we weren't around others we don't want knowing."

"Well, glad to finally know," Anakin said flatly, though not because he was denied the knowledge of the maze. "I just hope we beat Titum to the senator…"

"We will—if I'm right on where Sheev is waiting for us. We just need to go up this way and we are already ahead of that nerf herder guard. These passages are designed to be both shortcuts to anywhere as well as an emergency escape or hiding place."

"Noted." Anakin sighed. "I can't believe I can't see Obi-Wan for the rest of the day. I may try calling him to see where he is and why I can't see him."

"To be honest with you, when he said that is when I started to doubt if we could trust him. Obi-Wan is the man in charge of the entire royal guard. If there is anything that needs his attention like that, he makes sure I know about it."

"...You don't think something is wrong with Obi-Wan, do you?" Anakin paused, his breath shaky for a bit. "He's not gone because of me is he?"

"Of course not. I think that Titum guy is up to something and is taking advantage of Obi-Wan being busy with the search or something. There is no way Obi-Wan wouldn't have been in the first search party out to find us."

"But if he was part of a search party, he would have been notified by now, which means I would get to see him, but we were told we wouldn't get to see him for the rest of the day. It makes no sense unless he left because..." Anakin's words trailed off as several sad thoughts filled his mind.
"Because…what?"

"Because... Maybe he's upset that my first time wasn't with him... Maybe he's upset that I chose to have a baby with you."

"Oh Ani, there is no way he'd leave you because we are having a baby."

"He was so happy last night, then I wake up this morning to him gone, and I don't get to see him this whole day. How much you want to bet I don't get to see him tomorrow either?"

"You're being dramatic. How about you drop by his room tonight? I'm sure he'll be ready and willing to cuddle you or whatever it is you two do."

Anakin nodded. "Sorry. I'm worried, that's all."

"The man is head over heels for you." She reassured before opening a door and slipping out, pulling him with her quickly. "This way." She pulled him down the hall a little and out onto the balcony she knew Sheev often enjoyed when visiting. She grinned, spotting the man sipping tea overlooking the city below.

While Padmé and Anakin approached the older man, Titum also made himself known, glancing at the royals while his eyes still glowed eerily yellow.

"No, you out. Now." Padmé demanded, pointing to the archway the guard had just walked through.

"He will stay," Palatine said in an even tone. "He is a good man, though his style is a bit different from Kenobi's."

"Senator," Anakin said with a slightly shaky voice. "We apologize for running of this morning..."

"He is disrespectful and intimidating and I'll not have him here, Sheev. We will face the consequences of our actions but without that man."

Sighing, Palatine turned to Titum and nodded, dismissing the man from his duties. "Titum is a good man, I assure you. He is probably just as stressed as the rest of us with your disappearing act."

"I apologize, it won't happen again. Things have just been so stressful lately that we decided to take a day to ourselves. No bickering politicians, no demands from that Mustafarian representative, no intrusive inquiries about future babies…" Padmé said as she moved to sit across from Sheev.

"I understand this is a stressful time, but it is no time to be acting like children and running off when you don't want to do something." Palatine looked over at Padmé. "You left me with a very difficult task today. You're lucky I was able to hold back some of the senators from taking advantage of the situation."

"We appreciate that," She sighed, "and again, we are very sorry for putting you in that position."

"I should hope so. You had everyone panicked to begin with." Palpatine sighed, putting on a smile. "Despite all the chaos that resulted from your absence, I am very glad to see you both back safe and unharmed. If a day off from the politics was what you wanted, all you had to do was ask. You are, after all, monarchs with no real obligation to participate."

"That is a bit debatable, but next time we will request a day off before taking things in our own hands."
Nodding, the old man agreed. "Now, we can return to everything tomorrow. Take the rest of today off without having to worry too much. I've already sent the other senators away for the day, but they will be returning tomorrow ready to take action, so I suggest you prepare for that."

Anakin blinked, then he smiled a little. "Thank you, Sir. We greatly appreciate that."

"Join us for dinner this evening so that we can show you our appreciation?" Padmé asked the old man with a smile, "I'll request the kitchens to make that mousse you enjoy."

"I would enjoy that very much, thank you." He bowed politely. "Just let me know when dinner is ready and I will join you."

"Of course. We will have word sent to you when it is sent to us that dinner is about to be served."

After dinner, Anakin left by himself to visit Obi-Wan's room. He wanted the redhead to be there, but he knew that the room would most likely be empty. He was saddened by the truth, but he had to accept that some days Obi-Wan was just too busy to return to his room for the night. Such was the life of the captain of the royal guard.

Anakin soon arrived at the door of Obi-Wan's room. First he listened, begging the Force for any sort of sign that Obi-Wan might be home. Receiving no such sign, Anakin sighed to himself and glanced around, making sure no one was around to see him sneak into the room. Getting caught a second time in Obi-Wan's room would be a sure sign that something was up with the King and the Captain, something Anakin had neither the time nor the patience to deal with.

Nothing was out of the ordinary. Everything was in its place, just like Anakin had remembered and known it to be. There was never a single thing out of place when Obi-Wan was around.

As Anakin walked in, the door closing behind him, he turned on the lights, as the room was dark despite it being before sunset. Slowly, he took in every detail about the room. The way Obi-Wan made his bed in the mornings, the number of books he had stacked on a shelf on one of the walls, several maps of different areas of Naboo, if Anakin had to guess what they were. The small holoterminal Obi-Wan owned was tucked away in one corner of the room, and Anakin was glad that Obi-Wan always had to manually receive incoming calls. The blond was certain that without that feature, there might have been some awkward situations in which Anakin never wanted to be a part of.

Anakin felt happy in that room, despite his lover not being in it. Everything in the room made him feel at home, warm, and glad he wasn't without love on Naboo. A bit of emotion caught up to him, making his throat hurt as he sat on the end of the bed.

"I wish I knew where you were," Anakin said out loud after a bit, accepting that he wasn't going to see Obi-Wan that day. "I'd feel a whole lot better if I knew…"

That was when Anakin noticed Obi-Wan's desk, and the one item that was out of place in the whole room. A journal, open to the most recent entry Anakin discovered when he approached the desk. It was dated just the day before, written before the night, obviously.

Anakin ran his fingers over the writing, feeling the slight indentions on the surface of the open journal from the writing. He didn't pay much attention to the writing until he glanced at the word
"Uncle" written on the page. Frowning, Anakin started reading the journal entry. It began with Obi-Wan explaining what was to happen that night and why. Then it went into how excited Obi-Wan was to spend a whole night with Anakin, how Anakin made him feel so happy and important; wanted for the first time in a long while. Obi-Wan mentioned how excited he was that there also was to be a baby in the castle, and how he wished he could help Padmé and Anakin raise the child, calling himself 'Uncle Obi' as his excitement grew with the more he babbled on about the subject.

Anakin's emotion built up even more as he realized that Obi-Wan didn't leave because of him. Obi-Wan was gone for some other reason, a reason that wasn't clear and made Anakin confused. As he let him emotion get the better of him, the king's vision blurred with tears, and for a long moment he sat there, crying over the journal, realizing that Obi-Wan loved him so much, and also realizing that for the first time since he adjusted to life on Naboo, he felt incredibly lonely.

A thought ran through Anakin's mind; if Obi-Wan wasn't upset at Anakin, then why was he still gone from home?

"It's not fair. I was basically second in command, I deserve just as much respect from those two as Kenobi gets!" Titum paced back and forth, grumbling and fuming. "Now I'm the Captain, and I get even less respect! This is outrageous!"

"They don't know you're captain yet and they won't until Kenobi's disappearance is covered up. Focus on how to do that before you expect your men and those in the castle to treat you as captain. And if you want respect and not to get fired I suggest you control your temper around those who matter. Make yourself likable and hold in your anger for when you can use it. Act more like Kenobi if you have to." Palpatine huffed.

"Act more like Kenobi?!" Titum turned around to face Palpatine, eyes glowing. "Are you out of your karking mind?! I'm trying to be different than Kenobi, not like him. And I was not upset until the karking queen decided she was too good for a decent attitude towards one of her guards!"

"She is the one you need to gain trust with." Palpatine snapped, "If you can't win her over, then you are nothing. Kenobi had her trust and respect because he was likable. You were overly demanding."

"I only told her to follow me, that was it! She put a mood into the situation, not me. I was not overly demanding."

"I could feel your aggression in the Force long before you walked in after them. Next time if she doesn't do what you ask, then used the Force to persuade her to do it! She's not weak-minded but the Dark Side has a greater effect. I've used it on her many times. She doesn't even remember I killed her family despite being a witness to it. It was easy locking the memory away and making myself so important to her."

Titum groaned and threw his arms up into the air. "I can't just use the Force on her. She's smart. She'll figure things out eventually."

"She's not Force sensitive. She won't know as long as you do it sparingly. It's only a spark of doubt in the back of her mind that helps sway her into what it is you want from her. Just don't use it on Skywalker. He's strong in the Force and even though he isn't trained, he will know something's
"Fine," the slightly younger man grumbled. "But if she snaps at me again, I'm going to snap back, and I won't hold back."

"If she snaps at you, you will bow your head and take it!" Palpatine hissed, "If not, your position as captain will be very short and I'll have to find someone else to take the position that is loyal to me."

Titum growled as the Force hummed darkly, finally beginning to calm and submit to his master. "No one else deserves the position of captain…"

Palpatine narrowed his yellow eyes and his fist clenched, the Force clenching around Titum's throat and lifting him onto his tip-toes. "Don't be so presumptuous to claim to be the only one right for the job. The one who deserves the job is the one I say deserves it. Prove to me that you deserve to keep it."

Titum thrashed around a bit, but he kept his eyes on his master. "I'll prove it to you," he growled out.

"Good." The old man let the guard drop. "Have you come up with a plan to explain Kenobi's disappearance before people start to take notice?"

Titum rubbed his throat gently, then brushed back some of his greying hair. "I had a temporary one that worked for today. But… I'm not sure the one I have for the rest of his disappearance will convince everyone. I had thought about something along the lines of Kenobi leaving because of Skywalker sleeping with the queen."

"That would work for the royals, but not the public as they do not know about the affair, and that has no need to go public anymore as all it will do is hurt the King's reputation and I have plans for him, and his reputation needs to stay intact for a while longer."

Rolling his eyes, Titum sighed. "Then what do you think we should tell everyone? Kenobi needed a vacation, so he just up and left?"

"Too out of character for the man. He takes his job seriously, and everyone knows it. Besides, you need something Permanente. I haven't decided if he'll be useful or not, but if not, then I'll have Maul kill him."

"Then he went out on night patrol and noticed something odd in the distance. Went to go check it out, turns out it was an ambush, so he was killed."

"Hmm, a story like that would need evidence…a body—or the remains of one. I'll contact Maul to have him send us back a limb or two."

Titum smirked. "Sounds fantastic. Make sure they're extra beat up."

"You'll need to plant evidence to support your story. Make a few guards think that they witnessed Kenobi leave to investigate something. I'll have Maul plant blood and body parts to be discovered."

"Sounds like we have a guard to kill." Titum chuckled. "I'll get to working on some guards tomorrow."

"Good. The sooner this mess is taken care of, the sooner we can keep moving forward with my plans."
"We'll be leading the empire in no time."

"I'm thinking of going in to get my nails redone. Maybe in a nice pink or purple." Arlan's wife said as she held her hand up to look at her gold-painted nails as they rode side-by-side along the forest path.

"You just had them done though, didn't you?" Arlan chuckled.

"These were done before my top surgery. These were flat-chested me treating me to some sparkle in celebration of finally starting to get my body fixed! Now I'm half-way to the perfect body and I'd like a change of color before I return to work. It's either that or new hair, but I don't want to cut my hair. I like it long. Really makes me stand out from the crowd that is my brothers." She laughed.

"I thought you had your nails done after your surgery." Arlan shrugged. "Well, I think you should go with pink and purple"

"Both hmm?" she lowered her hand and smiled, "I'm glad you were able to get today off. It's nice having some time to ourselves before I'm also back at work."

Arlan smiled at Dixti lovingly. "I think we both needed to just get away and be ourselves. No judgmental eyes watching us, no people talking behind our backs, just the wind and the animals accompanying us."

"People are talking behind our backs?" she blinked.

"Unfortunately. There are some who still refer to you as a male, and it sickens me." Arlan sighed. That got the happy sparkle in her eyes to dim, "Oh…I didn't know anyone did that…"

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you upset." He reached over to grab her hand, and he held onto it tightly.

"I know you support me and know that I am a woman, Arlan, I just hoped that…well, I hoped that everyone I knew before I came out would support and respect me as a woman…"

"Not everyone is as understanding and supportive as I am, my love. I wish it weren't true, but it is."

"But I've changed so much. I've gone on estrogen and my voice has grown softer, body hair turned into peach fuzz, my face even looks more feminine. And now I have a proper chest—all I have left is bottom surgery… Looking at me you can't tell I originally had a male body… I'm just this tall girl with muscle. Calling me by the wrong pronouns doesn't even make sense!"

"I know. To be honest, there are days I forget that you weren't always this way. When I realize just how far you've come, I can't help but be so proud of you. You're the most inspiring and amazing person I've ever met."

"Yes, good! Forget you ever saw the 'manly' me." She smiled, reaching over to take his hand.

"I've only ever seen the beautiful." He smiled and leaned in close, hinting at wanting a kiss. She hummed and leaned over to press her lips into his. "And I've only ever seen my short little
sweetheart."

Arlan flushed a little, bit he chuckled. "Yes, we both know I'm short."

"itty-bitty." She giggled, kissing his cheek before straightening up.

"Just gives me the advantage of getting carried more often by my big buff wife."

"I do like carrying you to bed every night." Dixti laughed.

"And I enjoy it. Makes me feel our relationship is even more special."

"Not many girls can say their nightly routine is to throw their man over their shoulder and literally drag him to bed for cuddle time before drifting off to sleep." She agreed.

"Sometimes you drag me to bed for things other than cuddling."

"It's still cuddling...just vigorous cuddling."

"Vigorous cuddling, I like that." Arlan chuckled to himself.

"I like it too." She flushed slightly. "Come on, race you to our favorite picnic grove!" she said, snapping the reins and urging her mount to take off ahead.

"Right behind you!" Arlan raced on behind her, a smile on his face as he watched his wife ride with a beauty only she was capable of creating.

"Get used to the view!" she laughed over her shoulder, continuing the lead as she made her way along the twisting path through the trees and bush. And then she gasped, pulling back on the reigns to stop, so suddenly that her mount reared back, throwing her from her saddle. She landed in the dirt, her eyes wide as she tried to process the scene before her.

Red.

Too much red staining the green of the forest right outside Theed. There was so much of it, she could smell what it was; blood that attracted insects and scavengers that happily went about their gruesome business.

"Dixti!" Arlan halted his mount quickly and ran to his wife. "Hey, are you okay? What happened?"

"I—I don't know...I've never seen so much in one place..." she muttered, eyes staring at how thick red dripped off a leaf next to her. It didn't even register in her stunned mind that he was concerned for her and hadn't yet noticed their gory surroundings.

"What? What are you talking about?" That was when Arlan looked around and noticed all the blood. He went pale. "Oh my god..."

"I—Sorry, I think I'm—the smell's too much!" she said, pushing herself up and rushing a few feet back away from the bloody scene to empty her stomach.

Arlan backed away from the blood, swallowing hard. "Who...what even happened here?" He looked around more, seeing the blood all over the nearby trees and bushes. He thought he saw some fabric, but he wouldn't investigate until he knew Dixti was okay.

"Water?" she asked after she felt she was done being sick.
"Sure, hold on." Arlan went back to his mount and grabbed a canteen of water, handing it to his wife when he returned to her.

Dixti rinsed out her mouth and cleaned off her lips and chin before taking a small sip to put something back into her stomach.

"Thanks..." she handed it back to him and straightened up, checking her long braid for any mess, and glad when she found it had been spared. She then took out a handkerchief and pressed it over her nose and mouth as she looked back towards the scene they had discovered.

After putting the canteen back, Arlan decided to finally investigate the cloth he thought he saw. Sure enough, it was cloth, but it made his heart sink in an unimaginable way. The cloth belonged to a set of tunics, tunics that bore the royal insignia and proper markings to identify it as the captain of the royal guard. Arlan went pale as he pushed around the bush the clothing hid behind, revealing parts of a body that were roughly torn and cut, tossed about carelessly. A booted leg, a hand with painted nails... It was impossible to tell who had really been murdered, but unfortunately the tunics didn't lie.

"Arlan?" Dixti asked from behind her handkerchief, not wanting to get too close to whatever it was her husband was gawking at, his face pale.

"This... This can't be real." Arlan looked back at Dixti. "These are Obi-Wan's clothes..."

"Captain Kenobi?" she blinked, "But...no, it has to be a mistake..."

"No one else has these clothes, Dixti. They are his. He... He's..." Arlan couldn't finish his sentence.

"They are just clothes and blood, right? Maybe...maybe he's just really hurt and we can get to him in time—"

"Dixti... there are pieces of his body everywhere here... He's gone. Oh Force, he's gone!" Arlan felt his eyes grow wet, his vision blurring slightly as he shuffled away. "We... we have to go tell everyone. We have to go now!"

Dixti reached out and pulled her husband into her arms, holding him close. Obi-Wan was her boss, her captain, but he had also been a close friend to her husband. He had even been in their wedding.

Taking a little time to breathe and calm himself, Arlan looked at Dixti. "We really need to get back to the castle. Everyone... Needs to know what happened, and an investigation needs to start..."

"I know. I just need you to make sure you're able to ride properly after the shock." She hummed, kissing the top of his head in comfort.

"I can ride... I can make it back to the castle." He stood up with a sigh.

"Okay. I may be a bit behind you, but I'll be with you...sore from my fall."

"Right. Need me to help you up on your mount?"

"Yeah, that'd be nice." She nodded.

Arlan helped Dixti up onto her mount carefully, then he hopped up onto his with a groan. "Think you can ride fast any?"

"I'll go as fast as I'm able to. Don't worry about me, if you pull ahead then that's fine. We need to
report this."

"Sorry, but this needs to get to the castle as quickly as possible." He snapped the reins, his mount charging forward. "I'll see you back at the castle," he called over his shoulder.

"I know." She said, doing the same and trying her best to keep up despite the pain in her lower back.

Arlan raced back to the castle, tears blurring his vision as he rode. His chest hurt. He wished what he saw wasn't true, but there was no evidence to suggest that it wasn't what it seemed. Blurs of green raced past him, a few sobs escaping his throat.

Then finally the castle came back into view. Arlan's heart jumped in his chest as he saw people gathered around the area. He began shouting, though he couldn't really hear himself. He was still in shock of the situation.

"Is that Commander Mach? I thought he had today off…" one of the guards asked, leaning towards a few of his companions.

The others just shrugged as they watched the commander of the Calvary ride up, a second rider chasing after at a bit of a distance.

"We need an investigation team now!" Arlan dismounted while breathing heavily, face pale.

"Why? What happened?"

"Obi-Wan..." The man paused, emotion growing in his eyes. "Obi-Wan is... He's dead..."

"What? The Captain? He can't be..."

"He went out to investigate something just a few hours ago..." another guard said.

"Dixti and I were just riding down the trail and... We came across a lot of blood... His uniform was there. It was devastating..." Arlan sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"You go report this to Titum. I'll take a party out—Mach you can show us the way? Or your hus-I mean wife can?" the first guard said.

Arlan glanced back at Dixti. "She can take you back to the site. It's... Very gorey. I'll go talk to Titum. We... Need to figure out who will take Obi-Wan's place."

"True, you're Kenobi's second in command, even if you usually solely work with the Calvary division. Titum's worked his way up there, as well. Either way, we'll need someone to answer to if Kenobi really is..." he shook his head and once he and a few men got mounts, they rode out to meet Dixti who turned around to show them back to the scene.

Arlan sighed, rubbing his face and taking a moment to breathe before he sought out Titum. He started to walk in the direction he needed, then he looked up to see Anakin standing in front of him. His eyes widened, mouth opening slightly. "My King... I didn't know you were here..."

Anakin looked back at Arlan, trying to show little emotion but failing as a few tears rolled down his cheeks. "Is he really...?"

The white haired man looked at the ground once more. He nodded.

The king was left alone as Arlan left; left to contemplate his emotions as he realized the situation
that had just taken place. He didn't take much longer before he was sprinting off to find Padmé.

Padmé sighed as she sat in front of her mirror, trying to pin her hair up in an intricate design as Sabé braided the strands to help speed up the lengthy process. "On a scale of one to ten, how annoying do you think the Senators will be when the meetings resume today?"

"A solid ten for sure," Sabé replied with a smile. "I'd prepare for the worst."

"I was afraid of that. Too bad it's too early to know if I'm pregnant or not and I can't use that to get them to calm down when they get overwhelming."

Sabé laughed. "Nope, not yet. But maybe in a week or two you can find out. How exciting!"

"Yes." She smiled, catching Sabé's hand and pulling her to lean over her shoulder and press her hand to her flat belly, "And I'll start getting bigger here."

Sabé kissed Padmé's cheek. "I can't wait until I can start feeling that baby bump."

"I can't wait to carefully cuddle you with the baby bump pressing against you." She grinned right before there was a frantic knocking at the door.

Sabé groaned as she sat back, standing up to go open the door. "We're continuing this conversation after this."

She blinked once she opened the door. "Anakin?"

Anakin hurried in, his face pale and his breathing quick.

"Ani? What's wrong?" Padmé asked, standing up and turning towards her husband.

"Obi... He..." Anakin sat down on the nearest surface with a huff, clearly in a panic or shock.

"Obi-Wan?" Padmé glanced over at Sabé before sitting down next to Anakin and taking his hand.

"I'll get some water," Sabé said as she hurried away.

Anakin looked at Padmé, tears streaming down his face. "He's gone..."

"Gone? Gone where? I'm sorry, I don't understand..."

"He's dead!"

Sabé dropped the glass of water she was bringing to Anakin. Shards of transparasteel scattering across the floor.

"Y-you're sure? I know he has a habit of putting himself in danger for others, but—" the queen asked, feeling stunned and very stiff.

"He's dead," Anakin repeated, his voice weak and sad. "I heard Commander Mach say it..."

"Sabé, would you mind...going to find out what's happening out there? I'll stay with Anakin for now..." Padmé requested.
Sabé nodded hesitantly, dazed as she made her way out of the room and off to find Arlan.

As soon as she was gone, Anakin choked as he let himself sob out his emotions. He leaned heavily on Padmé, searching for a comfort he knew he wouldn't get ever again.

Padmé didn't say anything; she only held him close and let him work out his emotions on her shoulder. It was all she knew to do.

To be continued…
A cry of pain echoed through the dimly lit corridors of a ship far out in space, the sound haunting to any not yet used to it, though all on the ship knew the source.

A redheaded human who was strapped down to a hard metal table, granted only enough medical aid to keep him alive. No pain killers, no soaks in bacta…just bandages and injections to lower infections.

He had been awake when the horned Sith known as Maul had stepped into his holding cell and began to hack at his limbs while holding him down with the Force. His blood red lightsaber hadn't been used, no; the cauterized flesh would have been too obvious. Instead the yellow-eyed devil had used a vibroblade to hack through slowly, painfully. Carving away at his flesh, muscle, and bones.

Maul had started with his right hand, right above the wrist, then he'd moved to above his left knee, and then below his right knee. The blood loss bringing Obi-Wan his only relief with a spell of dizziness, and then darkness.

When he awoke, he was bandaged up and strapped down, without knowing why he'd been dismembered in such a way. He couldn't think of much, only the pain he was in.

“Good, you woke up,” a menacing voice said near Obi-Wan. “It wouldn’t have looked good on my record if you died this soon.”

Obi-Wan moaned and turned his head, his vision blurred with tears as he took in the shadowy figure in the room with him. "Why..?"

“Why? To make sure this war doesn’t end.” The figure stepped into the light that shone down on Obi-Wan. It was Maul. “You’re a crucial pawn in this game. You don’t get the freedom of death.”

"War? I have n-nothing to do with it…” he groaned, his head pressing back against the hard surface of the table in attempt to distract himself from the throbbing in three of his limbs.

"You’re so naïve.” Maul chuckled and pat Obi-Wan’s cheek. “See, your little fling you have with the king of Naboo is the key to the war. And this?” He walked around to Obi-Wan’s legs and grabbed them roughly. “This just helped you die back on Naboo. Your king thinks you’re dead.”

Obi-Wan screamed in pain, his body trying to pull back, but unable to move, so it only caused more pain to ripple through him as his muscles tensed.

“Stop trying to fight it. You’re only putting yourself in unnecessary pain.” Maul let go of the redhead’s legs, continuing to walk around the table. “So, you’re officially dead, your rank of captain has been taken over by Titum Curshar. Name sound familiar?”

Panting, Obi-Wan tried to wrap his mind around what he was being told, trying to focus through the pain.

Titum. Of course he knew that name. It was the name of one of the traitors he witnessed right before he was captured and sent to—wherever he was being kept and tortured.

“Titum has been working with Lord Sidious for years, though maybe you know him as Senator
Palpatine.” Maul shrugged. “Either way, this has been in the plans for quite some time now, and then your little king had to come and steal your heart, making things that much more difficult.”

"Well, if he was interested in—my heart, then he should h-have spoken up sooner…” Obi-Wan attempted to smirk.

Maul acted quickly, slapping the redhead across the face with a growl. “You karking nerf herder. You’re a real smart ass, aren’t you?”

"I prefer the term smart-sass."

The Zabrak shook his head. “You’re lucky I’m under strict orders from Sidious. Otherwise you’d actually be dead by now.”

"Really? I thought I already am dead.” He said, holding back another groan.

Maul’s hand flew to Obi-Wan's throat, squeezing tight. "You'll be dead for real soon if you don't wise up."

Obi-Wan choked out a gag, his mouth open as he desperately fought to take a breath.

"I could take another limb off easily," Maul continued to threaten. "Maybe your king would love a gift from you. Perhaps your head."

"He'd—prefer yours—on a platter." Obi-Wan gasped out when Maul's hand loosened slightly.

"You are just full of smart remarks. Even after losing both your legs and a hand. How long until you break completely?"

"How long would it take you to learn to brush your teeth? Your breath is nasty. Maybe try starting with a mint?"

Maul sighed and pulled his hand away. "I'm curious. Why aren't you so upset at the fact that your boy toy thinks you're dead?"

"Because I'm not dead—I can return to him."

"And how exactly did you think you were going to do that with no legs and one hand?"

"I'll find a way, don't you worry about that."

Maul rolled his eyes. "Right, you keep me updated."

"Sure thing, Red." He hissed, sarcastically.

"Don't get cocky. You're nowhere near safe from harm here. In fact, this is the worst place you can be right now. Far away from your home, your position being given away to someone else, and too bad you never actually got to sleep with the king. Then again, the way you left right after a night he was uncomfortable with really says something to him."

"You know nothing of our relationship.” Obi-Wan grit his teeth.

"I know everything about your relationship." Maul leaned over Obi-Wan's head. "Your relationship is foolish and will get you nothing in the end. Besides, are you even sure the king really loves you? I mean, he is having a baby with his wife after all."
"Try using something against me that I haven't discussed with him and we have good communication about."

"The baby, of course. You both understand it had to be done, but are you really okay with it? Are you really okay with knowing that his first time was with the Queen and not with you?"

"We weren't going to rush our relationship, we weren't ready."

"And now your relationship ends here. Never had sex, never got to see or raise the child together, never get to grow old together. You're never going to see Skywalker again, and if you don't think that now, wait a couple more days. Wait weeks, months if you want. He's never coming for you, and you're never going to escape."

"He'll come for me. A few limbs aren't a body. He'll grieve, but then he'll start thinking. He'll sense that I'm not gone—he'll look for me." He said, though he wasn't sure of it. The Force might not work like that—he didn't know because he never experienced what it was like to be one with the Force.

Maul chuckled darkly. "He's not trained nearly enough to sense someone's presence. He won't find you"

"He's stronger than you know. He'll know to search for me."

"He won't be able to find you, or me, or even this ship were both on. Even if he could identify your presence within the Force, he wouldn't even find this ship because there is a shield around it that blocks any Force activity from getting in or out. You're straight out of luck."

"I—I don't believe that's how the Force works…you can't block it with technology…"

"Funny thing about technology in our galaxy today." Maul smirked down at Obi-Wan. "You see, it's advancing so fast that as soon as the new technology becomes available to the public, the next generation of the same technology is already being used by those who work on it and perfect it. We have the latest generation of Force inhibitors working on this ship. Impossible to break through with and Force power."

"But—that doesn't make sense…The Force, it's…everywhere, connecting everything, and…" Obi-Wan felt himself start to panic, though he tried to hide it.

"Accept it, Kenobi. You're trapped here. No one will find you here." Maul grabbed Obi-Wan's shoulders and pressed them down onto the table, leaning his face in close. "Your pathetic little king will never find you."

"Then I won't give up on escaping myself to get to where he can find me." Obi-Wan choked out.

"It's best you get that idea out of your head now. You'll never be able to fulfill it." Maul stood back up and back around to Obi-Wan's legs. "Now, I think it's time you go back to sleep." He held out his hand and let the Force hum, a ghosting hand grabbing the redhead's mind. "Nighty night," he purred.

"Stop—I don't—"he started to say, but the suggestion in his mind was too strong for him to fight it.
Padmé sighed and nodded to the guard that had knocked on the door to deliver a message before she turned to move over to her husband and sat down on the edge of his bed where he was laying, face hidden in the pillows. Gently, she touched his back, "Ani, we just got word that a ship from Mustafar has requested landing in the royal hanger. It sounds like your mother is on the ship if you want to go with me to greet them?"

Anakin lifted his head, eyes red with dark circles under them. “My mom? She didn’t tell me she was coming… But I do want to see her.”

Padmé smiled, "Yes, your mom. Maybe she wanted to surprise you because she knew you are going through a hard time, especially after the healers confirmed the identity of…well, you have been taking it hard. Let's go greet your mother."

Anakin took a shaky breath as he sat up, struggling not to continue crying so he didn’t give away anything to those who didn’t know of the relationship he had with Obi-Wan. “Okay… Do I look presentable? I guess I need my crown…”

"Go wash your face to freshen up, maybe brush out your hair, then I think you'll be presentable enough." She suggested.

It didn’t take too long before he was groomed a little better and in better clothes, mostly black out of mourning. He sighed as he approached Padmé, ready to head out. “Okay, let’s go.”

She slipped her arm through his and guided him out of their room and to the greeting platform outside the ship hanger as they watched the Mustafarian ship land and the ramp lower so that the visitors could exit.

First to appear was a few battle droids, followed by some Mustafarian royal guards. After that came the king, and beside him strolled Shmi—until she spotted her son and she rushed forward, not slowing or stopping until she had him in her arms. It wasn't a regal greeting by any means, but she didn't care.

Anakin slipped away from Padmé’s arm and ran to meet his mother halfway, hugging her as tight as he could while hiding his face in her shoulder. There he cried a little, letting his emotion show while he was held in his mother’s arms.

"Shh, it's okay, I'm here, Ani. I'll help you through this." She soothed into his ear, holding him tight.

After a bit, Anakin pulled back, wiping his eyes and trying to look more collected. “I didn’t know you’d be coming so soon. What made you come?”

"When news came of what happened. I decided to risk take-off, much to your stepfather's protest. But you need me, and I wasn't going to delay."

Anakin nodded. “Thank you. I… I haven’t been doing so well since we found out.”

"I know." She pushed curls back behind his ear and looked into his eyes, "But I'll be here as long as you need me to be. Your stepfather came along to discuss politics, but he knows that when he's finished I may be staying longer."

“Would it be too much to ask you to stay for several months? We may need you here after all the grief has passed.”

"I'm here for you, Ani. I won't leave until you are ready for me to."
“Well Padmé may need you here soon. We find out soon if she’s pregnant or not.”

The woman's eyes widened, "A grandchild? Already?" she couldn't help but smile as she looked over at Padmé.

“It’s not confirmed yet,” Padmé replied as she approached. “But yes, we are hoping. We… were sort of pressured into it.”

“Not forced as in sleeping together,” Anakin clarified. “As in giving the kingdom an heir.” He fought back tears as he remembered the night he had with Obi-Wan after.

"Come on, lets go greet your stepfather before he feel insulted, then you come with me to help me get settled in and we can talk more openly." Shmi suggested.

Anakin nodded, motioning for his wife to join them as the three went over to the king of Mustafar. Anakin bowed slightly before his stepfather. “Pleasure to see you here, Highness. I know it’s colder here than Mustafar, so we can have a room arranged quickly for your comfort.”

The king chuckled and pat Anakin's shoulder fondly, "Yes, this planet is very cold." He agreed, and then took Padmé's hand and bowed over it. "Queen Amidala."

“It’s an honor to meet the stepfather of my king,” she said with a smile. “Welcome to Naboo.”

"Thank you. I look forward to discussing things with you in person. My senator is frustratingly vague lately in his reports to Mustafar." 

“Yes, it has seemed that way,” the queen said, a bit impressed that the king had implied that his senator wasn’t good at the politics that had been taking place. “I’m sure you are here to clear several things up for us. We all look forward to that.”

"Yes, and depending on how our meeting goes, we may be in for a new election for a Senator." He said in a friendly tone.

Padmé smiled even more. “That’s fantastic news, isn’t it, Ani?”

Anakin smiled as well, eyes glittering. “That’s the best news I’ve heard in the last couple days.”

"We'll discuss this all later. For now I’d like to get someplace warmer to relax after such a long trip." The king decided, gesturing the others to lead the way.

“I can have you and Mom stay in my personal room. I’ve been staying in the shared room with Padmé recently.” Anakin turned to lead the other royals to his personal room.

"Let me guess, you keep your personal room very warm." Shmi guessed.

“I haven’t recently, because I’ve been getting used to the climate here. But I can quickly warm up the room for you.”

"We’ll do that and then I'm claiming you for some time together—alone." She said as there were others gathered around them in the escort to the castle.

“I’d like that a lot.” Anakin smiled at his mother, looking forward to simply hugging her and being able to talk about Obi-Wan with her.

“We’re under a bit of a change with our royal guard,” Padmé said. “So excuse the chaos around here. Unfortunate timing has really messed with things around here recently.”
Once the Mustafarians were settled in, Shmi stepped out of Anakin's private room and greeted her son, "Now, where can we go to be alone?" she asked.

“Well, I guess we can go back to Padmé and my shared bedroom…” Anakin hesitated. “Or we could go to Obi-Wan’s room…”

"Would you be alright with that?" she asked slowly.

“I… I don’t know.” Anakin shook his head. “No, I’m not ready for that yet. Let’s just go to the shared bedroom.”

She nodded, "Of course. We'll sit on your bed eating junk food, how does that sound? I brought those home-made cookies you always loved."

"Sounds really good." Anakin sighed as he took his mother's hand, leading her to the bedroom. "I know I've already said this, but I'm really glad you're here."

"I'll always be here for you. You're my baby boy." She soothed as they approached the door to the royal suite.

Anakin opened the door, letting his mother enter first. He closed the door behind himself once they were both in the room. The blond made a beeline to his bed, falling into it once more.

Shmi followed him and sat on it, crossing her legs as she pulled out a tin of cookies. Opening it, she held it out to her son to help himself.

He grabbed one and began eating it. "I missed these."

"I have two more tins in my luggage if these run out." She smiled, waiting for her son to be ready to open up and talk.

"You're the best mom in the galaxy." Anakin finished his cookie, then grabbed another. "You should show me how to make these."

"Of course. We'll commandeer the kitchens for a bit one night after supper."

He nodded with a smile as he ate his second cookie. Then the smile faded once the cookie was finished, and he sat up and wrapped his arms around his mother. Knowing he was safe and allowed to be vulnerable, he let himself cry some more, something he seemed to do nonstop now.

She slipped her arms around him and said nothing, letting him cry as she rubbed his back.

"I can't believe he's actually gone," he whispered once he had calmed down some.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Shmi asked carefully.

"He went out to investigate something from what I've been told. After a while parts of his body were discovered with his uniform and a lot of blood." Anakin sighed. The body parts were tested... His DNA matched with the DNA if the body parts."

"Was it…do they know if it was foul-play or an accident or an—animal?"

Anakin shrugged. "I don't know any more than what I've told you. They've kept a lot of details from us."

"I'm sorry, Ani… Your Obi-Wan was a good man."
"It's not fair. I finally find someone who I like and eventually love, and as soon as we both admit we love each other and want to take our relationship further; he's stolen away from me."

"He'll always be in your heart, Ani. Nothing can take him from your heart. Even the Force itself can't remove love from someone's heart."

"But to never hold him again... Never kiss him again. It's so hard..."

"I know...and you'll always miss him, I won't lie, but it will get easier to cope."

"Why did he have to go... I loved him so much."

"If there is one thing I know, it's that he did not want to go, he would have fought tooth and nail to stay here with you." She reassured, taking his hand and squeezing it.

Anakin looked down at the ground. "He never got to be Uncle Obi..."

"To your child?"

"Yeah. He wrote in his journal about how excited he was about the baby."

"You can make sure your baby grows up knowing about their Uncle Obi, maybe take them to his grave marker?"

"I guess. Maybe not until they're older." Anakin sighed.

"When they are old enough to understand." She nodded.

Anakin sighed as he looked towards the door. "Maybe... We should go to Obi-Wan's room... There might be some items in there I want to keep."

"Does he have family that would want to collect things first?"

The blond shook his head. "If he does, he hasn't mentioned them. It's just been he and I here. None of his family."

"Well keep in mind some family may show up when word reaches them—if they are out there." She cautioned.

"Yeah..." Anakin leaned his head on his mother's shoulder with a sigh, feeling tears build up in his eyes once more. "Damn it," he whispered.

"Maybe going through his things, you'll find holos of his family so you can know to try and contact them?"

"Maybe." He stood up, helping his mother up afterwards. "Let's go. The sooner the better."

She nodded and got to her feet, "Alright, dear, lead the way."

As they went, Anakin chose to distract his mind a little. "So if Padmé turns out to be pregnant, would you be willing to stay here for the whole pregnancy?"

"And longer, darling. Ah, to hold a baby in my arms again..." she smiled at the thought.

"Thank you. I think both Padmé and I will appreciate you being here."
"Especially if your little one is as much of a handful as you were." She laughed, pinching his cheek.

Anakin smiled. "I wasn't that much of a handful, was I?"

"You're Force sensitive, Ani. You may not know it, but it became quite clear when you grew upset and things started levitating in the room. Usually small toys or baby bottles. I didn't know how to handle that as a non-Force-user and a new mom. Plus being a slave? I had to keep your ability hidden."

Anakin halted, growing pale. "You knew..." He stated quietly.

"Of course I knew, I'm your mother. I never said anything because my priority is keeping you safe. If anyone had found out when you were a boy—they would have taken you from me and who knows what would have happened to you?"

"Mom... Watto found out. He punished me for it... I never told you because I didn't want you to get hurt."

She looked up at him with wide eyes before yanking him down into a hug, "I'm so sorry..."

"I'm sorry too," he whispered. "I shouldn't have waited this long to tell you. I should have told you when I knew I was Force sensitive."

"It's okay... I couldn't have helped you learn to control it, and after we went to Mustafar—well, I don't trust your stepfather enough to tell him such a secret."

"I never told you because I didn't want to be taken away from you. I didn't want to be a Jedi."

She kissed his cheek before pulling back to look up at him, "I love you, Ani, I would have done what was best for you."

"I know. But I never wanted you to get hurt because of who I was. It would have been unfair to you to be punished for something I did or was."

Shmi guided Anakin into resuming walking as she took his arm, "You're a sweet, loving, protective young man, Ani. But I'm a strong woman with a motherly instinct to protect my baby."

“Still, if anything were to happen to you... like what happened to Obi-Wan... I don’t think I could go on living.” Anakin sighed heavily.

"I don't want you talking like that, and neither would Obi-Wan. We both would want you to live your life to its fullest and to find happiness. Your child will need their daddy, too."

“But to lose the two most important people in my life... life itself just wouldn’t seem worth it at that point.”

"Once you are a parent, you'll have a third person in your heart that is most important in your life, Anakin. Trust me. I didn't know love until I had you."

Anakin felt skeptical, but he didn’t show it. “Just promise me you’ll always be careful, no matter where you go.”

"Of course, Sweetheart. And for the next who-knows how long I'll be right here in your lovely home, safe and under the protection of your guards as well as the guards your stepfather brought
with us."

The blond nodded as they arrived at the door to Obi-Wan’s room. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, preparing himself for the flood of emotion he was sure to experience. With a shaking hand, he opened the door, a small waft of air smelling like the redhead filling his nose.

"Want me to wait out here a moment before going in, or do you want me to hold your hand?"

“Come with me,” he said, already grabbing her hand and pulling her in with him.

"Alright, I'm here." She reassured as they stepped into the room, the lights turning on and the door shutting behind them.

Anakin looked around, identifying all the things he had seen the last time he was in the room. The journal he had read was still open on the redhead’s desk. It drew Anakin’s attention once more as he approached it. “He wrote about the baby,” he said quietly. “Said he was excited…”

Glancing at the journal showed that there hadn't been any new entries after the one Anakin had read; which did seem off as it seemed Obi-Wan wrote something in it daily.

"Obi-Wan was a very organized man. Nothing seems out of place here." Shmi observed, looking around.

“He kept his wits about him. He was organized but cared a lot about the people he was around. Especially Padmé and I.”

His mother nodded and picked up a holo projector designed for still shots, pressing the button to turn it on. She smiled at the first image that popped up. One of Obi-Wan and Anakin together, smiling at the holocam.

Anakin looked at the still, his chest growing tight. “We took that just after we started dating.”

"He keeps it on his bedside table." She smiled, knowing it was now a bitter-sweet memory for her son.

“I never thought to take a still of us… I wish I had thought to do so, but…” Anakin took the holoprojecter and held it gingerly. “I suppose I can use this one now.”

"If anyone has a right to that holo image, it's you."

"I wonder if he has any more around here..."

"First see if there are more on that projector, then we'll see if we can find more."

Anakin attempted to look through the holoprojector, at first finding nothing. Then he hit a button and a few more stills popped up. One was just a portrait of Obi-Wan, another that was of Obi-Wan and Arlan taking a ride together. Then came a few candid shots of Anakin, one where he was looking out a window, one while he was on top of his mount, and one more with him sleeping. The last one was another of Anakin and Obi-Wan's together, a gentle kiss captured in a quiet moment.

Shmi left Anakin to quietly look through the images as she moved around the room, searching for any more projectors that could hold stills of Obi-Wan's life. However, it was the call terminal that caught her attention first. A small blinking light on the controls indicating that a message had been sent and recorded, but never watched.
"He has a missed call…"

Anakin looked up from the holoprojector. "He does? I wonder who it's from." He went over to the terminal to stand beside his mother.

"Should I play it?" she asked.

"Maybe. It can't hurt, can it?"

"No, and if it's family, we'll be able to call them back to let them know." Shmi said before playing the message.

The projector flickered to life, static and interference distorting the image and suggesting that the connection was not a good one.

"Please—I don't have much time to speak, and I don't know who I can trust." A distorted voice began, "So I'm calling my own personal number in hopes that you, Anakin, find it. I'm not dead. Don't believe whatever they planned. Don't trust—kark!" the distorted image seemed to reach forward to end the call, the final frame finally in enough focus.

Obi-Wan Kenobi, laying on his stomach, reaching forward with one hand as his other three limbs were missing and loosely wrapped in bandages that needed changing.

Anakin didn't know how to react. He was stunned. In front of him was a very clear image of Obi-Wan. Very much alive. He played back the message again, and when it was over he slammed his hands on the terminal with wide eyes.

"Ani…" Shmi whispered, reaching out to rub his back.

"I'm not hallucinating am I? That was...that was Obi-Wan..." Anakin looked at his mother, starting to panic as he realized his lover was alive but in a great deal of danger.

"Yes, that looked like it was Obi-Wan." She nodded, "He—it doesn't look good…and obviously he doesn’t trust someone who could have intercepted the message if it was sent directly to you…"

"We have to find out where he sent this from.” Anakin got down on his knees, working open a panel on the front of the terminal to get to all the electronics that were safely tucked away. “Can you find me something that would be a good conductor?"

"Can you do that? You know I don't have the talent for anything technical. And if Obi-Wan risked his plea for help never reaching you, or reaching you too late, it really makes us wary on who we can trust to help."

"I can do this. I’ve been working on droids and machines my whole life. You just… never saw most of it.” He smiled sheepishly at his mother.

"Silly boy, yes I have, I just let you have your hobby. Nothing too dangerous in working on mechanics, and boys will be boys. You were careful most of the time so it was fine."

“Well you never saw me working on the bigger things. Star ships in particular.” Anakin shrugged. “Anyways, I do need some sort of conductor, so if you could find me one while I figure out these wires, that’d be fantastic.”

She looked at him, clearly confused. "What…is a conductor?"
He looked at her, hesitating for a bit. “Something long made of durasteel. Kind of like a wire.”

She nodded, "I'll try my best. Hopefully Obi-Wan has something we can use so we don't attract attention looking all over the palace."

“If you have to tear apart something, do it. I'm sure Obi-Wan won't mind when his life is on the line.” Anakin got down lover on the floor, laying on his back as he shoved his head into the terminal.

"I'm sure." She said as she started searching for a wire.

“I’ve never worked with a model like this,” Anakin muttered. “I’ll have to come up with a decoder myself. But that takes so much time, and we don’t have time.”

"I'm sorry I'm not more help…” Shmi apologized as she opened a closet.

“It’s okay, you’re not slowing me down any. I’m having just as much trouble as you are with this.” Anakin sighed and pulled himself out of the terminal, sitting up to think.

"Would this work?" She asked, pulling out a metal hanger and removing the tunic that had been hanging on it.

Anakin looked at it, then nodded. “Yeah, that’ll work.” He took it and stood back up. “Now what wires to connect it to…” After some more thought, Anakin was back on the ground, poking and prodding around until a small display with the time and date showed up. “Does that tell you anything?"

"Time and date, it's current."

“Okay.” He worked around a little more, grunting a couple times as he pulled on wires and tried to make several different connections. Then finally, some coordinates popped up. When Anakin came out to look at the coordinates, his face fell. “Those are Naboo’s coordinates…” He sighed and sat against the terminal.

"So, that means he's here somewhere, right? Or close to Naboo?"

“No. Or he’s nowhere near here and is lightyears away, and this terminal only gives me dates that are current and coordinates that are insignificant.” He sighed and went back in. “Let me try one more thing… if this doesn’t work, we’ll know he’s not here.”

"If he's not here…maybe you should hire a bounty hunter to find him?"

“I’d rather go out and find him myself.” Anakin grunted again as something clicked into place, then he came out of the terminal once more. The numbers that were now displayed were a second pair of coordinates, though the numbers flickered and were impossible to read. “That’s what I thought.” Anakin turned to look at his mother. “He’s deep out in wild space.”

"Ani, you can't just leave to search deep space. I understand why you want to, but think of his safety. You're king, and your wife may be pregnant, and if you suddenly leave people—the wrong people—may get suspicious that you know about Obi-Wan. They could send word to where he is and order him moved or worse. Sending a hunter to investigate and search would be a safer option for getting Obi-Wan back alive."

Anakin sighed and looked at the floor. “I know you’re right, and I’m acting rash. But I wanted to the one to save him… you know?”
"You'll be the first one he wants to see when he gets home. Even before going to the healers, I'm sure."

“I’d want to see him as soon as he gets home.” Anakin sighed. “I guess it’s time to start looking for a bounty hunter.”

"Secretly." Shmi nodded, then paused, "Maybe Padmé can help with that…I feel like we can trust her at least."

“I trust her. And you of course. But maybe she knows someone.” Anakin grabbed his mother’s hand. “Come on. I’ll lock the room so no one disturbs anything.”

She nodded and followed him, her mind distracted with worry as to the reason all this was happening. Why would anyone fake a guard's death?

To be continued…
Padmé sat nervously on the examination table, her fingers tugging and twisting a handkerchief in her lap to the point where it had started to frey.

"It's taking so long…it's a negative, I know it…they will come back with bad news and we'll have to try again." She muttered.

Anakin grabbed her hand and squeezed it. "It's okay… if we have to try again, it'll be okay."

"Even though this isn't a great time to try again?" she whispered.

He shrugged. "At least it'd make me think of something other than what's happening elsewhere."

"He'll come home." She continued to whisper, "He'll come home and we'll make sure he's taken care of."

"Are those two we spoke about supposed to be here soon?"

"I have Sabé escorting them secretly to our meeting spot, where we will go after we find out if we have a baby or not."

Anakin nodded. "I hope they're willing to cooperate. Their kind have a bad reputation that follows unfortunately."

"Yes, but they are effective. And these two have at least been proven to be loyal. They don't betray a client for a higher price."

"That's good at least." Anakin sighed, leaning back against the wall. "I just hope they find him before it's too late."

"They'll do their best to make sure they aren't too late." She reassured before the door opened and the healer stepped in with a smile.

"Well, you have a little prince or princess bun in the oven." She confirmed.

Anakin's eyes lit up, his posture straightening. "Really?"

"Yes, you are pregnant." She nodded, handing Padmé the test results.

Padmé looked over the results, a smile stretching across her face before she pushed herself up and threw her arms around her husband. "We did it! We're going to be parents!"

Anakin laughed as he hugged her back. "I almost don't believe it. This is fantastic!"

She kissed his cheek and pulled back to run her hands over her belly.

"Don't make an official announcement yet It's always best to wait about ten weeks to make sure the pregnancy is off to a strong start and it's unlikely that something will happen." The healer advised, "For now keep it to close friends and family only."

"My mom is going to be so excited," Anakin said with the widest smile.
"We'll tell her first. I believe I saw her in the waiting room." Padmé laughed.

"Well let's not keep her waiting!" Anakin laughed as he pulled Padmé out of the room with him.

Padmé laughed again and followed him out to where Shmi was waiting with a hopeful look on her face. Grinning, she wrapped Anakin's arms around her and placed his hands on her belly, "You're going to be a grandmother."

"Oh!" Shmi got up quickly and wrapped her arms around both Anakin and Padmé. "I'm so happy for you two! You're going to make great parents, I just know it."

"With your help, I hope." Padmé smiled, finding herself sandwiched between the two Skywalkers.

"Oh of course! I'm here as long as you need me for." Shmi brushed away some of Padmé's hair.

"She'll stay all through the pregnancy, and then some if we want." Anakin smiled and hugged both his mother and Padmé tight.

"Of course. We'll appreciate the help, and this baby will need to know his or her grandmother." Padmé hummed. "Much better than a grumpy old nanny."

"Your baby will be in good hands. You won't need a nanny."

"Between Ani, myself, you, Sabé, and...well, I hope a nanny would be completely unneeded when the time comes." She smiled. "But we do have a meeting to get to, for now. You are welcome to come, Shmi."

Shmi nodded. "I would love to join."

"Good. This meeting is important to the future." Anakin turned to Padmé. "You know where the meeting place is. Lead the way."

Padmé nodded and began to lead the two Skywalkers down to a secret meeting room under the palace, one protected behind bio locks and hidden passages. The safe room hadn't been used in generations, but after Padmé had seen Obi-Wan's call for help, she wasn't taking any chances at any outsider listening in on their meeting.

When they finally entered the safe room, Sabé was already there, sitting across from two bounty hunters. One was a large man in Mandalorian armor, his helmet off and sitting to the side to show brown skin and dark hair. Beside him sat a shorter Chiss man in a leather jacket and a bored look on his face as he slumped back comfortably in his seat, one leg crossed wide over his knee.

Shmi hesitated it slightly upon entering the room, but after being encouraged by her son, she sat down in one of the empty chairs.

"Thank you for coming," Anakin said once everyone was settled. "I hope you didn't have too much trouble getting here."

"Getting here's the easy part." The Chiss shrugged, "I'm Vaenette, friends call me Vae. This is my partner Jango Fett, I'm sure you've never heard of him." He joked, knowing full well that Fett was well known all across the galaxy as being one off the best bounty hunters around.

Jango nodded at his employers.

"Good to meet you Vae, Jango. I suppose we should just get onto the details. Make things quick."
Anakin took a breath before continuing.

"Our captain of the royal guard has disappeared. We thought he was dead to start with, but I received a holo transmission from him not too long ago. We were able to narrow the coordinates down to somewhere out in Wild Space. I would go, but I have to stay here for multiple reasons. Thus why we are hiring you two."

"So this is a rescue bounty?" Vae asked. "Bring this captain back alive at all costs?"

"Yes. We aren't very trusting of many people right now, so the quieter the better. Just…" Anakin took a breath to calm himself. "Just bring him back home."

"We can do that. We just need all the information you have, and a good holo image of our target."

Anakin took out the small holoprojector he had taken from Obi-Wan's room. He activated it, showing the two bounty hunters the image. "Will this work?"

Jango leaned forward, examining the picture. "Yeah, that'll do." He looked up. "What's his name?"

"Obi-Wan Kenobi."

"He's badly injured and not likely being given proper medical attention." Padmé explained, "They took his legs and a hand so he'll be unable to walk himself when you find him."

"Good to know." Vae nodded, "We'll make sure we'll have a way to transport him to our ship."

"I tried to unscramble some coordinates that I found attached to the transmission, but I wasn't very successful." Anakin pulled out a sheet of flimsy he had written on. "This was as good as I could get. It's a place to start at least."

Vae took it and looked over it, "Any secure holocomm we can contact you on with updates? You shouldn't expect many, but if we need to update you, I assume you want it to be secure seeing as you trust so little right now."

"Yes, we can give your a private comm channel. It should be secure, and only those in this room would be able to pick up." Anakin nodded

"Anything else we need to know before we discuss price?"

Anakin shook his head and looked over at Padmé, who also shook her head. "I think that's all," Anakin said. "If we think of anything else, I'm sure we can let you know via holo."

"Good, now, we discuss price." Jango leaned forward. "Since this is a rescue mission, and clearly we're gonna have to take care of the guy when we get him, I think our price should be a little higher than normal." He looked at Vae. "Do you agree?"

"Getting a target out alive and not frozen in carbonite is quite a bit more work. Plus medical supplies on our ship will need to be used."

"Money is not an issue." Padmé stated, "You don't need to make a speech of it. Just give us a quote and I'll transfer half to you now and the other half when you return with Obi-Wan alive. But expect a deduction in that second payment if you were too late and we only get his body."

Jango shrugged. "Fair enough. So all together, I think the price should be 200,000 credits."

"That seems high…" Shmi muttered.
Jango folded his arms. "We have to have money to keep ourselves alive. It's 200,000 or we don't find your guard."

"We won't argue, and the secrecy is worth the extra price. It's important that we get him back alive." Padmé shook her head.

"We'll pay it," Anakin said quickly. "You have to find him. We don't care if the price is high."

"Ani. No one said we weren't going to pay it." Padmé soothed, taking his hand. "Excuse my husband, Obi-Wan is his closest friend, and he's very worried."

"So do we have a deal?" Jango held out his gloved hand.

Anakin took it and shook it firmly. "Deal. We will transfer 50,000 credits to each of you accounts, so you have the first 100,000."

"Great. We'll leave as soon as we confirm the transfer, Highnesses." Vae said with a bow.

"Thank you." Anakin stood up, helping both his mother and Padmé up. "Let's go take care of the credits."

It hurt to breathe. At least a few of his ribs had been broken, and by the sheer stabbing pain each short breath caused, he was sure one of the broken ribs had punctured a lung. But if his message had gotten through, if Anakin entered his room and saw it waiting for him…it was worth getting caught on the floor, inches away from the comm which he had tipped a table over to get, and upon hearing Maul's approaching steps, he'd cut his message short, sent it, and tossed the com just out of reach so that Maul wouldn't know he'd managed to call for help.

And oh, he was being punished for his achievements, and it was all he could do to endure the pain and suffering as he waited and hoped.

But it was hard, days passing by without anything to refresh his hope; hell, it could have been weeks, months, he wouldn't know for sure.

Maul had punished Obi-Wan severely for several days in a row, and there was no signs that the Zabrak was going to stop the everyday torment. Clearly, he was teaching a lesson to the redhead for his wrong actions. The beating was brutal, never breaking to let Obi-Wan rest. It went on for hours sometimes. Sometimes it was only lightning, other times it was lightning and using the Force to crush his internal organs. Either way, it was always painful. Not that anything less was expected from a Sith.

"Stop…" he finally groaned out, "Please—stop…"

"Why should I?" Maul growled out. "Give me one good reason why I should stop."

"Too much…I'll die…and the Senator will be angry with you…"

"I'll know when you're about to die, and you're nowhere near." Maul crushed the Force around Obi-Wan once more.

Obi-Wan cried out, his scream echoing through the ship. Truly, in that moment, he wished Maul
was wrong, he wished death would embrace him and ward away the pain until there was simply nothing.

Finally the crushing stopped, and Maul let Obi-Wan breathe. "You're pathetic. Crying out for help when you know it won't come, and risking the life of the man in charge of your own. How stupid can you really be?"

Obi-Wan could only take ragged breaths, whimpers of pain accompanying each one he desperately tried to take.

"I just—want to go—home..." the redhead finally gasped out.

Maul groaned as he rolled his eyes in disgust. "Of course you do, and now you're just dead weight for me. I'm considering getting permission to just eject you out into space. But that would be too easy an end for you."

"...You're—too much a—coward to—try it."

Suddenly a red blade was at Obi-Wan's throat, threatening to slice it right open. "You need to learn to choose your words more carefully." Gently he pressed the blade into the soft flesh, knowing that even the lightest touch would burn incredibly.

Obi-Wan tried to cry out, but even his rough voice failed him in that moment.

"Learn to think before you act or speak." Maul pulled back his lightsaber and hooked it back on his belt. "If someone ends up coming here to find you, you will die by my hand."

Words no longer seemed capable of forming on Obi-Wan's lips, but the pathetic look in his eye as he watched Maul spoke volumes; begging for whatever end awaited him to come faster.

Maul shook his head. "You're lucky I'm done for the day. Maybe you'll get food later. Don't expect it though."

Obi-Wan's heart sank. The torture was breaking him; but in the times he was left alone were even worse as he was often plagued by nightmares and visions, even while awake.

Turning, Maul left Obi-Wan alone once more, muttering under his breath as he left.

Obi-Wan whimpered, his eyes shifting around as he grew paranoid. The door closed and locked, there was silence, and then...it began.

Anakin glanced out the window for a bit, watching some of the cavalry ride around the perimeter of the castle grounds. He turned away to return to working on moving furniture around in what would eventually become the baby room. "Where did you say you wanted this dresser moved to?"

"Over there against that wall Padmé said, adjusting the angle the rocking chair was sitting in and then sitting in it to test it out."

Anakin pushed it over to the wall Padmé specified, then he wiped his face. "Okay, that was the last piece of furniture for now, right?"
"Yeah. It's all the basics, and once we know if we are having a boy or a girl, we can start personalizing this room for them with toys and clothes and everything cute!" Padmé squealed.

Anakin chuckled. "Well we've got several weeks still. Don't get too excited for this room yet."

"Months until we get to meet the baby." She huffed, "Too long a wait if you ask me."

"Well, it does take some time to make a whole human being. Takes time to create a masterpiece."

"I know, but I want to hold our baby already, and my belly isn't even that big yet!"

"You'll get to hold them soon enough." Anakin chuckled again as he approached Padmé, kneeling before her.

"I know, I know, but waiting's hard."

"I know. But if you're patient, our baby will be here before you know it."

"Well, your mom isn't helping with pulling out your old baby holos to show me! You were such a cute, curly-haired baby! I keep imagining those curls on ours and I just want to put them up in little bows!"

Anakin rolled his eyes as he moved onto his butt. "We both have curly hair. Our baby is going to come out with curly hair, I'm calling it now."

"Mine isn't natural. I curl it every morning when Sabé and the girls help me get ready." Padmé smiled, "My hair only has a wave to it that helps the curls stay longer."

Anakin shrugged. "Either way, our baby will not come out with straight hair."

"But which color?" she hummed in thought.

"I think brown."

"Like mine and your mother’s?"

"Yeah, considering I'm the only one out of us three with blond hair."

"My grandfather had blond hair, so there is that gene in my family as well."

Anakin shrugged. "Who knows? Genes are weird things."

"We can only wait to see." She sighed, hands on her belly and feeling the very slight bump that was starting to form.

The king smiled up at Padmé, then he sighed and leaned back against the chair. His mind wandered away from the baby and once more to Obi-Wan. Since discovering that Obi-Wan wasn't dead, Anakin had felt a bit odd about the whole situation. He was happy that his lover was still alive, yes, but it almost didn't feel real.

"You're thinking of him again." She observed, playing with the curls on the back of his neck.

"Yeah. Hard not to when I'm so worried about him." He closed his eyes, focusing on her touch.

"Hang in there, the hunters are on the job, and they have a very high success rate. They'll find him before it's too late."
"I hope. I want to hold him again."

"You will. As soon as he's home again you'll be right there holding his hand as he rests and heals up. You'll be there holding him up as he learns to use his prosthetics. You'll be there to comfort him if he breaks down, and you'll be there holding him close at night once he's able to sleep in his own bed again—or yours."

"He's staying right by my side as soon as he gets back home." Anakin sighed as he opened up his eyes. "Padmé… I've been thinking about going public with my relationship with him. I don't know if it's a smart idea, but I hate hiding all the time. Whenever we go on rides, I want to be able to hold his hand and love on him while around others. I want to show affection in public, not just in private."

"I think…" she paused and sighed, "If you do that, I think it should be discussed first with him. And if he's okay with it, then I need to discuss things with Sabé. If we all come out publicly, then it'll be easier on us all, and the media wouldn't try to spin it to make you guys the bad guys."

"Yeah… I'll talk with him once he's getting back to his normal self."

"Best not to rush him…he'll need time to adjust and feel safe again." She nodded, "And we don't know what all he's going through, how damaged he is. We don't want to overwhelm him."

"Force I hope he's okay. I'm worried he'll get back and be a completely different person when he recovers."

"Can you—I mean, I know you hate using the Force, but can you sense him with it? I know Jedi talk about sensing people sometimes…"

Anakin sighed. "I can most of the time. I sense him the strongest when he's next to me, but I can't sense him at all now. I think me not being able to sense him is messing with me. Makes me think he's actually dead."

"Maybe he's just too far away then." She sighed, "Wild Space…deep space…it's farther away than any planet in the galaxy…"

"There's very little out there, and it's not mapped very much. It's a dangerous place to be if you don't know where you are or where you're going."

"There could be entire planetary systems out there not yet discovered." She agreed. "But with any luck, he'll be found and brought home safe before we have our baby."

"I sure hope he's brought back before then. I wish he could be back here and recovered mostly in time for the baby to come."

"He needs to be one of the first to hold our baby. Me first, then you, then your mother, then Obi-Wan and Sabé."

"You want Obi to hold the baby before your own girlfriend? Or was that just naming off the people allowed to hold them?"

"Normally no, but he's going through a lot right now, and if him holding the baby can help him heal…then I think Sabé would understand. She and Obi-Wan have a good friendship between them."

Anakin nodded. "I'm glad of that. Makes things a lot easier between all four of us."
"We're all good friends, and are here to support each other. It really does help."

After being silent for a little bit, Anakin stood back up and stretched. "I could go for a snack. How about you?"

"Do you even have to ask?" she smiled. She wasn't getting cravings yet, but her appetite was starting to increase.

"I'm sure I didn't, but I thought I'd be nice anyways." He offered his hand to help her up.

"I'd think it would be nice if you just showed up in my room with a plate of your mom's cookies or a burger right off Dex's grill." She said, taking his hand.

"I can do that if you want to go back to the bedroom and relax."

"Yeah…Tell Sabé I want cuddles, if you happen to see her?"

"I will. Do you want me to go to the bedroom with you or are you okay?"

"I'll be fine. It's not like I'm anywhere close to my due date." She smiled, "But when I am closer, I would very much like you to escort me places. Until then…food is more important to escort."

"Got it. I'll meet you at the bedroom then." He smiled and turned to head off to the kitchen.

She smiled after him before closing up the nursery and walking down the hall only a little ways to their shared rooms.

When Anakin got to the kitchen he requested a couple of burgers from Dex. He was interested in having one himself, and he was going to request cookies later from his mother, hoping she could teach him with that batch.

"These for the Queen?" Dex asked as he flipped the patties of meat.

"One of them is for me. We both were craving some burgers."

"She's been wanting these in-between meals quite a bit lately. I'm starting to wonder if she's eating for two."

Anakin shrugged. "Maybe. We're hoping so." He smiled.

"If she is I can keep a secret and make sure she's getting foods with the nutrients she needs in her meals." He hinted.

"That would be a good idea. If you could do that, we'd both be grateful."

"So, I should plan it into the royal meals very soon, or just somewhat soon?"

"Very soon, if you wouldn't mind." Anakin couldn't help but smile wide. He was excited.

"Noted." Dex smiled before lowering his voice, "And congratulations. Let me know if there is anything she starts craving and I'll make sure to have it stalked."

"Thanks Dex. You're the best."

"Happy to help." He nodded, melting cheese over the patties before flipping them onto toasted buns and placing the toppings on.
Anakin took the burgers after they were ready, and he nodded at Dex with a smile. "My mom and I may swing by the kitchen later to make some cookies. Just as a warning."

"Oh I like her. She's always welcome to come use my kitchen. She's like my cooking soulmate."

Anakin raised an eyebrow. "Sure... Anyways I'm sure I'll be back, so I'll see you later."

"I'm not creeping on the queen." Dex reassured, sensing Anakin's hesitation, "I'm in love with her cooking, that's all. I'd give her a job here if she wasn't a queen."

"I'm sure she'd love the opportunity," the blond said as he left with burgers in hand.

Half way back to the room, a hand fell on Anakin's shoulder. "Those for our always hungry queen?" Sabé's voice asked.

Anakin jumped slightly, but he smiled when he realized who it was. "One of them is. But who knows, maybe she'll steal part of mine."

"You better plan on it. She ate half of my breakfast this morning when I brought her breakfast in bed for two."

"Well, good thing I plan on making cookies later with my mom."

"Oh, those will be gone by morning if she gets a whiff of them." Sabé laughed, "So where is our hungry lady?"

"Our bedroom. She requested cuddles, so you can follow me."

"Shared or her personal?"

"Shared, but I can leave and let you two have some time together."

"That depends on what you want. Don't want you to get lonely..."

"If you and Padmé want some time alone, I can go find my mom. I won't get too lonely." Anakin smiled reassuringly.

"We have alone time every night." She shrugged, "You won't be intruding."

"It's fine, really. I'd just end up in my bed reading or something anyways."

"Just know that we do care about you, and you are going through a rough time emotionally right now, so if you ever just need a girl's night, Padmé and I are here for you. Junk food, holodramas, makeovers, silly games usually played by teenagers..."

Anakin chuckled. "I'll be sure to come to one of you if I decide I want all that."

"One of us? Try both of us."

"Alright I'll come to the both of you." Anakin paused for a bit as they approached the door. "You know... Maybe I do want some of that. I've been thinking a lot about Obi-Wan today..."

"Then we'll start by letting Padmé scarf down her food, pop in some cheesy old holo drama to run in the background, and pull out some hair and makeup things just to have fun."

Anakin nodded as he opened up the door to the shared bedroom. "Hey Padmé, I got you a burger
and a girlfriend."

"Oooo, gimme." She grinned from the bed, holding her arms out.

"Here you go. One of the greasiest burgers you'll ever eat." Anakin gave Padmé her burger, then he climbed onto her bed and settled to start eating his own burger.

"Fantastic. Now girlfriend!" she smiled as Sabé slipped onto the bed behind her to hold her.

"We're having a girl's night, the three of us." Sabé informed Padmé. "Your husband can use a nice distraction from his worries, so we'll pop in a drama and break out the beauty supplies to doll each other up."

"Should be an interesting night," Anakin said between bites.

"It'll be a fun one." Padmé agreed.

To be continued…
"Do we have to speed things up now?" Titum asked Lord Sidious, worried about how their planned might be ruined.

"Rushing is the best way to fail. It would do you well to remember that." Palpatine said as he looked over some reports.

Titum rolled his eyes with a groan. "Enough with the lessons. I'm just asking if we need to speed up things or abandon our mission entirely."

"Whatever would give you that idea?"

Titum looked at the old man like he was crazy. "Obviously there is something wrong with the plan. How can you not see it?"

"Enlighten me." Palpatine said, lowering his data pad to look at the guard.

"Have you not noticed how Skywalker is acting differently now? He's happier. Like he completely forgot about Kenobi. That doesn't just happen overnight."

"The queen is pregnant." The old man stated, "I sense the new life forming within her womb. It's too early for an official announcement, but the king and queen both are aware."

"That can't be it. Even if she's pregnant, that wouldn't make Skywalker just up and forget about Kenobi so suddenly. I'm telling you, something is up."

"It distracts him; that is enough."

"But what if they're doing something behind our backs? What if they know Kenobi isn't dead?"

"I would have foreseen it in my nightly meditations. The Force bends to my will, and Skywalker has no training. He can not hide from me. I sense from him a joy regarding he baby and his mother, and a deep sadness regarding the loss of his bed warmer. That's all."

Titum shook his head. "I don't care what you can see or not. Something is wrong, I can feel it."

"Then find out what it is and come up with a solution. I don't have time to hold your hand through everything."

The younger man made a disgusted face. "Fine. I'll just do everything in this whole operation. Not like you do anything anyways."

Palpatine growled and flipped his wrist, the Force gripping Titum's ankles and yanking them up so that he was dangling up-side-down. "Without me you'd be nobody. Just a starving urchin wandering the streets and picking pockets on Coruscant. Without you? I'd still be where I am."

Titum fought more than usual, trying to get his ankles free almost desperately. "What good have you done this whole time? Sit on your ass and command me? It's time I show my true potential!"

"Fool. I don't tell you everything, and why should I? You are nothing."
"I'm a Force user just like you! I'm capable of things many people aren't, and that deserves at least some recognition by my master, but do I get any? No!" Titum thrashed about, starting to scream in frustration.

"You let your abilities in the Force get to your head. But if you tried to take out Skywalker in his untrained state, you would still lose." Palpatine warned as he stood up and walked around his desk.

"I would challenge that. I've actually been training! He has zero Force training, so how can you say he'd beat me?"

"Because he's stronger than you. He is like a supernova in the Force…you are like a camp fire."

Titum made an offended noise. "Put me down!"

"I'm wondering why I should at this point."

"I'm gonna karking punch in that old crusty face of yours if you don't let me down right now!"

"You test my patients."

"As do you." Titum finally stopped struggling and simply glared at the old man.

Palpatine tilted his head, looking at the man for a long, silent stretch. "I don't think you are necessary to my plans anymore. Your services are no longer needed. It's a shame. You weren't nearly as beloved around the castle as Kenobi. You won't be missed." He said, the Force closing around Titum's throat.

Titum's eyes widened as his breathing was slowly being cut off. "No  Wait!" He barely managed to choke out the words.

"You should have learned to stay in your place, but you let your power get to your head. Disappointing."

"Please!" Titum's hands flew to his throat. "Give me… another chance "

"Why should I?" he asked, bored, letting up only enough to let Titum take a restricted breath.

Titum gasped, taking in a huge breath before he spoke. "People will get suspicious if I suddenly disappear. The senators… they'll think something is up and make a nasty war here on Naboo. We were supposed to keep this place calm to lead the Empire."

"You assume too much of your own importance. Your autopsy will suggest heart failure. Nothing will happen further than your funeral."

"No, no! Please, I can be useful! I'll show you, I promise!" By that point, tears were blurring Titum's vision.

"Hmm…" Palpatine took time to think it over as he paced the office, "Very well." He dropped Titum suddenly and stood over his heaped body, "I'll be watching you closely, and any hint that you will betray me, that you will disobey me—your heart will fail you immediately."

Titum trembled on the floor, hiding his face from the old Sith. "Yes Master..."

"Now, you have a bad feeling about something. Identify it and come up with a way to fix the problem to prove that you aren't useless."
Titum only nodded in response, laying on the floor in defeat a little longer before he got up and left the room, limping slightly as he rubbed his throat.

Palpatine sighed, "I need better apprentices…" he muttered to himself as he sat back down at his desk.

"Dad, how long are we going to float out here in Wild Space?" Boba asked, flopping over Jango's lap.

"As long as we have to, son." Jango smiled down at the boy and ruffled his fluffy hair.

"But it's so boring out here, and there's nothing fun I can help with on the bounty. I want some action."

"You know you're too young to get in on the messy stuff. Give it a couple years, and then you'll be able to help me all the time."

Boba's eyes got big as he pushed his lower lip out in the best pout he could manage, "But you taught me everything I know! I can do it, dad!"

"Boba, I can't let you do the big stuff yet. If something were to happen to you, I would never forgive myself. You mean the universe to me. I don't want to lose you because of carelessness on my part. Do you understand that?"

"No—I mean, you said this one is a rescue job—I can rescue! Not like we're aiming to kill someone or freeze them in carbonite!"

"Most rescue missions are some of the more dangerous missions bounty hunters do. If you're rescuing someone, they're in a lot of danger, which puts you in danger while you're trying to save them." Jango sighed and pet Boba's hair. "I know it's hard for you to understand when you're so young. You just have to trust me. Can you do that?"

Boba groaned, "Vaeee, make dad see reason!"

"It's not my place to interfere with his parental decisions, Boba." Vae said as he shifted through their research data on where a ship could be hiding in the surrounding space. "Besides, I agree with him. You're too young. Childhood is short, enjoy it while it lasts."

"Traitor." The boy huffed.

"He's just looking out for you. Just like I am." Jango started tickling Boba mercilessly as he laughed.

"Daaaad!" Boba laughed and wriggled, trying to escape, "I'm too old for this game!"

"You're not too old if you're laughing!"

"That's just—ahhahaha! Stop! It's just a natural response most humanoids have!"

Jango finally stopped, still laughing some. "If you can still laugh at things, life is pretty good. Always remember that, Boba."
"Yeah, yeah, but I still want to help!" he said, pulling himself up to sit on his father's lap.

"I know you do, and I promise you will down the road. But right now, this mission is too dangerous for you to help."

"Well..." Vaenette said suddenly, "We most likely will need to make a quick get-away, and I think Boba can handle making sure takeoff as soon as we have the target on board. He's pretty good at piloting, what do you think?"

Boba looked hopeful. Sure, he would still be on the ship and not out in the action, but he'd be an important part of the plan!

Jango thought over it for a while, then finally he nodded. "Alright, I suppose he can do that."

"I won't let you down!" Boba promised, throwing his arms around his father, "I'll show I'm ready, you'll see!"

"You know piloting will be all you'll do for a couple years, right? Still too dangerous for you to do anything else."

"But that could include piloting in sweet chases!"

"We'll see. If it gets too dangerous, you will let me or Vae take control, okay?"

"Awww..."

"Take what you can, kid." Vaenette said, "At least you weren't left back home this time."

"I wouldn't have brought you if I didn't think you'd be of some use on this mission." Jango smirked.

"You should always take me. This ship is home, with you."

"Now you're just getting sappy." The man chuckled as he pulled his son in for a hug. "I do appreciate having you here."

"We're partners, Dad, always."

"Of course." Jango smiled, then glanced back at Vae. "Any updates on where a ship might be?"

"I got a ping." Vae nodded, "It's a bit of a distance away, but worth a look."

Jango nodded, taking the controls for the ship. "Good, let's go check it out."

"I'll plug in the coordinates."

"What can I do?" Boba asked as the ship was prepped for travel.

"Take the co-pilot's seat. I'll let you fly the ship to the coordinates."

"Hell yeah!" the boy hurried over to do so.

"Well, here's hoping we have the right lead." Vae stated.

"Won't know until we get there." Jango smiled at Boba. "Get the ship ready, then take off whenever you're ready."

Boba nodded and soon they were rocketing through the vacuum of space.
Anakin adjusted the collar of his jacket and brushed away his hair gently. It was finally the day to announce to the kingdom that a baby was to be expected. Of course the announcement was a huge public event. Everyone was invited to come and hear the good news the royals had to offer.

Padmé was behind her changing screen, Sabé helping her into one of her intricate Nabooian royalty outfits. It was one specifically designed for the tradition of announcing a royal pregnancy.

"I'm so glad this thing is only for the announcement ceremony." She complained, "I'd hate having to get into this thing every single day until the baby is born."

"It's the most intricate outfit this royal family has ever had," Sabé said with a sigh.

"It's worth it though," Anakin said. "To dress up nice for our baby... It feels good."

"So you like your outfit?" she asked, knowing he'd been dressed in the traditional king's outfit for the same ceremony. And male outfits could be just as intricate and layered as the female ones.

"I do actually. It's probably the most expensive outfit I've ever worn."

"It does make you rather dashing. And the Nabooian makeup really brings out your eyes." Sabé said as she finally finished dressing her lover.

Anakin chuckled. "Thanks for helping me with that. I wasn't sure I'd be able to do it all myself, considering I don't usually wear makeup."

"Not all cultures do, and many think it a feminine thing, but on Naboo it's gender neutral and can be a symbol of status." Padmé said

"It's interesting, to say the least." Anakin sighed as he looked at himself in the mirror.

"A good interesting, I hope." Padmé stepped out, looking every bit as a queen as she had on their wedding day, only she was in green and silvers rather than white and golds.

"Of course. It's interesting but good." Anakin turned around to face Padmé, smiling. "You look beautiful."

"Do I look glowing? I know the layers have hidden my baby bump quite well, but I hope you can still see my joy at our baby."

"I can definitely still see it. It's hard not to see when you're so excited."

"Good. Let's go announce our pregnancy." She smiled, linking her arm with his and pausing to kiss Sabé before they moved to the door.

Together they moved outside, arm in arm as they moved confidently through the halls of the castle until finally they stepped outside. They were greeted by the residents of the kingdom, who cheered to be in their presence.

Anakin felt a bit overwhelmed by it all.

"You'll be fine, Ani." Padmé whispered as they moved to the platform where they would make the
Anakin prepared himself as the citizens silenced themselves, eager to hear what the royals had to say.

"Citizens of Naboo," he started off. "I know that this union between the Republic and the Separatists has been a difficult one all across the galaxy. However, your queen and I have figured out how to work with and appreciate each other. That being said, Queen Amidala and I have decided that the time is right, so we have a very special announcement to make."

Anakin looked at Padmé with a smile. "We are expecting a child to serve as the heir to the throne of Naboo."

Padmé grinned, her hands going to her stomach as the crowd reacted with cheers and words of celebration.

"And so, this evening we celebrate. We feast together, Nabooians and Mustafarians alike. All are welcome to join." She looked over at Shmi and the Mustafarian king with an inviting smile, "And let this child also be a vow of true peace between our planets."

More cries of celebration came from the crowd of people, and for a moment, all was well on Naboo. There was no worry about who had gone missing or what might go on behind the smiles of the royals and senators. There was simply the celebration of a new life, a new child to be brought into the world to bring peace and joy throughout the galaxy.

Padmé moved over to embrace Shmi, as the king moved over to greet Anakin, "This will bring your mother joy." He said, "She's always loved younglings, and I am incapable of giving her more to love as she loves you."

"This decision wasn't an easy one to make," Anakin confessed. "Padmé and I both were struggling with it before, but we made it work. Now we're both extremely happy to be having a child."

"Younglings are woven completely from joy and love. It is not hard to be infected by that. They are a gift from the Force."

"Well… joy at least. Joy of having a baby, that is." Anakin sighed.

"And love." He insisted, "You'll see."

"Oh, I don't doubt I'll love the child. I'm going to love them with every fiber of my body."

"You will be a good father, then."

"I hope so. I'd hate to be a terrible father, especially when I'm not in Separatist space."

"It won't be Separatist and Republic space much longer. Our Galaxy will be mended once more."

Anakin nodded. "Soon I hope. I don't want to bring a child into a galaxy still at war."

"Have faith, my human son, Peace is coming."

"I'll be happier when it comes. Right now, things are still messy, and it's difficult when I have to worry about ten different things at once."

"The work of a king is never done. But you'll always have your family."
"Yeah. I'm glad I have a good family now. I'm glad that my child doesn't have to have the same childhood that I did."

"I like to think the second half of your childhood was pleasant."

"It was, don't get me wrong. Just the start of it was bad... I'm glad you found Mom and I on Tatooine."

"I am too, son. Now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll go over closer to that fire for warmth. It's getting too cold."

Anakin smiled. "Get warm. I'll be with Mom." He turned to make his way over to Shmi and Padmé, smiling lightly.

"Ani." Shmi smiled at him as he approached.

"Hi." Anakin hugged his mother. "Think everyone is excited for the baby?"

"Most definitely."

"But none more so than us and our family." Padmé smiled.

"Of course." Anakin smiled at his wife. "I hope the senators will be satisfied with the news."

"Ugh, I just hope they stop with that hounding." She sighed.

"Same. We did what they wanted. They should be happy now."

"But are you happy?" Palpatine asked, joining them with a smile.

Anakin turned to look at the old man and smiled. "Yeah, I'm really happy actually."

"Very good, my boy. And you?" he asked the queen.

"I doubt there is any doubt about how I feel." She grinned.

"This is a good time for all of us here," Anakin said.

"Well, let us celebrate the child's conception and get the feast going." The Senator said, "I'm sure our pregnant queen has an appetite."

Titum felt it was hard for him to breathe. There was no phantom hand around his neck, no physical hand either. He wasn't around anybody, simply standing at his post, looking out longingly at the distant mountains and forests. He sighed, rubbing his throat slightly. The pain was still there from his dance with death. Bruises were there as well, and they were very difficult to hide. He was surprised no one had noticed yet, but then again he had done a good job at avoiding others at all costs. He didn't want anyone to see how badly he messed up, how close he was to making his last mistake. Titum was just glad Palpatine was gracious enough to let him live a little while longer.

Still... he needed to somehow interfere with Anakin's happiness. With him so happy, there was clearly something wrong, and it didn't settle well with Titum.
"Come on, we're already late! I bet we've missed the big announcement!" a voice drifted towards him from a distance down the corridors.

"Don't worry, Dix. If we have, we can just ask around," another voice spoke up.

Titum stiffened up, hoping he wouldn't be noticed as the two passed him. He stayed quiet, looking off into the distance.

The married couple soon approached, hand in hand. Dixti turned her head to nod at her fellow guard, but stopped with a frown, "Are you alright? Did something happen?"

Titum shook a little, avoiding eye contact. "N-no… I'm fine."

Arlan raised an eyebrow. "You don't look fine. Do you need to take a break or something?"

"No!" The older man turned his head away from the couple.

Dixti frowned more as she stepped forward, "Hey, if you need someone to talk to…if you're in an abusive situation…well, Arlan and I will help…"

Titum shook his head. "It's not like that… you wouldn't understand."

Arlan sighed. "You have bruises all over you. Are you sure it's not like that?"

"It's not, now leave me alone…"

"Just…know that we're worried about you, and it's good to have friends to support and help you." Dixti said softly, knowing that they shouldn't push things.

Growing irritated, Titum rolled his eyes. "You really don't know what I'm going though. It's all above your heads, right under your noses and you know nothing about it."

"What are you talking about?" Arlan crossed his arms. "If you're getting abused, you need to seek help."

"Under our noses? Is it another guard?"

"No, it's not another guard. It's not anything. Nothing is happening, so quit asking and trying to help, because you're not helping at all." Titum was silent for a moment. "Unless you can tell me exactly why Skywalker is so damned happy now. He got over Kenobi's death too easily."

"What?" Dixti asked, taken off-guard by the question.

Arlan shook his head. "Come on, Dix. I don't think we're going to help him."

"Can't help, won't help, whatever." Titum sighed, looking out at the mountains once more. "Didn't want help anyways."

"I don't like leaving people in need of help…" she muttered as she let her husband pull her away.

"I know," Arlan said as they walked away. "I can't help but feel something is off with him. He's been off ever since Obi-Wan passed away…"

"Maybe he had feelings for the captain… though that wouldn't explain those bruises…he was definitely attacked by someone."
"Titum seems too violent for Obi-Wan..." Arlan sighed. "I know he's been wanting the title of captain for a while, since before Obi-Wan came here even."

"Doesn't mean he didn't have feelings. True, I don't think Captain Kenobi would have returned those feelings, but he still could have had them despite his jealousy over his position... Or..." she frowned, "...You don't think he had anything to do with what happened, do you? In order to get the job..? I wouldn't think he'd go that far but...we still don't know what exactly happened..."

"I don't know. I want to think he wasn't involved in Obi-Wan's death... But I've got a bad feeling about him."

"...Should we say something about it?"

"I... Don't know. Let's not for now, just to keep everyone safe."

"Then...should we keep an eye on the guy?"

Arlan nodded. "Definitely."

She nodded and sighed, "But for now, we have a celebration to attend."

"Yeah. We'll worry about Titum later." Arlan kissed Dixti's cheek gently as they hurried on to hear the announcement.

To be continued...
"Ease up on the throttle, Boba." Jango put a hand on his son's shoulder, gazing at the ship from a good distance still. "We don't want to be detected."

"Okay, dad." Boba said, doing as he was instructed.

"And stay alert and ready to take off as soon as we get back with the target." Vaenette reminded as he double-checked the medical transport droid so that there wouldn't be any surprises once they got to Obi-Wan, if they were right about the missing man being held on the large ship they were approaching.

They had arrived at the location to find the ship, and had camped out, observing and tapping into transmissions being sent to and from the ship to make sure boarding it would be worth their efforts. Kenobi's name was never mentioned, but there had been mention of a captive aboard the ship.

"Good boy," the father said as he stood up, ruffling his son's hair. "Now, let's get back Kenobi."

Jango led Vae to the small cargo hold in the back of the star ship they were in, prepping and handing a jetpack to the Chiss. He checked his own before strapping it on, then he took an oxygen tank and a helmet, strapping them on as well. He looked to Vae, waiting until he signaled he was ready to exit the ship.

Vaenette readied himself and grabbed an extra blaster for good measure before nodding and motioning for their droid to follow. "Let's earn the last half of our paychecks."

Jango smiled and moved on to the airlock, hitting the button to open the door to let the two of them out. As soon as the door was opened, he pushed himself out and rocketed away to the targeted ship.

The Chiss followed, dragging the droid along and enjoying the freedom floating in space gave him before they were at the larger ship.

Planting his feet on the hull of the ship, Jango crawled up the side of the ship, tapping a few spots on the hull on the way up to search for an airlocked room to enter into. Finally he stopped, tapped in a little more depth, then pulled out a small device that would cut a hole large enough for him to slip through.

Vaenette landed next to him and turned to catch the droid so it wouldn't smash into the side of the ship.

Jango then attached the deice to the hull, setting it to cut a large circle. He moved to the side a little, letting it cut until it sliced all the way through. He then pulled the device away, taking the cut hole with it. He released the device, letting the cut piece of hull float off into space as he pocketed the device and pulled himself inside.

Once Vaenette was also inside with the droid, Jango pulled himself to the door of the room, carefully picking at the lock until it unlocked for him, causing the whole room to suddenly fill and empty simultaneously with escaping air. He was quick to move through the open door before any alarms started going off, and he reached out to pull his Chiss partner through the doors before he promptly shut it. Their feet were pulled to the durasteel floor as soon as the door was closed.
"Whoo, what a rush." Vaenette said, setting down the droid. "Let's tap in to get an idea of where to go."

They moved along until they found a place they could tap into the Ship's database and pull the floor plans for the ship. Working quickly, he used a datapad to get in and download what they needed before he nodded, "Looks like we need to go down a few levels."

Jango nodded. "Let's make it quick. No alarms have gone off yet, but I'd rather not stick around to set any off." He started jogging off in the direction of the elevator to lower decks.

Vae nodded, tucking away the datapad and taking out one of his blasters just in case as he hurried along beside his partner, the droid hovering along behind them.

Once on the correct deck, Jango pulled up a smaller version of the ship's layout on his holoprojector, data he had copied in the short time they had the map pulled up. "I can't pick up any life signs yet. I think we need to go here though." He pointed to part of the map, then looked back up at the long hallway before them.

"Well, we know he was seriously hurt before we were even hired, so he'll likely be harder to detect with that. But it'll also let us know if we aren't alone anymore." Vae said as he started walking towards the area Jango had pointed out.

"Lead the way. I'll keep a watch on anyone who may pass by." Jango kept his little map up as they walked, ready to alert Vaenette once danger arose.

Vae nodded and kept in the lead, pausing when he needed to bring up the map to check their progress and direction until finally, they had arrived in the brig. Small cells lining the walls, though each one was empty. It was eerily silent as they moved along, deeper and deeper into the brig until the cells stopped and instead they found a window viewing into a room that looked like a medical ward from a horror drama.

It was dimly lit, and what looked to be dried blood coated much of what was in the room, most of it in a dark puddle shape on a metal operating table.

Jango pocketed his holoprojector as his eyes widened. "Damn…I wonder if this guy is even still alive." He looked at Vae and nodded his head towards the door. "At least his body would be in this room, if I had to guess."

"They didn't even bother to try and clean up." Vae said, horrified. Just what kind of monster was responsible for this…and was there a bounty on their head? There needed to be judging by the scene before them.

"Let's find the door into that room and see what's behind those curtain walls."

For a long while they searched for a door, finding nothing until Jango finally happened to stumble upon it. It was tucked back in a dark corner, obviously hidden so no one would find it but the person who knew where it was. He tried the handle, finding it locked electronically. He swore under his breath before he knelt and began trying to slice into the lock. After some trying, he got it open, and without any alarms going off, which he was relieved of.

"This is going so smoothly I have to wonder if they were stupid enough to think they wouldn't be found and never activated any alarms…or they know we're here and we're pawing at a trap." Vae muttered as he slipped into the horrific room.

"Either way, we need to be quick and thorough." Jango began pulling back the curtains, searching
for the target they were sent to find. When he continued to find no sign of the man, the growled out of frustration.

"We'll find him—or what's left of him." Vae said as he continued to search each section of the large room, some of which suggested strongly that someone had been tortured, and one looked like some half-hearted attempts at healing had been done on someone, likely to prolong a life destined for more torture and pain.

"I sure am glad I have a strong stomach," Jango muttered, noting how much dried blood he was finding.

"I'm glad you made your kid stay back on the ship." Vae added.

"Me too. This is way too much for most adults to handle even." The Mandalorian shook his head as he pulled back another curtain, and then he stepped back. "Vae… I think I found him."

"That doesn't sound as good as I hoped those words would sound…" the Chiss said, crossing over to where his partner was, the droid hovering along as well. "Kark…"

Obi-Wan lay on a table, his neck bent uncomfortably as his head hung off the edge. Leather straps held him down, wrapping around his chest, hips, stumps, and one fully remaining arm. His skin was ghastly white and lips purple. But worst of all, he seemed to be awake but unaware. His eyes open with dilated pupils that stared straight ahead unseeing, blinking sluggishly. His body had been stripped of all clothing and each bruise, scar, and fresh lash in his skin was on display, including what looked to be a blistered burn across his throat. Dried blood was smeared over his nearly translucent skin, and the only coverage he had was the old, loose bandages on his stumps and one that was nearly fallen off completely around his neck.

"…I kinda wish we were too late…the poor guy…death would have been better…" Vae whispered.

"Let's fix him up just a bit before we get out of here." Jango pulled out a small vibroblade and cut the straps gently, careful not to touch Obi-Wan. "There we go, free of those straps now. Help me shift him more onto the table."

Vae nodded, placing one hand under the redhead's head, glad of his gloves as he could still feel the dried blood matting his hair crunch under the touch. He then carefully lifted his head so that his neck was at a more natural angle before placing his other hand under Obi-Wan's waist to help slide him more onto the table. "But do you have any proper bandages on you? I doubt we'll find anything clean here."

"I don't have any on me right now. There are some back at the ship though."

"Then let's get him loaded and back to the ship as soon and possible and treat him there." Vae suggested, and the droid hovered over next to the table and activated its anti-gravity field around Obi-Wan, waiting for his body to start floating before it moved back, and shifted Obi-Wan above it for transport. "Also lessens the chance at being discovered." He added.

Jango nodded and quickly made his way back out the door, making sure the coast was clear before he led Vae out and back to the elevator. He pulled out a com unit. "Boba, we have Kenobi. Get the ship ready."

"Will do, Dad." The response came.

The two bounty hunters hurried out, the droid hovering between them so Obi-Wan would be
protected from the front and the back should they encounter any problems.

"Can that thing protect him from no oxygen?" Jango asked as they approached the elevator, heading back up to the deck they boarded the ship on.

"Yeah, we got the expensive one that does it all. It even deflects blaster shots."

"Good. Get ready to go back out in space. Make sure that droid doesn't get sucked away from you." Jango started sprinting towards the door that lead to the hole they came in through. He wasn't concerned with any guards or enemy droids. All the cared about was getting Kenobi out of the ship alive and far away.

That was when red lights started flashing and alarms blared though the whole deck.

Jango's eyes widened as he looked back at Vae and Kenobi. Behind them, several droids were running to catch up. "Watch your self!"

"I got our tail, you just keep us moving forward!" he shouted back, two blasters in hand as he started shooting at the droids.

Pulling out his own blaster, Jango surged forward, sprinting as fast as his legs could carry him. Only a little further, and then he could open the sealed door that held back the vacuum of space. He merely shot the access panel for the door as he got closer, and he suddenly found himself rocketing out into space. He used his jetpack to keep himself upright as he grabbed hold of the droid, briefly looking over Obi-Wan as he moved towards his ship.

Hundreds of vulture droids began to chase after Jango, blasters aimed for the Mandalorian.

"Crink!" Vae bit out, finding himself behind, shooting droids as he backed up closer to the strong suction into space. Then his eyes widened, the obvious sound of a lightsaber sounding. "A karking Jedi?" he guessed out loud as he saw a red-skinned Zabrak appear behind the droids. He turned, risking a blast to his back as he made a run for the exit.

The deep hum of the lightsaber rapidly got closer to Vae, and just as he jumped out and sped away, a deep crimson blade swung out, nicking part of the Chiss's jetpack, and angry scream accompanying it.

"Kark!" Vae cursed yet again as the jetpack sputtered and stopped working, its fuel leaking out into space.

Jango glanced back briefly, just in time to see Vae's jetpack lose fuel. "Haar'chak! Boba!" He looked back at the ship. "Bing the ship in close, and hit some of those droids if you can!"

"Sure thing!" Boba's voice responded before the Slave 1 turned and made its way closer, shots firing at the floating droids.

"Open up the bay doors. I need to get Kenobi inside before I go save Vae." Jango tried to follow the flight path of his ship, going as fast as he could while lining himself up so he could toss the droid in.

Boba did as he was instructed, the ship slowing as it pulled up next to Jango and the droid transporting Obi-Wan. Unfortunately, as Jango and the droid got into the ship, so did a few surviving vulture droids.

Jango quickly shot at the droids, hoping to at least hold them off while he got Obi-Wan safely into
the ship. He grunted as he shoved the droid through the open bay doors. "Close the doors, Boba!"

"Everyone in?" Boba asked.

"Just Kenobi. I need to go get Vae or he's not making it back with us. Keep shooting those droids!"

Tilting his body, Jango looped around and headed back for his partner, letting his jetpack fly as fast as it could go.

Vae was floating helplessly, shooting droids as there was nothing else he could do.

"Vae, grab onto me!" Jango zoomed past the Chiss, hoping he would grab on tight.

The Chiss hooked his blasters on his belt before he reached out to grab Jango's arm and pull himself into his chest. "Thanks for not leaving me to float."

"I wasn't going to leave my partner behind." Dodging back and forth, Jango avoided the vulture droids until he got back to his ship. Then several started surrounding him and Vae, blasters aimed and ready to shoot.

"Boba! Get ready to jump to hyperspace!" He clambered into the ship, pulling Vae with him and slamming the access panel on the inside of the door, hoping the door would close before the droids started shooting.

"Hold on, we're about to get out of here!" the boy said as the engine's hum started to increase and the doors closed tight, and then they were off, rocketing through space.

Vae let out a relieved sigh as he dropped off of Jango and discarded the ruined jetpack, examining the damage. "There was a karking Jedi or something back there. Kidnapping and torture doesn't seem like a Jedi thing, but he totally had a lightsaber."

Jango sighed as he sat heavily on the floor, taking off his helmet with a sigh. "Jedi aren't so aggressive... There was no way it was a Jedi."

"Corrupted one, maybe? I don't know. But he ruined a perfectly good jetpack." He sighed and pushed the ruined pack away before removing his helmet. "You want to start the medical stuff while I report to our employers back on Naboo?"

"Yeah. Hopefully Kenobi will make it back..." Jango stood up and approached the droid housing Obi-Wan. "He needs a lot of work to get back to who he was before."

"We'll do what we can for him, but he really does need access to a full medical center...and probably even a mind healer just as much a physical one." He glanced over at the hovering body of their target. "Never had to rescue someone in such bad a condition before."

"Me either. I think this guy is in the worst condition out of all my previous targets."

Vae nodded and sighed, pushing himself up, "I'll check on Boba to make sure he's good continuing to fly us back into known space before I make my call. You see about getting our guest bandaged up properly." He decided, making his way towards the cockpit first.
casting a shadow from the light escaping in through the open door. Then the edge of the bed dipped next to Anakin, followed by the soft touch of fingers through his messy curls.

"Anakin." Padmé whispered, "You'll want to wake up right now."

Anakin sighed heavily, waking up slowly at Padmé's touch and voice. He moaned softly, and then his eyes fluttered open, squinting at the light.

"Sorry, it's early but we're getting that call you were waiting for. Sabé went to answer it in a secure location, but we need to hurry if we want to hear the news ourselves."

The king's eyes widened as he sat up quickly. "Let me throw on a shirt and boots and I'll be ready."

He scrambled out of bed and pulled on his boots, then tossed on a light sleeping tunic. His heart pounded in his chest. There was either going to be really good news, or the worst news all over again. Anakin hoped with every fiber of his being that it would be really good news.

"Okay, let's go," he said as he approached Padmé once more.

She nodded and took his hand to lead him out and back down to the secure room where they had originally met with the pair of bounty hunters. Sabé stood before a holo projection of the Chiss.

"Everyone here now?" Vaenette asked.

Anakin nodded. "Yes. Please tell us you found him."

"We found him." The man nodded, "And we have him on our ship, but…"

"But?" Padmé asked, and watched him frown and advert his eyes.

"...To be honest, it would have been better if we had found him dead...his condition...what it looks like he went through...it's worse than death. Jango's tending him now, but we aren't sure if he'll make it the full trip back to Naboo. It's that bad..."

Anakin's head was suddenly dizzy. "Don't say that..." He gripped the edge of the table the holoprojector sat on.

"I'm sorry, I really am, but I can't sugarcoat his condition. The room we found him in was straight out of a horror drama. We are doing all we can and going as fast we can to get him to you, but it's hard to be hopeful."

"Just bring him back safely... That's all I ask." Anakin sighed, trying to control his emotions.

"We are doing all we can." Vae promised. "But there is more. I don't know if he was a corrupted Jedi or what, but the guy I assume was in charge on that ship was a Force-user with a big double-sided red lightsaber. We barely escaped with your missing captain, and if he has someone pulling his strings, it's possible that he's already contacting whomever he works for to report the rescue."

"That's not good at all," Anakin said with a sigh. "So it's possible that we could get some unwanted company once we have Obi-Wan back?"

"Yeah. I suggest getting some people you can trust to help guard him during his recovery...and keep him in that secret room if you can. I don't know, but plan something before we arrive—including full medical care. We'll send word when we are getting close."

"We will." Anakin nodded. "Thank you for this, you don't know how important it is to have him
"With the price you're paying to get him back safe, I can guess he's very important to at least one of the members of your group that met with Jango and I. It's none of my business, so I won't pry, but I'm just saying, we can have a guess at how important he is to get back to Naboo."

Anakin nodded again. "We will be waiting for your call."

"Of course, and if there is a change in Kenobi's condition, we'll call sooner."

"Thank you." The call dropped after Anakin's thanks, leaving the king both happy and worried even more.

"Are you okay?" Padmé asked, touching his shoulder.

"I think so." He pulled his wife into a hug, merely seeking comfort. "I'm so glad he's alive still."

"He is, and he's on his way home to you." She reassured, rubbing his back and watched Sabé move around to make some tea for them.

"I just hope he makes it back home." Anakin sighed as he pulled away.

"Have faith that he will. And when he is back home…what do you want to do? He'll need proper medical care, but we still don't know who it is he tried to warn you about, so he could be in danger once he's back and being treated."

"I want him in our shared room. That way someone can always keep an eye on him, whether that be me, you, or Sabé. And it's only us that have access to the room whenever we want. We can let the healers in when they need to work on him, but we would get to chose who sees him and who stays out."

"That still may be difficult." Sabé said, bringing over a tray with three cups of tea on it, "I mean, Padmé is good with a blaster, and I know you can fight, but me?" she shook her head, "Maybe we should call off-world for help guarding…"

"You mean asking the Mustafarians?" Padmé asked.

"I was thinking more towards the Jedi. Especially if the people who did this to Obi-Wan was able to use the Force and has a lightsaber."

"We could hire more Mandalorians," Anakin suggested, wanting an option that wasn't the Jedi.

Padmé bit her lip, "I think I agree more with the Jedi idea. They could handle Force-user attackers better, and this is Obi-Wan's safety we are talking about. We shouldn't risk it."

Anakin sighed. "Okay...We can contact the Jedi. But I'm not going to interact with them too much. I'm not letting them take me away from Obi-Wan."

"Ani, you're my King. They can't take you from Naboo." Padmé said, "And I'll request that they send Master Jinn, if possible. He came to Naboo once before and saved my life when I was newly crowned as Queen. I was fourteen, so I grew to really trust him."

Still skeptical, Anakin nodded. "I hope you're right. If the Jedi is the type of protection we need here... Then we'll get the Jedi."

"Don't worry; you won't have a problem with the Jedi." She reassured him.
"I believe you. But I think... I might stay away from any Jedi that comes here for now. They need to focus on protecting us, not discovering that I'm... Force sensitive."

"I really doubt it'd be an issue." She sighed, sipping her tea.

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"Can I help with anything, Dad?" Boba asked, sitting on the edge of a counter in the Slave I's medical bay, his feet swinging and bumping against the paneling under him.

They had finally arrived at Naboo, and Jango was readying Obi-Wan for transport off the ship and back to those who wanted him safe. The redhead was better in the sense that he no longer looked like death would have been the better fate, but he hadn't woken up or responded the entire trip from Wild Space, either.

Jango nodded as he looked over the redhead. "Can you hand me that pack of bacta patches? I think Kenobi needs one more before we're ready to escort him out."

"Yeah." Boba grabbed what was requested and hopped down to take it over to his father.

"Thank you." Jango carefully applied the patch to Obi-Wan's chest, among several other patches. He stepped back with a sigh. "Poor guy… at least he's almost home."

"Yeah, and I hope Naboo isn't a windy planet. He doesn't need the sheet flying off exposing him."

"Don't worry. I'm sure we'll be in a spot that will be safe for him."

"Can I go planetside with you and Vae?"

"I don't know how long we'll be planetside. Would you be okay if we only dropped him off and left?"

"I guess, but I'd like to see the planet a bit before we go."

"We'll see. If we're safe enough once Kenobi is back home, we'll explore a little."

Boba smiled at that, giving his father a hug as Vae walked into the med bay.

"I've prepped our shuttle, and we can leave as soon as Kenobi's secure." The Chiss said.

"Good. I think we're ready to go." Jango stepped back from the redhead with a nod.

To be continued…
An orange-skinned Togruta teenager hurried after her Master's long-legged stride as they left their ship and stepped onto the beautiful planet of Naboo. Two lightsabers were clipped to her belt, an impressive number of silka beads dangled down from the chain headdress she wore over her montrals, and unlike her master who wore the traditional Jedi robes, she wore a red dress with a shorter hemline and a keyhole under her neck.

"Have you ever been to Naboo before, Master?" she asked excitedly. She was eager for a mission that was more like what the Jedi Order did before the war which had been all she knew as a padawan.

"Yes I have," the tall man said with a smile. "I know the queen well here. I acted as her body guard once."

"Really? Think this mission is guarding her again? We really weren't told many details in the mission briefing."

"I'm sure we'll do some guarding. That's mostly what Jedi do when others hire us."

"I miss having the troopers with us on missions, but it's nice to experience missions as they should be rather than what the war required of us."

"Hopefully our time in this war will end soon. It's gone on long enough."

"Well for the most part we're working neutral missions now, so that's a good first step." She said as they approached the small greeting party waiting for them. Two of which were obviously royal. The king and queen by her guess.

"Indeed it is," Qui-Gon said as they approached the royals. He bowed respectfully with a smile. "It's an honor, your highnesses."

The girl also bowed quickly with a smile.

"It's good to see you again, Master Jinn. This is my husband Anakin." Padmé smiled. "We are glad you were able to answer our call for help."

"I'm glad we were able to come as you requested." He stood slightly to the side. "This is my padawan, Ahsoka Tano. She's a very bright girl and quite the learner."

"It's a pleasure to meet you." Ahsoka smiled, bobbing in a curtsy.

"The pleasure is all ours. Thank you for also coming." Padmé smiled at her.

"So, shall we get inside to discuss what you want of us?" Qui-Gon smiled as he gestured for them to move inside.

"Yes, sorry for the secrecy, but we couldn't be too open about this." We let the Jedi Council know what they needed to in order to consider our request for Jedi aid, but we sadly don't know who we can trust right now." The queen explained as they walked to where they could speak more openly. Once they were alone in a secure place, she sighed and sat down as she offered the Jedi seats.

Chapter 17

Chapter by bigwolfpup, TiBun
"So you don't know who to trust. Then am I right to assume that this is a protection mission?"

"Yes." She looked over at Anakin, "Do you want to explain?"

Anakin, who had remained quiet, sighed lightly and sat up a little. "Sure... Our royal guard captain is on his way back home. He was rescued from a ship out in Wild Space, where he was being held hostage. He was originally thought to be dead, but now that we know he's alive and coming home, we don't know who to trust to watch over him when one of us can't."

"Whoa, that sounds like quite a story." Ahsoka said, but she quieted when Qui-Gon placed a hand on her shoulder.

"He's in bad shape and needs medical attention. He's likely completely unable to defend himself right now, so he's venerable. And by the reports we were given, it seems that at least one Force-user was involved with the abduction."

Qui-Gon's eyebrows lowered. "A Force user? A Jedi wouldn't kidnap someone..."

"There are other groups of trained Force-users. You know that, I'm sure." Padmé pointed out.

"And independents like those who left the Jedi path..." Ahsoka added slowly, knowing well the story of her master's previous Padawan's fall.

"Yes, but I don't see why they would want to kidnap a royal guard..." Qui-Gon shook his head. "In any case, we should prepare for a Force user to pay us a visit. I'm sure that whoever was holding your captain captive will be wanting him back."

"Maybe he overheard something he shouldn't have?" Ahsoka suggested.

"I suppose that is a possibility." Qui-Gon thought for a bit. "Is there a possible power struggle going on within the ranks of your guards," he asked, turning to the two royals.

Anakin frowned. "Now that you mention it... There was one guard who seemed to appoint himself as captain almost as soon as our original captain was declared dead. Of course that was before we discovered he was still alive."

"That'd be someone to keep an eye on, then." Ahsoka hummed out. "Don't worry, we'll make sure he stays safe as he heals up!"

"He's a middle aged human. Looks like he's in charge of the whole kingdom, carries himself that way too." Anakin sighed. "I hope he's not the problem, but I wouldn't be surprised if he is."

"We can get you his employee file." Padmé added, "I believe he has been in our guards' ranks before our captain even came to Naboo."

"We would love to look over that file," Qui-Gon said. "The quicker we can figure out this situation, the sooner Naboo will be safe once more."

"Does the captain have a family? A life partner or kids, or anyone that will have clearance to visit him?" Ahsoka asked.

A silence fell in the room, Anakin looking down slightly red in th face. "Padmé and I will have access, and so will Sabé. But I'm...closer to him than those two."

"Close friends?" the girl asked with a smile. "Brothers?"
"Ani and I have a more open marriage due to the fact that ours is an arranged marriage. I have my special relationship with someone other than him, and he…he has our captain." Padmé explained, "This is not a widely known thing, in fact, you two are the first outside our tight circle to know."

"We'd like to keep it that way," Anakin said quickly. "If word got out, it wouldn't be good for Naboo, Mustafar, the whole galaxy even."

"Well, if it gets out the wrong way. We want it to be on our terms if it goes public." Padmé said as the door opened and Sabé stuck her head in.

"The bounty hunters' shuttle is landing."

Anakin stood up, looked at Padmé, then left the room promptly.

"Well, it looks like our meeting is over," Qui-Gon stated.

"If you need anything more, just let us know, but for now we have a captain arriving to take back to the castle." Padmé nodded, standing up.

Outside, the shuttle had landed and doors opening so that the two hired hunters, a boy that looked a lot like Jango, and a droid carrying Obi-Wan exited.

Anakin arrived at the shuttle just as the small party exited the ship. He held his breath when he saw Obi-Wan. Thin, very pale, missing three limbs and covered in bacta patches. It was a sight he had hoped to never see his beloved in, yet in his mind he knew there was no way he could have avoided it.

"Your highness." Vae nodded as they approached, "He hasn't woken up at all the entire trip, but we didn't lose him, either, so I'd say we were successful."

"Yes. Thank you… thank you so much. You don't know how happy I am to have him back home." Anakin reached out to gently touch Obi-Wan's face.

"Do you have a place ready for him so our droid can place him on a bed or something?"

"Yes, follow me." Anakin led Vae up to his and Padmé's shared bedroom. He opened the door and let the droid and Chiss go in first with Obi-Wan. "Set him on this bed," the blond said, pointing to his bed.

"Fancy room." Vae said as the droid set Obi-Wan carefully down onto the bed as Jango had stayed outside to speak with Padmé and ensure the rest of their payment was transferred. "Here's our files on his condition throughout the trip if your healers need it."

"Thank you. I know that you did this for the money, but I'm very grateful you took care of him on the way back here." Anakin bowed out of respect and gratitude.

"Hey, I prefer rescue bounties. They are harder to pull off, but it's more gratifying in the end." Vae smiled.

"Never thought I'd hear a bounty hunter say that." Anakin smiled. "Padmé should be just outside working out the last of your payment."

"Not all of us are hired assassins who are willing to shoot any mark for money. Some of us like to just get dangerous criminals out of society, and help those who can't help themselves while making a living. Jango has a son to support, and I just like knowing I can eat when I want to eat."
"Knowing you can eat when you want to is a luxury we take for granted sometimes. To not know where your next meal comes from is hell." The king shook his head. "Anyways, you're welcome to stay if you like, but once you receive your payment, you're not obligated to stay."

"Thank you. I hope your captain makes a swift and full recovery." He said before he and the droid left to rejoin the Fetts, leaving Anakin alone with Obi-Wan.

Anakin sighed, letting his worry show once he was alone. "Thank the Force you're home now," he whispered as he sat on the edge of his bed. Obi-Wan didn't respond.

After a while, the door opened again and Padmé lead the two Jedi inside, along with their head royal healer whom they had decided that they could trust. She wheeled in a large amount of medical equipment she assumed she would need and began setting it up.

Anakin stepped away from the bed and let the healer do her work, moving to stand next to Padmé. "He's finally back," he said quietly.

"Yeah." She squeezed his hand, "And you can make sure he stays. The bed's big enough where I'm sure you can sleep next to him without interfering with his healing."

"I hope. I'm worried that this is all a dream… and when I wake up in the morning, he'll be gone still." Anakin sighed.

"It's real. If you wake up to a surprise, it would be that he's awake."

"You don't know how bad I want that…"

"It's possible." Qui-Gon said, "If he subconsciously feels safe, he could awaken. I'm not a mind healer, but I can sense that he's shut himself away in attempt to protect himself from what horrors he endured. I suggest speaking to him soothingly to reassure him that he's safe. Maybe some soft touches."

Anakin nodded. "I'll try some later tonight. He needs to know he's safe at home now."

"My Padawan and I will take turns guarding this room. Just let us know if you want us to stand outside the door or inside as needed."

"Thank you, we will. For now, we just need you outside."

Qui-Gon nodded and guided his Padawan out. "Come, we'll discuss shifts."

Padmé sighed and moved over to look down at Obi-Wan, taking in his condition for the first time.

"He doesn't even look that alive." Freyja, said, "There's some internal trauma as well as the… obvious."

"Is it possible we can get cybernetic limbs ordered for him?"

"Yes, of course. I would just need you to sign off on spending the money for such things. They would also have to wait until he's healed better where they will attach. If his nerves aren't healed properly, it'd only cause him a great deal of pain."

"He's suffered enough." Anakin sighed. "When his nerves have healed, we'll order limbs for him. He doesn't deserve to be bedridden for the rest of his life."
"He'd also have the option of a hover chair if he'd prefer, and at this point I don't think he'll ever be quite the same physically, but we'll definitely do everything we can to help him get his life back."

"I just want him to be comfortable once he's healed up completely."

"I think everyone would like to see him healed up and comfortable after this. I'll be contacting a good friend of mine who's a talented mind healer if that's alright. I'm sure he'll need help healing mentally as well."

"That's fine. Whoever you need to give him a good recovery."

She nodded. "Then if you'll excuse me, I'll go give him a call and grab a few more things for Kenobi's treatment." She curtsied before slipping out.

Anakin moved to the window, watching the bounty hunters leave in their ship. Silently he thanked them yet again for bringing Obi-Wan back home. He turned back to the bed and sighed, trying not to show just how worried he was, and how desperately he wanted to kiss the redhead until he woke up.

"I think it's safe to give him a gentle one." Padmé said in a soft voice, reminding him that she was still there, and likely reading him like a book.

Anakin glanced at her. "Yeah... Sorry."

"Want some time alone with him?"

"Sure, if you wouldn't mind."

"Of course not. I'll handle everything today and have your dinner sent up here. Just spend time with him—for both your sakes." She said before she, too, left the room.

Once more Anakin was alone with Obi-Wan. He watched the redhead breathe for a bit, then he laid beside the man, gingerly touching him. "You're safe now, I promise... We'll get you healed up properly and you'll be back on your feet in no time..."

Obi-Wan didn't awaken, but at the touch, his lips did part ever so slightly.

Anakin continued to simply touch Obi-Wan. He thought of how lucky he was to have his lover back, to be able to physically touch him again. He sighed and buried his face into Obi-Wan's arm gently. "Please just wake up soon..."

"What condition was he in when those lawless hunters brought him in?" a very unhappy Palpatine demanded to know as he paced his office. Kenobi knew too much, and he'd raged when he'd gotten word from Maul of the escape. And now Kenobi was back on Naboo and everyone knew that his death had been exaggerated. He should have just had the man killed right out, but now he needed to be silenced all over again.

"Almost dead," Titum replied with an unsteady voice.

"Non-responsive?" he asked and relaxed only slightly at the nod he was given. "That gives us time, then. We need to just kill him right out and be done with it. Poison his bacta treatments or
something so it'll look like he just lost his battle. He can't be allowed to expose us."

"Yes, Master. And what should I do about Skywalker?"

"He's not an issue right now."

"How is he not an issue? He's going to get in the way "

"He'll be useful later. With his lover dead again, his mother dead, eventually his wife dead…all he cares about taken from him, he'll grow unstable. He'll take the fall and the blame as the people learn the truth of his adultery and Force-manipulation. The people will think that because his lover and mother was taken from him, that he turned against our queen and killed her himself. He'll take the fall for us and I will be left to raise the royal child, therefore securing my place in power and we can finally move on to bigger things."

"And so the child will replace me," Titum concluded grimly. He knew that he had already messed up far too much for his master to want to keep him around. He just didn't think the child would replace him, and so soon.

"The child will only be the face of the crown. The public will think he or she is in charge but really they are under my control. The child is but a puppet whose strings I pull. If I replace you, it'll be with someone more reliable for the position."

"You wouldn't train the child?"

If the child is able to use the Force as Skywalker is, then I will train it as I have trained many. You already know you are not the only apprentice I have. And so far none have truly proven themselves to be my true heir. You still have the chance to fix your past blunders and prove yourself to me."

"The child has a better chance at becoming your heir than I do."

"Perhaps. If the child can remember its place and prove itself better than you can."

Titum lowered his head. "I'm trying, Master. But I've failed you yet again. I knew something was wrong, but I didn't know they were planning to rescue Kenobi."

"And Maul was charged with keeping Kenobi hidden and he failed greatly. You both have failed tasks recently, but unless you are dead, you have the power to impress me. Kenobi needs to die before he awakens and starts talking, and Skywalker's mother needs to meet an unfortunate end of her own. Succeed in these, and you may just impress me yet."

"Yes, Master. I won't let you down."

"Good. Go make your plans. I look forward to your success." Palpatine drawled, dismissing the guard.

Titum turned and left the room, a new bounce in his step as he began planning the deaths of the two people closest to Anakin.

The door to the Royal suite opened and Ahsoka, who had been standing guard outside the room stuck her head in and smiled, "Sorry to disturb you, but dinner has been delivered for both of us.
Mind if I join you inside the room so I can eat at a table and not leave my post?" she asked Anakin.

Anakin looked up with a smile. "No I don't mind. Come on in."

"Thanks!" she disappeared for a second before reappearing, carrying the tray that held the dinner for each of them. The door closed behind her via the Force as she set the tray down on the table and began to divide the two meals up for them.

"Um, I've never eaten with royalty before. Is there any proper customs I need to know before I dig in?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Not with me. Go ahead and eat." Anakin grabbed part of his meal as he sat down and started eating.

"Cool." She smiled at him and dug in, openly enjoying the flavors that met her tongue.

"I couldn't really care less about all those fancy customs. I'd rather be without them if I'm to be honest." Anakin shrugged as he took another bite of his food.

"As a Jedi I was taught to respect all customs, so I try to learn them when I go to a new place." She said.

"No big customs here, not since the queen and I married. Things are kept nice around here, and it satisfies both of us, so no need to change it with unnecessary customs."

"I suppose that's nice—relaxing at least." She nodded.

"Yeah," Anakin agreed. "It's nice to not worry about acting like a proper royal around everyone. It gets old after a while."

"But do you like it? Being a King and all?"

The blond shrugged. "It has its good days and bad days."

She nodded, "I suppose it's like that for everyone. Oh! You had been a Separatist before, right? Do you know Lux Bonteri?"

"Lux? Yeah, I've seen him a couple times. Why do you ask?"

She blushed, "I just-I met him once on a mission I just…wonder how he's doing sometimes."

"I haven't seen him in a while, but last I heard he's doing alright. Helping out on Mandalore mainly." Anakin smiled, choosing not to mention Ahsoka's reaction to talking about Lux.

"Maybe now that the war is basically over…I can contact him myself without raising suspicion."

"I'm sure he'd like to hear from you again."

"I hope so. We didn't always get along, but…he's nice."

"You never know, maybe you two will get along better the more you get to know each other."

"Maybe." She grinned at him.

Silence fell between them as they continued to eat. Then after a bit Anakin, cleared his throat and spoke once more. "So what's it like to be a Jedi? I don't want to just assume things before I actually
"I'm not sure if I'm the one to answer that. I'm still young and I became a Padawan during the start of the war—I didn't experience any missions during a time of peace until now. I know we are peace keepers but all I know is fighting a war the Senate told us to fight for them." She answered truthfully.

"Are Jedi really taken from their families when they're young? The family has no choice when the kid is discovered, they have to be taken away?"

She blinked, "No, well, yes and no. We are taken at early ages. I was three, myself, but families are asked and have the chance to say no. If the family wishes to keep their child, then they do and instead the Jedi offers the child basic training to use the Force properly in the comfort of their own homes for a few years. The only time a youngling is taken without the family's permission is when it's discovered to be an abusive situation for the child, but that's very rare. But families normally agree because they see their youngling becoming a Jedi as a great honor to their family name. I'm surprised you didn't already know—I mean, weren't you discovered as a kid and offered some training? Being royalty, I'm sure your family would have refused you being brought to the Temple."

Anakin shook his head. "I wasn't born into royalty. I was born into slavery, and being a Force user meant that the person who owned me would lose good property. I forced myself to keep it hidden to protect my mom."

"That—that's awful." The Jedi said with wide eyes.

Anakin shrugged. "I was never found, and I was able to stay and protect my mom. It was a win situation for me."

"Were you trained later though? Like after you were free?"

"No, I never let anyone know I was Force sensitive. I still wanted to protect my mom even after my step-dad bought us both our freedom."

"I see…would you like some training? My master and I can give you some while we are here. That way you could also help protect him better." She nodded over to the bed Obi-Wan lay on.

Anakin shook his head quickly. "I would rather not. I don't need training, and besides I don't want to be a Jedi."

"You won't be a Jedi if you accept training from us. We'll just be teaching you useful things. Besides, you're much too old to become a Jedi." She laughed. "Come on, it can only help."

Sighing, Anakin sat back and closed his eyes for a second. "If I have some sort of training… I'm worried they're going to want me anyways. I've seen Jedi work, and I've seen what I can do without training. I'm… not like a normal Force user."

She rolled her eyes, "If someone asks you then just say no. Jedi can't force anyone to be a Jedi, and there are Jedi who leave the order simply because they decide they don't want to be a Jedi anymore."

"You can do that? I thought being a Jedi was a lifelong commitment." Anakin sat back up. "Okay, I'll accept some training, but just for the sake of Obi-Wan."

"It's a lifestyle more than anything." She shrugged, "Most stay in the Order but we all have the
choice to stay or go whenever we feel is right. I'll talk to my Master tonight when he comes to take over and we can probably start teaching you some stuff tomorrow at your convenience."

Anakin nodded. "I don't have to have one of those laser swords do I?"

"Likely not, no. Lightsabers are special to Jedi. We earn them and have a special connection to the crystal inside them. Our lightsabers are our lives, in a way. An extension to our bodies. Not things to just hand out to anyone. We'll mostly help you feel more in tune with the Force itself and show you how best to work with the force rather than bend it to your will. In the end you should just feel more comfortable with it and be able to better feel what is light verses dark, and feel your bonds and connections to people in your life more clearly. For example, if your future baby is upset or hurt, you'll be able to sense it even if you're not in the same room. You can rush to check on them."

"That's… nice, actually. Maybe it's a good thing to strengthen my skills in the Force."

"It really will be." She promised.

Anakin looked over at Obi-Wan and sighed. "I hope he wakes up soon. I keep trying to talk to him and tell him he's safe here, but it's not working."

"Just don't give up. He's in there deep, so it'll take time to draw him out enough to wake up, but he will if you keep soothing him."

"I've have been in every spare moment I have. I keep waiting for him to open his eyes and wake up, but every time I think I get a reaction from him, it's just something I imagined."

"It's only been a few hours, and it may take a few days at least. But you have a healer looking after him and helping to make sure he keeps on the path to good health. That will also help. And really, if I were him, I'd rather wake up later when my body was more healed and in less pain."

"Fair point. I hope he'll like the idea of cybernetic limbs. I don't want him to be trapped in a chair the rest of his life."

"Well, I don't know him personally, but I'm sure he'll find an option he likes for regaining his independence."

"Of course. I don't want to force him to do anything he won't like." The king rested his cheek in his palm, gaze set on his lover. "But one step at a time. He has to wake up first."

"Wake up and feel ready to face the Galaxy again. Based on the bandages, I assume he went through a lot."

"Based on the missing limbs, I'd have to agree." Anakin shook his head. "He's too good a person to be tortured like he was."

She reached over and patted his hand before she stood up, finished with her dinner, "Well, I'll leave you to talk to him some more. If you need anything, I'll be outside the door."

"Yes, thank you. I loved talking with you. Maybe we can talk over another meal." He smiled as he stood up.

"Of course! Any time." She smiled before slipping out the door.

Anakin sighed as he moved back to the bed. "Ahsoka seems nice. You should wake up so you can meet her," he said to Obi-Wan as he sat on the edge of the bed. He gently brushed back some red
hair before cupping the older man's face. "I know you need time to wake up, but please don't take too long. I still miss you…”

To be continued…
A nearly silent, pained groan broke the silence of the moonlit room, followed by another, barely louder one before blue eyes cracked open, blinked closed, and then snapped open wide with sudden fear. They looked around the dark room, searching for the man he knew would be quick to deliver pain to him once more.

His one remaining hand curling into a fist and gripping the silk sheets under him.

Beside him, a groan came from another man, someone close to Obi-Wan. It didn't come closer, nor did it get further away, but it didn't sound like someone who was threatening. Still, it made Obi-Wan's heart speed up in panic and his lips parted as he tried to gasp for his breath, breathing suddenly very difficult for him as his chest tightened.

No…No more, he couldn't take it anymore…why wouldn't the Zabrack just kill him?

More moaning, then what sounded like words being spoken at Obi-Wan. The voice got a little closer, though it sounded like whoever was talking was trying to stay quiet. The voice spoke the same thing over and over, though it was hard for the redhead to decipher what exactly was being said.

Obi-Wan began to tremble, squeezing his eyes shut and turning his head to the side in attempt to run away, thinking that he was still strapped down and unable to actually move.

"Obi," the voice started to get clearer. "Obi." There was a tone of gentleness in the voice that began to come through with the clearer words.

Tears began to sting his eyes and he let out another silent whimper between the hitching of his strangled breaths. It sounded like Anakin…his Anakin…he was hearing the impossible so he had clearly lost his mind.

"Obi, it's okay, it's just me." The voice continued to soothe, coaxing Obi-Wan out of his panic to realize where he was and who he was with.

The redhead swallowed and squeezed his eyes tighter. No pain had been delivered yet, and the voice was still there, gentle and worried… He wanted to keep it there, and he knew if he opened his eyes it'd disappear and he'd be back in the dark and pain.

"You don't have to hide. You're safe here, I've been telling you that since you came back home." A pause. "Please… open your eyes."

Obi-Wan tensed, wanting to fight the soothing voice coaxing him to relax and open his eyes, but slowly he was unable to resist it and his eyes cracked open once more.

Just above him was Anakin, smiling down with tears in his eyes. "Hey, Obi…"

Obi-Wan hiccupped and felt tears escape, rolling down his cheek. Anakin…he looked so real…like he could just reach up and—his hand actually lifted from his side, free from it's restraint, and his fingers actually met a soft cheek when they gingerly tried to touch. He sucked in his breath in surprise.
Anakin choked on his tears as he leaned into the touch. "Yeah, it's really me. I'm here."

"Mmph…" Obi-Wan closed his eyes again, squeezing out a few more tears before opening them to take in Anakin's face.

"Can you speak?" Anakin glanced at Obi-Wan's neck briefly before looking back at his face.

Obi-Wan's lips parted, little gasping sounds escaping before he closed his mouth and seemed to curl up in shame.

"Oh Obi…" Anakin shook his head, touching Obi-Wan's face gently. "It's okay. It's not your fault."

His fingers curled, gripping Anakin's shoulder and pulling him down closer.

Anakin finished closing the gap between them, connecting their lips in a soft but longing kiss with a soft moan.

Obi-Wan hiccupped into the kiss, growing overwhelmed with how real Anakin felt, and he began to tremble with emotions again.

The blond pulled back slightly, scared he was sending Obi-Wan into another panic. "No, no, it's okay. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to overwhelm you." But Obi-Wan only pulled him back down, crying into his shoulder and even wrapping what was left of his other arm around him best he could.

Anakin couldn't help but hug Obi-Wan as tight as he dared without hurting Obi-Wan. He cried as well, feeling so guilty as he felt the lone arm wrap around him, but oh did that one arm make Anakin so happy. Obi-Wan recognized Anakin, and that was all the king needed in that moment.

Obi-Wan shifted to look over Anakin's shoulder, wanting to stay close, but also wanting to see where he was. The moonlight was soft as it fell into the room, outlining the shapes of the rich, comfortable room he'd never seen before but still had the familiar feel of Naboo.

Home… he was home…

Anakin pulled back slightly. "Don't worry, we're in the shared bedroom. Just us in here right now. Padmé and Sabé are in a private room for tonight."

Obi-Wan looked up at Anakin, his expression questioning how he got there.

"We hired some bounty hunters to rescue you after we got your holocall… They brought you back safely and brought you in here to rest, as per my instructions. A healer came in and started to fix you up better than the bounty hunters did, though you wouldn't have made it if they hadn't fixed you up a little on the way back here." Anakin sighed, moving onto his side while still holding his lover close.

Obi-Wan looked relieved. The price he paid to get his plea for help out had been worth it. He was home because of it. Home and with Anakin's arms around him.

"We were just waiting for you to wake up before we could move on with more medical treatments." Anakin kissed Obi-Wan's shoulder. "And now you're awake…"

"H-h-m…" Obi-Wan stuttered.

Anakin looked at Obi-Wan. "Hm?"
"H-m" he repeated, his lips forming the word 'home'.

"Home. Yeah, you're home now..."

He gave a small smile, "H-m..."

"Home," Anakin repeated in a whisper, sitting up slightly so he could kiss his lover once more. Obi-Wan fell into the kiss more easily, closing his eyes and letting his new reality of safety sink in.

"I love you," the younger man said into the kiss, making sure the redhead knew just how important he was.

'Hold me,' Obi-Wan mouthed, 'don't let go.'

Anakin tightened his arms around Obi-Wan, fresh tears forming in his eyes. "I'm never letting go," he whispered. "I promise."

Together they shifted so that they could lay comfortably in the middle of the bed, Obi-Wan's head resting on Anakin's shoulder as the blond's arms held him close.

Slowly Anakin fell back asleep, able to finally sleep well with knowing that his Obi-Wan was awake and safe. But it took Obi-Wan a while longer as he glanced around, watching the shadows drift across the room before he felt calm enough to let himself drift off, simply happy to be in his lover's arms once more.

As morning came, Anakin woke to a knock on the door. He tried to sense who it was before he granted them access. He was sure it was the healer, which meant he had to get out of bed, breaking the look that he and the captain were together. With a yawn, he pulled away from Obi-Wan, kissing his forehead gently before he got up and tossed a light tunic on.

Obi-Wan whimpered, his fingers curling, trying to keep his lover close. But when Anakin still escaped him, he cracked open his eyes, longingly watching him cross the room to the door.

Opening the door, he smiled at the healer. "Good morning. I've got great news. Obi-Wan is awake," Anakin said to the healer.

"Oh good! We should check his vitals just in case." She hurried over to the redhead carrying a bag of her medical supplies. "Good morning, Sir! I'm so happy to see you finally awake."

"He can't speak very well right now," Anakin said as he followed her back to the bed, looking down at Obi-Wan.

Obi-Wan shifted, looking at the healer, a bit unsure. But Anakin was there, and he was sure that he'd be safe as long as his Anakin stayed there. His eyes moved over to Anakin and he held out his hand, wanting him to get close again.

As the healer began looking over Obi-Wan, Anakin grabbed his hand and squeezed it, trying to tell his lover that the healer didn't know about the relationship.

Obi-Wan seemed to relax at the touch, and Freyja smiled, "You're nervous, that's understandable."
She then looked up at the king, "He trusts you. It's good of you to give him that comfort he needs right now, my King."

"He a good friend of mine. There's no way I would leave him here without anyone to comfort him, especially now." Anakin rubbed his thumb over Obi-Wan's knuckles, hoping to calm him down a little more.

She smiled at him again and gently began to test Obi-Wan's vitals, adding notes to his medical file as she went. Finally she was done and she prepared a tonic, assuming that an injection would startle the wary patient too much.

"This is a standard pain-killer, and should help make him feel more comfortable. It can make him a bit drowsy and he may drift in and out of naps, but please help him get it down after he's had some breakfast. I'll have the kitchens make him something that will help him regain strength but will also be easy on his stomach." She said, setting the tonic down on the table next to the bed.

"Thank you, I will help him. I'm sure now that he's awake, he'll make a quicker recovery."

"That is most probable." She agreed, "I'll be back every few hours or so to check in on him and mix up more tonic as needed. Injections last longer, but I have a feeling he wouldn't handle the prick of a needle well right now.

Anakin nodded. "We'll work up to it. Thank you again for your help"

"It's my pleasure, Highness." She curtsied, then smiled down at Obi-Wan, "And I look forward to seeing you back to full health."

As soon as she left the room, Anakin leaned down to kiss Obi-Wan. "We'll get you healed up in no time."

Obi-Wan squeezed his hand, "L-Love you, A-Ani…" he managed to whisper, his voice low and scratchy with a hint of pain.

"I love you too, Obi." Anakin sat on the edge of the bed so he could kiss Obi-Wan more.

Obi-Wan took the opportunity to tug Anakin back against the pillows so that he could curl up against him again.

Anakin couldn't help but smile as he curled up with Obi-Wan once more. He yawned, though he didn't think he would fall back asleep. He was too awake, and Obi-Wan was also awake, so he had no need to sleep anymore until the night came.

After a while the door opened and Padmé slipped in, carrying the trey of breakfast food. By her smile, it was obvious she heard Obi-Wan had awoken and she intercepted the breakfast and decided to take it up, herself.

"Hey, heard you were awake." She smiled when Obi-Wan glanced over at her stiffly, then relaxed again. Clearly she was another trusted face.

Anakin looked up at Padmé and smiled. "He woke up last night, actually. But I kind of forgot to tell anyone before we fell asleep… He's doing good for the most part though."

"Well it's good for him to have time to adjust to being in a safe place again and not be overwhelmed with too many people." She said, setting down the trey and slowly approaching the bed. When Obi-Wan didn't seem to react negatively to her approach, she allowed herself to sit on
"We have some good news for you, too." She continued, "You're going to be an uncle."

Obi-Wan's eyes widened before they looked down at her slightly rounded belly, a soft gasp escaping him.

"You may touch if you want, though our little one hasn't started kicking yet." She granted him and watched as he pulled slightly from Anakin so he could reach across and gently place his hand on her stomach, feeling the swell of pregnancy that hadn't been there before.

Anakin smiled wider. "When you disappeared... I went into your room and noticed your journal. I read how excited you were for the baby. I had my doubts on why you had disappeared, but when I read that, my doubts went away."

"And now that you're back, we'll be a family, all five of us. You and Sabé are going to be important parts in the baby's life, Uncle Obi." She promised, kissing his forehead.

"Absolutely," Anakin agreed, grabbing Obi-Wan's hand and squeezing it.

Obi-Wan smiled, rubbing Padmé's baby bump a little more with a happy sigh.

"I assume the silence means speaking is difficult for him right now?" Padmé asked, looking at Anakin.

Anakin nodded. "He's struggling. I think his vocal chords may have been damaged."

"We should get him a holo pad where he can type out anything he wants to say, then." She decided, and Obi-Wan looked a bit hopeful at the suggestion.

"I think that's a good idea. He won't have to strain his voice when he tries to speak."

"We'll get you one as soon as possible." Padmé promised before getting up. "But for now, I'm sure you're hungry, I know I am."

"Yeah, let's eat." Anakin looked at the redhead. "Feel like trying to eat?"

Obi-Wan nodded, eager for food he could trust. He wasn't completely sure, be he had a feeling that the little food he had been given during his capture had been tempered with. Drugged or even poisoned to weaken him.

Obi-Wan leaned into the touch, closing his eyes in his enjoyment.

"Would you mind if Sabé joined us for breakfast?" Padmé asked, "She'd like to, but we don't want to overwhelm you, so she's waiting outside the door."

Obi-Wan opened his eyes again and took a moment to think it over before giving a small nod.

With the permission granted, the Queen moved to the door and beckoned her lover inside so that the four could enjoy the morning meal together. Then the girls handed out the dishes, Obi-Wan's being a thick soup.

Anakin remained on the bed beside Obi-Wan as they ate, giving him small encouraging touches every once in a while, reminding both himself and Obi-Wan that they were safely together again. "Is your soup good?" he asked after finishing a bite of his own food.
Obi-Wan nodded, looking like he wanted to say something as well, but he refrained from trying to.

Anakin leaned slightly into Obi-Wan. "We'll get you that holopad soon. Then you can speak your mind about things."

Again, he nodded, looking forward to being able to more easily express himself.

"So when is your next checkup?" Anakin asked Padmé after taking another bite of food.

"Next week. You're welcome to come, as always—you too, Obi-Wan. Sabé has come to a few already."

"I think all of us should go to this next one. If we're all willing and able of course."

Padmé nodded, "We'll be doing an ultrasound scan and will get to see how big the baby looks, if you'd like to see that."

The redhead nodded with a small smile, then looked down at his empty bowl and held it up to Anakin in hopes his lover understood that he'd like more.

"Feeling up to some more? You want more soup?" Anakin took the bowl while setting his plate to the side.

Obi-Wan nodded.

"So when is it that we get to know the gender of the baby," Anakin asked as he got off the bed and dished out some more soup into Obi-Wan's bowl.

"It's possible this next checkup, but more likely if we wait a few more weeks." She answered.

"So should we wait to find out?" The king returned Obi-Wan's bowl to him, kissing him on the cheek before he climbed back on the bed.

Obi-Wan was the first to respond, shaking his head.

"I agree," Padmé laughed, "If we can find out sooner, the better. We'll be able to start planning the nursery and baby clothes and toys."

Anakin nodded. "Then I guess it's time we find out if we're having a prince or princess." He smiled wide as he finished up his meal.

Later that day, the two royals and their lovers took some time to just relax with each other. A holopad was requested and was on its way up to them, so while they waited they simply enjoyed being all together once more. Unlike their usual of breaking into couples and talking to only their partners, the four all settled on Anakin's bed around Obi-Wan. It felt more like a family that way.

"So Ani," Padmé started as their previous conversation started, "How has your training with Master Jinn and his padawan been going?"

"It's been pretty nice actually. I'm getting stronger in the Force. I can sense people better, like who's outside the door or coming down the hall. I can even sense my mom." Anakin smiled as he
reported his progress.

"That's great!" She smiled.

Obi-Wan tugged on Anakin's sleeve for his attention and tilted his head in question.

Anakin looked at Obi-Wan. "We brought some Jedi here to protect this room while you healed, just to be safe. I've been training under them a little to enhance my skills in the Force. I… felt it was necessary for me to train a little, so I could protect this family better."

The redhead's lips formed an 'O' as he nodded and his eyes shifted to the doors, feeling a strange mix of emotions at the news.

"When the bounty hunters rescued you, we were worried that when you got here, you'd be followed by who kidnapped you. Now that you're back home, we want you to stay home."

Feeling a spike of fear as he realized Maul was still out there, Obi-Wan gripped Anakin's arm tighter.

"Hey, it's okay. Nothing has happened since you got here." Anakin wrapped his arms around Obi-Wan comfortingly.

'Yet.' Obi-Wan thought, 'Nothing has happened yet, and you don't know what he can do.'

Anakin blinked, having heard most of what Obi-Wan thought. Maybe it was because the thought was directed at him, but Anakin guessed his Force training had gone further than he thought. 'It's okay, I'll keep you safe,' he attempted to communicate to the redhead.

Obi-Wan's expression changed from fear to surprise as his eyes snapped up to look at Anakin.

Anakin chuckled as he pulled back, then he shrugged. "I guess my Force training has helped me in more ways than one."

Padmé and Sabé glanced at each other, clearly confused.

Anakin glanced over at the girls. "Oh, uh… apparently I can use the Force to communicate with Obi-Wan. Didn't know until just now so…"

"That's interesting." The girls both said before there was a knock on the door and Ahsoka's voice spoke.

"A datapad has just been delivered."

"Oh good!" Anakin jumped off the bed and hurried to the door, opening it to find Ahsoka standing there with the datapad. "Thank you, Snips."

The girl rolled her eyes as she handed over the pad, "Don't call me 'Snips', Skyguy." She smirked.

"Hey, you earned that nickname, it's sticking." Anakin smirked as he took the pad, then headed back over to his bed.

"You got my Master using it." She pouted as she closed the door.

Anakin chuckled as he handed Obi-Wan the datapad. "Here you go. Now you can communicate with us better."
With a smile, Obi-Wan powered it up and began to type before turning it to show them.

Happy to be home.

"Already comfortable with it." Anakin leaned in and kissed Obi-Wan's cheek. "We're happy you're home too."

It was hard to keep hope, but I tried. I thought I'd die alone… He typed before sliding the pad off his lap and pulling himself into Anakin's arms.

Anakin held Obi-Wan tight. "You won't die alone now. Not on my watch."

"Right now, all you have to worry about is your recovery." Sabé said.

"We'll protect you," Anakin promised, holding his lover just a little tighter. "We won't let them hurt you again."

Obi-Wan took a deep breath, closing his eyes as he briefly wondered about his future… needing protection and unable to protect himself, let alone do his job in protecting the royal—no, his family.

"One small step at a time," the blond said softly. "We'll get through this. And we have a baby to look forward to and give us hope."

"And before you make a smart remark about steps, We already have discussed ordering you some custom prosthetics if you want them." Padmé said as Obi-Wan's hand reached for the pad, smirking when her words halted the action.

"Of course, it's your decision to actually get them or not. We won't force you." Anakin pulled back and brushed away some of Obi-Wan's hair. "I do suggest you get them though."

With flushing cheeks, Obi-Wan pulled the pad back into his lap so he could type again.

Two arms are better to keep you close. He turned it so that hopefully only Anakin could see.

Anakin smiled, nodding. He leaned forward to kiss the redhead. 'I want you to be able to hug me again…'

Obi-Wan sighed, 'I'm sorry I'm so broken…' he thought.

'Don't apologize. None of this is your fault, Obi.' Anakin sighed as well, placing his hand on the back of Obi-Wan's neck.

Obi-Wan simply pulled in closer, breathing in Anakin's scent.

"You know I love you, and I care very much about you." Anakin said in a low voice. "Everything is going to be okay."

"Should we give them some time alone?" Sabé asked Padmé in a hushed voice.

Padmé chuckled lightly. "Sure. They have a lot of missed time to catch up on."

The girls silently slipped from the bed and left, leaving the boys alone.

Anakin glanced at the girls leaving. "I think we scared them away," he said to Obi-Wan.
That's fine, less company is more calming right now. Obi-Wan typed out.

Anakin nodded. "I can agree with that. I can imagine you're starting to get exhausted a little."

He nodded and typed again.

Long day, not enough naps.

"You're more than welcome to take a nap, you know. We won't be gone when you wake up."

You'll stay the whole time? He typed.

"Of course I will. I'm not letting you out of my sight for a long time."

And you'll hold me? He asked, feeling needy.

"I will hold you until you don't want me to hold you anymore."

Right now that feels like it will never happen.

"That's perfectly fine with me." Anakin chuckled and fell back on the bed, gently pulling Obi-Wan with him.

Obi-Wan let out a happy sigh, sinking into the embrace and letting his eyes close as he got comfortable.

"Sleep as much as you need. I'll be right here." The king planted a small kiss on Obi-Wan's forehead.

Titum paced in his room. His mind spun with details of how he would pull off Obi-Wan's death. Sneak some poison into his antibiotics, strangle him in his sleep, or just stab him enough until he died. All were options that could work if no one was around him. All were options that might have given him a little pride for a bit, but certainly not crafty enough to have his master be proud of him once more.

A knock sounded at his door, a familiar voice speaking up. "I bring news, Captain."

Titum sighed, being pulled away from his thoughts. "Juris, you better have good news for me."

Titum sighed, being pulled away from his thoughts. "Juris, you better have good news for me."

The door opened and Juris, the second guard Obi-Wan had seen just before his capture, entered with a nervous look, "Sorry, sir, it's not great." He shook his head and stood at attention before delivering his news. "I was just on my dinner break, sir, and heading down to the kitchens to grab my food from Dex. Took the short cut past the Royal suites where those Jedi have been hanging around lately and the door opened as I walked past. The queen and her favorite handmaiden walked out but behind her I could see in just before the door closed. Kenobi's in there! I knew there was truth behind those rumors that Kenobi was found alive somehow. But the rumors said he was in a coma and he totally wasn't. He was sitting up in the bed, looking worse for wear, but far from a comatose." He babbled on. "Came right here instead of the kitchens because what if he talks? Tells Skywalker we're onto his separatist plot? Or even lie to the queen about us and claim we're traitors?"
I mean—we did attack him so he'd use that as evidence, right?"

Titum's arms dropped to his side, his mouth opening. "Did you say…Kenobi is awake?!" His voice thundered in disbelief and anger.

"…Yeah, Oh, you already knew the rumors were true and he was back? So was the coma thing true? I guess, I mean, it has been a few weeks since the rumors started up. But you'd think he'd be in the med center again and not in rooms reserved for only the royal family. Do you think the Jedi are here because of it? Do you think they are investigating Skywalker?"

Titum pressed his fingers against his temples. "Kenobi is awake… Kark!" He sent a cup flying across the room, shattering against the wall. "Yes I knew he was here. He's woken up too early."

"Oh, so he's supposed to be back?"

"No, he's not," Titum said through clenched teeth.

"Then why is he 'awake too early'?"

"He was rescued and brought back here. My job now is to kill him before he wakes up, so I ask you how I'm supposed to kill him when he's awake already?!"

"Um…poison?" Juris suggested meekly.

Titum rolled his eyes. "Yes, because it'll be so easy for me to do that now without anyone noticing."

"But you can use the Force…"

"So can Skywalker, and he's been training under the Jedi, which is another roadblock in plans. There's no easy way for me to kill Kenobi now."

"You can't poison the food as it leaves the kitchen where Skywalker's nowhere to be seen?"

"Skywalker can sense when things are wrong now. He's stronger in the Force. He will know." Titum began pacing again. "I can't do this in secret now. I have to just do it. There's no other way. Sidious be damned if he doesn't like it."

"What are you going to do, sir?"

"I don't know, but it'll have to be something quick. And it needs to be done soon." Titum looked back up at Juris. "Kenobi has to die, but so does Skywalker's mom. If she's killed before Kenobi, it'll put everyone in a bad mood, including Kenobi. It'll be easier to kill him if he's depressed."

"The separatist queen? Did she also over hear something?"

"She's being used to get Skywalker under Sidious's control. The more people he loves die, the more he'll run to Sidious for help."

Juris frowned, "What do you mean? We want Skywalker gone so our dear Queen won't be manipulated by the evil separatists anymore…"

"We want the baby Skywalker and the Queen made. No one else matters but that baby. As soon as it's born the queen will die as well, leaving Skywalker and the baby in the hands of Sidious, and the war will turn back to our favor. We will live like royalty ourselves while the war rages on and kills thousands more who are insignificant to the future of the galaxy. No more Jedi, no Republic, no
Separatists. Only the glory of the Sith empire will survive this war."

Titum stepped towards Juris threateningly. "And if you don't like it, you will die too."

Juris' eyes widened as he took a step back, "But—that's treason! Queen Amidala...she is our one true monarch! To speak of killing her—taking her place and using her heir? The little innocent unborn baby prince or princess?" he shook his head, "You won't get away with this!" He said, turning to run from the room and alert others to what he'd just learned.

Titum grabbed a hold of the Force and grabbed Juris's neck with a phantom hand. "You will tell no one of what you have learned in this room." He pulled the smaller and younger man to him until his physical hand was around the thin neck.

Juris squirmed, his eyes glossing over as he choked out a monotone "I will tell no one of what I have learned in this room."

"The next opportunity you have, you will get rid of Skywalker's mother, even if that means you will die."

"The next opportunity I have I will get rid of Skywalker's mother."

"Good." Titum let go of Juris and let him stumble forward. "You know your mission. Go."

"I know my mission." He said, turning to leave. "I will go."

Titum sighed once Juris left the room. Now all he had to worry about was Obi-Wan's death, and it would happen as soon as Shmi was dead.

To be continued…
Obi-Wan was sitting up straight, eyes forward and locked onto the door as he waited with Anakin, Padmé, and Sabé. He was easily the most excited in the room, as the others have already attended pregnancy checkups, and this would be his first.

Anakin excitedly chatted with the girls, asking what they thought the baby might be and what name they would give it. Obi-Wan of course was included in the conversation as they waited for the medic to come into the room and set Padmé up for her check up.

Obi-Wan sighed and turned to his pad to type before showing the other three.

*Any name ideas yet?*

"Well, since our baby is royalty, they'll have to be named after someone in the family," Padmé said. "Maybe after my mom or Anakin's mom."

"Does the name have to be someone else's," Anakin asked. "Why don't we give our baby an original name?"

"Middle names could be the traditional names so you can have more fun with the first names." Sabé suggested.

*Can Sabé and I help?* Obi-Wan typed.

"Of course you can help, Obi," Padmé said with a smile. "I think we'll need help anyways. Picking just one name is hard."

*I like Leia for a girl's name.* He quickly typed out.

"Ooh Leia is a lovely name," Padmé said. "Oh and for a boy maybe… Luke? Or Ben?"


Obi-Wan smiled and typed again; *My middle name is Ben.*

"We can make Luke's middle name Ben." Anakin smiled at the redhead.

"If the baby is a boy." Sabé said.


"It's not set in stone, but they are very strong possible names." Padmé smiled.

Anakin nodded, then sighed. "Man, I'm excited to find out what we're having. I hope the healer comes soon."

Right as he spoke the words, the healer came into the room with a smile on her face. "Well, it's good to see all four of you here, especially you, Mister Kenobi."

*Happy to be included in this.* He typed out.
"I'm sure you are," the healer replied. She clapped her hands together. "Alright, let's get you set up, my lady," she said, smiling at Padmé.

Before long, the queen was set up to receive her ultrasound, belly covered in gel and the wand at the ready. The healer started to go over her belly with the wand, the royals and their partners watching the screen intently so catch a glimpse at what might be considered a baby.

"We're hoping to find out the gender of the baby, if possible." Padmé said as she held onto Sabé and Anakin's hands. "So if you see something, tell us."

"Of course, and I think… we're starting to get a clearer image of what's in there." The healer leaned towards the screen a little, tilted her head, moved the wand a little more, and made a surprised noise. She moved the wand just a little more before she shifted in her chair with a smile.

"So here's the baby," she pointed out with her finger, drawing a circle around the blob that was meant to be the shape of a baby. "Looks healthy, perfectly normal growth rate, which is good."

She smiled and moved her hand to the other side of the screen, circling her finger around another blob. "And here, here is baby number two."

Everyone's eyes widened.

"…Two?" Padmé asked.

The healer nodded with an excited giggle. "Yes, two!"

Anakin sat back in his chair, eyes wide and he processed what was just discovered. "Twins, are you kidding me?"

"No, it's very clear here." The healer pointed out each baby once more. "Baby one, baby two. And from what I can tell, one is a girl, and the other is a boy."

"It seems you two were double as successful as we thought." Sabé grinned. "Which one is which?!"

"Baby one is the girl, baby two is the boy." Again the healer pointed out the separate babies, clarifying the different parts of the babies that told their genders.

"Force…We're getting both…at the same time…" Padmé said, a little stunned, then she smiled, "Good thing there are four of us to help raise these babies, and Ani's mother for the first few months."

Anakin smiled. "Twins... I don't know how, but I can't say I'm unhappy with the results."

Less fighting over who gets to hold a baby when they come. Obi-Wan eagerly typed and tugged Anakin's sleeve so he could read it out loud since everyone's eyes were glued to the image of the growing twins.

Anakin read what Obi-Wan had typed. "That's true. More baby love to go around."

Obi-Wan smiled.
Humming a soft tune to herself, Shmi walked around the royal gardens, picking fresh herbs for a recipe she planned on trying out for Obi-Wan. It was actually her own recipe, but Naboo didn't have the same herbs as Tattooine did, so she had done some research and was confident that the substitutions she came up with would work.

From a distance, one line guard watched her with sharp eyes, dark thoughts running through his mind as he knew this was the best opportunity he was going to get to carry out his plan.

He watched as Shmi set down her basket and knelt in the grass as she bent over to pick some herbs that grew very low to the ground. Vulnerable and unsuspecting. He closed in, moving silently through the garden with an intense stare. He pulled out his vibroblade as he got within fifty meters of her.

She didn't notice until he was already too close. Sensing that she wasn't alone, she straightened up to turn and smile at the man, only for her lips to fall when she spotted the raised blade.

"What—what are you—no, don't!" she cried out, turning to try and scramble away and onto her feet at the same time.

Juris brought the blade down quickly, shouting as he did so while his eyes burned molten gold.

Anakin laughed out of happiness with Padmé, Sabé, and Obi-Wan. And then the hairs on the back of his neck prickled, a sinking feeling rising in his gut. His smile disappeared quickly, his eyes widened, and he shot up from his chair. A second later he was running out the door and to the gardens where he felt his mother suddenly go into distress. He feared for her life as he sprinted to her. He knew when she was upset about something, but this felt different. This felt life-threatening, and he didn't like it.

"Ani?" Padmé called out after him, gaining no response as he was already too far away.

Shmi had fallen, the blade scraping her side, but missing anything vital. Only a little blood drawn. She rolled over, reaching up to try and grab her attacker's wrist and stop the second attempt as she screamed out for help.

Juris growled as he tried to swipe at Shmi with his blade. He seemed to only be focused on one task, unaware of his surroundings.

That was how Anakin was able to storm in and shove the guard away using the Force. The blond, now very angry charged at the guard and shoved him up against a nearby wall by the neck. "What do you think you're doing?" he screamed at the deranged guard. "Don't you dare lay a hand on her!"

"The next opportunity I have I will get rid of Skywalker's mother." The guard said automatically, as if repeating something.
Shmi gasped and pushed herself up. And clutching her bleeding side.

Anakin lowered his eyebrows. "Were you hired to do what you did?"

"The next opportunity I have I will get rid of Skywalker's mother, even if it means I die." He responded again.

"It—it's like he's in a trance…" Shmi said as she got to her feet, hissing in pain.

"Someone manipulated him… his mind is a mess." Anakin let go of the man's throat but still held him tight by the arms.

"Looks like you need some help." Qui-Gon said, walking out into the garden, "I had Ahsoka take over the post so Obi-Wan is still protected, don't worry." He added before Anakin could question him. "I'll take this young man for questioning, and I'd suggest you help your dear mother. She's injured."

"Thanks," Anakin muttered as he handed the guard over to Qui-Gon. He hurried to his mother and checked her over. "Come on, let's get you to see a healer."

"Yes, this wound stings…" she said as she leaned against him, still keeping pressure on her side.

"If it helps any, I do have some good news for you once we get to the healer." Anakin smiled as he pulled one of her arms over her shoulder and helped her walk.

"I do like good news."

"You'll really like this good news. It's about the baby."

"I remember she was having another baby appointment. I thought of joining you, but thought Obi-Wan would like a Nabooian-variant on my desert-flower soup…wanted to make it best I could for him."

"I think he'd like that a lot. I'd like some too if I can get any."

"Well, we'll see if I can after the healer takes a look at my side…" she looked down, pulling her blood-covered hand away from the cut to show him.

Anakin looked at the wound and sighed. "It's okay, we'll get you fixed up soon…"

"I've been through worse, don't look so…worried…" she muttered before feeling dizzy and slumping heavily against her son.

"Mom!" Anakin grunted slightly while looking over his mother. "Okay, sorry, but I need to get you to that healer now." He picked her up and carried her in his arms all the way back to the medical wing.

"It feels like I'm burning inside…" she hissed, "I don't feel good, Ani…"
Anakin sighed. "Well, at least she's still alive. Healers think that the blade she was injured with might have been poisoned."

"So they have to flush her system to be sure?" she nodded in understanding, rubbing his back. "First Obi-Wan... now your mother... maybe you are the ultimate target of whomever's doing all this..."

"I feel like I'm bringing a lot of bad luck to Naboo." Anakin shook his head.

"It's not you." Sabé soothed, "It's someone who doesn't like you, and we need to figure out who that is. I doubt the guard who attacked your mother is responsible. He's newer and it really doesn't seem like something he could mastermind." She sighed and sat down in the chair closest to where Anakin stood, "I'd hate to trigger any bad memories Obi-Wan has so soon as we have been trying to keep him happy and healing, but maybe it's time to ask him if he knows anything... who attacked him and why...

The king hesitated. "I don't want to hurt him... Especially with memories he's not ready to relive."

"I know, but if what happened to him and what almost happened to your mother is connected... do you really want this person or people to continue to act freely?"

"I don't, but it's only been a week since Obi-Wan woke up. He still can't talk and he barely gets out of bed yet because he's still so weak."

"Which is why I didn't want to suggest it. I care about him, too. He's a good friend of mine, and I know that the fact that he, himself, hasn't brought up the subject means that mentally he likely isn't strong enough to face it yet. But we have others to think of as well. Padmé, the twins, you, me, Obi-Wan, your mother... none of us are really safe right now, and this attack on your mother is proof of that."

"He's not ready, you know that." Anakin started to sound a little defensive, though truthfully he knew what had to be done. He was just in denial only to keep Obi-Wan safe.

"I'll leave it to you to decide, but consider it... or we may need to request more help from the Jedi."

Anakin sighed. "Okay... I'll consider it. I'll talk to him about it too. I want him to agree to this."

She nodded, "Do what you feel is best, but let us know so we can get more trusted protection here if you decide to wait."

"I will." The king looked off in the direction his mother was. "I hope we find out why all these attacks are happening soon. I don't want to lose anyone I love..."

Obi-Wan found himself alone for the first time since he woke up safe on Naboo, and the solitude was putting him on edge. Once again he felt helpless, just waiting for heavy footsteps to break the silence, promising pain. It was mid-day, and despite the sun shining through the open windows, it felt like everything was growing darker, threatening to swallow him.

There was a soft knock on the door to the grand royal bedroom before the Jedi Qui-Gon popped his head in. "Pardon me," he apologized. "I couldn't help but notice your Force signature feels very
stressed." He stepped inside. "Are you feeling well?"

Obi-Wan's wide, fearful eyes snapped up to look at the Jedi. His irises almost trembling as they moved over the tall figure, lingering on the lightsaber upon the man's hip. He let out a whimper.

Qui-Gon paused. "It's okay, I'm not going to hurt you. You can trust me."

He shook his head, hand flying up to the scar crossing his throat as he pressed himself back into the pillows that helped him sit up comfortably in the bed.

"I really have no intentions of hurting you. I just wanted to see if you were okay, that's all, because you're a distressed about something."

Obi-Wan whimpered again. The rational part of his mind knew that this was the Jedi that he'd been told about, who was there to protect him, but the man also had the same type of weapon he'd painfully had learned to fear, and that fear was winning out over everything else.

Without taking his eyes off the lightsaber, he reached to the side, feeling around for his datapad. Once he located it, he managed to type out quickly, and with a few uncaring typos; No lasreswarfs!

Qui-Gon looked down at his lightsaber, and he unhooked it from his belt, setting it on a nearby table. "There, is that better?"

Obi-Wan gave a small nod, relaxing just a little.

"Your stress level has gone down a lot just now." Qui-Gon hummed. "Interesting."

The door opened back up, Anakin walking in looking tired and ready for some personal time with his lover. However, when he stepped in, he paused, seeing Qui-Gon alone with the redhead.

"Uh… I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" Anakin asked.

"No, I was just checking in on Mister Kenobi here. His stress levels were rather high for a bit." Qui-Gon bowed. "I can leave if you would like."

"Yes, if you would. I need to talk to Obi-Wan about something."

"Of course." The Jedi made his way out the room. "I'll be just outside if you need me."

Biting his lip, Obi-Wan started typing; What happened? Is everything okay? No one tells me anything anymore.

Anakin sighed as he sat on the edge of the bed. "Sorry, I don't want to worry or scare you." He reached forward to grab Obi-Wan's hand. "But… I wanted to talk to you about the time you were missing… like what you experienced."

Obi-Wan seized up, his body stiff again as somewhere in the back of his mind he heard it again. The cruel laughter he so often heard escaping Maul's lips. 'Why?' he mouthed.

"Well… It's just that my mom was attacked recently, by one of your men… And she was poisoned. Everyone I love is being attacked, and it makes me uneasy."

Obi-Wan pulled back, closing his eyes and taking a few deep breaths before he began to slowly type, one character at a time.

Was it Titum or Juris?
Slowly, he slid the pad over off his lap to Anakin.

Anakin read the names, then he looked up at the redhead. "It was Juris… It was like he was under some sort of spell. He wasn't himself, I don't think."

Obi-Wan swallowed and closed his eyes again. Simply sitting there so long, that Anakin almost would have assumed he'd drifted off. But finally he moved to take back his pad and typed slowly again.

_They were there that night with another, speaking of treason…against you…against me…_

"Both Titum and Juris? But why? What could they gain from treason?"

Obi-Wan shrugged; _I don't remember everything from that night… glowing yellow eyes, anger… fear and a lack of air… I was… floating, I think._

"Were Titum and Juris the ones to kidnap you?"

_Titum was pleased, I think… but the other man… he was so familiar but I can't place him. He sent me away._ He typed, feeling his throat tighten.

Anakin squeezed Obi-Wan's hand. "It's okay, I'm here for you. You won't get hurt. We don't have to talk about this any more if you don't want."

_I couldn't stay strong for you._ He typed out before dropping the pad and burying his face into Anakin's shoulder.

Anakin sighed, wrapping his arms around Obi-Wan, holding him tight. "I'm sorry we didn't find you sooner…"

With a whimper, he pulled Anakin in tight with his lone hand. It hadn't been his fault. Anakin could only do so much with so little information. But he? He'd stupidly pressed his luck over and over again until he'd lost part of himself completely. If he hadn't—maybe then he'd be the same strong man he had been before. The man Anakin had fallen in love with.

"It's okay..." Anakin nuzzled into the redhead. "You know I still love you. Just because you couldn't stay strong doesn't mean I love you less."

Obi-Wan nodded. That fact was the only thing keeping him happy a lot of the time. Though news of the twins also helped. But without Anakin, he wasn't sure he'd be able to continue on.

Anakin pulled back slightly and pulled Obi-Wan into a gentle kiss. His hands held gently onto the older man's sides.

Obi-Wan kissed back, almost timidly compared to the kisses they had shared before, but there was also a desperation to be there, to stay there pressed up against Anakin.

"Don't be shy," Anakin whispered, running his hands around and up Obi-Wan's back, pulling him closer. "You can trust me."

_'I trust you,' Obi-Wan thought, hoping Anakin would pick up on it again, 'I trust you and don't want you to go.'_

Anakin went in for another kiss, deeper this time with a hint of something more than just love. _'I won't leave you.'_
'I wish I had both my hands right now.' Obi-Wan thought as he slipped more comfortably into the kiss with only one complete arm to hold Anakin back with.

'You'll have your other one soon.' Anakin replied while his hands rested at Obi-Wan's hips.

'Are you here for the rest of the night, or will you go visit your mother again?' Obi-Wan's thoughts asked.

'Depends. Do you want me here tonight?' Anakin moved his lips to Obi-Wan's neck and throat, letting out a soft moan.

'I don't like being alone...I start to think he is near...'

'I should have had you stay with my mom and I last night. I'm sorry.'

'Sorry, I...just am not ready to be alone after...'

'I know.' Anakin pulled back, choosing to physically speak. "I'll stay here tonight with you, okay?"

Obi-Wan nodded, 'Thank you, Anakin.'

Anakin smiled. "You don't have to worry about me leaving. I'm staying with you until you're back to your normal self."

'I don't know if I can go back to normal...'

"As normal as you can be after all that's happened to you... You'll be happy again one day, I promise."

'I'm not so sure...' he thought with a sigh.

To be continued...

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the unusually long wait for an update, I've been sick and unable to concentrate on editing anything to post. I'm not at 100% yet, but I'm getting there and able to edit again.
Titum paced his room, his heart hammering in his chest. Juris had been caught. Typical. The younger guard had been sloppy, even though he was almost under Titum's full control. Everything was a mess. No one was dead yet, and Titum felt himself slipping further and further from success. He was too far gone.

His worries only cemented deeply as he heard a pounding on his door. "Open up in the name of the King!" a voice demanded.

For a second he considered jumping out the window. It was a quick and easy way out, but he had hardly anymore time to think about it as a second round of pounding on his door prevented him from acting any further on the thought. The door burst open and in came several guards with blaster pointed at him and a Jedi with the green blade aimed at his throat.

Titum swallowed as he raised his hands in surrender.

"You are under arrest for contributing to the abduction and crimes against Captain Kenobi." Dixti said, "You have the right to a fair trial."

"I'm surprised I get one…"

And just like that it was over for Titum. He didn't bother fighting capture as his hands were cuffed behind his back. He should have known that trying to work with a Sith Lord would have ended up with him behind bars, and that were exactly where he was going until he was put on trial along with Juris.

"You could always avoid a trial by pleading guilty to all charges. You'll have plenty of time to think it over. Our King and Queen themselves will be confronting you, should you wish to share any further information."

Titum sighed as he was shoved out of his room roughly. "No point in me pleading not guilty. I knew this was coming."

"You disgust me…after all Kenobi has done for all us guards? He's always been there for all of us, and you…why?" She asked as she escorted him along with the other guards down to where he'd be held.

"Some people were just born to be the villain of the story."

"No, you had a choice. You chose to do this."

"Juris didn't have a choice," he said flatly.

"What do you mean?"

He looked up at Dixti with a blank expression. "I influenced him with the Force."

"You can do that?"

"Of course I can. I'm Force sensitive, just like your King."
"Then it seems I should make sure he can't slip free." Qui-Gon stated.

"I would watch your king." Titum hissed. "Jedi can't be trusted around others who are Force sensitive."

"Claims the traitor." Dixti pointed out.

"You call me a traitor, yet I've been here years longer than you've been here. Even longer than Kenobi. How am I the traitor if I've stayed here all these years and never harmed anyone?"

"You harmed Obi-Wan. His blood and pain is on your hands."

"I didn't do any damage to him. Someone else was in charge of torturing him."

"You put him there."

"I did nothing to him," Titum repeated. He sighed as he felt the eyes of every passing person on him. "There are others involved in Kenobi's kidnapping, I hope you know that."

"And maybe if you talk, the Queen and King will be merciful."

"Don't worry, I'll talk, but to them only. You won't be getting anymore out of me."

"I don't need you to." She huffed, "You caused enough pain, and I'll never forgive you for what you have done and the pain it has caused others—particularly my husband!"

Titum rolled his eyes, refusing to speak any more on the situation until the king and queen decided to talk to him.

Finally, they arrived down in a room where he would be questioned. A ray shield stretched across the center of the room, separating Titum from where the King and Queen sat. In the corner of the royals' side, and by the door, sat Obi-Wan himself in a hoverchair, the Jedi Padawan next to him. He certainly appeared to be only a shadow of his former self, like he wanted to blend into the walls rather than be the strong guard he had once been, leading the questioning of any criminals that were taken into custody. He looked pale, and his scars looked angry red against the muted color of his skin.

Titum sat down in the chair presented for him, or rather he was shoved into it. He shot a glare at the guard who tightened his hand cuffs behind the chair, then he looked across the table at the royals. He avoided any eye contact with Obi-Wan.

"Guard Titum, you stand accused of treason within the ranks of the Naboo Royal Guard, and implications that plans were to extend further to the royal family." Padmé stated, her hand settled under her slight baby bump in a protective gesture. "Do you wish to plead anything or speak out before a trial date is set?"

"I don't have a need to plead not guilty. I know what I did." He leaned forward. "But I'm not the mastermind behind all those plans."

The news didn't seem to surprise the two royals; no doubt Obi-Wan had mentioned Sidious when he finally opened his big mouth about what happened the night he disappeared.

The queen leaned forward, "And will you name this mastermind for us?"

For a moment, Titum's expression turned slightly fearful. He glanced around, hoping the man in
question wouldn't be around. Then again, did it really matter? He was going to die anyways.

"A Sith Lord... Lord Sidious. But you know him by a different name."

Behind him, the Jedi stiffened.

What name do we know him by?" Padmé asked.

Again Titum paused. "Senator Palpatine," he responded quietly. The man clearly still had some sort of emotional control over the guard, even if that control had slipped with how easily the man named him.

That surprised the Queen and she suddenly stood up, walking over to the wall with her back to the others as she took in the information. The man was like a grandfather to her. Her only family after her actual family had died in an accident when she was so young... She had been ready to name him the godfather to her children, and yet...

"That can't be true..." she whispered.

"Are you sure it's him?" Anakin asked in a careful voice.

"Of course I'm sure," Titum replied. "You think I wouldn't know the man who commanded me for years? The man who I trained under to complete his plans?"

'I knew I had a bad feeling about him...' Obi-Wan's thoughts drifted to Anakin.

Anakin sighed, and he rubbed his face with his hands. "Would Palpatine know if you spilled all this information?"

"He's either on the run right now or on his way to kill someone close to you. I hope you didn't leave your dear mother alone."

"Padawan." Qui-Gon interjected, "Stay here." He commanded her before he disappeared through the door on their side of the divided room.

Anakin panicked, watching Qui-Gon go, then he looked back at Titum. "Why are you doing this? What did you hope to gain?"

Titum sighed, finally looking over at Obi-Wan. "I was going to become the captain. With that position I would have input into the royal affairs and have a say in whether we keep fighting in the war or pull out of it. Of course I would keep us in, because that's what Palpatine wanted. He wants the war to continue and the Sith would win the war. No Republic, no Separatists, no Jedi. Only the Sith would rule, and he would have dominion over the entire galaxy. I was training to be his apprentice, as was another, Maul. He was the one who did all the damage to Kenobi."

At the mention of Maul, Obi-Wan visibly stiffened and tried shrinking into himself with a whimper.

"Palpatine and Maul are the ones you want more than me, but I was involved this whole plot. I planned out both Kenobi's and your mom's deaths. But Juris messed up, and I failed my master. Even if you don't give me the death penalty, Palpatine will end me anyways."

"Not if we get him first." Ahsoka said, "And my master is after him as we speak!"

"You don't know that," Titum argued. "I told you either he was fleeing the system or he was
attacking Skywalker's mother."

"You better hope it's the first," Anakin growled out with a panicked tone.

"I can't believe it…why would Sheev…he's always been there for me after my family…" Padmé muttered.

"Not everyone is who they seem to be. You didn't know your husband was Force sensitive until you went to the falls with him for the first time."

"Being Force sensitive isn't a crime!" she snapped, "Doing all this…this is!"

"Him being Force sensitive is what caused all of this!" He snapped back at her.

"So my husband's gift in the Force is so much that it can turn a man who I always saw as a grandfather to turn on the republic and Naboo? Anakin has nothing to do with this!"

"Anakin has everything to do with this!" Titum stop up from his chair, his hand cuffs snapping as he swung his arms around front and slammed his hands on the table. "Your husband is the most powerful being in the galaxy! He has the power to stop this whole war or urge it on until every living thing in our known universe is dead and he is left as the only one left alive, free to rule the universe the way he wants. He is a literal god! And he's going to train under my master so he can teach his full potential!"

Anakin's eyes widened more and more the more Titum went on, his heart racing in his chest.

Dixti and the other guards moved in, trying to get Titum back into the seat. Their shouting causing the room to fill with nothing but noise that didn't quiet until Obi-Wan's chair hovered from the corner and he slammed his pad against the ray shield right in front of Titum's face. The contact of the pad causing the shield to spark and hiss.

Anakin would never join a cause for evil!

Obi-Wan glared at Titum, his brows low.

"You don't know the power he possesses! He can hurt anyone with a snap of his fingers, I dare him to do it to me!" Titum fought against the guards, quickly feeling his anger rise as he suddenly didn't feel ready to die.

Anakin had to step back from the table, feeling the Force suddenly shift very dark and his mother suddenly in great pain. He started hyperventilating, backing up until he was against the wall, staring wide-eyed at the guard on the other side of the ray shield.

"Anakin?" Padmé looked at him.

He shook his head, eyes glittering as they grew wet. "Something's wrong…"

"Go to her." Padmé whispered.

Anakin said nothing more as he rushed out of the room.

"You coward! Come back here and face your enemy!" Titum screeched as he banged against the ray shield, burning himself each time and sending the guards on him flying with the Force. "Your fate is to rule the galaxy, Skywalker!"

"No." Padmé drew a blaster from her skirts and pointed it at Titum, "No, his fate is to be a father
and a good man of Naboo.”

"You know nothing of what the Force wants. You're not Force sensitive, so how can you claim to know what the Force wants with him? He has a destiny far bigger than you, Kenobi, of that child of his. He will rise above it all and lead us all to glory!"

"Stand down!" she demanded.

"Why should I? Why should I fight? Why should I stand down? Does any of this really matter if I'm just going to die anyways?" Titum finally stopped fighting, letting himself being shoved back into his chair, a glare directed towards Padmé. "This has gone on long enough. If you're going to shoot me, aim for my head."

"I don't kill unless I have to. It is the way of Naboo not to execute even criminals unless we have to." She reminded him.

Titum shrugged. "Then put me in a cell already. I'm done talking."

"Ahsoka, will you help escort him to his cell?" Padmé asked and the Jedi nodded, moving out and around to do so.

Titum kept a strong glare on the queen as he was escorted out, then he only looked at the floor the rest of the way to his cell.

Anakin sprinted as fast as his legs could carry him. Already he had suffered through his mother getting hurt when he wasn't around, and he had hoped it wouldn't ever happen again. He was wrong, and that scared him. His mother was in the medical ward and she was getting hurt. It sent up a red flag for the young king. Then there was the issue that he was supposed to rule the galaxy, according to Titum. He wanted nothing of the sort. Anakin just wanted his mother to be okay, for Obi-Wan to recover fully and smile once more, and for both Padmé and the twins to be safe during the birth. So many people Anakin wanted to protect, and yet it felt that everything was falling apart around him as the truth came out.

When he reached his mother's room, Anakin was stunned to see Qui-Gon and Palpatine locked in a vicious lightsaber battle, and so close to his weak mother.

Qui-Gon was trying to push Palpatine back away from Shmi, but the man's skill was seemingly matched and Palpatine was keeping the fight in close.

Shmi was watching everything with wide, frightened eyes as she clutched her shoulder which had been pierced by a lightsaber and ripped downwards, nearly cutting off her arm. Her scared eyes drifted to him, "Anakin!"

Anakin stood stunned in the doorway, looking back and forth between his mother and the lightsaber battle. He knew he had to get his mother out of there and to safety, but how he would do it without hurting himself or his mother more, he didn't know. Finally he made up his mind. If he got hurt, so be it. His mother was more important in that moment. He rushed forward to his mother, using the Force to shove away both Jedi and Sith so he had a small window of time to grab Shmi and run.
"My king! This Jedi just up and attacked your ailing mother!" Palpatine said after he found himself flung back against the wall with the Jedi.

Anakin halted, stepping closer to his mother as he looked at Palpatine. "But… Jedi aren't evil! How can I trust you now?"

"I was protecting your mother!" he claimed. "Ask your mother, it was his saber that cut her!"

"A sacrifice to her arm to save her life from this Sith, I assure you." Qui-Gon stated.

The king looked back at his pained mother, examining the injury. Angry, he looked back at both Qui-Gon and Palpatine. "This is exactly why I never wanted any Jedi or any other Force users here! People I love get hurt when the Force is involved. I don't want to rule the galaxy! I just want to live with my family!"

"If I wasn't here to help, she'd already be dead." Qui-Gon pointed out, "My padawan and I are here to protect those important to you."

"I don't know what's going on." Shmi said, "I was sleeping off the last dose of antidote to the poison in my system when I awoke to pain, these two standing over me and beginning to fight."

"What was the conversation before the fight started," Anakin asked all three.

"There was none. Pain and then I opened my eyes to flashes of red and green…"

"I ran straight here to find Palpatine standing over your mother, ready to plunge his saber into her heart. I acted quickly to stop that." Ui-Gon said.

"Lies!" Palpatine hissed.

"Why did you want to kill my mother?!" Anakin took an aggressive step towards Palpatine.

"No." The man's voice twisted darkly, "Don't trust the Jedi. Only I can help you!"

Anakin's face twisted into an awkward expression, the Force starting to close around his throat. "How can I trust you when your apprentice just ousted you?"

Realizing he wasn't going to talk his way out of this, Palpatine shrugged and sighed, "Well, there is always your child." He said before blue lightning shot out of his fingers at Anakin.

Anakin cried out as he fell to the floor, the lightning shooting through his body and causing him to convulse uncontrollably. Never had he felt such physical pain at one time, and it scared him.

"Ani!" Shmi screamed in horror before turning a glare on the old man ass she got to her unsteady feet, "Stay away from my son!" she hissed, a pulse exploding from where she stood in the Force and knocking the Sith back hard enough for everyone to hear the cracking of bones.

Anakin gasped as he suddenly wasn't in pain anymore. He caught his breath as he looked up at his mother in surprise. "Mom… you can use the Force too?"

"This…has never happened before." Shmi said, stunned by her own ability.

"Some people go through life not knowing they have some connection to the Force until they are desperate to protect that which they love most." Qui-Gon said as he scrambled to disarm Palpatine and secure him before he shook off the blow he'd been dealt.
Slowly, Anakin rose to his feet, looking at Palpatine. "I want to ask again… why did you want to kill my mom?"

The man said nothing. Only growling in pain and anger.

The blond sighed. "I don't understand why this is happening. I just wanted to have a happy family when I moved here and married Padmé. I didn't want all this Force nonsense. There was a reason why I kept it hidden for years."

"You'll have the peace you want once this man and his followers are taken care of." Qui-Gon promised.

"I'll have my peace once all the Jedi are off Naboo as well. I don't want anymore Force activity here unless it's from me, my mom, or possibly my children." Anakin sighed as he turned to his mother.

"Ani, are you okay?" she asked, turning to cup his face in her hands.

"I should be asking you that. The wound on your shoulder is pretty deep... Put your arm down. It probably shouldn't be moved too much." He helped her put her injured arm back down to her side.

"You were electrocuted, Ani. I'm your mother. I'm going to worry about you more than anything I suffered."

"I left the interrogation because I felt you get hurt. I was afraid Palpatine was actually trying something, and unfortunately I was right."

"Thank you for coming to save me, my darling boy, but I want you to get looked at by the healer, too.

Anakin nodded. "Don't worry, I will."

"Good boy. Now I'm sure the Jedi will take care of that man, and we'll call for the healer—"

"She's dead." The Sith hissed out as he was picked up by the Jedi, "Killed her on my way to you."

Anakin glared at Palpatine. "Get him out of here now. Let him rot in jail. He deserves a slow death."

"I—I'll try to call the healer anyway…" Shmi said, pressing the call button that had fallen to the floor at some point.

"Someone will come," Anakin muttered as he turned back to his mother. "I'll stay with you until someone comes. Your arm really isn't in a very good shape."

"No, and the adrenalin I was running on earlier is wearing off and making me aware of the pain…"

"Why don't you sit back down?" He guided her to carefully sit back on the bed, careful not to move her arm too much. He sighed as he sat next to her.

She sat down, holding her shoulder once more as she looked up at Anakin, "What all happened?"

"We got Titum, and he was fine with the beginning of the interrogation, then he just went insane on us and… He claimed that my destiny was to rule the galaxy."

Shmi blinked at that, "You're right, that's insane. You are no more special than any of us, and your
future is what you make of it."

"I just want to be with my family, that's it." Anakin leaned against his mother carefully. "I'm happy with my life here on Naboo..."

"Then that is your future." She said, leaning back against her pillows with a small hiss of pain.

Finally a healer walked in, a different one from the original healer. Anakin sighed, knowing that the old one was indeed dead. Regardless, he moved out of the way so the new healer could work on his mother.

"What happened?" she asked, a bit shaken. "Our head healer I—I found her dead, and now..."

"Senator Palpatine killed her," Anakin said grimly. "He had no reason... All he wanted was power, and he was killing innocent people so he could get what he wanted."

"Th-the Senator did this? Our own senator?"

Anakin nodded. "He's worse than we all thought."

"Is the Queen alright? She had been...close to him." The healer said as she got to work, removing Shmi's sleeve so she had a better view of the wound.

"She's troubled by the news... I don't know how else she feels now. I rushed to my mom so I could help her."

"That senator—or, former, I would assume—also sent lightning into my son. Please also look at him after you finish with me." Shmi requested.

"I'm fine, Mom. You're the one who needs the most attention."

"She'll be taken care of first, don't worry. But humor your mother and let me look you over before you hurry off, my King."

Anakin sighed. "Alright. But I should get back to Padmé soon. I'm sure she's in need of some comfort..."

To be continued...
Chapter 21

Chapter by bigwolfpup, TiBun

Obi-Wan sat out on a balcony, looking out over the horizon. He was a changed man after everything had happened to him. Quieter, often found lost in thought.

It had been months since his return to Naboo, he'd been fitted with prosthetic legs and an arm, and with the help of a physical trainer, he'd relearned how to walk, though he still stumbled at times. He'd also not returned to work as his mind healer hadn't yet cleared him to resume command of the royal guard. But truthfully, Obi-Wan wasn't sure he wanted to return in such a way. After the trials of Palpatine, Titum, and the other members of the royal staff who had all been discovered to have been working for Palpatine, the redhead had assigned Dixti as Capitan during his long healing process, and she was frankly doing a wonderful job at it.

Not that he wanted to stay lazy and not working. No, he wanted to work again, just something more calm. His reoccurring nightmares were enough action for him, as well as a constant reminder that the man who haunted them was still out there. They had placed an impressive bounty on the man called Darth Maul, but there was little more they could do as long as the Zabrack stayed far from Naboo. Obi-Wan didn't know what would happen if he ever saw his captor again, and he didn't want to ever find out. But he also knew that he'd never feel completely safe until Maul was no longer freely roaming the galaxy.

He sighed and shifted to lay on his back, looking up at the clouds lazily drifting past in the deep blue sky, a small smile quirking his lips as his mind drifted away from his uncertainties and towards, well, frankly they were his family. Padmé who was looking ready to burst. There was a month left to her pregnancy, but the twins had her on permanent bed-rest until they were ready to greet the galaxy. He looked forward to meeting them and holding them close. Maybe he'd become their nanny as well as their uncle. A life where all he had to do was care for two tiny lives already so dear to him. That would be nice.

Padmé's bed-rest left her in the care of the healer, Sabé, and Queen Shmi who each took turns at her side, helping her, leaving his Anakin to deal with any official royal affairs, which kept him quite busy most days. But Obi-Wan didn't mind it so much. The four of them had decided to publically announce the extent of their relationships. The news had been met with some back-lash from some older nobles who felt that while Naboo was open to most romantic dynamics, that the royal family should stay purely monogamous. But the majority of Naboo's people were supportive of their Queen and King's choice to bring two others into the marriage purely out of the love they shared. It made it so they could openly show their affection, and Obi-Wan had to admit it felt nice not to hide his true feelings for Anakin. To be able to get close to him outside of locked doors, to dance close with him, to kiss him…to hold and be held… Before his capture he wouldn't have minded the secrecy of their relationship in the long-term, but things were different, and he was glad for the secret to end.

Inside, Padmé slept quietly, exhausted just by laying in bed with twins in her womb. The twins had proven to be quite the kickers. Next to her bed, Sabé also napped. There was little for them to do while Padmé was on bed rest and Anakin was taking care of the kingdom as best as he could.

A shadow fell over Obi-Wan's face, accompanied by soft footsteps, no boots on the feet they came from.

"Shouldn't you be trying to get all your senators in a row?" Obi-Wan asked, not bothering to look at
who cast the shadow—he knew through the strange bond that had formed between them that it was Anakin. His voice was gruff, permanent damage to his vocal cords had changed its tone when he was finally able to use them again, no longer requiring him to rely on a datapad or Anakin to speak for him.

"We have the afternoon off surprisingly." Anakin sat down next to Obi-Wan, sporting a bit of scruff on his face that he had let grow since Palpatine had been imprisoned.

"That's rare. Did you just lock them in a closet to shut them up?" he chuckled, shifting over on the chaise to give Anakin space to join him.

Anakin chuckled. "No, they actually suggested we take the afternoon off. We're making great progress surprisingly." He leaned closer to Obi-Wan and kissed his cheek.

Humming, Obi-Wan turned his head to catch Anakin's lips, "Final peace treaties to end the war are finally going to be signed?"

"It looks like it, yeah." Anakin smiled, resting his head on Obi-Wan's shoulder.

"Good…the galaxy needs less violence in it..." He sighed and pushed himself up before guiding Anakin to sit against the arm rest of the chaise so that he could curl up with him more easily. "I've been thinking more on what I want to do after I get the clear from my mind healer to return to work."

"Don't want to be the captain anymore?"

"No." he shook his head, "I don't think I'd fit that position anymore. Even with my prescribed medications and therapy with my mind healer, I still have triggers that affect me far too much. I could freeze when it matters most."

Anakin sighed lightly. "Yeah, and Dixti is doing a fantastic job in your stead. She's enjoying it too I think. You chose well."

"I trust her with the safety of you, the twins, and everyone. She was the best choice." He agreed. "But the choice not to return to that position also leaves me lost as to what I'll do."

"Well, is there something you've found that you enjoy doing while not protecting everyone?"

He shook his head, "I just want a peaceful life with our family. But I also don't want to live without contributing."

"I'm sure you will be helping with the twins a lot, so you'll be busy still."

"I thought of that too…if I were to take place of a nanny…watching the twins when you and Padmé are unable to…but would you want me to do that? If something happens and I don't take my meds one morning my depression and anxiety and everything hits hard and can mess with my ability to function..."

"If you want to be a nanny, I'm sure Padmé would be okay with it. I mean, I am, and when she and I get busy or have an emergency meeting, we'd need someone to watch the twins, and you and Sabé are out first picks."

"You'd trust me?" Obi-Wan asked with surprise.

"Of course. Why wouldn't I?"
Obi-Wan shrugged, "It's your son and daughter we're talking about. I know you'd want them to be in safe, dependable, and trustworthy hands."

"Obi… To me, their just as much your kids as they are mine. I view this whole thing as them getting four parents to love and take care of them. Obviously Padmé and I are the main parents, but I want you to feel like they're your kids as well."

"I never thought I'd be a father…"

"Is it okay that I want you to be one to the twins?"

"Be 'Daddy Obi' instead of 'Uncle Obi'?"

"Yeah…"

"Can I?" Obi-Wan asked with pink in his cheeks.

"Yes, Obi-Wan, you can be a dad with me."

"I'd like that." He smiled, lacing their fingers together.

Anakin smiled. "I'm glad. I think you'll make a great dad."

"Well, it's not like I could be a mother." Obi-Wan joked.

The king laughed. "You're not wrong."

"But don't let that stop you from trying to make me one tonight if you're up to it." He winked.

Anakin raised an eyebrow. "Feeling up to a little fun tonight?"

"You've waited so nicely for so long while I healed up and got used to these new limbs…it'd be nice to finally try going all the way with each other."

"I agree." Anakin held Obi-Wan closer and sighed. "I'm so glad you're alive still…"

"Even with all that is broken and changed about me? The nightmares that wake you up at night?" Obi-Wan had officially moved into Anakin's private rooms with him, so they always shared a bed, just as Padmé and Sabé always shared.

"Even with how you are now, I love every bit of you. Nothing can change that."

With a small smile, Obi-Wan nodded and reached up with his flesh hand to run his fingers through Anakin's short beard, "So what do you want to do on your afternoon of freedom?"

"I'm not sure. I know I want to check in with Padmé for a bit, but other than that… do you want to go for a ride?"

"I think that would be nice. And I believe your mother did some baking again. We could go steal some to offer up to Padmé…just in case she's in a grumpy mood when we arrive."

"I like that idea. Besides, I know she's still a month or so off from her due date, but she could go into labor any day now. So I don't want to go on too long a ride."

"Multiple-birth pregnancies for humans do tend to go into labor early." Obi-Wan nodded, "We'll stick close and take a holocomm. That way we can get back fast if something happens. I'm sure
Sabé or your mother would be quick to call."

Anakin nodded. "It hasn't really settled in yet that the twins will be here soon."

"I don't think it will until they are physically in your arms." Obi-Wan admitted, moving to get up.

"Yeah. But I mean it could be another month, it could be a couple weeks, hell, it could be a couple days. We're so close to having them."

"Or a couple of hours, even." Obi-Wan pointed out, "But I hope those two little ones wait a few weeks. The closer to the due date, the better for them health-wise."

Anakin nodded as he too got up. "You know, I can feel them in the Force. Their presence has gotten stronger every day. It's almost like I can predict when they might be born…"

"Okay, well do you feel we'd be safe going off for a ride today and not risk missing on the birth of your—our children?"

"Yeah, I don't feel they're ready to be born yet." Anakin chuckled. "Let's go on that ride, and then we can have cookies with Padmé and Sabé when we get back."

Obi-Wan nodded and offered a hand down to help Anakin up.

Anakin took Obi-Wan's hand with a smile. "So, to the falls and back?"

"If we can spend a little time alone there before we head back." He nodded.

"Deal. Some alone time will be nice."

"My mind healer has wanted me to go someplace quiet and calming. This should be good." Obi-Wan said, linking his arm with Anakin's.

"Well, tonight won't be so calming, so you better take advantage of the falls once we get there."

"Well I won't be telling my mind healer about tonight's activities, now would I? That's just between us two."

Anakin shrugged. "Well our relationship is public now." He smirked.

"That doesn't mean our sex life needs to be public."

"Of course. We've barely got one to talk about anyways."

"Well, that'll change tonight if everything goes to plan."

"We'll go easy tonight." Anakin paused and pulled Obi-Wan into a kiss.

"Take things slowly…romantically…test the waters, as it were." He hummed against his lips.

"Get to know the most intimate parts of each other." Anakin smiled and rested his forehead against Obi-Wan's.

Get to know exactly what we like together." Obi-Wan whispered back.

Anakin closed his eyes and took in a slow breath. 'Force, I don't know if I can wait until tonight…'

Obi-Wan's face colored, "Watch those thoughts, it's way too early…"
"We better go on our ride before we get too carried away."

"Yeah…” Obi-Wan popped up into a kiss, holding it before he pulled back and pulled Anakin along on their way to the stables, stopping to let Dixti know they were leaving for a ride.

In the stables, the two saddled up their mounts and headed out to the water falls, taking a slow pace as they rode, determined to simply enjoy their time together being away from the troubles of the galaxy. Anakin took in a deep breath of the fresh air, letting it out with a smile as he reached over for Obi-Wan's hand. "It's a beautiful day."

"Calm. A nice change from the storms we had yesterday."

"It's a bit humid, but not too much. Perfect day for a ride."

"…I've not been out to the falls or even a ride since our first kiss…” Obi-Wan reflected.

"I think it'll be appropriate if we kiss at least once while we're out here."

"Make it at least three times."

"It can be more than three if you want."

"I just want it to be more than one." Obi-Wan confessed.

"It'll be more than one, I promise."

"Good." He pulled his hand back to run his fingers through his hair to get it out of his face. It was getting long, but not quite long enough to pull back into a tail. "Has your mother said anything about your beard yet?"

"She said it makes me look older and more handsome. But that's what most mother's would say to their sons, right?"

"Some, yes, but some also are brutally honest when they dislike a choice their offspring makes, and some choose not to comment at all. I was hoping your mother approved because I quite like the look on you, and I get the feeling that if she didn't like it, you'd think about shaving it off again."

"Maybe." Anakin ran a hand over his chin with a thoughtful hum. "I'm still deciding if I like it. It's itchy."

"It'll stop being that way once you get used to it. Trust me. I felt the same way when I first grew mine—and now when I do shave, I feel…naked."

"Well, if it means anything, I like your new style."

"The hair or the new shape to the beard?" Obi-Wan asked.

"Both. A new style for a new way of life. I like it."

"I think I'll like it more once I can pull my hair back out of my face. Right now it's at an awkward length."

"Tuck it behind your ears. I think that'll help at least a little bit."

"It does, but I still want it to be a bit longer."
Anakin smiled. "Whatever you want. I'll love it anyways."

"I know you will. You already do with how you play with it when you think I'm asleep."

"I know you're awake when I do. Your breathing doesn't change until you're fully asleep, so I know when you're falling asleep with me touching your hair.

"And in the morning before you leave to go do your job as King?"

"I don't notice as much in the morning. I'm usually too tired."

"Well, you usually do play with my hair then, too. Then kiss my temple or cheek before you leave.

"I hate leaving, you know. I still worry some days that I'll wake up and find you gone again."

Obi-Wan gave his reigns a small tug to stop his mount, also coaxing Anakin's mount to also stop so he could lean over and kiss his lover, "I don't leave our private rooms at all after we settle in for the evening. Last time I disappeared because I left to go back to my old room, but never made it there because I walked into a conversation I wasn't meant to hear." He said in a low voice. It was the first time he'd chosen to speak about what happened on his own, apart from his mind healer, that was.

"You heard Titum and Juris planning with Palpatine," Anakin stated, putting names together with events. "They had to get rid of you once you heard what their plans were."

Obi-Wan nodded, sucking in a breath. "Yeah... I didn't know it was Palpatine. He had a hood shadowing his face. But he dragged me to him with the Force when I tried to run, and then choked me until I passed out...when I awoke I was somewhere in space, bound and left in the dark..."

"Almost everyone in this case has been taken care of. We're just trying to find Maul now..."

Obi-Wan took in a sharp breath, "...Yeah..."

"Sorry to bring up his name... Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I just...with everything he did to me..." He closed his eyes, trying to block out the memories as he took deep breaths like his mind healer taught him.

"You don't have to talk about it." Anakin reached over to rub Obi-Wan's shoulder gently.

"I don't think I'll ever be ready to confront that part of what happened...not even with my mind healer..." he sighed, opening his eyes. "He's a monster."

"It's okay, I'm here for you. He won't be taking you away ever again."

Obi-Wan nodded and took a deep breath, "I know. I'm home and safe, and we have a growing family together with the girls."

"And we'll have our twins soon. We'll be a big happy royal family."

"Mostly royal. Sabé and I aren't royals."

"Yes you are. You both are in relationships with royals, that ought to make you royals yourselves."

"Not until we officiate the extended marriage which would make Sabé and I both royal consorts. And Padmé didn't want to do that until at least a few months after the babies are born."
Anakin sighed. "Still, you're my future husband, and that makes you a royal in my eyes. You should be treated like one."

"I don't mind not being treated as such. What matters to me is that we get to be together."

"I do agree, but I want you to be treated nicely. You deserve it after the hell you were forced to go through."

"The castle staff are all as pleasant as ever. A few of the nobles…eh, they don't matter." Obi-Wan shrugged.

"If you're sure. I trust your judgment."

"After what I somehow survived, a few stuffy nobles calling me a whore is nothing."

"You're not even close to being what they call you. It's disgusting they call you that."

"Sabé and I both get called nasty, untrue things, but we have been getting through it together, and eventually they'll stop. Same with the rumors."

"I wish everyone saw our relationship the way we see it. We're all faithful, it's not like any of this was behind backs."

"Like I said, their opinions don't matter. We're happy the way our relationships are."

"I guess acceptance comes with time. The kingdom will realize we're happy eventually."

Obi-Wan nodded, flicking his reigns to continue forward along the path, "After a time, they will realize that Sabé and I change nothing when it comes to how Naboo is run. The most we could do is act as advisors to you and Padmé. We don't make any official decisions."

"Well, Padmé and I do let you know what's going on and let you give us feedback, so it's not like you're totally out of the loop." Anakin moved his mount forward again.

"And we give our honest opinions, but don't pressure you to make a choice based only on our opinions. They worry Sabé and I will only take over the government by using you and Padmé. Which is laughable only because, as it turned out, that had been very similar to what Palpatine had been planning."

Anakin took in a deep breath of the fresh air. "At least that's all over now. We don't have to worry about corruptions getting in the way of ending the war."

"Hopefully you're right."

"If I'm not, I'm going to scream. I can't stand this war any more."

"It'd be nice to be in peace and maybe go on a proper vacation as a family…"

"I can't wait until we take the twins to the falls for the first time. Let them splash in the water while we splash back at them."

"I meant off-planet. But yes, the Falls are a special place they should enjoy once they are big enough to sit up and splash."

"Maybe we can go to Coruscant, or maybe Alderaan."
"Someplace nice. Coruscant wouldn't get my vote."

"I've heard Alderaan is nice. Colder than here, but still nice."

"Think you can handle it, Lava-desert-boy? They have snow."

Anakin chuckled. "I think I can handle it now. I've had a while to get used to Naboo's cooler temperatures. I think if I went back to Mustafar now, I might start sweating the moment I step off of the starship."

"That's a bit surprising."

"How so?"

"Because you spent your whole life in the intense heat."

"I haven't lived in that heat for a while now. My body has gotten used to a lower atmospheric temperature."

"But you do cuddle very close at night. I assume it's partially for the warmth."

"Well, yeah. I like to be warm at night. You also happen to be warm, so I cuddle you to get warmer."

"We share a gigantic bed and only use a small portion of it." Obi-Wan chuckled.

"A large bed to share with someone is better than a large bed with no one to share it with."

"Well, little kids like to climb in with their parents so we'll likely sometimes also have one or two little ones joining us when they can walk and escape their own beds."

"I wouldn't mind that. As long as they're happy to crawl into bed with us."

"Usually it's because they have a bad dream or something."

"Or maybe they just want to be in bed with their dads."

"Or moms."

"Or all four of us."

"Yeah, or all of us."

"I hope the bed can handle our whole family," Anakin chuckled.

"In the royal suite it will. Those beds are big enough to fit six full grown human adults."

"Of course. Designed for the most amount of comfort for anyone, even if that includes six adults."

"Or one large family."

"It's crazy how large my family has grown just in this last year. Started with just my mom and I, now look at us."

"I was alone, and now I have you and the girls, soon the twins as well…a future mother-in-law…"

"Such a big family…" Anakin sighed happily, looking up at the slowly passing clouds.
"Our family." Obi-Wan agreed, reaching over to touch Anakin's cheek with the back of his curled finger.

Anakin smiled at his future husband, nothing but pure love in his gaze. "So, let's get to the falls and return to the castle. I'm sure the guards are nervous about us leaving for this amount of time."

"Dixti likely has someone tailing us at a distance, just in case. Far enough back so we have our privacy and freedom, but close enough to rush into action should something happen." Obi-Wan shrugged, "After all, she trained as a guard under me, and that's what I would have done once told any member of the royal family was going out on a private ride."

"I see. Well, still we don't want to be gone too long. Come on." Anakin flicked his reins to get his mount to move faster. "Hopefully you can handle a trot."

"I'm less worried about me and more worried about if I hurt my mount. I still have troubles with how strongly I'm gripping things with my robotic parts, including how I straddle."

"I'm sure you're mount will let you know if you squeeze too hard."

"I'd still feel bad."

"I know. You're far too kind for the rest of the galaxy to understand."

"I also love animals."

"I noticed that. I bet you'd have loads of pets if you lived on your own."

Obi-Wan chuckled, "I'll be the dad that brings home a tooka kitten for the twins…and myself."

"I wouldn't complain. The twins could have a companion that grows up with them."

"It'll teach them to be gentle, and responsibility just as much as provide them with another playmate."

"Giving the twins a pet sounds like a great idea now. I wonder if Padmé and Sabé would agree."

"I'm sure they'll be okay with it once the twins are old enough."

"A couple months old at least."

"Maybe a year or two." Obi-Wan said before noticing they had arrived at the falls. "We're here."

"Finally. Shall we walk?" Anakin dismounted and patted his mount's neck affectionately.

"Yeah…help me down? I feel like I'll lose my balance on my new legs. Haven't done much in therapy for balance when hopping down from things, yet."

"Of course." The king went around to Obi-Wan's mount, helping him down and helping him balance properly. "Maybe we should go on these rides more often, so you can practice your balance."

"I wouldn't mind that, but you are working so often, Padmé's stuck in bed, Sabé never wants to leave her side, and my close friends have their jobs to do. I'd rather not go out here alone."

"Well, whenever I have the chance, we can go on rides. It' may not be often, no, but at least we'd get to ride together a bit."
"Or I need to make a few more good friends who like riding." Obi-Wan smirked, moving over to the rocks and climbing up onto one to sit, facing the falls.

"I'm sure my mom would love a ride to the falls. Maybe you can ride with her."

"You think so? Give her time to show me all your cute little kid holos as I get to know my future mum?"

Anakin rolled his eyes. "I'm sure I was super cute as a child. And I'm sure she's waiting for the right moment to share those holos with you."

"I'll request the embarrassing ones, first." Obi-Wan smiled, starting to pick a few of the tiny purple flowers that grew in the cracks between the rocks.

"Yeah, get those out of the way first." Anakin chuckled, putting his hand on the small of Obi-Wan's back gently.

With a number of flowers picked with their thin, delicate stems, he began to fiddle with them, picking a few more as they linked together.

"Mind if I ask you something?" he asked, eyes on the flowers he was playing with.

"Not at all. What's on your mind?"

Obi-Wan turned to face Anakin fully and smiled, taking his hand in both his own, slipping a ring of flowers onto his finger. It was a bit loose, but it fit. "We never got to make a romantic moment of it, so I want to try again. Will you marry me, Ani?"

Anakin's eyebrows raised as he smiled wide. "Well of course I will, Obi."

Obi-Wan smiled and leaned in, claiming a gentle kiss.

The kiss lasted for several seconds before Anakin pulled back with a smile. "You know, we should get proper rings."

"Ones that won't wilt and fall apart?"

"Yeah, actual rings. Ones we can look at every day and be reminded of how much we love each other. All that cheesy classic love stuff."

"I happen to like the classic cheesy romance stuff."

"I do too. That's why I want to be reminded of it when I look at our rings."

"We'll have to plan a shopping trip, then."

"Should we invite the girls?"

"We should. They may wish to join us, or maybe they'd rather do their own thing by themselves. Either way, we should give them the option."

"I'm sure they'd love to join either way."

"We'll ask them when we bring them baked goods" Obi-Wan decided.

"Hopefully Padmé will be awake when we get back."
"I'm sure Sabé will be guarding the door if she is napping."

Anakin sighed as he made his way closer to the small beach close to the falls. The water roared in his ears as he took a deep breath of the air, watching birds and other fauna roam about in the warm sunshine. "If you were to tell me as a child that one day… one day I'd have a life as good as this, I'd think you were crazy and just trying to feel pity for me."

"Well, what did you imagine your future to be?"

"Back then? A life of torture and pain while trying to protect my mom. I just thought I'd be a slave the rest of my life."

"You never imagined being freed?"

"Of course I imagined being free, but the reality was that I was never going to be free unless some miracle happened. People are born into slavery and die in slavery. It's the way life happens sometimes, and for those unfortunate to live their lives in such a way… my heart aches for them. They deserve so much more than what life has dealt them."

"You escaped…and maybe you can make that difference for them."

"I hope I can make at least a little difference. No one deserves to live in slavery."

"Everyone deserves to live their life, free of another's control, and free of fear…"

Anakin nodded silently, watching the falls in his silence. "One day… I hope the galaxy is completely rid of slavery."

Obi-Wan stood up and walked over to Anakin, sliding his arms around him from behind. The blond sighed gently, leaning back into Obi-Wan slightly. "Love you," he said quietly.

"And I, you." Obi-Wan whispered back, nuzzling his nose into Anakin's neck.

"I can't wait to call you my husband. That'll be one of the best days of my life." Anakin smiled as he closed his eyes.

Obi-Wan hummed in agreement, "Padmé wanted to go with me to the fitting of my wedding outfit and help me choose. Sabé mentioned wanting you to help her choose her dress."

"That sounds nice. I'll talk with her about it."

Obi-Wan nodded and smiled, "I hope it can be a small wedding, not like yours to Padmé which had half the planet in attendance."

"It could just be us four, the twins, my mom, Arlan and Dixti, and a few other friends. Small enough to make us comfortable and safe."

"That's what I'm hoping."

"Regardless, our wedding will be very special. I can't wait." Anakin turned around in Obi-Wan's arms and leaned down to kiss him.

To be continued…
Obi-Wan hummed as he waited for Anakin to get out of the shower, moving around their private room lighting candles and sprinkling petals for a romantic feel.

The king could be heard humming a light hearted tune, perhaps some folk song from Tatooine or Mustafar that he had learned as a child. Either way, it was clear he was in a good mood, which was good for the intimate night he planned on having with Obi-Wan.

The redhead finished making his romantic touches to the room and stepped behind the changing screen to slip out of his bathrobe and into a silkier robe in a deep red color. Then he moved to the bed to lay in wait.

It didn't take Anakin much longer to emerge clean from his shower, a towel wrapped around his waist. He smiled upon seeing Obi-Wan ready for him on the bed, taking note of the decorating Obi-Wan had done. "Well hello there."

"Have a pleasant shower?"

"Very pleasant. Would have been better with you, but I liked the anticipation." He stepped towards the bed slowly.

"I showered already when you stayed to help Padmé with something." He motioned him over, "Come."

Anakin moved a little quicker until he was at the foot of the bed. "You look amazing..."

"So do you. You make that towel look good."

"I've got a pretty good no towel look as well," Anakin said with a smirk.

"You may have to prove it."

"I can prove it easily. Just say the word..."

"I just want you to join me." Obi-Wan patted the bed next to him.

Anakin crawled into the bed and laid beside the redhead with a smile. "I have to admit I'm a bit nervous."

"Me, too." Obi-Wan breathed, lifting his robotic hand, "Particularly about accidentally hurting you with my touch."

"Don't worry about it too much. You have better control now than you did when you first got your prosthetics." Anakin brought his own hand up to Obi-Wan's cheek.

"When my grip shattered a glass?"

"Yes, but you've gotten a lot better. Don't worry, if you start to hurt me, I'll let you know."

"I don't want to ruin the moment, though." He said, settling his hand on Anakin's hip, his touch so light that the blond could tell he was holding back."
"You won't." Anakin moved his hand to guide Obi-Wan into more of a touch on his hip. "This is all about us, and nothing is going to kill the mood, I promise."

"If you're sure..." Obi-Wan breathed, leaning in close so that their breath mingled.

Anakin moved his head forward and nuzzled Obi-Wan. "I'm sure. Don't shy away from touching me. And if you get too worried, use your normal hand."

Obi-Wan kissed him, "What are you most nervous about?"

"I don't know... Maybe it's the stuff we haven't done before."

"We have explored a bit back before—, so we can start with the familiar we already know we like..."

"Probably the best way to start this," Anakin said as he reached down to tug at the towel around his waist.

Obi-Wan nodded, his eyes glancing down before he pulled back to shrug out of his robe.

Soon the towel around Anakin's waist was discarded to the floor, leaving all of his body in display for his redheaded lover. He waited for Obi-Wan to remove his robe before they continued.

"Don't mind the scarring..." Obi-Wan said as the robe pooled around his waist.

"I don't mind it at all." Anakin leaned forward to kiss Obi-Wan. "They're proof you've survived a rough part in your life. Battle scars, if you will."

"They aren't exactly attractive to look at. I'll understand if you don't want to look at them."

"They aren't going away any time soon, so they're going to be looked at several times. It's okay, they don't make you any less attractive, if that's what you're worried about."

"They don't make you uncomfortable?"

"No. They've not bothered me since you came back home."

"I don't think that's true... I've caught you staring at the one across my neck more than once."

Anakin sighed. "That one has bothered me, yes... I worried when you couldn't talk when you woke up that night. I thought that Maul had stolen your voice from you. In a way, he stole part of it, damaging your vocal cords like that..."

"I think that was his goal." Obi-Wan said with a fearful shiver. "I was...too outspoken—too cocky...so sure you'd save me, that I tested his anger..."

"Obi..." Anakin pulled Obi-Wan into a hug and held him tight. "I'm so glad we got you rescued..."

"I begged for death..." he whispered.

The king started to pet some of the red hair. "You're safe now... You're recovering very well."

"Being here, feeling your soft touch...I'm glad I survived.

"I'm more than glad. If you had actually died like I thought you did..." Anakin didn't finish his sentence, choosing instead to release the hug and let a hand slip down to Obi-Wan's hip.
"I can't imagine what it was like… finding the parts of me that were cut away to convince Naboo of my passing…"

"Arlan and Dixti found the mess first. Arlan came back to the castle and… I happened to be walking by when he said you were dead. I rushed to Padmé and Sabé as fast as I could. I cried for the rest of that day… I got really depressed and stayed in bed most of the time until my mom came. Without her, I don't think I would have lasted long enough to discovered your message you sent."

"I should thank her, then."

"She's done so much for our family since she got here. She deserves so many things that I can't give her."

"She's a wonderful woman."

"Yeah..." Anakin leaned in to kiss Obi-Wan, soft and slow.

"Feel a bit calmer now?" Obi-Wan asked into the kiss.

"Yeah," Anakin sighed. He kissed Obi-Wan a bit longer, then moved his lips to the scar across the redhead's neck, kissing it gently.

Obi-Wan shivered, "Just be careful there, it still… gives me pain sometimes. Nerves are shot… No nipping."

"I won't bite," the king promised, shifting so he could run his hands up Obi-Wan's back while he pulled the older man closer.

Obi-Wan complied, pressing into Anakin's chest as his own hands began to explore again, his mechanical one touching a lot lighter than his flesh.

"Don't be afraid," Anakin reminded, his hands moving back down pale skin with fingertips moving lightly.

"I could never fear you, Anakin. I love you."

"I love you too." Anakin pulled back from the kiss and pulled Obi-Wan into his lap, having the older man straddle him. With that position, Anakin then leaned down until Obi-Wan's back was against the mattress. He indulged in another kiss, a stronger, more passionate one.

Obi-Wan let out a moan into the kiss, his arms wrapping around Anakin to keep him close as they finally began to fully explore each other in the most intimate of ways.

Obi-Wan gave a happy, soft sigh as he snuggled into his lover's bare chest, his eyes closed as he slowly welcomed sleep after their rigorous activities. It had been well worth the wait, and they both had been left satisfied and panting.

Anakin had drifted off quickly afterwards, and Obi-Wan wanted to, but he also resisted slightly as he feared his nightmares would ruin their perfect night.

Just as the two were finally starting to sleep happily, there was a frantic knock on the door, and
then the door flew wide open, letting in light from the brightly lit hallway. In the doorway stood a very frazzled looking Sabé. "You two better get your asses out of bed right now because Padmé just went into labor!"

Anakin jumped awake at Sabé's loud voice suddenly ringing in the private room. The he processed what she had said, and he sat upright quickly with wide eyes. "Are you serious?"

"Yes I'm serious!" Sabé nearly shrieked. "Get some clothes on and get to the medical ward ASAP!" With that, she was gone again, leaving the door open as she ran to go be with Padmé.

"...She saw my bare ass..." Obi-Wan muttered with red cheeks as he untangled himself from Anakin.

"She saw mine too, but did you hear that?!" Anakin turned and grabbed Obi-Wan by the shoulders, a wide smile on his face. "Our babies are coming!"

"I heard shrieking, but assumed it was baby-related—where's my—oh never mind, I'll just use these ones." Obi-Wan said, grabbing a pair of Anakin's pajama bottoms and pulling them on.

Anakin scrambled out of bed and threw on his nightshirt and sleeping pants, quickly putting on his boots and hurrying to the door. "Which do you think will be born first, the boy or the girl?"

"Don't care, I just want to hold one as soon as I can! Obi-Wan said, searching for a tunic or shirt to wear.

"I have to agree. Just throw on one of my shirts if you have to, let's go!" Anakin nearly bounced in place as he waited for his lover.

"Alright." Obi-Wan pulled out one of Anakin's shirts, tossing it on as well. "You can go on ahead. I can't just run. Haven't gotten to that point in my physical training. Don't want to trip."

"We can walk fast together. The twins aren't gonna be here within the next five minutes if Padmé just went into labor."

"Still, if you're too excited to put up with my pace, I understand. I wish I could go faster, too...oh, is my hover chair still in the closet? You could push me to make us go faster."

"Do you want to be in the hoverchair? It would get us there faster, but I don't want you to feel like your freedom is taken away again."

"I have legs now, Ani. I can stand up and walk away from the hoverchair at any point. This is just for going fast since I can't handle anything faster than a slow strolling pace."

"Well, if you're okay with it." Anakin moved to the closet and took out the unused hoverchair, activating it and pushing it over to Obi-Wan. "Let's go then!"

Obi-Wan nodded and sat in it. "Now let's go as fast as your legs can carry us."

"You got it!" Anakin pushed Obi-Wan out of the room, closed the door to the room, and took off with a giggle as his excitement grew for the arrival of his children.

"Did the four of us ever finally decide on their names? We had a few ideas we were discussing..."

"I don't remember. I guess we'll figure that out as soon as the twins are here." Anakin rushed as quick as he could, finally reaching the medical ward and the room Padmé had been taken to. "Here
"Yeah." Obi-Wan stood up and knocked on the door to the room they knew the birth was happening in. After all, it was a private event and only a select few were allowed to enter the room. Bursting in would cause an alarm that might not be good for Padmé and the babies.

Shmi was the one to open the door, looking tired but excited as she smiled at the two newcomers. "There you are, boys. I was wondering when you'd get here." She stepped to the side to invite them in.

"Things are pretty slow now, but once Padmé's contractions get closer together, it's go time."

"We came as quick as we could. Had to locate a few things." Obi-Wan smiled, slipping in. "Scans show the babies are doing well?"

"Yes everything is going fantastic. If it continues like this, it should be an easy birth for both Padmé and the twins."

Anakin smiled and moved to stand beside Padmé. "Are you doing okay?"

"I'm kind of scared…not sure I'm ready, but the twins sure are…" she admitted. Taking his hand.

He squeezed her hand. "I'll be here for you, and so will Sabé and Obi-Wan. Are you at least excited for the twins to be here?"

"The twins, yes, the labor thing, no."

"At least my mom is here to tell you what's going on. And the healers and nurses."

"Your mom is likely going to be my best friend when it all gets going…the rest of you who have never given birth…well, I may not like you for a while. If I say anything hurtful, please don't take it to heart. I've been warned some women get that way during the pain of labor…"

"Don't worry," Sabé reassured. "We know you'll be in a lot of pain. Just push through it and let whatever come out of your mouth. None of it will matter once the twins are here."

She nodded and took a deep breath, letting it out as she closed her eyes and let her head fall back against the pillows propping her up. "Stay close…"

"We will," the handmaiden promised with a smile.

"All of us will." Obi-Wan said, brushing a lock of brown hair from her cheek.

Time passed, and Padmé's contractions grew closer together, Shmi guiding her through breathing making it through the contractions. The healers keep monitoring her vitals, as well as the twins'.

Anakin sat in a chair next to the bed, still holding his wife's hand and squeezing it every once in a while to reassure her that he wasn't going anywhere. He didn't voice it, but he grew more and more worried for his family as the twins' birth closed in. But he remained calm mostly and out of the way, letting the healers work and letting Padmé do the most important job of delivering their children.

"You're doing great, my love." Sabé whispered, kissing Padmé's knuckles.

Before long, Padmé's cries were joined by another. Their first born.
"It's the boy." The healer said, handing the baby off to be cleaned up.

"You're half-way done. You can do this." Sabé said.

Anakin watched with a smile as the first twin was taken away to be cleaned up. He then looked back at Padmé. "Just a little more."

It was only a few minutes longer for the second twin to be born, the room suddenly filled with the crying if two babies. But soon both babies were cleaned up and handed to their mother in soft blue and pink blankets.

"Oh, Padmé, they're beautiful. Look at them." Sabé smiled.

"Adorable…" Obi-Wan added, holding Anakin's hand.

Anakin squeezed Obi-Wan's hand as he leaned in close to look at his children. "Oh Force," he whispered, tears starting to form in the corners of his eyes. "They're so small…"

"They're newborns that came early." Shmi pointed out, "But they are healthy."

"Will they need to stay here for a while then before we take them to our room?"

"Yes, we'll want to keep an eye on them, and Queen Padmé as well. Let her heal a bit and stay with the twins for feedings and bonding time."

Anakin nodded, reaching forward to touch the cheek of one the twins. "Did we settle on names for them?"

"No, we keep going between Luke, Leia, Leda, and Lorn." Sabé reminded them as Padmé simply cooed down at her tiny bundles of cuteness.

"Well… How about Luke and Leia? They have a nice flow together."

The baby boy gave a small hiccup and wiggled, his nose and forehead scrunching as he adjusted.


"Good." Anakin smiled, reaching a little further to touch the other twin. "Luke and Leia… our little prince and princess."

Leia wiggled and turned her head until she was sucking on the tip of Anakin's finger.

"Looks like they may be getting hungry after all that work of being born." Shmi smiled.

Anakin pulled back his finger from Leia's mouth. "That's all Padmé right? Unless someone needs to hold one of the twins while the other is fed."

"It'd be easier for her to feed one twin at a time, but yes, first feeding is important to not be bottle-fed." Shmi said.

"I didn't mean that one was going to be bottle fed, only that one is held while the other eats first. We can do that, right?"

Shmi sighed and shook her head, moving to help Padmé juggle the twins, taking Luke from her and carefully handing him to Anakin before coaching Padmé through how to breastfeed.
"I think she was letting you know that both your statements were correct, Anakin." Sabé said.

"Ah…" Anakin held his son carefully, losing all interest in anything else. All he could do was stare down at his tiny Luke with a smile and sparkling eyes.

"Mmph." The baby squirmed, so tiny and helpless, swaddled in his soft blue blanket.

"Force you're adorable… and so small." The new father pushed some of Luke's blanket away from his face, gently stroking the baby's face. "I'll be damned if I don't love you with all my heart though…"

His mother chuckled knowingly. "I bet he'll be a reckless terror, just like you were." She said.

"You really think so?" Anakin chuckled as he looked up at his wife. For once, he felt that their marriage more purpose than just to spread peace through the galaxy.

"Don't complain to me if he runs off to podrace or something." Shmi chuckled.

"Oh I'm going to teach him podracing when he's older, don't worry about that. Leia too if she's interested."

"And I'll be teaching them to appreciate the finer teas in life." Obi-Wan said.

"And how to live with two dads and two moms."

"That will just be natural to them. They have all four of us since the moment they were born." Sabé said.

"At least they'll have a big family that loves them to pieces." Anakin kissed Luke's forehead gently with a smile.

Luke squirmed again, his mouth opening in a 'o'.

"So adorable…" Obi-Wan hummed.

Anakin looked at Obi-Wan. "Do you want to hold Luke?"

"Yes! Just let me sit, first."

The king waited until his lover was seated, then he carefully handed over his son to the redhead.

"Oh, hello there. Hi, yes, aren't you the cutest little boy?" Obi-Wan cooed as Luke was placed in his arms. "You have your Daddy Ani's hair…look at those curls."

"He's got really light hair." Anakin looked up at his mother. "Was I born with light hair?"

Shmi nodded. "I believe you were, yes. Light hair and crying like a lost bantha calf when you came out."

"Well, Luke seems a more quiet type. At least for now. We'll see later how loud each of them are." Obi-Wan chuckled.

"Luke does seem kind of quiet. I almost hope Leia is like that as well." Anakin looked over at the girl having her first meal.

"We'll see. But now she's too busy eating and making adorable noises." Padmé smiled.
Anakin smiled as he leaned on the edge of the bed, watching his daughter. "How did we make such cute kids?"

"I could remind you, but I'd rather not."

"I'd rather not be reminded..." Anakin sat back as the conversation suddenly became awkward. He chose to go back to Obi-Wan and Luke, leaning on his lover slightly.

"He's starting to become fussy, I think he's hungry and wants his turn." Obi-Wan said, gently bouncing Luke.

"Then we can switch him out for Leia, make sure she's still doing well after her meal." Anakin stroked Luke's cheek with his finger.

"Hold on, Leia isn't quite done yet."

"Who wants to burp her?" Shmi asked.

"Oh, can I?" Sabé asked excitedly.

Shmi nodded, "I'll show you how. First you'll need a burp cloth to protect your clothes from any spit-up."

"Okay, cloth…" Sabé looked around for a spare cloth she could use when Leia finished her meal.

"Here." Shmi chuckled, picking one up for her.

"Thanks. Anakin, can I sit in your chair?"

The king moved to get up with a nod. "Yeah, of course." He let her sit down as he moved to stand next to Obi-Wan.

"I think Leia is full." Padmé said after a little bit longer, and Shmi moved to take Leia and hand her to Sabé to coach through burping.

"Ani, dear, help Obi-Wan out and take Luke to Padmé for his very early breakfast."

With Luke back in his arms, Anakin took his son to Padmé for his first meal, the baby wiggling eagerly as he was soon held close to his mother.

"Parenthood is juggling, it seems." Obi-Wan chuckled, getting up to move over to look at Leia. "Hi cutie, are you going to make a burp for Mama Sabé?"

Sabé smiled as she pat the small girl's back with just enough force to work out the extra air Leia had taken in. "I hope she does. I've never done this before."

"You'll get the hang of it—you all will." Shmi said.

"We've got plenty of time to learn and perfect parenting," Anakin commented.

"You'll have plenty of opportunity to become experts."

Anakin nodded, yawning as he realized how tired he was. "I think all of us will need a nap soon. I'm exhausted, and I did very little."

"Get used to it; the twins will dictate how well you all sleep for a long time." Shmi chuckled.
"At least a two hour nap, that's all I ask." Anakin chuckled.

"A nap sounds nice," Sabé said. "Maybe we can all have a nap when the twins settle into one."

"We can go on shifts. One of us stay here with Padmé and the twins while the other two gets some sleep. Then in a few hours we rotate. I'll volunteer to stay up first; I'm suddenly not as tired as I had been, so I can help out here." Obi-Wan suggested.

"If you're okay with that." Anakin wrapped an arm around Obi-Wan and kissed his cheek.

"I'll need someone to stay in here with me," Padmé said as she rested her head back against the pillows. "I may nod off..."

"I am, it'll give me some time to get to know Luke and Leia a bit while I wait for the excitement to settle enough for tiredness to return. Would you or Sabé like to take the second shift?" he asked, looking at Anakin.

"I'll take the second shift," Sabé spoke up. "Quality time with Padmé and the twins sounds fantastic."

"I'll wake you when it's your turn, then I can go join Anakin in our own bed for a few hours until it's his turn."

Sabé nodded with a smile. She moved to hand Leia to Obi-Wan after the little girl had burped. "I'll return in a couple of hours then. I'll work a little on getting the nursery ready for the twins before I sleep."

Obi-Wan nodded and smiled down at Leia, "And just look at you with your cute little nose and dark hair."

Leia wiggled her arms a little as she blinked up at Obi-Wan. So many new people, surely it was a bit overwhelming for both babies.

Obi-Wan smiled, "Her eyes are open. Brown, like Mommy's."

"I think Luke's were blue," Anakin said as he looked down at his daughter with Obi-Wan.

"His eyes were closed still when I was holding him." Obi-Wan shrugged, "But that's okay because now Leia and I get to share this moment, yes!" he cooed, making her giggle.

Anakin smiled and kissed Obi-Wan on the cheek. "I want to stay with Padmé still. I feel bad if I leave just to go sleep."

"Do what you want but you should get at least some sleep." Obi-Wan said, smiling up at Anakin.

"I'll be getting my own sleep once Luke is finished." Padmé said.

"You wouldn't be upset if I went to the room to sleep before I come back?" Anakin asked his wife.

She shook her head, "I'm honestly too tired to care. It's been a long night, and as long as at least one of you are here with me, I'll be fine."

Anakin nodded. "Alright. I'm going to get some sleep then. After Sabé's shift the twins can get some time with their biological parents."

"I should also be more awake by then to enjoy it with you." She nodded, "Go get sleep."
"Okay, you get some as well." He smiled at her, then left a lingering hand on Obi-Wan's shoulder before leaving the room with a yawn.

"Sweet dreams." Obi-Wan smiled after him before smiling at Padmé. "You did wonderfully tonight. If you need anything while I'm here with you, just ask."

"I'm sure I'll spend most of my time sleeping while you're here with me," Padmé said, looking down at Luke and running a gentle finger along his tiny jaw.

"I'm sure, but just so you know, I'm here to serve you and keep the twins happy until they also fall asleep.

Padmé nodded slowly, clearly exhausted. "I don't think it's possible for me not to be happy right now. The twins are finally here, and they're surrounded by so much love already..."

"Two amazing moms, and two loving dads. These two will know they are loved." He chuckled. "Which...I'd like to ask you something. I spoke about it with Ani earlier, but I want to know your thoughts."

She looked back at Obi-Wan. "What is it?"

"I don't think I'll be able to return to guard duty after—all that happened to me, but I don't want to just do nothing and have Anakin take care of me, so I—I thought maybe... Now I know you didn't want to do the whole nanny thing with the twins, but what if I was the Nanny-dad?"

She tilted her head, thinking. "You and Sabé are basically the twins' second set of parents. You two both can take care of them when Ani and I are busy being royals. If you do take on being a nanny of sorts, I certainly wouldn't see you as just a nanny."

"I'll of course be their second father, but as a job...taking care of the twins and making sure they stay safe. I just want a nice quiet, domestic life. No Sith or assassins or monsters unless it's the monster that lives under beds and in closets."

Padmé smiled. "If that's what you want for your new job, I support you."

"I think it is." He nodded.

"Well, if it's not, you'll still be helping take care of the twins."

"Of course I will, right Leia? You and Luke will want all of your parents taking care of you~" he cooed.

Leia wiggled with a wide smile.

"It'll certainly make things easier, having four parents taking care of the twins." Padmé looked down at Luke and yawned.

Luke was slowing down and starting to get squirmy.

"When they can leave the medical wing, Ani and I can have one in our room and you and Sabé have one in yours if we don't decide to just all use the royal suite."

Padmé shrugged, shifting Luke once he was done eating. "I think for now we should keep the twins together."

"In that case we'll rotate them between moms and dads' room at night until they are old enough to
be in their own room with a monitor."

"I like that. That way the twins will be with each other until they realize they can be apart and still be okay."

"And each of us get the chance to spend time with them at night, and have a peaceful night without baby interruptions. Anakin and I will of course need to have bottles ready for midnight feedings."

"I'm sure Dex would be happy to help with that."

"What do you think, Leia? Does that sound good?" he looked down at the newborn girl who only blinked and gave a yawn. "Sleepy, hmm? It's okay, you can go nii-nii."

Padmé smiled when Luke also yawned. "I guess they're both tired now. Good, maybe I can get some rest while they sleep."

Obi-Wan nodded, "Once they drift off I'll put them in the bassinet so you can get sleep." He promised.

To be continued…
"Anakin, dear, are you ready? Everyone is waiting on you." Shmi said, slipping into Anakin's room. "You're not getting cold feet, are you? You have a very handsome looking groom waiting for you in the ceremonial ballroom."

Anakin rose to his feet quickly, eyes bright and smile wide. "Sorry, I wasn't getting nervous. Just lost in thought for a bit."

"Well good. Because today you and Padmé bring your loves into the family officially. Go get married to your dream man and then you get to enjoy your honeymoon vacation with your family."

Anakin smiled as he approached his mother, kissing her on the cheek. "Thanks for being here for us. I'm not sure how we would have made it through all that's happened without you around."

"Of course, it's what a mother is for. Plus it's nice to get out of Mustafar's heat to spend time with my son and grandchildren."

"I can agree it's nice to get off Mustafar." Anakin looked out with window and took a big breath. "And speaking of nice, it's a wonderful day for a wedding. I shouldn't keep Obi waiting much longer."

"No, you shouldn't. He even has on the silver prosthetics you got him for special occasions."

"Well then let's go!" Anakin quickly exited the room, pulling his mother along with him so she could be there to watch him marry a second time.

She chuckled and shook her head as she followed her son.

"Oh Leia, no, that's not for chewing." Sabé laughed, pulling another flower from the baby girls' mouth as she kept trying to eat the blooms.

Leia whined a little, waving her arms at the flower being pulled away from her once more.

"Flowers are better than your pacifier, hmm?" she chuckled, trying to distract the three month old with tickling her belly.

The girl quickly forgot about the flower, laughing and kicking out her legs as she was tickled.

"That's our happy girl." She grinned, lovingly, "Come on, looks like Papa Obi-Wan has brought out some toys that Luke is getting into. Let's go share."

Leia squealed happily as she was taken over to her brother to play with the toys Obi-Wan was getting out.
Obi-Wan looked up from where he was sitting on the floor, a soft baby blanket spread out in front of him with a few of the twins' favorite toys laid out. Luke was carefully balanced sitting up against him with his stuffed tooka cat toy's ear in his mouth.

The redhead smiled and picked up a colorful rattle to hand to Leia who squealed and reached forward to grab and shake the noisy toy.

Sabé sat Leia down after her toy was handed to her, then she sat down with Obi-Wan. "Glad to see the twins are happy with today. Leia though, she kept trying to eat the flowers, the silly girl."

"In her defense, they are pretty colors and soft, and she likes things that are pretty colors." He pointed out, "And they are safe for her to put in her mouth. Padmé and I made sure the florist only used edible flowers just in case either of these two decided to put them in their mouth. As long as we get them out before they pose a choking hazard, it'll be fine."

"Still, it's no good to let her develop a flower eating habit." Sabé chuckled. "Well, I wonder where Ani is. We're just waiting for him now, aren't we?"

"His mother went to look for him." Obi-Wan nodded, "Knowing him, he's probably so excited, he's nervous."

"Hopefully not too nervous. He's got a second wedding to go through with." Sabé smiled, then she caught sight of Shmi heading their way. "Oh, looks like Shmi is back. I suppose that means that Anakin is ready now."

"The one he wanted." Obi-Wan nodded, "The one all of us want. Force, I love him…"


Obi-Wan smiled down, "And I love you too, don't you worry your silly little head. Papa loves you and Leia so much!"

"Are you two ready?" Shmi asked once she was close.

"As we'll ever be." Sabé stood up and picked up Leia, making sure she still had a hold of her toy.

Obi-Wan nodded with a smile, "You two want to play with Grandma for a little bit while Mommy, Daddy, Mama, and Papa finalize our extended marriage?" he asked the twins as he got up with Luke.

"I'll handle the twins, you two just focus on your wedding." Shmi grabbed both twins and nuzzled them lovingly.

"Slobbery baby kisses for luck!" Obi-Wan said, kissing both babies' cheeks before turning to Anakin with a smile.

"Let's get this going," Sabé said as she turned to Padmé.

Both Padmé and Anakin reached forward to take their future spouses' hands, and then began the short ceremony to marry in Obi-Wan and Sabé to the family.

"We pledge to you and your family our loyalty and love, to join you in matrimony from this day and until the end of our time in this galaxy." Sabé and Obi-Wan said in unison, giving their vows of joining the marriage.
Anakin and Padmé put brand new rings on their lovers' fingers and held their hands. "We promise to love you and to care for you like we already do, in matrimony from this day until our last in the galaxy." they also spoke in unison. "We accept you into our marriage as equals."

Obi-Wan and Sabé smiled as they were pronounced legally wed before they both leaned in to kiss their loves to seal their vows.

Anakin wrapped his arms tight around Obi-Wan as they kissed, then he hugged the redhead even tighter. "We're finally married… I'm so happy."

"Then keep kissing me, Husband!" Obi-Wan laughed as beside them Padmé picked Sabé up and spun her around as they kissed.

Anakin laughed as well, pulling Obi-Wan in for another kiss with a smile. He lifted the redhead up from the ground ever so slightly.

Obi-Wan chuckled into the kiss, not protesting for once and complaining that he's too heavy to be lifted as his prosthetics add so much more than what his natural limbs had. He was just too happy to be that self-conscious. He was finally married to the man he loved (as well as two of his closest friends), and after celebrating with their close friends and family, they would pack the twins up and be off to Alderaan for their honeymoon-vacation. Life was finally perfe—A scream came from down below the balcony in which the family were on. The several other screams followed, paired with the deep hum of a lightsaber.

Anakin rushed to the edge with a concerned look, where he saw a man with black tattoos slaughter an innocent citizen. He cried out in horror, leaning heavily on the railing as he watched the massacre before him.

"What's happening?" Padmé asked, slowly approaching the railing to look down, Sabé a few steps behind her, but Obi-Wan left frozen in the doors. He knew that sound. It haunted him.

"Obi-Wan…" Anakin looked back at the redhead, eyes full of worry. "That's him isn't it…"

Obi-Wan swallowed and gathered his strength and courage to shift one foot, then the other until he was close enough to look down at his nightmare in flesh. His body went cold and began to tremble as he gasped for his next breath, then another, and another.

"Easy, Obi, easy…" Anakin gently pulled Obi-Wan away from the railing and back inside the room connected to the balcony, sitting him down on the floor where he couldn't be seen. "It's okay, you're safe here. I won't let him touch you again."

"Breathe, dear, slow and steady." Shmi said, joining them with the twins to try and coach Obi-Wan through his obvious panic attack.

"Dixti will take care of this," Anakin said as he looked back at Padmé and Sabé. "She has to…"

Sabé swallowed and turned away from the scene as more screams filled the air. "If we hurry we can all get to the safe room before he finds us."

"We should. Especially get the twins there—and Obi-Wan as he isn't doing too well right now." Padmé said.

"I'll trail behind," Anakin said as he stood back up. "I'll make sure nothing follows us while we make our way to the safe room."
Sabé nodded, moving to take one of the twins from Shmi. "Let's hurry. Padmé can you help Obi-Wan?"

The queen nodded and moved to help their panicked husband to his feet. "Okay, follow me as quickly as possible."

The family rushed to their safe room as screams seemed to follow them no matter how fast they went. The whimpering twins were hushed as best as could be done in the stressful situation. Anakin was glad they weren't making too much noise, lest their position be given away to the man who hunted them.

"Here." Padmé said, opening up the first secret door they came to and holding it open, "The nearest safe room is straight ahead and to the left. Sabé, you have already been added to the bio lock so you should be able to get it open. Get the twins and Shmi in first, Ani, Obi and I will be right behind you."

Sabé nodded and led the way, holding Luke close to her, reaching the door and using the bio lock to open it. She motioned for Shmi to follow close behind.

Anakin walked backwards, keeping his eyes on the back of the group. His heart raced in his chest, worried that they would be found and Obi-Wan would be taken from him again. But no, he wouldn't allow that to happen. He was around to protect his husband, and he would do all he could to protect Obi-Wan.

"Okay, Obi, our turn. This'll be a tight squeeze, so try to remember to breathe." Padmé said soothingly to the redhead, pausing for a sign from him that he was ready.

Obi-Wan tried a few more jagged, but slower breaths before he managed to give a nod and she began to help him along the narrow secret corridor to the safe room.

"I'm right behind you," Anakin reminded. "Keep breathing, you're almost there."

"Close the hidden door behind you, Anakin." Padmé reminded him as she and Obi-Wan finally made it to the safe room door and slipped inside where Sabé was setting up the emergency power for the room.

Anakin did close the door behind him, making sure it was locked tight before the moved to help Sabé set up the room. "We've got a few things the twins can use to keep themselves occupied. Plenty of food and water too by the looks of it." He took a blanket and laid it out on the floor for the twins to lay on.

Padmé guided Obi-Wan to sit on one of the cots.

"Why is he here?" Shmi asked, setting the twins down on the blanket, "The one that's attacking, I mean… His master's in a high security prison guarded by Jedi…"

"Maybe he's trying to find his master." Anakin suggested. "Or he wants Obi-Wan back."

"He's not getting Obi-Wan back." Sabé grumbled as she got the power running in the room finally.

"No, he's staying here with us." Padmé agreed, moving to the storage closet and digging through, soon pulling out some blasters. "He's our husband, and he belongs with us." She tossed one to Anakin, Sabé, and then hooked one on her belt. "Shmi, can you use a blaster? There's one more in here, and I don't think Obi will be up for using it."
"I can use one if I need." Shmi moved to grab the blaster and hooked it onto her own belt.

"Good. These areas of the castle are a secret to only the royal family and very few others, but if that really is the Sith that had Obi-Wan…I don't know what abilities he may have for finding targets." She sighed, sinking to the floor on the blanket with her children.

Anakin moved over to Obi-Wan and gently put a hand on his shoulder. "Whatever that man is wanting, he won't get it."

"Power…blood…screams…" Obi-Wan muttered, falling over onto his side as he lay curled up on the cot, hugging himself.

Anakin sighed and sat down next to his husband, his gentle hand staying on Obi-Wan's shoulder. "It's okay, I'm here…"

Sabé put her hands on her hips. "All we wanted was a nice quiet wedding together. Why did this guy have to come and ruin it?"

"We did want him found so he could be dealt with and Obi-Wan could have that piece of mind…I just hope our guards can handle this—we don't have any Jedi on Naboo anymore." Padmé sighed. "…I feel a little guilty for hiding here while so many others are in danger…"

"We could go and fight him," Anakin said after a bit of silence. "Mom and I could, since we can use the Force."

"I'm only used it once, Ani, I'm not trained, I don't even know how I did that other than it being in my desperation to protect you..." Shmi said, unsure. She didn't want to see her son leave alone, but she didn't think she'd be much help.

"We have to protect our family now. Have the same mindset as you had when you protected me." Anakin got up and moved closer to his mother. "Plus I have something from when the Jedi were here… and I think it'll help us a lot more."

"What's that?" she asked, looking up at her son.

"They… they helped me make a lightsaber, and they showed me how to use it."

"A lightsaber?" She blinked in surprise.

Under Anakin's gentle fingers, he could feel Obi-Wan tense up at the word.

"That's surprising…how did you even get the crystal for it? I've read that it's quite a process for a Jedi to get one..." Padmé said.

Anakin paused before answering. "There was a night soon after Obi-Wan woke up that they took me to a planet called Illum. They told me that usually there is a process to getting a crystal, but they showed me where to find one easily. It was a bit difficult though, because a crystal had to choose me before I picked it. But I found one, and they brought me back here before the night was over. The next night they helped me gather materials for the hilt, then the next they told me how to build it." Anakin looked down at Obi-Wan. "I always made sure you were sound asleep and safe before I left, but I was always back before sunrise."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Obi-Wan asked in a whisper that sounded harsher than intended due to the damage to his vocal cords.
Anakin sighed and crouched next to his lover. "I only wanted to protect you… I knew I had to have something other than my skills in the Force to do so."

"There was a time I admired such weapons. Graceful compared to a blaster…but then…" the redhead swallowed, "They make me nervous now…especially if it's red…"

"It's not red, I can assure you that. It's blue and has a soft hum. I want to show you… but I don't want to scare you."

"If…it's in your hand and…not close to me…I may be okay…" Obi-Wan shook his head and pushed himself up to sit. "But you were talking about going out to face him. Are you sure you can do that?"

"If it means he'd be gone and not around to scare you anymore, then yes. Despite me not liking the Jedi or my Force powers… I'd still use them to the best of my abilities to protect my family."

Obi-Wan bit his lower lip as he studied Anakin's face before nodding and pulling a pendant out from where it was hidden under his fine wedding robes. It was one Anakin recognized from Obi-Wan's room before he had moved from the guards' quarters to the royals' quarters with Anakin.

It looked to be made of silver until Obi-Wan pressed it into Anakin's hand and it felt lighter and warmer, more like wood than metal. Its shape was that of a simple rain drop or egg with a design carved into it.

"This is one of the few things I have from my family—my culture. It's supposed to offer luck and protection, but I hadn't worn it in so long after coming to Naboo… Please, keep it with you if you are to go out there to fight that monster. Force willing, it'll help you return to us."

Anakin looked at the pendant with a sense of calm. "Thank you. I hope it keeps me safe until I return." He leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on Obi-Wan's forehead.

Obi-Wan nodded, "Be careful… you too, if you're going with him." He added, looking past Anakin to his mother-in-law.

She nodded, "I'm going to try my best."

"I'll protect you." Anakin said, standing back up. "Let's go. I want to get my lightsaber before Maul finds it and tries to use it against us."

"Where is it?" Padmé asked.

"In my private room. Far from the bed but in a hidden spot where most wouldn't look."

"Then we head there first… Padmé, do these hidden passages lead to that area of the palace?" Shmi asked.

The queen nodded, "Yes, if you know where you are going."

"I think I remember the way," Anakin said, heading towards the door. "We'll be back as soon as we can."

"We'll be waiting." Padmé nodded, "…May the Force be with you."

Anakin nodded before he led his mother out of the room. "Okay, stick close, some of the turns in here happen abruptly."
Through twist and turn he led his mother, taking them all the way to his room, or at least a passageway close by to his room. They moved silently until they got inside his room, and he made a beeline towards the closet. His lightsaber wasn't in plain sight, as he had said. It was hidden up in the panels of the ceiling, and it was a panel he could barely get into. If he struggled to get to his own lightsaber, then surely anyone else would have just as hard a time.

Thankfully the lightsaber was in its place, and Anakin pulled it out of the ceiling with a grunt. He climbed out of the closet, then he showed it to his mother. "Here it is…"

"And it works? You know how to use it? You do have a blaster still for back-up, right?" she asked, eyeing the elegant weapon.

"Yes, yes, and yes," Anakin replied. He ignited the blade with the press of a button, the blue blade illuminating the room and filling the space with a pleasant hum.

She nodded, "Alright…I guess we're doing this…"

Anakin nodded. "For our family, and for our friends who are out there fighting as hard as they can. We need to go before anyone else dies by Maul's hands."

Shmi nodded, "I just hope I can be more help than hindrance." She sighed, gripping the handle of her blaster. "Let's go."

Running through the halls, Anakin let his instincts and abilities within the Force lead the way to Maul. All around them were screams of pain and horror, and Anakin could almost physically feel when they were getting closer.

And then they rounded the corner to the courtyard. There stood Maul, red blades humming daringly over yet another dead body.

Past the Zabrak, Anakin could see the new captain of the royal guard, Dixti, and next to her, Arlan, the commander of the cavalry.

Dixti's eyes widened in horror and shock upon seeing the two Skywalkers. "Run!" she screamed, "This isn't a normal assassin!"

"We're staying here," Anakin called back to her. "I'm not running from the man who scarred my husband."

The Sith then turned his eyes on Anakin, squaring his shoulders as he brought himself to full height. "So you're the little king he had so much faith in. How…underwhelming."

Anakin tilted his head with an expression of disgust. "I could say the same about you."

"Did you marry him out of pity for what he's become? You should just let me finish the job. Free you from having to be responsible for a mindless lump of flesh." He taunted, pacing back and forth like a predator.

"He's recovered well from the hell you put him through. But if your goal was to kill him while he was under your watch, you failed pretty miserably." Anakin grabbed his lightsaber from his belt, though he didn't ignite it yet.

"I wasn't allowed to kill him…but now that I'm free from my Master's rule, I can do what I want. I want to finally end him. I will find my prey no matter where you have hidden him. Then I'll succeed where my Master failed." He raised his lightsaber, pointing a red blade at the king, "I'll
start with you and bring him your head, just so he can die in complete despair."

"You won't get that chance, and you'll never find him." Anakin finally ignited his lightsaber, getting in a ready stance.

The Sith's sickly yellow eyes widened before narrowing in on him and he took pose with both ends of his saber lit. "You're no match for me, Jedi-king."

"You underestimate my power," Anakin said in a cold tone.

"The Jedi can never know power. Fear of the dark side prevents them from ever reaching it. Only those who embrace it know true power."

"I don't claim to be a Jedi, nor will I ever. I'm not a fan of them, but your ways are far darker than I like. I don't fear you, and your words are doing nothing but stalling your death. If you're a real Sith, come and fight me like one!"

Maul snarled before his eyes flickered around at the remaining guards—and Shmi. His lips twisted into a calculating smile before he made his attack, charging not at Anakin, but at Anakin's mother who stood behind him with a blaster in hand.

Brief moments of scenes flashed before Anakin's eyes, scenes of Maul attacking his mother. With no hesitation, he moved in front of her and took the blow from Maul's attack. "Too cowardly to fight me? I said if you were a real Sith, then fight me!" He shoved the Zabrak back, using the Force to do so and send Maul flying back.

"So weak. Your bleeding heart makes me sick!" he growled, spinning his saber around to attack, aiming to take out Anakin's legs from under him.

Anakin jumped to dodge the blades, then he pushed his mother back a little more. "You talk too much."

"Why's the old bag even here? She can't be much good in a fight. She'd be worth more in a slaver's cargo hold." He hissed back, following through with attack after attack.

With each attack, Anakin's lightsaber got closer and closer to his face, causing him to grunt and continue to move backwards. "Don't…. don't you dare say that."

"What, don't want to see the old bag be worth something?"

"Shut up!" Anakin glared up at Maul, gritting his teeth together. "My mom will never be put on a slave market!"

"He's trying to get under your skin, Ani—don't let him anger and distract you!" Shmi shouted.

"Oh, your mother, is she? Doesn't look like much." He smirked, making more aggressive attacks.

"My mom will never be a slave again!" Anakin continued to move backwards, struggling to defend himself from Maul's attacks.

"Ani—focus!" Shmi pleaded.

"Again? Oh, so she is already a lowly slave—and so are you. I commend you on your skills to manipulate your way up to a king's status, but you will only ever be a slave."

"I will not go back to being a slave..." Anakin shook his head and dropped it with a grunt,
struggling against Maul.

"You are a slave, boy! A filthy little slave!" The red of his saber spun and in a blink it cut through Anakin's right wrist.

"ANI!"

Anakin cried out in pain, his lightsaber falling to the ground and deactivating. "I'm not a slave," he hissed out through his teeth.

"Your fancy robes don't fool me, slave." Maul said, kicking Anakin down and then turning his sights on Shmi again.

Gaspng, the woman raised her blaster and pulled the trigger twice. The first shot missing, but the second landing on the Sith's shoulder.

Anakin hissed in pain, rolling onto his side and holding his arm. "I was once a slave, yeah.... But that doesn't define me! The life I live now is far better than living in a slave pit, waiting to be sold to a new master."

Maul ignored him, reaching forward and the blaster ripped from Smi's hand before she was lifted from the ground, the Force clamping around her neck.

Anakin's eyes went wide when he saw his mother. "No, let her go!"

"You brought her here, didn't you? Can't even protect your own mother. How pathetic. Useless."

Anakin struggled to get to his feet, but he felt his anger rushing through his body, willing him to stand and face the Sith. "You're pathetic... Hurting an innocent woman. Is that really how Sith behave?"

"We do what we must to achieve our goals."

"Including hurting innocent people? That's low." Anakin stood up to his full height and stared down Maul.

"They're weak." He said before dropping Shmi who crumpled to the ground, unmoving.

Anakin looked at his mother with wide eyes, then he glared back at Maul. "You're going to regret hurting my mom..."

"I'm shaking in my boots." Maul mocked before letting out an animalistic war cry, leaping at Anakin with his saber staff leading the way.

Anakin dodged to the side and thrust his fist into Maul's gut with a shout, using his strength in the Force to push the man away further. He wasted no time following the direction the Sith had been punched. He may have been down a hand, but the Force was still his weapon to use, and he called his lightsaber back to his remaining hand and ignited it.

"We should help." One of the few remaining guards said as they watched their king battle the Sith with only one hand.

"No, look at how fast they're moving. We could hit the king by mistake!" another disagreed.

"Only take a shot if you know you won't hit King Anakin!" Dixti ordered, hoping for an opening.
Not even a second later the sound of a shot rang out and Maul halted with a stunned look. Behind him, Shmi was kneeling, her blaster in hand and a determined look upon her face.

"No one harms my baby boy." She hissed as Maul dropped to his knees and put his hand over the hole in his chest.

Anakin watched Maul fall to his knees, then he too dropped to his own. He glared at the Sith, his grip on his lightsaber strengthening as he brought the blade close to Maul's face. He caught his breath as he stared into Maul's nasty golden eyes. "You won't hurt my family ever again… Rot in hell you devil."

Pulling his arm back, Anakin pointed the tip of his lightsaber's blade at Maul's heart, then he shoved it forward, the hilt stopping right at the skin with the blade running all the way through.

As soon as the Sith hit the ground, dead, the guards were running forward.

"My king, are you alright?"

"Queen of Mustafar, you're hurt!"

"Only a little bruised. I'm fine." She said, dropping the blaster and moving over to her son.

Anakin was shaking slightly, but it wasn't out of pain or of fear. He rose to his feet, letting his lightsaber deactivate, and he looked at his mother. "I think I need to pay a visit to Palpatine."

"Not until after you see the healer!" his mother commanded worriedly. "That monster took your hand, Ani."

"I know." Anakin clipped his lightsaber onto his belt with a stern gaze at Maul's dead body. "He's paid the price for that and for hurting my family. It's time his master does as well."

"Palpatine is in custody and isn't going anywhere." She reminded him, "I'm taking you to the healer, and then we'll go let your wives and husband know it's safe to come out."

"And we'll start getting injured to the healer's as well as start cleaning up...everything, sir!" Dixti said, looking around.

Anakin nodded at Dixti. "Good work. Obi-Wan would be proud.

"And as for Palpatine," Anakin continued while looking back at his mother. "He deserves to be dead. If he had a Sith as an accomplice, he will have more. I will not allow him to continue living, even if he is in a jail cell."

"Don't, Ani. He had a fair trial and was found guilty. The Jedi have been placed in charge of his fate. He's gone from our lives."

"Being guilty isn't enough for me when it comes to my family's safety. He has to die." Anakin pushed past his mother, heading back to where the rest of his family was in hiding.

"Your family is safe!" she caught his shoulder and pulled him to look at her, "We knew this monster was still out there. We knew to expect him to make a move, and he eventually did. He's gone now, and you should focus on the love of family, not the emptiness of revenge."

"I am focusing on my love for my family. That includes safety, and I won't feel that my family is completely safe until Palpatine is also dead." Anakin sighed. "But since you're worried about it, I
won't bother to kill him yet."

"Let things settle before you take rash actions. You have two babies that need you, a new husband who needs your support, and a kingdom to run with your wife."

Anakin hesitated before he nodded, accepting that Palpatine's death would come another day. "I want to see Obi-Wan," he said in a defeated whisper, letting his weariness show.

"Healers so that they can make sure your wrist heals properly for a prosthetic. If you promise to go there on your own, I'll go get the rest of your family out of the panic room."

"I promise I will." Anakin slumped forward, hugging his mother tight. At least the biggest threat was gone. His family was indeed safe, despite what his head told him about the empty revenge he desired. "Have them meet me at the medical ward."

"As fast as Obi-Wan's legs can carry him, I'm sure," Shmi smiled. "Now go. Listen to your mother." She shooed him before pausing, "Actually…first you should let me into those secret tunnels…"

"Right..." Anakin smiled as he led his mother back to the tunnels. "I might as well come with you to get them if I'm taking you to the tunnels."

"Healers." She repeated. "Unless you want to walk into that room without a hand and give everyone a shock instead of have me explain your injuries first so they know what to expect when they see you."

"All right, all right. I'll go to the healers." Anakin rolled his eyes as he opened up the door to the tunnels. "Be quick please."

"Good boy." She kissed his cheek before stepping into the tunnels, leaving Anakin alone in the corridor.

Anakin looked into the tunnels for a little bit before he sighed and moved off towards the healers.

"That's it, Luke, good boy. You can do it!" Obi-Wan encouraged as he sat on the floor, hands held out towards the ten month old as the boy grinned and took slow, shaky steps towards him until he finally reached Obi-Wan's hands and grabbed a hold.

"Yay! You did it! Such a big boy!" the redhead cheered, lifting the boy and making him giggle.

Anakin smiled. "Okay Leia, your turn. Come to Daddy!" Anakin did much of the same, holding his hands out to his daughter. "You can do it!"

"Dada." She grinned around drool-coated fingers as she looked at him. She rolled onto her hands and knees and began to crawl at full speed towards him for cuddles.

Anakin sighed but picked up Leia nonetheless. "Okay, we'll try again later."

"She has plenty of time to start taking those first steps without holding onto things." Obi-Wan hummed, "Leia just wanted daddy loves faster than her feet could carry her."
"She just wants all the love, don't you?" Anakin nuzzled Leia with a laugh. "You're just a little love bug."

"She's such a daddy's girl." Sabé said, walking into the nursery with a plate of treats for the twins.

"There's nothing wrong with that. But it looks like the twins will quickly become a fan of those treats you have for them.

"Oh yes, I plan to get mauled by these two cuties very soon."

"Good because I think they just spotted their snacks." Anakin chuckled as he let Leia down and watched her crawl over to Sabé.

"Fna!" Luke cheered, clapping his hands and taking two steps before he tripped and resorted to crawling like his sister.

"Yep, it's snack time," Anakin agreed as he stood up. He offered his hand to help Obi-Wan up, wanting to use his prosthetic more so he could get used to it.

Obi-Wan smiled as he accepted the help, being pulled to his feet by his husband and making eye contact before glancing over at Sabé who was enjoying the twins crawling into her lap to wait nicely for heir snack. They both knew better than to just grab off the plate.

"Well should we leave them with Mama Sabé for a while? I think they'll be fine as long as she doesn't run out of food." Anakin chuckled.

"Mommy Padmé will be joining us soon. She had to finish up a holo call with Coruscant." Sabé said.

"I suppose the kids will be happy to have Mommy and Mama time." Obi-Wan said with a nod, "And I could use some fresh air."

"Care to go on a walk then?"

"Yes. You've been so busy lately. We haven't had much a chance to just go be together alone…and awake." Obi-Wan chuckled.

"Now is as good a chance as any we'll get for a while." Anakin held Obi-Wan's hand as they left the room to let Sabé, and eventually Padmé as well, take care of the twins.

"Bye-bye, Leia, Luke. Daddy and Papa will be back later." Obi-Wan waved to the twins who were already getting messy with their treats. He chuckled and linked his organic arm with Anakin's as they walked.

Sighing happily, Anakin smiled. "You know, I'm really happy. I'm glad that I came here."

"I'm glad you came here, too." Obi-Wan said as they stepped out into a garden, "Who knew it'd bring romance and a family into my life."

"I'm glad the war is over for the most part now as well. Don't have to worry about further assassination attempts for a while hopefully."

The redhead laughed, "I'll put my hopes to 'ever again', thanks."

"Yes, that would be better," Anakin chuckled. "No more attempts would make life easier for our whole family."
"Just you, me, the girls, and the twins. And your mother when she visits of course."

"We have it really good here. I'm glad I was able to have such a good family after being born a slave. That'll be my next goal, to end slavery in the galaxy. It just doesn't need to exist anymore."

"You mentioned bringing it up with the Galactic Senate. Have you started that yet?"

"I've tried, but too many senators like their slaves still I guess."

"Keep fighting for it." Obi-Wan encouraged. "Slaves don't have a voice in this galaxy, so you can give them one they can trust."

"I hope so. I wish they could all hear that I'm on their side. The story of a slave turned king would be inspiring at least a little in my opinion."

"I wish I had a suggestion for that—but I don't know if slaves even have access to—well, anything."

"They really don't. Not even a way to keep up with current news."

"Then I can't help you. Only things I can think of would be to use the holonet to get word to them."

"Yeah, I wish they had better access, but the reality of the situation is that they don't have much of anything. Some can't even claim a name for themselves. They're just a number, nothing more." Anakin sighed.

"They are more than a number, Anakin, you just need to make those who are blinded by the wealth of the slave trade realize that."

"I wish it were easier to do so..."

"You'll find a way...it may take time, but you'll find a way."

Anakin nodded. "For now, I can be happy with the life I live now and hope I set an example for those who look up to me."

"And," Obi-Wan smiled, moving in front of him, "You can simply enjoy life with your husband." He whispered, pulling him into a slow kiss.

Anakin's eyes went wide as they kissed, his heartbeat picking up speed in his chest. "You're being awfully bold out in public," Anakin spoke in a low tone with a smirk on his face."

"You are my husband. I needn't hide a simple kiss."

"Kissing can lead to other things." Anakin let his organic hand trail down Obi-Wan's neck and shoulders.

"Sometimes it's just a kiss, but yes, other times it can lead to so much more."

"You know... This could be one of those times when it leads to more."

"We're in the garden, Ani."

"Does that matter?"

"Normally."
"And now it doesn't?" Anakin glanced around. "There's a pillar over there with some bushes around it."

"You're serious?" Obi-Wan asked, cheeks flushed.

Anakin nodded, starting to pull Obi-Wan in the direction of the pillar.

"Force, Anakin..." Obi-Wan mumbled, but didn't try to stop it as he was pulled behind the pillar and pinned up against it.

Anakin didn't hesitate to kiss Obi-Wan hard as he pushed him against the pillar. He pushed his whole body up against the redhead's, feeling aroused just by the chance that they would be caught. It encouraged him on, and he started grinding on Obi-Wan as they kissed. "Just remember to keep your voice down," he whispered.

"I'll try..." Obi-Wan gasped, his own hands grabbing at Anakin's clothing to loosen them.

Anakin chuckled as he pulled back to loosen up his tunics to allow his chest to show. "If you get too loud, you'll get us caught. Do you want that?"

Obi-Wan moaned, shaking his head. "I love you, Anakin." He whispered, pulling him into a kiss again, this time, with purpose.

-End

Chapter End Notes

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