Epilogue: Present Progressive

by Fox

Summary

A series looking at Episode One from behind the scenes. What happened in all those screen wipes and quick cuts? Your friendly neighborhood Fox tries to smooth out the editing.

Notes

I am not now, nor have I ever been, George Lucas.

See the end of the work for more notes

Obi-Wan did not know how much time passed before they found him. Every part of his body hurt. His chest and shoulders throbbed with bruises where he had been kicked and landed; his neck and back felt stiff and sore; his eyes were dry, and stung. He heard footsteps before he sensed any approaching life-presences, and realized disjointedly that where he hurt the most was in his chest, just above the ribs, as though his breastbone had turned to lead. Whoever was coming was running. "Master Jedi!" he heard a voice call.

Panaka. He might have Amidala with him, and if she was there, Anakin was sure to be right behind her. Weakly, Obi-Wan tried to use the Force to keep them away. Now was not the time for the boy to learn.

"Master Jedi!" Panaka called again, reaching the inner core and slowing to a halt. "Jedi Kenobi, we -- oh." He saw. Saw the body, which had not disincorporated; saw the closed eyes and the
barely-parted lips, frozen as if sipping the air; saw the burned hole in the still, still chest. "Oh, gods."

"Where is the boy." Obi-Wan scarcely recognized the sound of his own voice.

"He is with the queen's handmaidens," Panaka said absently, as he started to move toward where Qui-Gon lay. Obi-Wan clutched his master's body closer and Panaka stopped in his tracks. "Your Highness?"

The captain stood aside and the queen stepped forward slowly. "Sir Jedi," she said, "the battle is won. The Trade Federation is overthrown."

"I congratulate you and your people," Obi-Wan said dully.

"You are to be commended," the girl continued. "The Jedi Order will be richly rewarded by the Naboo."

"The Jedi Order has lost Qui-Gon Jinn," Obi-Wan snapped, "and is immeasurably poorer for it. No riches can bring him back." Dimly, he was aware that this behavior was unbecoming; but he couldn't find it in himself to care enough to apologize.

Padme -- Amidala -- looked at him for a moment, then knelt at his side, carefully making no move to touch the body of the fallen master. "I have contacted your Council," she said. "We spoke to them when we communicated with the Senate to advise them of our victory. Several Jedi Masters are en route in the Senate's fastest ship."

"They don't know." He did not look up.

"No."

"We can't tell them until they arrive."

"No. They're in hyperspace."

"When will they land?"

"Some time tomorrow. Late."

Obi-Wan made no move to get up. This seemed to surprise the queen. "How long have I been here?"

"Here? The -- the battle was yesterday, Jedi Kenobi. Midday. Almost a whole rotation." The girl did not speak for a moment. "Shall we bring Master Jinn to the Grand Hall?" she suggested gently. He closed his eyes for a moment, then sighed deeply and nodded.

The queen nodded to Panaka, who snapped his fingers once, bringing several men forward. Carefully, respectfully, six of them together lifted Qui-Gon with a smoothness that could only have come from practice. They stepped soberly away, and Obi-Wan curled over on the floor, hollow, aching, his heart feeling as cold and stiff as the body now resting on the soldiers' shoulders.

He felt a hand on his back. "Come with us, Jedi Kenobi," the queen urged. "Come and rest before your Council arrives." Automatically, he allowed himself to be helped to his feet and led behind the body into the palace. The soldiers laid Qui-Gon in the Grand Hall -- Almost like he's lying in state, Obi-Wan thought -- and, with nothing more to do or say, bowed and left. "Anakin will be here soon," Amidala told him.
"No. No Anakin. Keep him away," Obi-Wan said. Someone handed him his cloak and Qui-Gon's, abandoned in the hangar at the beginning of the fight.

"But he --"

"No." He shook his head, dropping the cloaks to the floor. "Don't want him ... to see ..."

"Very well," the queen said, meaning, of course, that it wasn't. "What should I tell him?" Obi-Wan looked at her, not understanding. "It's been a full day, Jedi Kenobi. He has not seen either of you since the battle. He's afraid and alone. I must tell him something."

Obi-Wan sighed. "Tell him Qui-Gon has joined the Force. Tell him there is no body -- he disincorporated." The girl raised an eyebrow. "He'll do that soon anyway." He wondered whether to tell the boy now that he, Obi-Wan, had promised to train him. He had to tell the Council, at any rate. "Let me record a message for the Council," he said, "to transmit as soon as they are within range."

"If you wish. Sabe!" The handmaiden produced a small portable holorecorder and handed it to Obi-Wan. "This will record your message, and we can feed it into our communications center later," the queen told him.

"Good." He thumbed it on. "My masters," he said after a moment. "Although you come to celebrate a victory, I must be the deliverer of bad news." He paused, not knowing how to work up to the main point, then decided there was no easy way. "Master Qui-Gon Jinn is dead. He fell to the Sith in battle, and died soon after. The Sith is no longer a danger -- I killed it, and it is gone. Master Jinn's last wish was that Anakin Skywalker be trained as a Jedi. I promised him I would do this. The boy and I will meet your shuttle when it arrives. Kenobi out." It was short and brusque, but it would do. He'd just lost his master -- what could they expect? "Please keep Anakin with you until the Council comes?" he concluded.

"Very well," the queen said again. "You must rest before tomorrow."

"I can rest here. I will not leave my master."

"You'll have to leave him to meet the Council."

"He'll have dissipated by then."

"Rest well, then. Until tomorrow."

"Until tomorrow, Your Highness," Obi-Wan said. He settled into a chair -- much more comfortable than kneeling on the floor-- and, gaze never wavering from his master, eventually fell asleep.

His dreams were scattered. He seemed simply to be seeing selections of his life -- moments from his youth, scenes from his recent past, even glimpses of what had to be the future -- never lasting long, not seeming to illustrate anything except that he, Obi-Wan Kenobi, was a man with a life behind and before him. He stirred, sleeping fitfully.

He had a life behind and before him. He saw, in his dream, an older, bearded, white-haired self, consumed with grief at -- well, at something. He saw the same older self fiercely protecting -- something or someone. Frustrated, he stirred again. But then he noticed that in both these hazy images -- like looking at his own life through a misted window -- there was a ripple in the air just behind him. Puzzled, he tried to focus on his dream-visions -- but that didn't work, of course. Try to get a grip on something fragile and it will shatter and be gone.
He woke with a start. As he rubbed his eyes and shook his head, he felt the air behind him ripple. He was sure he heard someone call his name from a distance, and he stood.

Amidala stood at the far end of the hall. "The shuttle from Coruscant is landing," she said. "We have advised them of ..."

"Thank you," Obi-Wan replied, stretching his cramped muscles and pulling on his cloak. "Where shall we meet them?"

"In the courtyard," she said as he joined her. "We shall relinquish custody of the viceroy and his accomplices." Together, they walked to the main courtyard, where Panaka and his men were standing guard over the Neimodians. Anakin was with them; Obi-Wan took his place at the boy's side. "Now, Viceroy," the queen said, "you're going to have to go back to the Senate and explain all this."

The ramp lowered, and the first passengers began exiting the shuttle. "I think you can kiss your trade franchise goodbye," Panaka told the viceroy before stepping away as the transfer of the prisoners began.

Senator -- no, Chancellor -- Palpatine was striding towards them, beaming with victory. "Congratulations on your election, Chancellor," the queen said to him, a smile brightening her mask of dignity. "It is good to see you again."

"Your boldness has saved our people, Your Majesty. It is you who should be congratulated. Together we shall bring peace and prosperity to the Republic." As he walked toward the palace, the Chancellor stopped to speak to Anakin. "And you, young Skywalker. We shall watch your career with great interest." He turned on his heel and swept away.

*His career,* Obi-Wan thought, heartily wishing he had not promised his master he would train the boy. But his word was worth nothing if he honored it only according to his whim; he had made the promise, and he would keep it.

He bowed instinctively as he was approached by several Council members, led by Master Yoda and Master Windu. "Obi-Wan Kenobi," Master Windu said formally. "In a short time we will have need of you in the main -- in the throne room of the palace."

"Yes, Master Windu."

"Please meet us there in one standard hour."

"Yes, Master Windu."

As the small group of masters moved away, Master Windu turned back to him and laid a hand on his surprised shoulder. "I am profoundly sorry for your loss," he said quietly.

Not "for the loss of your master." Not "to have lost Qui-Gon." For your loss. Obi-Wan looked at the dark man and saw real sympathy in his eyes. "Thank you, Master Windu," he bowed. Then the Council was gone.

Pleasantries over, Obi-Wan left Anakin with Padme -- Amidala -- and went back to the Grand Hall to sit with his master before meeting the Council. He wanted to be there when the body dissipated; he could not understand why it hadn't done so yet. Sitting in his chair, staring numbly at the body, he was sure he felt a touch on the back of his head and a whisper in his ear -- but he couldn't quite make out what it said. As he was turning in the direction it had come, he saw the door open and Anakin burst in.
The boy froze when he saw Qui-Gon's body, then shouted a denial and raced to his side. "Anakin, you shouldn't --"

"No," Anakin said, sobbing, "why didn't you let them tell me?" Padme, two handmaidens and three soldiers ran in, breathless from chasing the boy.

"Get him out of here!" Obi-Wan snarled at them.

"Nobody touch him," Padme ordered. Anakin had buried his face in Qui-Gon's sleeve and was wailing like a widow.

"I told you not to let him see this!" Obi-Wan shouted.

"That's very noble of you, Jedi Kenobi, wanting to protect a child from violence, but he needed to --"

"I don't want to protect him from anything!" he yelled, starting towards the small group at the door.

"He needed to see for himself, for the finality, so he can start coming to terms with his grief."

"His grief? His grief?!"

"Yes!" For the first time, the girl raised her voice. "We all looked up to Master Jinn, Jedi Kenobi. We all feel his loss."

For a moment, Obi-Wan couldn't breathe. "How dare you," he growled. "How dare you compare your loss to mine? Or his," he flung an arm toward Anakin, "to mine? This man was my master -- my father, my brother, my lover, my friend -- for half my life. Half my life! A month ago none of you had ever heard of him!" Nobody answered him. How could they argue? "I am gratified that in such a short time he became as important to -- all of you -- as he did," he said, turning to Anakin again, "but if anyone is entitled to grieve, and mourn, and weep, I am he. Me!" he screamed. Everyone jumped. Anakin, wide-eyed, looked at him and sniffled. He suspected he was overreacting, but he didn't care. Not at all. "Now get him out of here. Let me grieve for my master in peace." Padme extended a hand and Anakin ran to her and took it. The seven of them left the hall, closing the great door behind them. Obi-Wan crumpled, gagging and coughing; when the wheezing had subsided, he dragged himself over to where his master lay and huddled protectively at his feet.

He did not sense Master Windu before he was next to him. "Obi-Wan," the Councilor said gently. "Obi-Wan, it is time for you to meet the Council."

"My -- my master," Obi-Wan croaked.

"I will stay with him while you go," Master Windu promised. "You won't be long. Go, now."

Obi-Wan walked through the palace, stepping from the cavernous hallway to the even-more cavernous throne room to find, instead of the assembled Council, only Master Yoda. Not sure what was supposed to happen, Obi-Wan went to the elderly master and knelt.

After long moments, Master Yoda thumped his gimer stick on the floor and walked past Obi-Wan slowly, pensively. "Faced many hardships you have, recently, hmm?"

"Yes, Master Yoda."

"Routine negotiation turned into invasion, hmm? Several times attacked by mysterious Sith
warrior, hmm. Suddenly burdened with powerful child. Hmm.

"Yes, Master Yoda." And I lost my master, he thought.

"And lost your master you did, but persevered. Hmm. Hardships these have been. Burdens. Hardships. Trials."

"Master Yoda?"

"Confer on you the level of Jedi Knight, the Council does," the master said. "But," he added immediately, "agree with you taking this boy as your padawan learner, I do not."

"Qui-Gon believed in him," Obi-Wan found himself saying. "I believe in Qui-Gon."

"The Chosen One the boy may be. Nevertheless, grave danger I fear in his training."

"Master Yoda, I gave Qui-Gon my word. I will train Anakin." Don't ask me to break my word to my master, not now. "Without the approval of the Council, if I must."

"Hmph. Qui-Gon's defiance I sense in you. Need that, you do not." The wizened master paused for a long, long moment before continuing. "Agree the Council does. Your apprentice, young Skywalker will be."

"Thank you, Master Yoda." Kneeling, the only bow Obi-Wan could make was a nod of his head.

"Now. Sorry I am that this must without Master Qui-Gon be done." Master Yoda shuffled towards him and drew a knife from his utility belt. "Kneel, Padawan Kenobi," he pronounced, formally, ritually, as Obi-Wan bent at his waist and bowed his head. He felt his neck tense as the blade drew closer to his head, felt the coolness of the blade near his skin, and sensed it slice neatly through the plait that had hung from behind his ear for half his life. The knife was withdrawn and Obi-Wan lifted his head. "Rise, Knight Kenobi," Master Yoda declared -- and Obi-Wan could have sworn he heard a hitch in the old gnome's voice. "Rise, and join the ranks of your fellows, guardians of peace and justice in the galaxy." Obi-Wan stood, and the gnarled old master pressed his braid into his hand. "Forget not your training," he warned. "All who teach -- learned once, they did." And Master Yoda bowed.

Stunned, Obi-Wan bowed low. "Thank you, Master Yoda."

"This evening," Master Yoda said, "Qui-Gon's funeral will be. Honor him, we will, as befits a Master of the Jedi. Rest, you must, before then. Soon, night it will be."

"Yes, Master Yoda."

Obi-Wan bowed once more and returned to the Great Hall to rest by his master's side. Master Windu was there, meditating over the body. He had dressed Qui-Gon in his cloak, crossing his arms over his chest. "Knight Kenobi," he murmured, as Obi-Wan reached his side.

"Master Windu," Obi-Wan returned tightly.

"You should be resting."

"I can rest here."

"I will stay with him," Master Windu sighed. "Sleep, Obi-Wan, before tonight."

Stubbornly, Obi-Wan refused to budge. "I want to be with him when he disincorporates," he said.
Master Windu looked up, surprised, and gestured for Obi-Wan to kneel next to him. "He's not going to disincorporate, Obi-Wan," he said after a moment. "If he were going to, he would have already."

"But I thought that -- " Obi-Wan began.

"When a Jedi dies, the individual Force presence falls back into the Force. You might say the soul leaves the body. If he is ready to die, and the soul can leave the body before the body has completely stopped functioning, the body will simply disappear. It is no longer needed. But --" he held up a hand against further interruption -- "but, if he is not ready, and the body shuts down before the soul is free of it, it is trapped. That soul -- the essence of what made that Jedi -- cannot join the Force as long as it is bound to that body. So we must assist. By destroying the body, we free the soul."

"Destroying -- "

"That is why we burn our dead, Obi-Wan. If we buried them, their souls would remain with those bodies until the bodies had completely disintegrated. This can take thousands of years. Immolation is our greatest kindness."

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, bit his tongue, and swallowed back the tightness in his throat that threatened tears and bile. "Not -- not ready to die?" he choked.

"Not in the exact moment that his body gave out, no."

Everything became clear. Obi-Wan had tried with both hands to pull his master back from joining the Force. If he had let go, accepted the inevitable sooner, Qui-Gon could have joined the Force days ago and the body would be long-gone, not lying stiff and cold and trapping a Force-presence that ached to be part of the whole.

But Qui-Gon, as well, had been struggling to stay. He had hung on as long as he could, insisting that Obi-Wan train Anakin, and when his body had failed, had switched to his mind to communicate. He stuck around to tell me he loved me, Obi-Wan realized. If he hadn't done that, he could have gotten out. "And he -- we'll burn him? Tonight?" Master Windu nodded. "May I keep his lightsaber?" Obi-Wan whispered. "Mine was lost."

"You may, of course, Knight Kenobi," Master Windu said. "But now you should rest, at least for a while."

"I -- would like to stay, Master Windu," the young man replied, suddenly calm and sober. "With your permission." The dark master nodded, and both turned toward the body, closed their eyes, steadied their breathing, and meditated.

The night was quick in coming. When it was fully dark and the stars were out, Master Yoda came to lead the funeral procession to the open-air temple outside the palace. With him walked Master Windu; behind them, six Naboo soldiers bore Qui-Gon on their shoulders. Following the body were Obi-Wan and Anakin, then the remaining Council masters. The queen, Jar Jar and Boss Nass, and Chancellor Palpatine were in the temple with a small crowd of soldiers and citizens; the pallbearers laid Qui-Gon's body on the pyre in the center of the circle and moved reverently away. Obi-Wan took his place next to Amidala, with Anakin on his other side. Master Yoda and Master Windu stood at Qui-Gon's head and Master Windu spoke clearly. "This was Qui-Gon Jinn, Jedi Master, guardian of peace and justice in the galaxy. His living essence is confined in his lifeless body; we free it to join the Force." He touched a torch to the pyre. "Qui-Gon Jinn," he murmured.

"Qui-Gon Jinn," Yoda repeated.
"Qui-Gon Jinn," the other Councilors said in near-unison. "Qui-Gon Jinn."

"Qui-Gon Jinn," Amidala murmured, next to Obi-Wan. Everyone was saying his name now, a valediction for the man they had known, as the flames rose higher. "Qui-Gon Jinn. Qui-Gon Jinn."

The voices never rose above a low hum, and faded away as the fire began to consume the body in earnest. Obi-Wan stared at the flame, resolutely not watching the clothing begin to burn, eyes glued to his master's face. He heard Anakin move next to him, and looked to the boy. "What will happen to me now?" the child asked.

"The Council have given me permission to train you," Obi-Wan told him. Anakin did not perceptibly react. "You will be a Jedi, Anakin. I promise."

Both looked back at the pyre, where the flames claimed the mortal remains of Qui-Gon Jinn. As the body was consumed, Obi-Wan barely noticed the ripple in the Force around him.

Long after the fire had burned itself out, the body was gone, and the other mourners had withdrawn for the night, Obi-Wan sat staring at the pyre and the ash. He held his severed braid in his hand, it and the lightsaber at his belt the only tangible objects he had to remind him of his master. He felt a breeze stir around him, and looked up -- but the night was still, the ash in front of him entirely unmoving. He felt the breeze again, and in front of his eyes, impossibly, the air and the darkness swirled together and coalesced into a glowing blue haze that slowly resolved itself into the very form of Qui-Gon Jinn. Obi-Wan felt his eyes widen in horror and wonder. "Master?" he said, uncomprehending.

"My Obi-Wan," the blue haze said sadly, its lips moving as if it were speaking, though no sound was audible in the temple. Obi-Wan heard the words, in Qui-Gon's voice, as though they had been thought directly into his own head.

He blinked. He'd always been able to perceive Qui-Gon's thoughts, emotions, in a general sense -- but he'd never heard the man's voice in his mind before. It unsettled him. "Master? You're -- "

"I am one with the Force," Qui-Gon nodded.

"Then how are you -- "

"I am always with you," the spirit murmured into his mind.

"But you're gone," Obi-Wan protested, his throat constricting again. A separate, detached part of his mind wondered when he would stop feeling that tears were imminent. "You are gone. Master Windu said the essence of what made you you has joined the Force, the whole. But ..." he gestured, emptily, unable in his confusion and grief to find words for the paradox before him, and looked away.

"What you see, Obi-Wan, is a physical manifestation of the Force, to give your mind something to hold on to. What you hear is the same. The voice in his mind was gentle and infinitely sad. "If I were to visit someone who only knew me as a child, I would appear to him as a child myself."

"So you're a trick of my mind?" Obi-Wan squeezed his eyes shut, the flicker of hope he had felt at the presence of his master extinguished under persistent, yawning despair.

"You might say that," the sad voice admitted. "Your eyes and ears and mind are filling in the gaps between what you believe and what you know. But listen, Obi-Wan," he continued. "It's more accurate to say I am a sort of incarnation of the Force in you. If you close your eyes and
concentrate and clear your mind, when you open your eyes I will still be here. A trick of the mind, a mirage, would disappear."

"A trick of the Force, then." Not much better.

\If you like.\n
Obi-Wan didn't like it at all. He felt tears escape through his lashes and impatiently scrubbed them off his face. "The Force is playing tricks with my mind, and no matter how I try, I can't reason it away?"

\Essentially. But why would you choose to reason it away?\ The pain in the spirit-mind-voice was almost palpable.

"You're not here," Obi-Wan said, his voice finally catching. "You're dead, out of my life, and seeing you -- manifesting, or whatever you're doing -- in front of me, it's impossible to make myself believe you're gone."

\Obi-Wan,\ the blue Qui-Gon said, crouching in front of him to look into his eyes -- entirely absurdly, that separate part of the young man's mind realized, just as it was preposterous to be speaking out loud to a spirit he heard in his head -- \if you need to make yourself believe a thing is true, how true can it be?\n
"Master?"

\Why do you insist that I am gone, when you can see me with your own eyes?\ Obi-Wan choked out an incredulous sob and gestured deliberately to the pile of ash and firewood in front of him. \But am I not real, Obi-Wan?\ A tear slid unchecked down Qui-Gon's cheek. Obi-Wan watched it, transfixed, bewildered. \may not be solid, but other than that I am the Qui-Gon you knew. And I will always be with you.\n
The young man tried to nod. "But how -- "

\You will not always see me, but I will always be there. I am with the Force, love, and the Force is with you.\ He stood and reached out a hand, and Obi-Wan felt a warm Force-touch on his cheek. He cried out in disbelief, leaning in to that invisible hand. \Don't forget that.\ the spirit whispered into his mind. Then, as impossibly as he had arrived, Qui-Gon disappeared, ghosting away into the darkness and the air.

End Notes

As I recall, the discussion on MA around the end of 1999 had to do, among other things, with time. According to officially licensed guides and whatnot, the travel time between Coruscant and Naboo (and Tatooine, for that matter) is several weeks, but of course in the movie we see the takeoff and the landing and it's as if only a few hours have gone by. This is a persistent problem in Star Wars in general -- where does the time go? So I thought I'd try to address that a bit. Mali Wane, Terri Hamill, and the incomparable [name deleted] (who can no longer use the handle she was using at the time) were indispensable, giving me the title, multiple betas, and film dialogue, which at the time was tough to come by. Terri had a VCD or some such thing, with subtitles in something like Balinese; I relied on that once or twice, but mostly on my memory and theirs.
Future Perfect was my first effort at slash, and approximately my second at fan fiction in general. (A friend and I began writing a gen SW novel in college; in high school, I wrote a paper on Tim O'Brien's In the Lake of the Woods that I now realize falls under the heading of "reinterpreive fiction," like Grendel -- it tells the story of a secondary character from that character's point of view. Fan fiction, in its way.) I look at it now and ... well, I don't hate it, but I sure hate some of the choices I made in it. The epithets alone make me squirm.

Past Conditional carries the thing through the end of the movie -- adhering to canon, I like to think, as much as possible (except for, you know, the slash thing). I see a difference in style already. Present Progressive is my concession to the weepiness in fandom over the death of Qui-Gon Jinn, and an attempt at a solution to the problem of why Ben Kenobi and Yoda disappear when they die, while Qui-Gon Jinn and Darth Vader don't. It's got some stuff in it that I like a lot.

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