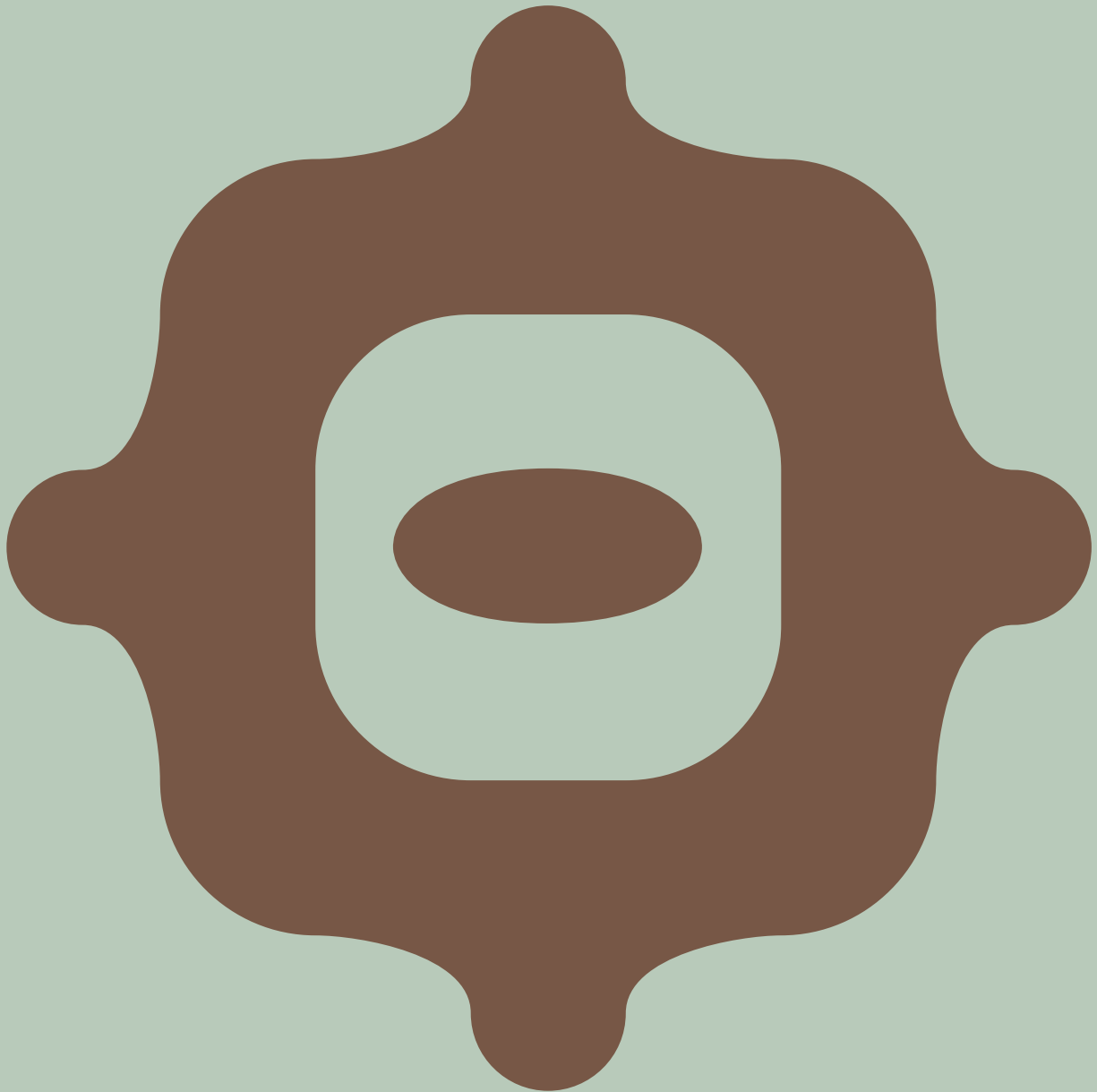


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& Other Tales of the Master and His Apprentice

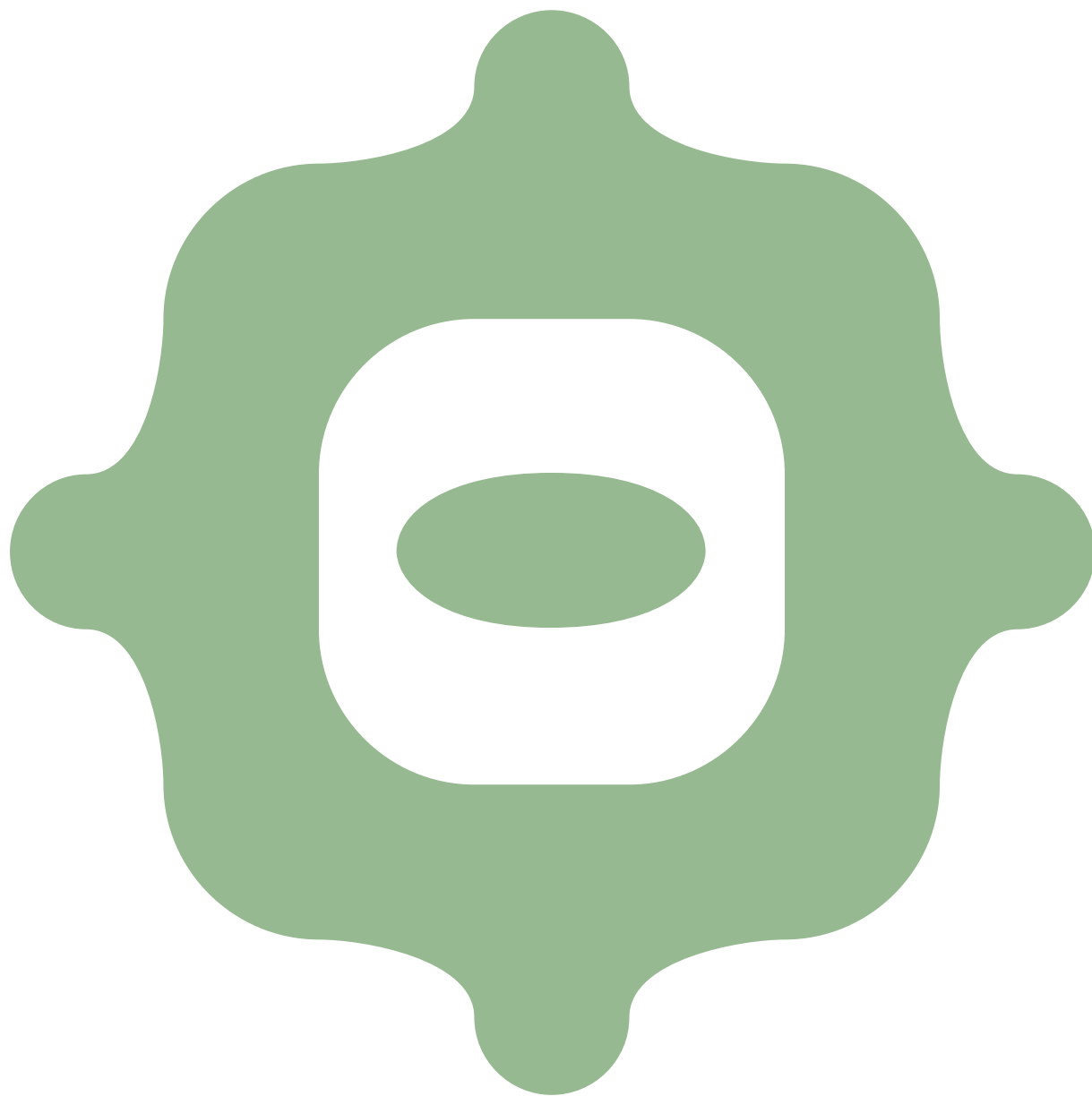


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Bene Dictum V

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& Other Tales of the Master and His Apprentice



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Bene Dictum V

Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan slash



## **Bene Dictum V: Nanshoku & Other Tales of the Master and His Apprentice**

an anthology of Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan slash fiction  
84,700 words

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## **WARNING:**

THIS ANTHOLOGY CONTAINS SAME-SEX, ADULT-ORIENTED MATERIAL (SLASH). IT IS INTENDED FOR READERS OF LEGAL AGE WHO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE CONTENTS AND WISH TO READ THEM.

## **Bene Dictum V: Nanshoku & Other Tales of the Master and His Apprentice**

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How do you read a zine? If I were to guess—based on anecdotal evidence—I’d say very few readers begin with the first story and work their way through, in order, to the end. I think a greater number of us will start by reading favorite authors or pairings or story types and then eventually read the other bits. But no matter how you do it, I’ve tried to give a couple of organizational options to this volume.

First, one variable is eliminated: author. All stories were penned by M. Fae Glasgow. If you’re looking for a different writer, you will not find her here.

Second, consider slash pairings: umm. I seem to have eliminated that variable too. This is a Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan zine. No other couple is available for your prurient pursuits.

Well, what about story types and themes? Ah, now that is something we can work with. You’ll note that I’ve grouped stories into sections. Don’t take these categories as absolutes, however. They’re either just general indicators or convenient organizational devices. The ‘Days’ category came together on the basis of title alone. Stories in the ‘Change’ section seemed to focus on transition and transformation of various sorts while ‘Froth’ is a recognition that these little bits are light and without a lot of substance to them. The ‘Endings’ pieces all mark the conclusions of things. Finally, the novel length story in the ‘Beginnings’ category leads up to a beginning, but it certainly takes a long time to get there.

These five categories don’t tell you how the zine is laid out. On the off chance that you’re a reader who begins on page 1 and goes straight through to the last period (or full stop, as M. Fae keeps nagging me), I realized there would be too much of a muchness to order the fiction this way. So, the stories from each category are sprinkled here and there. You’ll find short next to long, fully developed next to brief scene (noted by the term Scottish Trifle 🍷🍷 in this zine), and anchoring it all there is the title story ‘Nanshoku’ at the beginning and the very long story ‘Benediction’ at the end.

I ask again: how do you read a zine? In any fashion you wish.

Now for a few words about themes. It’s always interesting to examine the Glaswegian’s latest output and see what ideas she’s exploring. There’s always something that ties a lot of the work together. In this case, it’s reflecting on the nature of the master/apprentice relationship. For M. Fae, this means an unshakable underlying assumption that our two Jedi have a deep attraction and love between them. (It’s a slash zine—you expected something else?) In some stories they act upon it; in others, they discuss why they should or shouldn’t be lovers. Sex isn’t the focus of every tale. And that is how it should be. Good slash is not dependent on hot sex scenes—as desirable and necessary as they sometimes are. No, good slash is dependent on the exploration of relationships. In other words, the stories in this collection rarely take us away from the Temple on Coruscant and they rarely bring in secondary characters for more than the most minor roles. You could lock Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon into their quarters and the tales would still work. The focus is on the interior lives and emotional development of our master/apprentice pair and not on their adventures saving the galaxy. If you’ve read M. Fae’s writings before, you’ll know this is how she works. If her work is new to you, welcome. Happy reading.

—Caroline K. Carbis (*‘Palo Verde’*), Editor

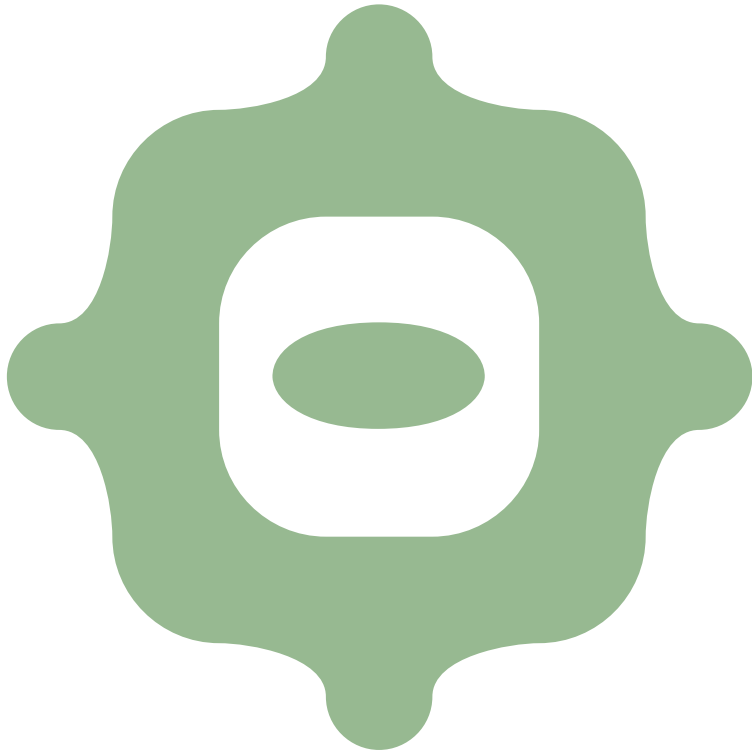
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🍷 Spelling and punctuation disclaimer. House style for the zine is our usual mishmash. Some of the spelling is British. What I absolutely loathe (e.g., doubling the ‘l’—labelling instead of labeling) has been converted to American standard. Punctuation follows American practices for the most part—except where it becomes resolutely Scottish. I have it on good

authority that spelling, too, is optional for the Scots. Typos are all mine. Place the blame there.

🍷🍷 Scottish Trifles are those pieces that are only a scene or a few paragraphs. They lack the structure of a short story and because we doubt that they’ll be developed any further, we’ve thrown them in here.



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Words sometimes change their meanings over the centuries; ‘nanshoku’ is one of them. Once, it was a word connected with love, with accepted social structures; some even claim it was one of the cornerstones of the samurai way of life. Now, if you look it up in on-line Japanese dictionaries, you’ll find it defined as ‘disapproval.’

This story is about how what is acceptable isn’t necessarily right, and what is unacceptable isn’t necessarily wrong, and how the times we live in can dictate love. And that sometimes, when we decide to accept one thing as right, we are making something else wrong.

**あはれをこめて縫った**

Master Qui-Gon Jinn had taken his padawan to his bed as soon as Obi-Wan was old enough. As the Code and tradition ordered, the very first time Obi-Wan had turned to his master with heat in his loins and hunger in his eyes, Qui-Gon had taken him, teaching him in this, as in everything else.

Gentleness, constraint, kindness, affection—these things had marked their beginning, until Obi-Wan was as accomplished in matters of controlling and channelling sexual need as he was in everything else. And as the years passed, the lessons became practice became reward, until Obi-Wan could reduce his master to a bundle of plucked nerves shattered with satiation, until they matched each other move for move in this primitive dance even better than they matched each other on the battlefield.

Until Qui-Gon had ended it all. A simple ending, one might say, but shocking, nonetheless, for the place and the timing of it. In front of the assembled Council, without warning or soft touches to soothe the harshness of the blow, Master Qui-Gon Jinn spoke those few words not to his padawan, but about him.

Ready for his trials.

Words every padawan longed for, and words many dreaded. Ready for the trials, ready to become a knight, ready to be marked as an adult, ready for the ritual cutting of the braid, and the severing of the bond.

And while the Council and the Senate debated ancient prophecy and upstart Trade Federations, a master and his padawan were given, by nothing more than chance and the benevolence of the Force, time for what lay between them.

**あはれをこめて縫った** after the announcement

had ricocheted around the Council Chamber, a thunderclap forgotten by all but two: the Council was engrossed in discussion of the Sith; already settled amongst his age-mates, Qui-Gon’s Chosen One had cast one last look over his shoulder and disappeared, grinning, into the chaos of younger-learners’ tumbling class; light-footed and heavy-hearted, Obi-Wan Kenobi was returning from a tiresome stack of form-filling.

Their chambers were not silent; music, as was so often the case when Qui-Gon had the leisure, was playing faintly in the background.

“You’re certain, Master?” Obi-Wan asked bluntly, the early days of silent obedience old, dead history between them. “You truly believe I’m ready?”

Qui-Gon smoothed the dark brown fabric lying heavily across his lap, his fingers lingering on the half-finished seam; he took a long time before he answered, honouring all the questions Obi-Wan had asked, answering what little he could. “Yes, Padawan.”

“This isn’t some...some necessary acceleration to teach Anakin?”

“To hold you back would be an insult to the Force and could lead only to the Dark.”

“I wish—” Discipline caught, and held, Obi-Wan not finishing the treacherous truth.

“As do—”

For a moment, they looked at one another, until Qui-Gon lowered his gaze from impossible wishes to final gifts, attention going back to the brown cloth in his lap, traditional silver needle sliding as slow as sadness.

**あはれをこめて縫った** was a blessing and benediction, imbued with Force, as was proper. But how many other robes, the master wondered, were sewn with love like drops of blood?





It was right, he reminded himself sternly, and proper, and the way it had always been, that a beardless boy would be padawan, the padawan would be knight, and thus become a man, an equal, and knights and masters could not lie with each other. And so, in the fullness of time, it was right, he repeated even more sternly, and proper, that the master would forfeit both padawan and knight, but gain him as a Jedi brother.

Master Jinn held the robe up, almost smiling at his own old memory of Yoda finally having to use the Force to present the long length of his first knight's robe to him. No such indignities would be necessary with his own padawan, of course. He was still taller than Obi-Wan, despite his padawan's most fervent childhood wishes.

Impossible wishes, chattered about so brightly all those years ago. More impossible wishes, left unspoken today.

He brought his mind back to the present, to what he could still do for his padawan. The robe puddled across his lap, mostly pre-made with only some of the stitching left to be done by a busy master's hands, an easing of tradition that had become a tradition of its own. Carefully, his fingers folded a hem on one of the inner pockets, his hands forming secrets, until he couldn't resist the pull of memories any more. It had been so different for him in his own youth. He had known what was coming, of course, padawan gossip being what it was, and had dreaded it. Not that he hadn't loved Master Yoda, but then, he couldn't imagine lying with someone so small. So green. So ugly. So smelly. He smiled now, remembering the sympathy and wide-eyed horror of his agetates contemplating his fate and discussing it in the padawans' common room.

But it hadn't been something horrible to be endured, after all. His own master, kind and thankfully of an incompatible species, had taken him aside and explained, gently, that it was not punishment nor a rejection, but still, that his training in matters sexual would be undertaken by a surrogate. His master had chosen a new knight to take the master's place as the Code allowed, and it had been interesting, pleasant, and such a relief after what he'd dreaded. And it had been brief, lasting barely long enough to teach him the basics and control, before the knight had pronounced him 'ready' and had gone off on a mission. No lasting passions there, no hints of undue enthusiasm lingering past the proper time.

And himself, so many years later, doing his duty

as a master, teaching and training a padawan all but exploding with the hungers and hormones of his body, new sexual desires and surges of need threatening a padawan's uncertain control of the Force. Difficult days, taming the wild fire of sexuality erupting at the worst possible moments, frustrating his padawan dangerously, the time when so many padawans came closest to losing their way on the Path: those long days, of moulding and instructing and providing safe relief—and control. He had done what was required with Xanatos, and then with Obi-Wan, and all had gone as it should, with Xanatos. As it had gone as it ought, with Obi-Wan. At first. And he had been relieved to be free of teaching those lessons.

Ah, but then it was later, when ought and should were shown for what they were, one padawan gone to the Dark and the other brimming over with light and... Perhaps it was best to leave it unnamed.

But it had been later, so much later, well into the days when Obi-Wan had achieved admirable control, when the desires of the body were no longer dangerous ambushes, when a padawan could and did and was welcome to share with whomever she or he chose: those heady days, when his padawan had returned to him, so serious, so mature, voice deep and seductive, demanding his right to claim succour and assistance from his master. The headiest of days, when it was no longer another lesson he was duty bound to teach, the days when it had become joy, a tight coil of happiness drawing him into its centre, Obi-Wan reaching for him, choosing him again and again, when the instant pleasures of his agetates had paled.

He stroked his hand across the wonderfully soft fibres of the dull cloth, measuring the span of the shoulders, remembering the wonderfully soft skin across the span of his padawan's shoulders. The passion was to fade to nothing, he'd been promised, as the youth grew to manhood; so little passion to begin with, he had expected it to be as welcome to give up the carnal with Obi-Wan as it had with Xanatos. But for all their talk, the healers and the other masters were useless, as Obi-Wan became a man and passion began, and grew, and consumed.

Until Qui-Gon had even considered...

He stroked the beard he had grown five years ago, reminding himself now as he had then, and went steadfastly back to his third last duty to his padawan.

            in hand, Obi-Wan smiled





as he came through the doorway, eyes brightening wickedly as he deliberately set the privacy lock.

The muscles in Qui-Gon's face ached as he pulled a tired smile out for his padawan's sake and laid aside the unfinished robe. "I didn't tell you earlier, Padawan, but I'm sorry," he said, time counting down in the back of his mind, his last few duties spread before him like famine. "I had an entirely different plan for telling you that you were ready."

He saw the reminder hit home as Obi-Wan's eyes darkened to a mere echo of the usual twinkle, but it was a good effort, nonetheless, and Qui-Gon credited his padawan for trying so hard.

"Let me guess," Obi-Wan said as he set the uncommon plethora of dishes on the low table, comfort or celebration, or some mixture of both, "somewhere with a waterfall and lush jungle? No—" a bit more laughter in the eyes, "too many insects and for all your mastery, Master, you have never been overly fond of bugs that bite. A luxurious palace, perhaps, with gold-cloth drapes and asiri-stone floors, a bath as big as a lake—"

"Here, my Padawan," Qui-Gon said, managing only a whisper. "Here, just the two of us, with the door locked and no mission pressing on us."

Blue eyes shading to green, summer on the sea. "Tell me," whispered just as softly, the caress to Qui-Gon's cheek softer still. "Please, Master, tell me now."

He shouldn't; tradition frowned upon it, although the Code was silent on the subject of whether this was allowed, so close to the time when it would become forbidden.

But this was to be their their last night as master and padawan, as evidenced by how often they used and thought those names, touchstones against the future: tomorrow, unless disaster befell, Obi-Wan would be no more a padawan, but a knight, and the Code was very clear on certain details as to what was allowed between master and knight.

Tradition he could cast aside, here, in private, without cost to his padawan; it was all he could give them both.

It was more than simple lust pulling taut between them, and he acknowledged that, if only for tonight, smiling at Obi-Wan. "My plan," he said, guiding his padawan to their bed, nudging gently as Obi-Wan stopped at the unpleasantness of a cot tucked into the corner, "my plan was to bring you back to our private apartments, ignore that thing—" he nodded towards the unwanted cot. Still, his padawan hesi-

tated, staring at this stark reminder of what was expected of them both after tonight—as early as tonight. Qui-Gon let go of his padawan long enough to give a rough tug at the blanket covering the cot to make it as rumpled as a restless Obi-Wan would leave it, a message to his padawan, an affirmation that this—that Obi-Wan—was still desired. He stroked the tip of his index finger down his padawan's cheek and waited for an answering smile before steering his willing padawan over to the large bed they'd shared so often. "I always wanted nothing more than to bring you here."

"Where I belong, Master."

He couldn't say yes to that; couldn't do that, not to his padawan, sow more seeds of unacceptable hopes. With almost delicate care, he eased Obi-Wan onto the bed and began to disrobe him, belt and sash and beginning on the boots. How many times had he done this over the years? From exhaustion to illness, from injuries to passion, how many times had he undressed his padawan? From the first night in tears over failure in the salle, to the first night of frantic squirming against him before collapsing in sleep, to the nights when he had done this on his knees to his padawan, an atom away from breaking the Code.

The boots, as always, gave him trouble, and as always, his padawan's eyes were full of amusement, defeating the encroaching sadness. And as always, the amusement then receded behind desire, never disappearing entirely, always there, ready to glimmer like sunshine on raindrops.

There were words he longed to say, words that would only be a cruelty now on the eve of everything changing. On the eve of giving up everything.

But he allowed himself a little, one small indulgence to hold the need to speak at bay. "I shall miss this," he said, and knew his padawan heard what he left unsaid.

Knew, too, the reason for the conflict in his padawan; knew it intimately, his own need growing until he was almost afraid he might actually ask the heresy out loud, 'do we have to give this up?'

He ran his fingers up the length of Obi-Wan's legs, soft cotton yielding to the rougher nub of homespun, designed to remind them of simplicity and humbleness, succeeding in reminding him only of how his padawan's flesh pebbled in the cold, or there, around his nipples, when he traced his tongue on sensitive flesh.

Hands in his hair, and he grew still, waiting while Obi-Wan undid the thin cord; the cord unlooped





slowly, coiled around fingers, a figure eight, neat and tidy, placed now beside the bed, another symbol of who he was.

Master.

But tomorrow, that would be nothing more than a title used by others, while close at his side would be a knight, although there might as well be a galaxy between them. As there would be, soon enough. Should Queen Amidala choose to return to Naboo in the very near future, there was always a chance that they'd be allowed to finish this final mission together, but that would probably be more penance than pleasure. Given how rarely a full master and a knight went out on the same mission, it would probably be the last time they would be sent anywhere together. Especially if they showed signs of wanting to go against the Code.

"Tomorrow will come soon enough, Master," Obi-Wan said gently, very nearly startling him out of his brooding contemplation of symbols and goodbyes. "We have little enough time left, unless..."

Impossible wishes, dangerous dreams.

He dredged up a smile for his padawan, ran the tip of one finger down one cheek, across the parted lips, down the cleft in the chin.

Old memories, teaching Obi-Wan basic hygiene when needed, old laughter, in the days when Obi-Wan had barely begun and he hadn't yet needed his own beard as reminder.

He ran that finger down his padawan's neck, over Adam's apple, into the hollow of the throat, down onto the chest; both hands to push aside the three layers of Obi-Wan's robes and touch the coarse hair and smooth skin thus revealed. Qui-Gon lowered his head, and with mouth resting on the perfect arch of his padawan's collarbone and Obi-Wan's hands coming up to encircle him, admitted with his sigh that it was a comfort to feel those hands stroking his back or his hair.

And still, crowding in his throat, there were those dangerous things he wanted to say. So many things. But it would be nothing more than wicked self-indulgence to burden his padawan with hearing them said aloud. He raised his head, looking down, his hair falling to one side, not even having to think about pushing it aside so that it didn't get in Obi-Wan's mouth or eyes, silver-shot hair brushing against his padawan's cheek, a curtain between the light and his padawan, casting that face into shadow, the eyes still uncommonly bright.

Reading those eyes, Qui-Gon found he didn't

need to say a single one of those dangerous things after all; his padawan knew, and echoed them.

"My Padawan," he said, and kissed that wonderful mouth. Almost chastely again, as chaste this last time as the first, gentle, kind, taking things very slowly, even as he felt the rushing burn of hunger in his padawan. "Slowly," he whispered, belying himself, shifting suddenly, grabbing his padawan in his arms, holding him so tightly.

Slowly, he'd said that first night, against the desperate hurry of new-found sex. We have all the time in the world.

Oh, what a lie that had been.

Delicate kisses from his padawan, to his closed eyes, his cheeks, his mouth, the most tender of kisses, saying what couldn't ever be said.

Fingers stroking his beard, birthing another memory, but tonight, a different question: "After I become a knight, Master, will you shave it off?"

He caught Obi-Wan's braid up in his fingers, ran his fingertips along the smooth length of it, counting the marker bands he'd put there himself, feeling the coarser ends of unbound hair against his palm. "I think," he said, lifting the braid and running it over his lips and across his beard, "that I shall need the reminder as much as ever, my Padawan."

Before the questions could be raised or his padawan say more than either of them ought, he kissed the willing mouth, taking Obi-Wan's tongue into him, wishing—none to hear him think of breaking the Code—that he could take Obi-Wan inside him in other ways.

To feel Obi-Wan's cock inside him, to be taken like that...it would say what he couldn't say.

And it would ruin their balance and eventually, both their reputations. If it was forbidden and ruinous for a knight to play the part of a boy, then a Master did not even contemplate such a thing.

Not out loud, anyway.

He allowed himself the luxury of not thinking, only feeling, surrendering to the pleasure, deepening the kiss, deeper, needing the impossible, trying devour the future. And his padawan opened to him, held him and hugged him, and fisted strong hands in his hair, and made the most gloriously happy noises deep within his throat.

Shamefully, Qui-Gon wanted to weep.

Wanted to shout and yell his love from the Council Tower, wanted to claim Obi-Wan and defy anyone to make him let go.

He gathered his padawan's braid in his hand, the



crumpled length of it bumpy under his palm as he cradled Obi-Wan's head, and pressed small, tender kisses all over his padawan's face.

Passion coloured by desperation, the tender kisses and gentle caresses gave way to frantic haste, clothing thrown aside, hands grabbing and clutching, gasps and groans, muttered words of need, of encouragement, of demand. No finesse, only hunger, the hounding, haunting need to be together, his padawan's body remembering him, opening up so quickly to him, pushing inside, fierce, burning, wanting. Biting, licking, sucking, leaving his mark, claiming what he could, and feeling the same bites and bruising on his own body, such strong hands digging into him, holding him so tight, not letting him go, yielding nothing and taking everything.

Over quickly, his cock and his seed planted deep inside, staying there, rocking back and forth, cradling his padawan while Obi-Wan's semen dried on their bellies, their breath so harsh, hearts pounding so fast, and snatches of unspeakable words crashing between them.

Waking, later, and beginning all over again, his padawan hot in his mouth, long and hard and thick, and he used none of his well-learned breathing exercises to make it easier, feeling, not thinking, nothing existing but his padawan and the heated attempt to fill an unfillable emptiness inside.

Later still, without truly having slept, holding his padawan in his arms, stroking the fair hair and the strong, smooth muscles of Obi-Wan's back.

Rising, his padawan asleep at last, albeit restlessly, frown between his brows and his master's name upon his lips, the master lit a single lamp beside the bed, and then there was, again, steady pierce and slide of the silver needle.

Not yet dawn, but the sky beginning to lighten, ominous as death. The cloak was finished, but not laid aside, Qui-Gon lying beside his padawan, the cloak covering them both against the end-of-night chill. Touching the familiar face, tracing the shape of hairline, brows, eyelashes, cheekbones, storing up each sensation, a miser with the last of his hoard. Lamplight, gold upon his padawan's hair and brows, eyelashes darker, but with tips of gold too, and when his padawan opened his eyes, there would be tiny flecks of gold in there too. Fool's gold, his own old master would tell him, sharp crack of walking stick against his shin in warning. Pyrite, pyre, did it matter? His own eyes burned, and his padawan's were glittering with gold and tears that would never be shed.

Night was almost over, the day nearly here.


So this was the last time.

He wanted to make it last forever, wanted to lose them both in the tenderness of this togetherness, but they were only flesh and blood and human weakness. More foolish wishes and impossible dreams that this could last forever, each slowing, damping down, holding back again and again, drawing this out for as long as they could, so reluctant to let it end.

They were both tired, nearly spent, emotion and not lust driving them this last time. Careful touching, as if each feared the other were fragile, would break, or as if each one could think only that this was the last time there would be this touch, and that touch, and this kiss. That there would never be another time when their eyes met, as master slid into padawan; this was the last time Obi-Wan would gasp in quite that way, the last time Qui-Gon would make quite that sound. There would never be another kiss shared so deeply, nor another caress felt so much. There would be no more feeling that particular tightness, no more of that particular fullness.

So they moved together, and came together and afterwards, they lay together, holding and held, and watched daylight come creeping cruelly over the floor to their bed.

And at the last possible moment, just before the first stab of daylight could touch them, Qui-Gon performed his second last duty to his padawan and his padawan, so much kindness, turned his face away, the padawan sparing the master from seeing the pain in his eyes as Qui-Gon severed their master-padawan bond.

 had cleared away their uneaten supper and made the morning meal, not needing to ask, of course, what Obi-Wan's favourites were.

Sitting across the low table from each other, eating slowly, with much offering of more tea, more food, and checking that everything was as the other wanted.

Many words, and not one of them a name, or a title.

The com unit chimed, Obi-Wan clearing up while Qui-Gon spoke quietly with their caller.

"The time is set," Qui-Gon said, voice stiff. "Mid-day."

"Then there is still time to..."

But their time had run out with the coming of dawn, no time left now for them to do anything. And



there was nothing to be said now, when too much had been said in the night.

Obi-Wan smiled, sad-eyed, and continued, briskly, as if he'd planned on saying just this and nothing else, "Time enough to get ready and clear this place up."

"Of course," Qui-Gon replied evenly, going into the bedroom, flinching not at all as he began stripping the bed, remaking it with clean sheets tucked in on the other side by his wan-faced... knight-designate.

The other morning routines, then, Qui-Gon bathing, dressing, quite sensibly refusing the temptation to have his—to have Obi-Wan brush his hair out the way they used to.

Standing alone in the main room, Qui-Gon listened to the sounds of Obi-Wan bathing, carefully strangling the memories as they tried to rise. Leave them be, he told himself, going back into his bedroom to dress—snatching up clothes instead, and dressing hurriedly in the main room where there was nothing to notice but the lingering aftersmell of their morning meal.

A last check of the stitching he had done, concentrating on that instead of the painfully familiar sounds of someone going through their morning ablutions, so many mornings, some taken for granted, others etched so clearly in his mind.

There would be time, and time enough, to remember those days, he lectured himself, when they had faded into nothing more than fond memories of a highly regarded padawan.

Highly regarded, he thought, as he gathered some necessary items together. Highly regarded and deeply...cherished. Yes, cherished was a word he could allow himself.

Cherished, indeed, and the intensity of his cherishing very nearly hurt as Obi-Wan walked into the main room. Obi-Wan was discreetly draped in a bathrobe today, Qui-Gon noticed with what he promised himself was simply approval, and Obi-Wan made no attempt to go back into the bedroom.

Easier, somehow, to do this in the public room of their quarters. Far easier, than to go back into the bedroom with its unused sheets and the memory of sex and desperation lingering in the air.

It was with approval again, and nothing more, of course, that Qui-Gon observed Obi-Wan's hands unclench and reach out to the dark hakama Qui-Gon held for him.

Not as dark as the trousers Qui-Gon wore, of

course, but a long way from the padawan white Obi-Wan had worn for these many years. He had planned, in the dark watches of the night, to put the tunics on Obi-Wan himself, but to reach around that naked torso, to smooth the new ecru clothing into place over gold-kissed skin, where the marks of his possession and their passion bloomed dark as blood?

He saw his own hungry temptation reflected back at him in eyes the colour of loneliness.

Impossible wishes and dangerous dreams.

So many years, so much potential, so much honoured service, too much, simply too much, to be thrown away.

Qui-Gon handed the tunic out as Obi-Wan reached for it, and they both looked away.

Two layers of inner tunics, one outer layer, and Obi-Wan standing there, simply looking at him. Not demanding, but wanting this tradition.

Deep breath, and carefully, with respect, Qui-Gon wrapped the wide sash around Obi-Wan's waist; banded it round with the narrower leather belt, handed the familiar accoutrements over one by one, watching as Obi-Wan put them into the small bag or slipped them into the secure hold of the sash.

Almost last, Qui-Gon balancing the lightsabre across his open hands, offering it with a formal bow as one would to a fellow master or knight, Obi-Wan taking it with a deeper bow and a hint of a smile.

The last, now, the warm brown cloak of a knight, Qui-Gon finding a smile and the gallantry to swirl the long mid-brown cloak as he draped it around Obi-Wan, marking him as knight.

"There," Qui-Gon said finally, fingers lingering a moment too long on tugging the cloak snug at Obi-Wan's neck. "You look every inch the fine knight you are."

"Almost," Obi-Wan answered. "There's still one more thing."

The very last duty of a master to his padawan.

The last thing he would ever do as Obi-Wan's master, the final ritual, the one that marked the passage from padawan to knight. Inside one of the pockets of his own cloak, Qui-Gon had a small pair of silver scissors, the blades stabbing deep.

Qui-Gon looked at Obi-Wan, then reached to pull the hank of fair hair out from under the weight of the cloak, the hair glinting clean and shiny against the brown.

Qui-Gon stood there, in the beauty of the morning sun, feeling cold. It wasn't something he ought to do, but he allowed himself, running his fingers down



the unbound length of his pada—Obi-Wan’s hair, fingering the softness.

“Braid it for me, master.”

Shocked by that, meeting Obi-Wan’s shining eyes.

Tradition was that the hair was left undone, transition between padawan and knight, and then cut by the once and former master, to be tossed into the flame, a symbol of surrendering to the Force. Rare it was, very rare indeed, for a knight to cut the braid and keep it; suspect, even, for a padawan not to burn the braid after being knighted.

Not begging, not pleading, but asking, as plain and honest as Obi-Wan had always been. “Please, Master.”

Qui-Gon found there were no words left for him to say, since he couldn’t say the ones that hammered at him to escape.

Obi-Wan’s fingers rubbed lightly at Qui-Gon’s beard, the way Qui-Gon himself did, when he needed to remember. “I will need my own reminder, Master.”

And it was the hardest thing Qui-Gon had ever done to not kiss him at that moment.

Qui-Gon nodded, just once, and turned away, going into the bathroom to gather the last of the braiding bands.

Bleak pride, bleaker pleasure, that his hands did not tremble as he plaited the hair, over, under, over, under, over.

He would not dwell on this. He would not dwell on what was over.

Yes, they were losing something, but they were

gaining so much more. A knight. A very fine knight, who would one day be a better master and Jedi than Qui-Gon himself.

And will you love your padawan as I love you? he wondered, and didn’t speak those words either.

But perhaps Obi-Wan heard, or perhaps Obi-Wan simply knew him as clearly as he knew Obi-Wan. Strong hands came up to touch his own, fingers barely brushing against the backs of his hands as he finished plaiting the braid, and then, his hands were taken, and held. Raised up, each palm kissed, just once, and then Obi-Wan’s warmth let him go.

“You have taught me well and been the best master a padawan could have,” Obi-Wan said, and in the carefully correct phrase, Qui-Gon heard every forbidden word they’d said to each other last night, and knew everything that this morning’s small words held. “I thank you, Master.”

And bitterly sweet, to say the traditional response. “It was my honour, and my pleasure.”

They could postpone it if they wished; it was still relatively early, but there would be people between here and the Temple Flame, friends and colleagues who would wish to congratulate one or both of them. Time then, to leave.

On the threshold, the Code and the future in front of them, the last of their intimacy behind them, Qui-Gon turned to Obi-Wan and said, commendably steadily, “May the Force be with you, my Padawan.”

And unspoken, but heard clearly all the same:  




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This was, believe it or not, inspired by Obi-Wan's ineffably cheeky "You were right about one thing, master." That cheek and that delight in teasing was just too good to ignore.

## 比本快在 丹 比沢在丹七村

of fresh air, Obi-Wan Kenobi strode into the comfortable room, brisk and full of life, his cloak over one arm, a stack of data disks in his free hand and the scantest pause as he took in the sight of his master in casual lounging clothes, very nearly lolling—yes, lolling—in front of the computer. Private downtime on a safe mission, Jedi formality shed at the door along with their cloaks.

Qui-Gon relaxed just a tiny fraction more with his apprentice back beside him. "How are your rooms?"

"A rare treat," Obi-Wan replied, voice muffled slightly as he hung his cloak in Qui-Gon's massive wardrobe, becoming rich and clear again as he sat on the floor and pulled off his boots, making himself very much at home under Qui-Gon's calmly approving look. "They're far better than anything we usually get," a sigh of relief as he pulled off socks and massaged the soles of his feet for a moment. "At least these people seem to understand that two large men require somewhat more than a small single bed in a damp and drafty hut."

Qui-Gon indicated the small—compared to the monumental pile of information they usually had to absorb for a mission—stack of disks in Obi-Wan's hand. "Finished already?"

"There wasn't much to learn," Obi-Wan said, setting the disks in a neat pile on the desk beside Qui-Gon's left hand. "Both parties seem remarkably sensible and downright keen to reach an agreement."

"My reading of the situation as well," Qui-Gon said, glancing toward his computer as it peeped to let him know of a new message. Arms folded comfortably, he settled back a little as Obi-Wan leant over his shoulder to check the screen.

"Anything interesting?" Obi-Wan asked, scanning the long list of messages from the Temple system.

"I assume they're all of great interest to the senders," Qui-Gon said dryly, eyes crinkling in a

smile to match his apprentice's. "But I confess—"

"If only this far from Coruscant and possible eavesdroppers."

Qui-Gon gave him a look that was, perhaps, intended to be disapproving for that remark, but was probably closer to indulgent. "—that I've no interest in what colour the primary school hallways should be painted nor in whether or not there should be four or five vegetables offered with each meal."

"Especially after a dinner like tonight's."

"I noticed you enjoying yourself."

"You weren't exactly complaining."

Fingers combing through his mustache, hiding a smile. "It did make a pleasant change from our most recent missions."

"Our most recent missions?" Obi-Wan said, only half pretending outrage. "All of our missions, Master. All too often it seems that our greatest danger isn't our enemies, but our food. Stuffed x'hsa snout, boiled intestines, baked snake heads, spices hot enough to do permanent damage to our mouths, water tasting like piss and given where that well was, I'm none too sure the water wasn't contaminated by the latrines—"

Qui-Gon throwing him another indulgent look, amusement warming his eyes, more than enough encouragement for Obi-Wan to continue, "And as for that blood custard we were served—remember that?"

"How could I forget. But hospitality is hospitality and as Jedi—"

"We are forever guests and should be properly appreciative of what we are freely given, yes, I know, I have heard the lecture once or twice. Usually," eyes twinkling, smile inviting, "when I'm trying desperately not to throw up or freeze to death in unheated bedchambers in the depths of winter on a planet where our hosts had forgot that we don't have the benefit of their own pelts."

Qui-Gon managed not to outright grimace at



being reminded of that particular bout of hospitality. "Although I seem to remember you being relieved at being deprived of those pelts."

Even now, and blessed with privacy, Obi-Wan wrinkled his nose. "If you remember that, then perhaps you remember the stench."

"Is it polite to comment on the hygiene habits of our hosts?"

Obi-Wan just looked at Qui-Gon, daring him to play down the joys of tightly weatherproofed animal-hide huts and a crowd of befurred humanoids who bathed only on their High Holy Night of the Alignment of the Sacred Stars of the Great One. Which had been four standard years prior to the Jedi visit. Qui-Gon said nothing, and Obi-Wan kept staring.

Qui-Gon finally gave the smallest of shrugs. "At least they excused us from their traditional guest-price."

The massed daughters of the tribe brought before them, keen to add fresh genes to the bloodlines and two Jedis trying not to offend. "Religious principles. Abstention to cleanse the soul, the chasteness required to retain a warrior's fire," Obi-Wan murmured, casting an overtly fond glance at Qui-Gon as he recited his master's ever-more desperate list of excuses from that night. "I'm surprised you didn't tell them I was your bondmate and the Jedi soulbond would kill us if we were unfaithful."

A mild look, laced with wicked good humour, a quick tug to Obi-Wan's braid. "Would you've had me lie to our hosts, Padawan?"

"I suppose they weren't too bad," Obi-Wan replied, trailing the unbound tip of his braid over Qui-Gon's cheek and down his neck. "At least they didn't try to poison us or sacrifice us."

"Very true," Qui-Gon said, stretching his long legs out, crossing one bare foot over the other, Obi-Wan's gaze drawn like a moth to flame to the lazy seduction of the movement. "And at least they didn't chase us off their planet—"

"With or without accusing us of being evil warlocks."

Another long, supple stretch, Qui-Gon smiling up at Obi-Wan, index finger briefly touching Obi-Wan's cheek. "And they didn't even shoot at us once."

Obi-Wan leaned on the back of Qui-Gon's chair, his fingertips against his master's shoulder, the ends of Qui-Gon's hair tickling the backs of his fingers. "Which brings me directly to my next point! Other master-padawan teams get sent to observe weddings, elections, coronations and the formal state openings

of governments with, I might add," sliding his hand forward to cup the back of Qui-Gon's neck through the lush mane of hair, his master leaning into his touch, "the attendant feasts and luxurious accommodations. We, on the other hand, consider ourselves well done by if we're not shot at!"

Qui-Gon tapped a finger at a message on the screen, Obi-Wan leaning down to read the latest salvo in the war over older padawans being restricted from leaving the Temple overnight without express permission.

Obi-Wan, long since trusted by his master and long since a man, just snorted in disgust.

"And even when we're not being shot at," he went on, well and truly in full spate and thoroughly enjoying himself, "we're being shouted at," a sudden hiccup in the good-natured rant, as his master swiveled his chair round, smiled up at him and then reached up, long, strong fingers removing the first band on his braid, a familiar, welcome signal, "or yelled at, or screamed at," big hands bumping softly against his neck and ear as the second band was undone, longer lengths of hair flowing loosely against his neck, "or being accused of working only for the other side or—"

Hitch in breath, pause in words, the last band being dropped onto the desk, a small pile of tangled red, orange, yellow, catching Obi-Wan's attention until the blue of his master's eyes snared him again.

His hair was being stroked, fingers running through the plaiting, until the long tail was loosened into softness and fanned thinly across his chest, down past his belt.

His gaze followed the ribbon of hair down, watching his master's hands undoing his leather belt for him, folding it properly.

"And?" the deep voice prompted, tugging him slightly to reach behind, his wide sash being slowly unwrapped.

"And—and when we're not being accused of working for the other side, we're being accused of working for both sides, or for neither—"

His waistband was folded in the correct configuration, laid on the desk beside the brightness of his hair ties, the twin outer sashes hanging loosely from his shoulders immediately, his two undershirts opening more slowly as his master's hands slid along their edges.

"Or for only the Senate, or against the Senate and only for the Jedi or—"

Sharp gasp, as teeth fastened unexpectedly on a





suddenly naked nipple, Obi-Wan's hands coming up hungrily to clasp his master's head against him, pressing that mouth more tightly to him.

Qui-Gon pulled away, looking up, a single finger rubbing too-soft circles around one wet nipple. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"Oh, you didn't," Obi-Wan told him, the beginnings of breathlessness nuancing his voice. "I simply lost my focus for a moment."

"Keep your concentration here and now where it belongs," Qui-Gon said, sliding the two sashes off Obi-Wan's shoulders, *hirosode* following, Qui-Gon resorting to Force manipulation to fold them all the way tradition and habit dictated. He was left with Obi-Wan standing, heavy-eyed, in front of him, padawan-white *kosode* gaping wide, displaying the beautifully muscled torso. Two large hands spread out across Obi-Wan's chest, covering and then squeezing the firm pectorals, palms rubbing flatly against the hard peaks of nipples.

"Be mindful of the future," Qui-Gon added quietly around Obi-Wan's hiss of pleasure, hands sliding the tight-sleeved shirt off. He paused for just a moment, admiringly, and then he was stroking down the curves of muscular arms, hands sliding back up and then down, around, cupping the solid strength of rounded buttocks—

"—but not," breath warm as he kissed his way down Obi-Wan's belly, words tickling lightly-haired skin—

"—at the expense," smiling now, around the damp spot his mouth was leaving on Obi-Wan's *hakama*, the cock inside leaping to meet his sucking—

"—of the moment."

"No, Master," Obi-Wan all but groaned, his hands clenching on his master's shoulders.

"Be mindful," Qui-Gon said, untying the *hakama*, the soft trousers slipping down, catching momentarily on the jut of hard cock, Qui-Gon's hands squeezing the naked bottom, mouth nuzzling words around the soft skin covering the head of Obi-Wan's cock, "of the living Force."

"Yes, Master," whispered, clutching hands letting go of broad shoulders. Those hands coming up now, almost reverent, certainly loving, deft fingers undoing the tight silk cord in his master's hair, freeing a new weight, a new swathe that swung down, under his palms, over the backs of his hands and wrists, through his fingers, hair that was warm from being held close against his master's head. His own hands

were now picking up that same warmth, as he hugged his master close, gathering him close and closer still, keeping that mouth on himself, hands pushing down and hips pushing up.

Hips that were stopped, mid-thrust, his master leaning back, looking up at him, smiling openly and widely, a gift far rarer and more intimate than the sex itself. "I thought you were going to concentrate on the moment, Padawan."

A moment spared for the sharpest glare, and defeat admitted at the first hint of Qui-Gon letting him go. "And usually, our accommodations are less than pleasant," Obi-Wan whispered, kneeling before his master, leaning in for a kiss, being given only the briefest, sweetest caress of tongue on tongue before Qui-Gon leant back once again, entirely open—

"—bearing no resemblance to the pleasant quarters we've both been given here." His fingers rubbed through the slightly coarse beard, fingernails scratching lightly, just exactly the way Qui-Gon liked best, strong chin lifting into the caress.

"Here, we have separate rooms and bathing facilities," grabbing now, unseemly in his hunger, pulling the nubby sage-green top off, making a mess of Qui-Gon's hair and then smoothing that thick hair back down, gathering handfuls of it, leaning over, rubbing his face across the luxury of his master unbound, breathing in the scent of him.

"—And unlike most places we're sent, here we have beds that are more than adequate," a reactive thrust of his cock against his master's leg—

"—and rooms with perfectly comfortable climate controls."

Pausing in his softly-voiced 'rant,' lapping at Qui-Gon's earlobe, his breath caught suddenly, as he was taken, held, large hands cupping his head, his master dipping a tongue-tip into his ear, making him shudder with the pleasure dancing up and down his back.

Qui-Gon going still, sitting back, observing Obi-Wan, the blue of his eyes nearly swallowed by the aroused black of pupil.

"Usually, we're sent to mudholes and swamps," Obi-Wan went on, running his hands through the scant dusting of hair on his master's chest and down the ripples of the strong abdomen to where the hair began again, darker, coarser, enticing—

"—where we have to perch on too-small beds and cling to each other just to keep out of the mud, with no room for doing anything else."

At a glance from Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon lifted his



hips helpfully, although by now, Obi-Wan's fingers weren't quite so agile, fumbling a little at the complex knot holding the hakama in place, until his master actually laughed, gently, affectionately and stood to take care of the problem himself. A fairly fraught moment, while Qui-Gon took the time to hastily—and frankly, sloppily—fold both pairs of hakama into one untidy lump and set them on the desk with the rest of their clothes, giving Obi-Wan the most delectable view of his bare backside. And then, finally, he turned round again.

Which left Obi-Wan on his knees at his master's feet, Qui-Gon's erection rising hard right in front of his mouth.

Obi-Wan opened his mouth, tongue darting out to taste the bedewed tip of Qui-Gon's cock, but he was pulled roughly to his feet, words pouring hotly into his ear, Qui-Gon hoarse with desire: "Not that, oh, don't tempt me so when there are other things I want tonight."

Obi-Wan smiled up at him, looking as wanton as he felt, leaning back against the strong arms enveloping him, letting Qui-Gon take his full weight. "And?"

"And," Qui-Gon told him, voice thrumming deep in his chest, "if you use that mouth of yours on me, I won't last long enough for a tenth of what I want."

Obi-Wan ran his hands over his own chest, pinching his own nipples, holding them between thumb and forefinger, until the heat from Qui-Gon's gaze was enough to melt ice.

But Qui-Gon didn't touch him, playing this game to the hilt, Obi-Wan conceding, smiling, pressing his hips forward just enough for the tips of their cocks to brush against each other, tenderness sparking raw desire.

"If it's not swamps with foul gases and putrid mud, it's deserts hot enough to bake our brains and dry enough to scour our skin," Obi-Wan said, finally letting go of himself, taking Qui-Gon in hand, those brown nipples already hard and waiting for his touch—

"—and never a decent place to stay. It's either broken down ships or too-small hovels," fingernails now, going round and round those nipples, Qui-Gon breathing hard—

"—or it's uncomfortable, unsanitary castles with enemies," a pause while Obi-Wan's teeth nipped Qui-Gon's nipple and two strong hands laid claim to Qui-Gon's cock and balls—

"—lurking around every crenellation."

A very undignified, un-Jedi squeak, chased by a

glissando of laughter, pure joy and lust from Obi-Wan, as Qui-Gon made a sound suspiciously close to a growl and lifted him up, Obi-Wan's powerful legs automatically gripping around his master's muscular hips, Qui-Gon's skin smooth and warm against his inner thighs.

"Or we're stuck in a palace," he whispered into Qui-Gon's ear, pushing thick clutches of Qui-Gon's hair back, coming in closer to lick and nibble the side of Qui-Gon's neck, right there, where the beard thinned out to smooth skin—

"—with excess thrown in our faces at every turn, even though we're crammed into rooms with only one narrow sleeping couch."

Qui-Gon was walking now, arms holding Obi-Wan so tightly, cock rubbing promisingly against Obi-Wan's bottom with every single step, Qui-Gon nuzzling and sucking and kissing every inch he could reach of Obi-Wan's skin.

"Or we're fighting off the advances of the curious or the perverse seeking to unveil the truth behind the salacious rumours spread about Jedi," a gasp as Qui-Gon shifted his grip, Obi-Wan wrapping himself around his master, holding himself in place, as his backside was cupped and then nails scraped slow, seductive circles in the small of his back, on the curve of his buttocks and there, just there, the exact spot, where it made him shudder and moan.

He tipped his head back, Qui-Gon taking the invitation, teeth nipping his exposed throat and nails coursing along the underside of his ass, where cheeks ended and thighs began, making him fully, triumphantly, erect against his master's belly. A kiss, long and hard, as intoxicating as the caress of nails up and down his back and ass, his voice trembling as he went on—

"—Or we're being sent on missions where we're expected to pretend to be master and sex slave—"

"Appropriately enough," Qui-Gon murmured just as he pulled Obi-Wan loose from himself and dropped him down onto the bed, a sudden splendour of spread limbs and arcing cock. Not even a single bounce on the well-sprung bed was allowed before Qui-Gon was pressing himself down atop Obi-Wan, covering him completely, stealing Obi-Wan's breath for a moment, their cocks sliding perfectly against each other.

"And if Master Yoda isn't forcing us to pretend to be what we're not, local customs force us to hide—ahh!—this—" breathless gasp and murmur, as his cock was taken in a tight fist, stroked hard, bringing



him abruptly to the brink and then holding him there, a coruscating knife-edge of pleasure.

“To hide what?” Qui-Gon said, low and husky, running the palms of his hands up Obi-Wan’s sides and round to his back.

“To hide this.”

A single lap of tongue against nipple, a shiver of pleasure, a torment of frustrated desire.

“To hide what?” Qui-Gon repeated, levering himself up, upper body supported by his elbows on either side of Obi-Wan, his hips pressed down, hard, motionless, potent, holding them both there, an anguishing lack of friction tormenting Obi-Wan and letting the threat of orgasm fade.

“This,” Obi-Wan said smiling upwards, so still under Qui-Gon, just long enough to lull his master into complacency, and then he was surging, pushing up, their cocks rubbing against each other, damp cockheads rilling through hair, sliding, as he twisted under Qui-Gon, reversing them, kneeling now, astride his master, Qui-Gon’s hungry erection pushing up against his balls and the underside of his cock.

“All that we are to each other,” Obi-Wan said, undulating, more gorgeous, glorious friction, amping up the pleasure, bringing orgasm closer again, his hands wrapped tightly around Qui-Gon’s wrists.

“—All that we have with each other,” leaning forward more, his cock pressing against Qui-Gon’s, his mouth coming down to nip Qui-Gon’s lips.

“—All that we fulfill in each other.”

A sudden move, blurring, stopping with Obi-Wan flat on his back with Qui-Gon astride him in his turn, “And all—” Obi-Wan’s voice rough with desire, “that I want.”

Obi-Wan reached down between their bodies, taking both their cocks between his hands, rolling his palms across them, thumbs coming up to stroke the tips. “And what do you want?” he asked.

Qui-Gon smiled down at him, greedy, lazy. “Fuck me.”

Obi-Wan let go of their cocks, twisted a little to reach under and between, his fingers rubbing against Qui-Gon’s small opening. “Your wish is my command, Master.”

“I know,” Qui-Gon said, dryly. Adding, drier still, “When you feel so inclined.”

“Are you saying I’m—oh!—disobedient, Master?”

Qui-Gon, quite pleased with the neat little move that had Obi-Wan spread out on the bed like a long strap of pale leather, all suppleness and tensile strength, kissed Obi-Wan resoundingly, silencing him

for the moment. “Disobedient,” Qui-Gon murmured against Obi-Wan’s lips, every word a welcomed kiss—

“—obdurate, insubordinate, incommodious,” a tweak to both brown nipples, mouth busy against Obi-Wan’s smile—

“—indecorous, ineluctable,” kissing Obi-Wan harder now, stifling the lazy tendril of laughter—

“—indispensable, irrepressible—”

“I thought,” Obi-Wan said, filling his hands again with the fall of Qui-Gon’s hair, lifting the curtain of silvered brown away from his face, “you were supposed to be describing me.”

“You’re saying that ‘irrepressible’ could ever be applied to me?”

Obi-Wan pushed upwards with his hips, teeth catching his lower lip on a groan, the tip of his cock sliding slickly up the long underside of Qui-Gon’s erection. “I’d say that’s pretty irrepressible.”

“Shall I list where the other adjectives came from, my padawan?”

“The Council Chamber?” ending on a squeak as Obi-Wan was taken very firmly in hand, his cock pressed up against his belly, a large, callused palm rubbing from balls to crown.

“Hmm, no, I shan’t list them,” Qui-Gon said, nipping and sucking his way from ear to neck to nipple. “You were to work on your focus. *You* list where you earned those descriptions, no matter how briefly.”

Qui-Gon’s mouth hovering a kiss away from the head of Obi-Wan’s erection, enticing, demanding.

Obi-Wan arching up, trying to get his cock into that mouth, conceding again as Qui-Gon pulled away, Obi-Wan’s voice as raw as his desire. “A mudhole with an amorous royal family who wished to sha—” a muffled sound, wordless pleasure, as Qui-Gon sucked, hard, taking him deep, Obi-Wan lying there, utterly still save for his breath panting hard and the words dripping from him—

“—to share a pair of Jedi around amongst them.”

“Very good, Padawan,” murmured, low and deep, tongue sliding along Obi-Wan’s cock, then farther, working its way up Obi-Wan’s body. “Go on.”

“The wattle and daub huts where the snow and wind blew through—” barely a hesitation in his recital as Qui-Gon, astride Obi-Wan, knelt up, thigh muscles striating. Qui-Gon reaching between his own legs, and Obi-Wan didn’t need to see to know exactly what was being done, for both of their pleasure—



“—through the—ah, the chinks in the walls, freezing us so much we couldn’t even spare the energy to do anything but keep frostbite at bay.”

Qui-Gon smiling, a small smile, but warming his eyes, warming Obi-Wan everywhere that smile touched him.

And both of them, in perfect unison, breathing in, forgetting to breathe out for a long moment, as Qui-Gon lowered himself, fast, hard, practised, onto Obi-Wan’s cock. It was all penetration and heat, hard heat within, soft heat without, eyes wide open as Qui-Gon took Obi-Wan all the way inside.

Qui-Gon settling, solid against Obi-Wan’s thighs, Obi-Wan so deeply inside him. Eyes nearly closed now as the intensity wound tighter, one hand stroking his own cock, hand sliding up as he raised himself, inches of his own cock appearing below his hand as inches of Obi-Wan appeared under him, then sliding down again. It was the most perfect rhythm, tried and true, building slowly, with control, the wildness focused inward.

Obi-Wan lying there, with only the head of his cock encased in luscious heat, the air cool on the rest of him, Qui-Gon waiting, just waiting, thighs trembling, cock glistening under that stroking hand.

“And on that space station,” thrusting up now, hard and fast—

“—where the food was doctored or at least tasted that way, the security guards who came after us, fighting our way to a—”

Losing it again for a moment, needing to stop, needing to just stop and breathe and not move, or it would be over, far sooner than either of them liked it to be.

Qui-Gon having no such problems, the benefits of age and experience, so many years of control brought to bear, Obi-Wan looking to him, finding his own thin thread of control again.

“—a lifepod, escaping with nothing but minimal supplies and energy.”

Slow movements again, Obi-Wan a coiled stillness under the inescapable tide of Qui-Gon’s rise and fall.

“Crammed together in that pod, and all we could do was eke out our resources and conserve our energies.”

Sounds, louder now, of skin on skin, of flesh on flesh, of one man inside another, harsh breathing born not of exertion but of inexorable passion.

“More recently, trapped on an ice planet, our craft out of power, our systems crippled, waiting for help and—”

Losing it a little more, voice breaking from deepness to high-pitched gasp, before resuming, faster now, words punctuated with the sound of his breathing, the pattern of his words matching the rhythm of his master moving atop him, control fading.

“On the only island, on a world of ocean, thrown together, amongst amphibians, who saw no need, for clothes, closed doors, privacy, but who—”

Reaching then for Qui-Gon, curling forward until his master supported him, held him close, his cock inside Qui-Gon, Qui-Gon’s cock against his belly, mouth open on his, strong arms around him, and his hands, once again, in the abundance of thick, long hair.

Whispering and gasping now, breathing the words into Qui-Gon’s kisses, “who would have staked,” nipping lower lip, rubbing chest against chest—

“—and killed any man,” letting go of hair, sliding hands down muscular, sinuous back—

“—found molesting,” cupping the flexing firmness of ass moving, moving, moving—

“—a child which,” fingers against cock, against body spread open and hungry—

“—is what they consider,” rocking now, small movements, small, needfilled, hoarding these last moments, making it last—

“—all students to be,” gasping now, Qui-Gon making noises deep in his throat, the two of them enfolding each other, Obi-Wan touching Qui-Gon now, strong grip around hardness, drawing the pleasure out of him—

“—and you, telling them,” a deep sound, tearing loose inside him—

“—we are all,” faster now, and faster—

“—students and teachers,” Obi-Wan trying desperately to push up as Qui-Gon pushed down, “endless cycle,” head tipping back, body on fire, pulsing, pulsing—

“—together,” pushing up, deeper, needing, oh, needing—

“—us—oh!”

Orgasm hitting him hard, hands leaving bruises where he had grabbed onto Qui-Gon’s arms, and it felt as if every atom of him erupted into Qui-Gon, nothing existing, absolutely nothing, but that one moment, aware of nothing but the moment, the now, the absolute now.

Sagging backwards, Qui-Gon moving with him, Obi-Wan’s penis coming free of Qui-Gon with an indelicately audible wet sound, Obi-Wan



barely aware of anything but the perfection of post-coital lethargy, and Qui-Gon's weight and heat on top of him.

Until there was movement, dimly registered, above him, and the tip of Qui-Gon's hard cock pressed against his lips. Almost sleepy, he smiled up at his master, and took him in, sucking sweetly, gently, then harder as Qui-Gon needed more. It never took long, not at this stage, and Obi-Wan had barely enough time to gently cradle Qui-Gon's balls before he heard Qui-Gon come, getting only a taste of him before Qui-Gon thrust in deeper, holding himself there while Obi-Wan worked his throat around him.

Side by side now, fitting together with the ease of their time together, Qui-Gon, as always, the first to drift toward sleep.

Until Obi-Wan's voice started up again, lazily replete. "And that time in the swamplands, blankets on the floor of a hallway for our bed and no bath—"

Hair falling over his face in a tangled mess that would take a good ten minutes to even begin to tame in the morning, Qui-Gon raised himself up on one elbow, regarded Obi-Wan's cheeky, if sated, grin, and said, firmly, "Enough."

Silence, bar a few rustles as two men settled for sleep.

And then: "But surely, Master, if I'm irrepressible—"

"Consider yourself," Qui-Gon leaned over and kissed Obi-Wan quite thoroughly, "repressed."

"Anything you say, Master," Obi-Wan said sweetly, laughter dimpling just below the surface, "absolutely anything you say."



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There are a wealth of stories in the two journeys of which we see so little—this just happens to be the first piece that I actually finished.

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/// weakness this, rarely admitted, even more rarely permitted, but it came upon him tonight and defeated him. Completely silently, he entered through the partly open cabin door, creeping like a thief in the night to steal a glance at love.

Obi-Wan was lying face-down on the narrow ship's bunk, his left leg twisted behind his right, body folded in an almost perfect rendition of the fourth position in the first kata, something Obi-Wan had once, long ago, found embarrassingly difficult to master. Now he slept that way, dreaming of Force alone knew what.

Qui-Gon sat on the very edge of the bed, barely impinging upon Obi-Wan's privacy, barely breaking his own rules, feared more than the Code itself. He sat there for a long time watching his padawan, appreciating the man's beauty and strength, body and soul, basking in the goodness in this man, measuring it, hoping, always hoping, that it was enough.

A waking mumble, Obi-Wan shifting, stirring, rolling over in the dim light, body glinting naked, exposed, just for a second, before Obi-Wan took pity on him as he always did and covered himself, removing temptation.

With a bluntness brought on by Qui-Gon's presence on his bed, the old argument was revisited once again, everything said so many times they had burned themselves down to the molten core, until Obi-Wan simply asked him, again: "Why won't you have sex with me, Master?"

Bitter tension in the seated man, and his eyes drawn back to look, and look again. Hands sliding inside sleeves, temptation denied or desperation conceded.

"Master?"

"You heard what you called me."

"Yes. And I know what you call me," hand

dropping down to the top of thigh, lying tanned and warm against the pale, thin blanket that merely enhanced the allure of the sleeping sex curving there, Qui-Gon looking, always looking. "I still don't see, Master, why that should stop us from having sex together when we both obviously want it."

"I have my reasons, Padawan," Qui-Gon said in a voice that sounded far too normal to be convincing for a dead-of-night conversation.

"You choose to disobey the Code when you know it's wrong."

"That assumes I believe the Code to be wrong in this matter," Qui-Gon's familiar parry leading to Obi-Wan's standard riposte.

"The Code bans sexual relationships between master and Dark-tempted padawan to protect too-young padawans. I am a man, Master, fully grown."

"And how many padawans do you think have said that, mistaking age for maturity?" Defensive manoeuvres only, safe moves from a man near exhaustion fighting what he fears to be a losing battle. "But in truth, they're still young enough to be coerced by their own need to please their beloved masters and swayed by their masters' desires."

"That might've been true of others—" the name of one particular padawan lying unspoken between them like a corpse rotting, the whole Order knowing of the fall of Qui-Gon's previous padawan, "—yet I'm trusted to be mature enough and morally sound enough to negotiate treaties, to fight for the Republic, to protect queens and emperors and innocents, to judge who's right and who's wrong and act for the Council accordingly. I think I can be trusted to know my own mind, Master."

Heavy gaze from darkened eyes.

Not their usual thrust and parry. Not their usual kata of debate on this subject, a break in the pattern, the forms changing, abandoned, an unguarded front waiting for the killing blow.



And Qui-Gon had trained Obi-Wan well.

"Tell me," murmured so softly, so gentle a fatal attack. Obi-Wan sat up, the lightweight blanket puddling around his hips, shadows tangling in the small patch of hair on his chest and under the hard tips of his nipples while the faint light gamboled in the fair hair visible above the lowered blanket. "Tell me, Qui-Gon."

One equal to another, as it had been in private for these many years. Qui-Gon, not Master, took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, breathed in again.

Not their usual battle. Their world had shifted today, spun like a top by swirling red and black and the focused hatred of a padawan Sith.

Master Jinn drew himself up, spine straight, hands tucked within the wide sleeves of his robe. And Qui-Gon looked, and looked again. Another deep breath, a Jedi facing his fear, letting Obi-Wan see it, bracing himself and then speaking, low and dark: "I think you saw my reason today."

And then there was only the gasp of air as Qui-Gon Jinn strode too fast from the room.

It was difficult to find him, of course, not only because the ship was so small and most space was already taken by the Queen's entourage and the newest strays his master had gathered to him: even without the Force, Obi-Wan could uncover his master in a crowd by some indefinable combination of smell, touch, resonance. He found his master sitting cross-legged in one of the safety observation bubbles, the side flukes of the craft all but obscuring the view of the streaming stars.

Obi-Wan eased in beside him, his left knee pressing against his master's right, neither man small, both of them instinctively shifting and moving until they fit together, in harmony at least to that small degree.

They sat together, silent, their breathing automatically falling into a matched rhythm, their postures almost identical. Once upon a time, it had worried Obi-Wan, a small fear that he was losing himself to become his master, but time had soothed that youthful fretting until he was content now to sit, and wait, and breathe with his master.

And eventually, since his master couldn't, to speak. Just as soon as he could think of the right thing to say.

The seriousness wasn't lost upon him, but his master's own advice had been their mainstay for so

long: everything in perspective, everything in its place, that calm reassurance carrying this padawan through the darkest nights of adolescence with something close to good humour.

In the eternity of all the worlds, even this could not be more than a handful of sand. Could not be allowed to be more, not if they were ever going to get beyond it and defeat the Dark instead of becoming ensnared as one had before them.

Perhaps not the right words, but perhaps the necessary words, softened with humour and barbed with deductions. Obi-Wan canted a look up at his master, letting his eyes be alight with teasing, knowing how it eased the sting for this man at his side, knowing how it was their greatest display of affection. "Were you truly so dreadful a lover?"

A jolt of surprise against him, Qui-Gon breathing in suddenly, and as so often in the past, Obi-Wan's own humour spilled over, blunting some of his master's sharper edges. For a scant second, he thought it would work as it so often did, but this time it wasn't enough, not to break this eldritch silence.

Low and soft, a kiss of sound. "To hide it now only lets it fester, Master. There is enough Dark around now without us adding more."

"Us, Padawan? No, it's mine, and mine alone."

"I would say that the Sith you fought today had more than his share."

Another silence, so long that Obi-Wan was very nearly spurred once more into speech.

"He didn't always."

"Then whence did it come?"

Qui-Gon shifted, restless, uncontrolled, as if his muscles rebelled at the memories his mind dredged up.

Obi-Wan said softly, "Tell me what happened."

This time, Obi-Wan simply waited.

Like bones dragged over rocks, the words finally came. "I fucked him."

A stiflement of shock, a reaction denied at the brutality of the pain behind the crudeness.

"I thought he loved me. I flattered myself thinking he meant every word when he told me he adored me. When he came to me," *as you did*, lying unspoken between them, "I turned him away gently, for he was far too young. On his planet, a person's considered adult as soon as they can father or bear a child, but in my eyes, he was but a child himself. Still he came to me, and he came back, and came back, telling me every time how he loved me."

The sound of deep, ragged breathing, slowly





leveling itself, the only show of distress allowed, a master centering himself, restoring calmness and shoring up control. “He was still too young that last time he came to me again. But I let him tell me I couldn’t use the excuse of his age any more. Either I loved him, or I’d have to let him loose.” A moment given over to reflection, a galaxy of regrets in Qui-Gon’s eyes. “I suppose some would say he seduced me that first time, but I was the master, I was there to protect him and teach him. That first time... I allowed him to seduce me. And after that, I more than met him.” Memory intruding, the breathing ragged once more, pain seeping from him. “More than.”

Obi-Wan was all stillness and eyes, watching, accepting, listening. Passing no judgment, simply gathering the facts, calm, calming.

“And I don’t know where it went wrong. I could tell you the ugly facts. He wanted what we had in private to ease his life in public, so we argued. He wanted to skim over the details and still be reported as fully taught, and so we argued. He... I was blind. I told myself he was a young man struggling to balance love and equality with fealty and obedience. I didn’t see the Dark seducing him. I didn’t let myself see.”

Obi-Wan didn’t reach out, did not lay a finger on Qui-Gon, the need to comfort a low hum of hunger between them.

“He very nearly had me, Obi-Wan. He very nearly got what he wanted from me, very nearly seduced me with his Darkness as he had his body and his love. But I came to my senses, barely in time and... He left.”

Voice gentle as a touch. “And that was the last time you saw him?”

“I didn’t see him. We— He and I—”

Obi-Wan waited this one out, too and he didn’t flinch from the raw agony and humiliation in Qui-Gon’s voice.

“I thought if I let him fuck me, it would be enough. To make him feel loved, to make him stay, give us both a chance to bring him back to the light.”

Eventually, Obi-Wan said enough into the silence to bring Qui-Gon back. “But it wasn’t.”

“It only made things worse.”

Different rhythms in their breathing, in their heart rates, Obi-Wan reaching out, soothing, easing, finding instead that his breath caught in his throat and his heart thudded painfully and a feeling, bitter as tears, choked him as his master’s voice grated in his ears.

“He found it amusing that the great Master Jinn had spread his legs like a boy whore.”

It was said with all the regrets of a quote, another voice echoing in between them, and woven over, a heavy blanket of guilt and pain.

“When morning came, he was already gone.”

Quiet after Qui-Gon’s words died out, and quiet while Obi-Wan picked his words, no laughter in him now as he looked at his master’s profile. “How do you know he—” no name, no such honour, not even now, perhaps especially not now, speaking to the unnamed one’s former master, “—was the Sith you fought on Tatooine?”

A crinkling around dark blue eyes, a rictus of a smile. “I recognised him. The face’s been altered, the soul corrupted, but...will I ever change so much that you won’t know me?”

“You and I have been linked longer...”

For the first time since the cabin, Qui-Gon looked at him again. “Thank you for your kindness, Obi-Wan, but I know him. I was linked to him long enough. I know it was him.”

Amidst the white streams of stars, they sat together for long moments, not meditating, just thinking, until Obi-Wan spoke again. “I will not turn to the Dark, Master.”

A stirring beside him: protest, pain, hope, dread, too much, too fleeting, too quickly dampened to be read.

“But it would have been easier on us both if you had told me all of this before.”

Shame washing over them like dirty water, regret tumbling behind.

“I know it would’ve been easier,” Obi-Wan continued, offering small comfort, “but I understand why you couldn’t tell me before. To tell me would’ve risked putting doubts in me, about myself and you. Master—”

And now, finally, he did touch, only his fingers at first across the back of his master’s hand. “I will not come to you again.”

His hand was taken, brought up to lips, beard and mustache brushing coarsely against his skin, lips brushing softly, sadly over his skin.

“But when I have passed my trials, Master, and when I am a knight,” turning slightly, so close now, so very close in the cramped space, his legs were between Qui-Gon’s, and he loomed over his master, no supplicant, no padawan here, “I will come to you.”

Eyes raised to meet his, Qui-Gon looking, and looking again.



"I will come to you, Qui-Gon."

With the lingering ghosts and shades of Darkness and memory deepening the blue of his eyes, Qui-Gon looked, and looked again. Then, an effort of will, a squaring of shoulders, courage and hope returning again, banished only briefly by today's discovery. "Yes," Qui-Gon said simply, accepting Obi-Wan's promise of the future as the gift it was. "You will come to me, Obi-Wan, and I'll meet you."

A rare smile then, a little sad still, eclipsed by the sudden brightness of Obi-Wan's as Qui-Gon

reached up and ran a single fingertip from the corner of Obi-Wan's eye to the curve of his lips. "And I'll more than meet you," Qui-Gon said, letting the last of the Darkness go, his voice soft as a caress. "More than."

And so they sat together again, unwilling to part, allowing themselves this small closeness as their ship hurried them to Naboo.

There was nothing to be done for Xanatos, now mutilated into a Sith. But at least for the two of them, it wasn't too late.



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I was wondering what Jedi did when they weren't out saving the universe and fighting the bad guys.

JUST ANOTHER DAY.

He told himself that again, since the last time hadn't made any difference. Just another day, and then the negotiations would be on hiatus and he could stop to catch his breath.

Lunch was a congealed, cold mass on a plate by the door; it had arrived three minutes after another urgent communiqué from the Council that he'd had to answer, analyse, précis and send to his master in the meeting. And even then, cold though it was, he'd made a determined start on getting something to eat, but his comm had beeped, this time with a back-door offer from one of the more recalcitrant groups.

And that had meant backtracking the person who'd sent it, their history, affiliations, motives and power base. Analyse that, and then condense it all into elliptical language that wouldn't cause disaster if intercepted, but which his master could still understand clearly, and without risk of misunderstanding.

His head hurt.

No time for that, though: he had the daily reports to do, and if he didn't keep right on top of them, by the time his master returned and he had to incorporate all of his master's notes, comments, offers and negotiating ploys into it, it'd be tomorrow before he got today's report sent back to Temple. And if there was one thing experience had taught him, it was that if he got that far behind, he'd never catch up.

Which would mean his master would have to step in to help, and he wasn't going to allow that: his master had enough to do, and anyway, it was his job to provide support on this mission.

Never mind that they really needed to have him out there helping his master deal with the sheer volume of meetings, receptions, and people, and at least two—perhaps three—support staff behind the scenes. The comm beeped twice, the warning timer cycling slowly as something truly massive downloaded

Just another day, he promised himself, and then there'd be a nice, long, long, break. When he could sleep. And eat.

And then he saw what had just downloaded, and groaned.

"JUST ANOTHER DAY," his master said, pausing on the threshold of the door. "I really think we can get them all to sign today."

And just who was his master trying to reassure most with that? The hiatus had been postponed, replaced by ever more frantic negotiations and meetings, everyone driven by the carrot of success at the end of the stick.

"Of course, Master," he said, deciding that exhaustion was a good enough excuse to fuss and fiddle with his master's tunics. "Just another day, and then it'll be finished." Exhaustion—great excuse, one he should use more often—allowing him to rest his hands on his master's shoulders, and even to lean in a little, not quite hugging. "Apart from the signing ceremonies, closing ceremonies, news coverage, interviews, receptions from grateful governments..."

His master actually sighed. Oh yes, his master was truly exhausted by this ridiculous workload, dark circles under the eyes, tension in the shoulders. He used exhaustion again, slipping under his master's usual defences and under his master's guard, slid his arms around his master, leaned his head against the bowed shoulder. Was held, for a long moment, his master taking his support and his warmth, another sigh gusting softly across his nape.

"Enough," he heard, but felt more intensely, a rumbling regret in his master's chest pressed against his. "If I stay here one more second, I'll let you tuck me back into bed."

He looked up

"Don't," half laughed, half groaned at him while



his master hugged him a bit tighter. “We’re on a mission, you know the rules...”

He didn’t have to say a single word; his master knew him, knew his smile, knew exactly what he thought of Qui-Gon Jinn, of all people, invoking hide-bound, archaic rules.

“Oh no, I have meetings, you’ll not tempt me—” a smack to his rump showing just how tempted his master was, “I’m leaving.”

Still, it was another few seconds before he was the one to finally step back, releasing his master and passing him through the door with a sweeping, intensely respectful bow that would fool even the protocol droids hovering in the corridor.

But his master’s gaze met his, another moment of perfect communication between them, and as the door slid shut, he was laughing quietly.

Until the comm unit beeped again, and this time, he echoed his master’s sigh.

ᐅᐅᐅᐅ ᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ ᐅᐅᐅᐅ. He woke to that thought, and stretched, luxuriating in having the time to waste on so frivolous a thing as stretching out. Beside him, there was a mumphled mutter, a grumpy shifting and a pillow pulled over a head of tangled hair.

He rolled over, moving carefully, doing nothing now to disturb his master’s rest. He could see the curve and sweep of shoulders, the heavy muscles, the dip of spine, the place where the healers had finally removed that scar. Shadows on the broad back, cast by the bedcoverings and the swell of muscle meeting the morning light. Another grumble, and with it, the shift of muscle and bone, shoulder-blades moving as his master shifted the pillow and burrowed in a bit deeper, hunting sleep with an obsessive hunger.

He lay there, wide awake, and looked at the shadings in the long hair, the grey strands coarser even than the brown, and there, flickering in the bright light, the occasional rough glint of reddish hair, just a few flecks, here, and here, and there.

His master had been truly exhausted last night—early this morning, rather—coming to bed with his hair still tied back, and now, the strands were disheveled, looped and caught, painful to sort out.

Real water shower then, this morning, he thought lazily, relishing the heat and comfort of the bed and the rare freedom of having no pressing duties.

Of course, that was the precise moment the

comm beeped.

He rested his hand on his master’s warm back for a moment, stilling the reluctant but dutiful movements, his master settling back down, allowing him to take over for a little while.

Naked, the cool air prickling against his skin, he went to the comm, and read the message: a routine acknowledgment of reports received from the Temple. He glanced over his shoulder at the huddled mound of his master trying so hard to regain sleep, then turned back to the comm.

He set the unit to display his master’s schedule, already busy till late afternoon. Well, it was true, he smiled to himself; his master was already booked till then. There was a shower, breakfast, going back to bed, lunch, going back to bed, another shower... Oh yes, his master’s day was already quite ridiculously full.

He did a few other minor things, pulled the covers up more warmly around his master’s shoulders, and headed for his own shower.

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The rich smell of java had the expected effect, a mumbling rumbling from the slowly-stirring mound in the bed. A rumpled head appeared, eyes nearly closed, hair every which way but neat, and then a huge yawn.

He didn’t bother speaking, just handed a large mug of the strongest java on offer, liberally dosed with sweetening, and stood back to watch, amused, as it was downed rapidly, and then the behemoth levered itself from the bed.

He wasn’t—quite—wicked enough to actually laugh as his master, the great Jedi master, stumbled towards the bathroom, scratching hip and chest and head, but he did allow himself a smile, and a kiss between his master’s shoulderblades. And a pat on his master’s bare behind, which actually got a response. A still-sleepy gaze was turned on him, and a slow smile warmed him. “Five minutes,” his master said. “I’ll be up for that in just five minutes.”

Five minutes? More like fifty, he knew. The shower first, then breakfast, then the hair.

And then...



Finally awake, seated, still naked, on the edge of the bed, his master put down the brush. "One of these days, I'm going to cut all of this off."

He gathered the heavy fall of his master's hair in his hands, and pressed in close against him, kneeling behind his master, his own naked body against his master's back, his cock sliding softly against his master's skin. The hair was still damp, the moisture smoothing the coarseness, and he stroked his master's hair across his cock, sliding it across his master's back and then his cock, letting his master feel the arousal begin in him.

"Fetishist," his master said affectionately. "But never worry, if I cut it all off," his master twisting suddenly, pinning him to the bed, "I'll save it and give it to you."

"I much prefer it still attached," he smiled, and pressed up with his hips and pulled down with his hands, his master's cock against his own, his master's lips opening against his. He sighed into his master's mouth, and kissed him, slow and gentle for a moment, and then harder, insisting, demanding.

"I've missed this," he murmured, his master's beard rough against his lips. "Missed you."

"Just another day," his master said to him, pausing to lick and kiss and nibble his left ear, the shivers rippling through him down to his cock, making him rise against his master. "Just another day or two of the usual back-slapping and scoring points, and then we can go home."

"To some down-time, and then routine."

A chuckle, warm and dark, and descending down his chest like kisses. "Such a change, Padawan. You used to loathe routine."

"Ah, but I was just a boy then," he said, spreading his legs and pushing, ungently, at his master's head, making it clear just precisely where he wanted his master's mouth. "I was young and foolish."

"And now?"

He raised himself up on his elbows, looking down the length of his own pale body, at the pink peaks of his nipples, and the dark rose of his cock rising up into his master's mouth. He saw his master's cheeks hollow, and felt the suction pull pleasure up through his cock; felt the rub of beard against his belly and the silk of tongue against his cock, and nearly forgot to answer. "Now, I'm older and wiser."

"Really?"

"Really," he said, sitting upright suddenly, grabbing and wrestling and hauling his laughing master around until he was kneeling between his master's

legs. "After all, I'm old enough," he stroked the head of his cock along the underside of his master's, "and wise enough," he slid his fingers into his master's mouth, closing his eyes briefly as they were sucked the way his master had sucked his cock, "to have my venerable master," he slid two fingers into the familiar heated welcome, "exactly where I," the muscle dilating so easily, so ready, so willing, "want him."

And then he slid his cock into the encompassing heat and desire and hunger, groaning at the pressure and the pleasure, smiling then as he looked at his master's face, at the unshielded happiness there, at the whispered, "Obi-Wan," and the big hands that took his hips and pulled him in harder.

He thrust in and out, slow and sure, taking his time, giving and taking kisses and touches, his master's cock lengthening and firming as he fucked him, his own hard cock pressing against his master's prostate, a little 'oh' gusting out of his master's mouth with every perfect touch, and a pulse hardening his master's cock with every deep thrust.

Fit as they were, controlled as they were, they could make this last, if they wanted to. He was tempted, sorely tempted, to fuck his master till lunchtime, but he could see the need in his master's eyes, could see the unconfessed fatigue pulling at his master. Not forever then, not this time, pushing in faster, fucking harder, allowing himself to yield control, inviting his master to do the same. The thrill, forbidden, and all the more hoarded for that, of seeing his master shed the everyday shackles of control that governed Jedi, of seeing his master close his eyes and open his mouth, undignified, honest, bare.

Lust, and pleasure, desire and hunger, carved in that strong face, gasped out in breathless moans and then, quickly, as he thrust hard and strong and fast into his master, low-voiced words, greedy, filthy, raw with sex and need.

And then—

His master, grunting, pushing down hard onto him, and coming, ribbons of white, so much, evidence of how long it'd been since they'd had time and luxury to do this, his master's arse loosening around his cock as his master collapsed into orgasm.

He leaned forward, fucked himself harder into his master, feasting his eyes on the sight of his master lying there, debauched and sated, and glutting his body on the feel of his master so slick and soft around him.



He dissolved, arms giving out, his body coming to rest atop and within his master, his master's soft laughter cradling him as he realised he'd tangled his hands in his master's hair and buried his face there. And then—

He woke, unsure of how long he'd slept. Not quite uncomfortable enough to stir, although he was sure his master would need to move the second awareness returned. Had to be uncomfortable, with one leg still splayed like that, and the substantial weight of a near-knight splattered on top of him.

But still, his master was still asleep, the lines of exhaustion fading, and he wasn't about to disturb him. He shifted only a fraction, just enough to see his master's profile, just enough to feel the rub of his master's hair across the side of his face where it lay between him and the pillow.

Far from beautiful, not even handsome by many peoples' standards, he thought, looking at his master. But a fascinating face, strong, with character written on it, and a mouth that knew how to laugh and smile and give incredible pleasure. He allowed himself a delicate touch, just his fingertips, across the roughness of his master's beard, around and across to the mustache, back down across the chin, to the cheek,

down to the neck, where the hair thinned and the smooth skin began.

No, not beautiful, not handsome, not flawless, but just exactly right. He dropped a gentle kiss to the side of his master's neck, eased very carefully into a position that would be more comfortable for his master, gentled the sudden startle of waking back into sleep.

There was a moment, very brief, when his master's eyes had opened. He'd been seen, and recognised, and trusted, his master willingly dropping back into sleep. Trusted, implicitly, to govern and protect, trusted enough that his master simply did what the soft kiss and gentle touch had told him to do.

Just another day, he thought, stroking his fingertips along the once-more tangled spread of his master's hair. Just another day of trust, and the love they'd never needed to voice. He sighed, and yawned, his own labours catching up with him again. Just another day, he promised himself, and then they would go back to being good, dutiful Jedi. Just another day...

And then there was only stillness, and two men, tangled warmly together in sleep.



行車專用道路





O wad some Power the giftie gie us  
 To see oursels as ithers see us!  
 Or at least to make others see us as we truly are.

## QUI-GON'S BOOKS UP

from the communiqué and shook his head, answering Obi-Wan's unspoken question. "The earliest anyone could get here is over five days, so there's no help to be had."

"And five days will take us well past this rally."

Frustration at being sequestered and fed propaganda darkened Qui-Gon's voice. "Leaving us none the wiser as to what's really being planned here."

"Then we're back to our original plan, Master," Obi-Wan said, dropping a bundle onto the bed. "We need to know what their real intentions are, not just what they pretend to us."

"I am aware of that," Qui-Gon responded, sifting through the brightly coloured cloth. "I'll keep to the shadows and if anyone should see me, I'll—"

"You'll what, Master?" Obi-Wan interrupted. "Wave your hand and hope you manage to catch everyone who looked at you?"

"I'm aware there are one or two minor problems with the plan."

"One or two—" Obi-Wan reined himself in before his master could so much as raise an eyebrow at him. "Look," he said, tone quite reasonable considering his opinion of his master's planned course of action, "their security screens make it impossible to use any of our technology to spy on them—"

"Not spy, Obi-Wan."

Obi-Wan absolutely did not roll his eyes at his master. He merely happened to look up at the ceiling at that particular moment. "Observe clandestinely then, Master," he replied, just a touch sharply. "We have to get someone in there to sp—observe. But what's the point of observing if we can't make a report to the Council?"

Qui-Gon held a shirt up, looked at it before asking, in his calmest tone, "Meaning what exactly, Padawan?"

"Meaning, Master, that if you go in there, you

won't last five minutes before you're caught. Then not only won't we know what they're really up to, but they'll also have a Jedi master either to execute for spying or to send back to the Council and the Senate in disgrace. Neither of which will do much good for the peace process."

"What other options do we have? We have precious little time, no allies, no reliable sources, the closest that auditorium has to hiding places is a bit of shadow around the back wall and what's more, they'll be expecting us to try to infiltrate this rally. Every other option we have is even worse than this, so apart from me disguising myself and getting in there, just what other suggestions do you have?"

"Only the one, Master," Obi-Wan replied, obviously having missed that Qui-Gon had intended his question to be rhetorical. "We do need to get one of us inside..."

Qui-Gon's back stiffened, the glare he turned on Obi-Wan very cold, and no less protective because a Jedi master had been pushed to near anger. "And I've told you, I'll not have you executed like a common criminal because of—"

"Because of what, Master?" Obi-Wan interrupted, unbuckling his belt and undoing his sash as he spoke. "Because you sent me into danger?"

"I've sent you into danger before and I'll do it again, but to feed you to an angry mob when there's no chance of success or escape— Stop that."

The 'that' in question was undressing, Obi-Wan's boots put aside, socks and tunics and leggings rapidly forming a neat pile beside the tumbled mass of local clothes.

"I'm going, Master," Obi-Wan said, skimming out of his underwear, standing quite splendidly naked in front of his master. Hands on hips, the very picture of confidence bordering on arrogance, he stared his master down, only then turning to the pile of local fashions, sorting through items rapidly. "It's the only



thing that makes sense. Look at you," a casually dismissive hand gesturing briefly. "You're very noticeable, very distinctive... Even if you got rid of the beard, your lower face would be so much paler than the rest of you, that alone would have people staring at you. And how long d'you think it'd take them to realise that the big tall man with the bluest eyes they've ever seen is the same big tall but bearded Jedi with the bluest eyes they've ever seen?"

"And yes—" tossed over his shoulder the instant Qui-Gon opened his mouth to argue, "you could use your mind on them, but there'll be a *lot* of them and only one of you. But," a pair of trousers met with approval and were shimmied on with much wriggling and adjustments, "who'd look twice at me?"

"Dressed like that, one or two, I'd say," Qui-Gon told him, dryly.

A sudden look over a naked shoulder at him, Obi-Wan's surprise showing for a moment, before the eyes sparked with laughter. "But the point is, Master," Obi-Wan said, voice muffled for a moment as he pulled a top on over his head and smoothed it into place, "even if they look at me like this, now, they'll never connect this me with what they'll be looking for—one of the two Jedi. You, we've already discussed. But think about what they'll be looking for if not you. Someone small—"

Qui-Gon looked at him, frowning. "You're not small."

"No, I'm not," Obi-Wan said, sitting on the edge of the bed to pull on shoes, "but compared to you, I look short, and that's how everyone remembers me. So short, and slender—"

Qui-Gon actually laughed.

Eyes twinkling, Obi-Wan looked up at him. "I'm not joking, Master. People swear I'm slight. But that's because they're used to seeing me with you—"

"—rather than trying to survive training sessions with you."

"Exactly. Short, slender, wearing dull clothes that make me look like a monk," Obi-Wan stood up, the clothes clinging in all the right places, the absence of underwear apparent, if one chose to look. Then Obi-Wan was turning his back to Qui-Gon again, looking at his master in the mirror on the wall. "And of course, what they all see," deft fingers unbraiding hair and ties, "is the padawan braid."

The long braid was undone, pulled back to join the short ponytail, an unexpectedly long hank of hair hanging down Obi-Wan's back and shining surprisingly blond in the bright artificial light.

A jar of something slick was opened, and a few swift passes of Obi-Wan's hands had brought the bristle of the padawan hair cut down into something suspiciously close to fashionable. Another jar, far smaller, was opened, something intriguing rubbed into various points of Obi-Wan's skin, body-warmth bringing out the seductive scent of the cream, a subtle haze of sex clinging around Obi-Wan.

"And most of all," Obi-Wan said, turning once more to face his master, "when they look at that Jedi apprentice, what they see is someone very, very, very young," the absence of the apprentice's braids and clothing leaving the face bare and the experience of the years of training showing. "And when they don't look beyond the robes and the braid to see *me*, what they see is someone very, very, very innocent."

But there was nothing of innocence in that look, or in that pose, or in that richly sexual voice.

"Tell me, Master," the word gone from title to invitation, "would you take me for a Jedi padawan?"

Qui-Gon Jinn stared at the man in front of him. Simply stared, words not so much inadequate as far too dangerous.

Obi-Wan stalked closer to his retreating master, no hint of demure little padawan in this nearly feral intensity. "Sometimes, we fail to see what is—" a sudden shimmer of laughter, almost as shocking as the raw sexuality that fit so comfortably, and so well, over what had once been a sedate little Jedi, "literally, in your case, right under our noses."

Obi-Wan stopped, inches from his master, staring up at him, daring him silently to think, do, say *something*. After a tense moment, he let it go, stepped back, some of that libidinous hunger tamed, for now. "I'm going, Master. And I will bring the information back safely."

Qui-Gon simply nodded, and bowed, for the first time, to his padawan as to an equal. "Cover yourself with your cloak as you leave here, make sure you're unobserved when you...emerge."

Like a butterfly from a chrysalis. Or a boy to a man.

"Yes, Master," Obi-Wan replied, with only the scantest shading to the properly respectful tone.

The cloak covered him, head to toe, and there was only a momentary glimpse of his face as he turned, for a moment, in the doorway. His voice was very soft, tender, revealing perhaps too much, when he asked of his master: "How clearly do you see, Qui-Gon? And whom?"



The door closed with the quietest click, leaving Qui-Gon alone with nothing to do but wait until his padawan returned.

Nothing to do but wait; and to think about

appearances and how a man can use them to deceive himself.

And how very little he knew about the man who stood where once his padawan had been.









And Obi-Wan's flanks would dimple, as Obi-Wan thrust forward, muscles clenching, oh, to watch that, to see how that gorgeous rear tensed and the flanks hollowed, to see what he couldn't see when Obi-Wan was inside him, pushing and thrusting inside him—

Obi-Wan thinking about that, looking at him as he thought about that, fist still stroking hard cock, mouth open, eyes bright with pleasure, the tip of his tongue—

Qui-Gon moistened his lips, tasted the water pouring down on him, felt the caress of the wetness over every inch of him, the coolness of air against his back, against his backside, where his hand was so wet as it slid over himself, fingers parting himself, fingertip pressing inside—

Obi-Wan looking at him, stroking his own cock, egging his master on, trying again—and again, time after time—to get his master to let go, to abandon the restraints and give in completely, to yield completely to the passion and need in them. Obi-Wan would be matching his movements to his master, the two of them staring at each other, Obi-Wan's eyes desperate in their appeal for him to let go, just let go, don't hold anything back, nothing, please, Master, don't hold anything back, don't hide from me—stroking their own cocks, wanting each other, needing each other—

And Obi-Wan would come, with Qui-Gon's name on his lips, and love in his eyes.

Qui-Gon leant forward, the wall warm against his forehead as the water sheeted down his back.

It was ridiculous, really, to miss someone this much.

But miss Obi-Wan he did. Enough that shifting fantasies in the shower weren't enough, couldn't do Obi-Wan justice.

He turned off the shower and began drying himself, taking his time, enjoying the simmering arousal between his legs and in his mind, lingering over drying his hair, thinking and thinking about Obi-Wan.

By the time he was completely dry, he was completely hard, and hungry, prowling from the bathroom, intent on his bed, and his right hand, and the pleasure he would bring himself until the real thing got home.

He made it as far as the hall, when the smell of food stopped him dead—and naked, and hard—in his tracks.

He stalked into the kitchen, a quick glance round

taking in the dirty cookpots on the counter, the container of juice left out beside the basin, the travel pack dumped in the corner, spilling well-worn clothes, and his former padawan, fork in hand, food half way to his mouth, mouth open, body rising half way out of his chair, and a sudden flush of lust pinkening his skin.

"I'm glad to see you too," Obi-Wan said, fork clattering to the table, food splattering, unnoticed.

There were any number of things Qui-Gon could say, many things he'd practised, all sorts of words and carefully measured phrases to express how much he'd missed Obi-Wan, how much more deeply he felt than he'd known, how very glad he was that Obi-Wan was well, an invitation to discuss the mission and a former padawan's reactions to handling things completely on his own. Any number of things, including a carefully mature comment about how Obi-Wan was still young, and free to do as he pleased, how Qui-Gon wasn't going to hold him down or chain him, no, they were both far too mature and sophisticated and worldly-wise for that.

He couldn't think of a single blessed one of them.

His mind, what little hadn't fled down to his cock, could only notice the sexy glint of smile, the seductive brightness of humour in the blue-ish eyes, the perfection of the body, the open mouth—

Could only think one single word: mine.

Later, if Qui-Gon remembered, he'd be embarrassed to know that he'd growled, deep in his throat, an animal sound of possession and need; he'd be embarrassed to know that Obi-Wan had squeaked, when Qui-Gon picked him up, bodily, and laid him on the table.

He wouldn't care that he'd shoved dishes and cutlery aside, would celebrate that Obi-Wan had looked up at him and laughed from pure joy, and then stopped laughing, as Qui-Gon kissed him, hard, and felt that joy surge from Obi-Wan into himself.

He should speak, should say the words of love and partnership, but all he could do was kiss, and lick, and bite. Marking and claiming, and feeling the pounding of his pulse as Obi-Wan's eyes darkened with glee and lust, and Obi-Wan's mouth and hands left their own marks on Qui-Gon, marks to be touched in bemusement and delight later. Bite marks around his nipples, spiking pleasure into him, fingers digging into his upper arms, leaving bruises, nails, scraping shudders of pleasure across his back and leaving narrow pink welts behind.

He should restrain himself, but Obi-Wan was



sliding out from underneath him, easing gracefully to his knees, and sucking him in. All the way in, every cell of him, breathing controls never meant for this put to the best possible use, tongue and teeth and palate and wetness and heat, conspiring to make him groan, and push, and to hold Obi-Wan's head hard and still between his hands as he thrust up into that hungry mouth, and stared down into those devouring eyes.

He tried to find enough words to ask if this is how Obi-Wan wanted it, but then he looked at his former padawan. Kneeling in front of him, hands cupping Qui-Gon's arse, and the expression in those eyes.

Just returning from that terrifying, and unbearably lonely, first solo mission.

The first time, ever, away from everything and everyone he knew.

The very first time, of being completely alone, of being solitary, of not belonging.

Qui-Gon slid his hands under Obi-Wan's arms, and lifted him, kissing him, tasting himself, and need, and the desperate hunger to be *home*.

Still holding on to Obi-Wan, Qui-Gon watched as Obi-Wan, graceless in his hunger and his haste, scrambled back onto the table, eyes never leaving Qui-Gon's, feeding his starvation and his fears and his needs into his master's eyes.

"Master," Obi-Wan snarled, and Qui-Gon let his padawan grab him, maul him, haul him in close, helped lift his padawan's legs, broke the intensity of their shared gaze long enough to look down at the weeping, arching cock and the tiny pinkness that would stretch so tautly around him.

Too much experience between them, and too many years of controlling their bodies for there to be any need to go through gently protracted preparations.

And anyway, he could see that a knife-edge of pain would be welcomed.

To make it real. To make it earned. To limn the pleasure in gilded perfection.

Tight, so tight, but he pushed his cock in anyway, groaning himself and hearing his padawan gasp; feeling the sudden pop as the wide head of his cock slid through, the tight mouth of muscle sliding down the shaft of his cock now, so tight, so fine, so very good.

His padawan curved his back, and he leaned down, gladder than usual of his height, until they could kiss. He opened his mouth, and Obi-Wan fucked his tongue into him, attacking him with every

iota of need, giving all of that up to Qui-Gon, and demanding everything in return.

No words, no need for words, not now, with raw emotion crackling around them and through them, passion laid bare, hearts and souls far more naked than flesh.

Too intense, too much, Obi-Wan coming without a single touch to his cock, his hot-blooded youth crashing through him too soon.

Qui-Gon thrust again, and Obi-Wan wailed, a single, high-pitched sound forced from him in an extremity of passion and completion.

And then there were words.

Hot words, hot breath, whispered truths and shouted needs, every exhalation matching the inward thrust of Qui-Gon's cock all the way inside the man who would always, and forever, be his.

"Now," Obi-Wan said into his mouth, "*now*."

And he came, dissolving, who and what he was shooting from him, inside Obi-Wan, leaving his mark and his claim and his essence far inside, slowly being absorbed, becoming a part of Obi-Wan.

They ended up a mess, tangled together on the floor somehow amidst spilled food and a chair that had been upended at some point, Obi-Wan's semen drying on his belly, and Obi-Wan's laughter soughing gently against his neck.

"I think I need a shower, Master."

Thinking of Obi-Wan in the shower, the recuperative speed of hot-blooded youth, Qui-Gon smiled, his gaze going first to reddened skin where his beard had rubbed too hard, then moving on until he ran his fingertip around a bite mark he didn't remember doing, his other hand slipping down Obi-Wan's back to where the muscle was still relaxed and open to his fingers.

"Master?"

"Hmm," he said, re-finding his voice and the surface civility of speech. "You said you need a shower. And you know, I hope," rising quickly to his feet, pulling Obi-Wan up with him, "that I need you."

"I did manage to guess that," Obi-Wan laughed up at him. "And I managed to notice your decision to abandon your usual constraints."

"Not that you mind."

"If I said I did?"

Qui-Gon cupped Obi-Wan's chin, and kissed him, thoroughly. "Since I was in the kitchen with you, I'd call you a liar."

He hadn't expected that considering, thoughtful look to come over Obi-Wan's face and he waited,





still content and at peace after the sex and the honesty between them.

“Do you mind, Master?”

He ran his finger down Obi-Wan’s cheek, where the skin was pink from his beard and the lips were swollen from the demands of their kissing. He looked into Obi-Wan’s eyes, and into his own soul, and felt...right. At peace, and for once, balanced.

“No, I don’t,” he said, wrapping his arm around Obi-Wan’s waist and steering him towards the shower. “You were right, there’s no Darkness in this...fire between us.”

“And no Darkness in this need?”

He slid his hand from the soft skin of Obi-Wan’s waist back down to the softer skin that surrounded the tender place where he had laid his deepest claim.

“None,” he said, the last of the weight and the hidden fear lifting from his shoulders. “None at all.”

And if there was no evil or darkness in that, then there could be no harm, for once, in taking a day off, and showing Obi-Wan the joys he’d imagined in the shower and the sweetness of a day spent on nothing but each other.







These all began life as little bits of email, quick toss-offs, done just for fun, to make Monday mornings pleasanter—or at least more interesting!

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of clothing was simply tipped into the open bag, packing forgotten as Obi-Wan walked quickly over to his master, his concern showing. “Master?”

“Oh, it’s all right,” Qui-Gon said, chin sunk down onto chest, long legs stretched out in front of him, crossed at the ankle under his sleep robe. “It’s not the end of the universe, but still... Here, look,” he said, tapping at the screen, continuing wryly: “And you wonder why I won’t blindly follow their Code?”

Obi-Wan read the message from the Council, and looked at his master, taking in the kernel of absolute seriousness under the would-be joking surface. “It’s only another mission.”

“End of the universe, is not; another mission only it is,” Qui-Gon’s impersonation of Master Yoda absolutely spot on. “They’re quick enough to wave the Code in my face, but when it comes to observing their own rules about keeping their promises and outlawing slavery—”

“We’re hardly slaves, Master,” Obi-Wan said through a bubble of laughter, his fingers gentle in the rumpled mass of Qui-Gon’s hair. “I know we were promised a break—”

“Three times,” Qui-Gon rumbled. “Three times they promised and three times—”

“We’ve been needed elsewhere. But unless it is the end of the universe, after three postponements they *must* honour our personal time.”

“Hah.”

Obi-Wan slid his hands down onto Qui-Gon’s shoulders, dropped a kiss on the top of his head, crouched down so he could rub his face against Qui-Gon’s cheek. “It’s only a minor mission, it won’t take long,” coming round in front of his master, a nudge of the Force to push the armless desk chair back, leaving enough space between Qui-Gon and the desk for Obi-Wan to straddle those incredible thighs, “and then you can do what you’ve promised.”

Automatically, as if designed for nothing else, Qui-Gon’s hands cupped Obi-Wan’s bottom, his fingers sliding gently along the inner curve of the buttocks, the leggings thin enough that he could feel one fingertip rub against the opening to Obi-Wan’s body. “I will fulfill my promise to you, Obi-Wan, whether the Council likes it or not.”

A tender kiss, an amused smile, Obi-Wan’s eyes bright in the early morning light. “Whether the Council likes it or not?” he mocked fondly. “You know perfectly well they’ve given their approval—or you will know,” a brief kiss to the tip of Qui-Gon’s nose, “when you’ve been up long enough to be properly awake. Now, come on, Master, finish your messages, send your report, I’ll finish the packing and make you breakfast.”

A speculative look slanted at him. “And that’s supposed to make up for them canceling our personal time?”

“No,” Obi-Wan said softly, the burr of his voice a pleasure against Qui-Gon’s skin, there, where Obi-Wan was kissing him, “that’s supposed to get you up and moving so that we have enough time before our transport leaves for me to make up to you for our personal time being canceled.”

“Oh well, in that case,” Qui-Gon said slowly, earning a moment of laughter as he surged suddenly to his feet, Obi-Wan scrambling to stay wrapped around him. The unplanned burst of Force shoved the chair half-way across the room and Obi-Wan completely up off the floor until he was eye-to-eye with his master and wrapped, quite firmly, around him.

“All right, my little padawan,” Qui-Gon said, obviously now in good enough humour to tease, “if you’re going to make morning actually worthwhile...”

“Oh I’ll make the morning worthwhile, I can promise you that,” Obi-Wan murmured against Qui-



Gon's mouth, arms and heels pressing against firm flesh, a finger of Force pressing against Qui-Gon's anus, making the promise very clear.

Qui-Gon stood stock still, legs spread just far enough, and kissed Obi-Wan, making his own promises.

"You're right," he said after a few moments. "And it's only a negotiation in a minor trade dispute, so it's not as if it's going to take any great while to sort it out. It *is* only another delay, and the last one."

"Exactly. And because they've delayed us three times..." he trailed off, inviting Qui-Gon to finish.

"... we'll have a longer holiday."

"So it's not all bad, is it?"

"Of course not," Qui-Gon said, heading towards the bedroom.

"Master, packing, reports, mail, first?"

"No."

Obi-Wan kissed the smiling mouth, bit—not entirely gently—Qui-Gon's earlobe. "Duty, Master?"

"Can wait a few more moments, Padawan."

Lying on the bed, Qui-Gon's discarded sleep robe covering one foot, his own clothes no longer covering an inch of him, Obi-Wan lay back, spread himself out for Qui-Gon's gaze to feast on, indulging him in this, before getting to his knees, and pulling Qui-Gon into bed. He ran his hands down Qui-Gon's chest, to belly, to groin, where enthusiasm was beginning to make an unseemly display. "It's only one more mission," he said, one hand stroking Qui-Gon's cock, the other sliding down between his cheeks, one finger slipping easily inside.

"Just one—" gasp, eyes closing, "last mission, then I'll keep my promise to you."

Two fingers pressing inside, mouth suckling on the head of Qui-Gon's cock.

"We'll take care of this Naboo situation," hands cupping Obi-Wan's face, as Obi-Wan left his cock and got to his knees, lifting Qui-Gon's legs, "and then I'll take you home."



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/// Kenobi flicked his braid back over his shoulder and straightened from his bow. "I know it seems impossible," he told the gape-mouthed assemblage, "but you truly will be able to master this within two birthdays."

The looks he got expressed just how much faith they had in him, bringing back memories of his own childhood, not yet 14, thinking himself nearly a man, sitting staring as some upstart padawan showed him impossible skills and unbelievable speeds. Well, Apprentice, now Knight, M'ca'i had taught him and all of his class; now, he would teach this class. He turned a steady gaze around the salle, looking at every face in turn, carefully suppressing his smile at their expressions. "Any questions?" he asked evenly.

As expected—as remembered—there was a shuffling and a looking to others, an all but audible push of 'no, *you* ask.' Kenobi waited, patiently, hands sliding inside his sleeves. Ah, finally. "Yes?" he asked, keeping his voice kind.

"Padawan-teacher," the learner asked, "why do you wear decorations in your braid?"

In other words, why do *you* get to break the rules and we don't, he thought. Jedis in training they surely were, but they were still youths first. "On my planet, only women cut their hair. Men wear theirs long, and each decade of life is marked a special bead, as are marriage, fatherhood and—" well, no, he didn't think the masters of these learners would appreciate him giving a lecture on just which preferred sexual practices were denoted by beadwork, "—many other social details."

"What do yours signify, Padawan-teacher?"

As he so rarely did, he touched his beads. "Only that I have passed two decades of life."

The student on the far left obviously needed a lesson on the acuity of a nearly-trained Jedi's hearing, for Kenobi clearly heard the murmured, "Master Jinn must surely need an entire necklace then!"

"No, Selen, the necklace would be for Master Yoda. Would you care to tell him?"





"No, Master! I mean, no, Padawan-lea—Padawan-teacher, sir, I—"

Kenobi allowed a little of his own smile to show, as his own master had done for him so many times. "A whisper can bring disaster as surely as a shout, young padawan-learner," he said, feeling suddenly very old, half-expecting his bones to start creaking. "And an unkind thought can lead to thinking oneself as better than others. And undeserved pride—"

"—leads the Dark Side," the class finished for him.

Not quite the cheerful note he wanted to leave them on, so he pulled his 'saber out, slicing it through the air and cutting another few minutes from the students' free time before afternoon meditation. "But it is not pride to do the best you can, nor pride to achieve the highest level, like this—"

He was aware of their rapt faces and focused energy surrounding him, a low, humming wall of Force encapsulating him as they all stared and wondered, his body twisting and turning and somersaulting, his 'saber turned down to the lowest level, nothing more than light and the deepest, faintest buzz. He went through the moves, the ones he'd mastered under the tutelage of his own master, let his joy in this show through, let these students see some of the benefits of all the hard work, the sometimes desperately unhappy moments.

Awareness scything through him, the door opened as his master came in, entering his exhibition as smoothly as air, the two of them blending into one long choreography of movement, himself all flash and motion, his master all stillness and strength. The willow tree and the wind, his master called this exercise, and this was what it was: it was who they were. The wind darted and ruffled, the tree bent only enough, the wind stormed and raged, the tree endured, the wind finally dying, the tree still standing.

There was a moment of silence, Obi-Wan standing there, sweating, grinning at his master who had that rare amused glint in his eyes and a half-smile curving one side of his mouth.

And then the class broke discipline, a sudden patter of applause, a sound as loud as a crowd in the teaching rooms.

"Be getting on with you," his master said to the students, that soft voice indulging them all but commanding all the more for its very kindness. "Off to your midday meal now."

Nearly the last of the students to file out, Obi-Wan stopped Selen for just a moment, only long

enough to ask, "Do you still think a necklace is needed?"

"No, Padawan-teacher," he was told. "And even so, it would be a great achievement."

"What was that all about?" Master Jinn asked, wiping his padawan's face with his sleeve.

"Teaching him as you taught me, Master," Obi-Wan told him, standing still for this, not quite as he had stood when he was a boy. "They asked about my beads," he tipped his head back a little as his master ran the cloth across the hollow of his throat, "and Selen made a remark that showed a lack of understanding of the benefits of age," he leaned forward, his forehead on his master's shoulder as his master dried the back of his neck and hair. "Then the discussion turned to the Dark Side."

"And you remembered how you would fret in the dark at night, fearful that you could turn to the Dark."

So much smaller than he was now, curled up in bed, terrified, his master coming to him at last, soothing him.

"And how being afraid of turning to the Dark made me fear that my fear would, indeed, turn me to the Dark and—"

A deep chuckle, right against his ear, warm breath cooling against his skin. "Going round in circles till I thought you'd bite your own tail."

"A long time ago," Obi-Wan sighed, rubbing his cheek against his master's neck, there, where the hair wasn't trimmed and combed.

"Thank the Force for the passing of time," his master agreed, tongue darting suddenly, shiveringly, into Obi-Wan's ear.

"Qui-Gon!"

"Who's to see this small display?" the deep voice asked. "It is nothing more than a small moment of affection."

"Small?" Obi-Wan asked, leaning back far enough to look at his master's face. "Small?"

"Obi-Wan," was his reward, in that treasured blend of amusement and affection. "Keep that up and I shall—"

Perhaps it was his own realisation or perhaps it was the glee in Obi-Wan's smile, but his master stopped.

"I thought you'd outgrow that," Qui-Gon said, turning his apprentice towards the door, slipping his arm around his padawan's waist, letting go only when another person entered the corridor.

"It would not appear so, Master," Obi-Wan said, the perfect picture of the perfect padawan, the



facade slipping as he realised they weren't turning down the corridor towards the main refectory.

"To our rooms, Master?"

"Are you required elsewhere?"

As if Qui-Gon had to ask. Obi-Wan answered properly, however, keeping his smile small enough to meet public propriety. "No, Master. This is my lunch hour. I will be happy to return to our rooms."

"But after a display like that, surely you will be hungry?"

Obi-Wan met the teasing glance with one of his own. "I am, Master, but I believe you have...provisions that will prove sufficient."

"As long as you don't make any of your jokes about protein," Qui-Gon told him, quickening their pace, "I think it'll be more than sufficient."



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the master's responsibility," Obi-Wan muttered, clicking through another seven layers of notes and still unable to find the transportation costs. "I don't even know which forms..." He paused, reading, then sighing as he scrolled down a screen at a time, copying all those snippets of dates and payments, beginning to realise just how long it'd been since he and his master had submitted their expenses and reimbursement requests.

"So if I add all of these and then put them on this line..."

Another pause.

"No, that line's only for single voyages. We need..."

Apparently, what they needed didn't exist. He reconnected to the Temple system, did another search for "expenses: multiple voyages" and was given the same three useless—not to mention apparently contradictory—answers.

This, he decided, absolutely had to be the master's responsibility.

"Master?" he called.

"No."

Obi-Wan looked up at the bathroom door, whence had come that unyielding denial.

"Master?" he asked again.

"Absolutely not."

This time, Obi-Wan glared at the bathroom door.

So it's 'no,' is it? he thought.

We'll just see about that.

He was already barefoot, his outer tunics and

belts gone, the outer door of his master's rooms already locked. Not much more to add to the effect, he thought, but pulled his loose top off and pushed the waistband of his trousers down a little bit farther, just to make sure.

Pushing open the bathroom door, he propped himself up on the doorjamb, in a pose he'd borrowed from a streetwalker on Alderaan.

"Master," he said, very softly.

Up to his neck in hot water—literally, not figuratively—Qui-Gon opened his eyes. Opened them wider when he saw his padawan standing there, looking like that.

Obi-Wan couldn't suppress his smile, and canted his hips, fingers pointing into his most interesting assets.

Qui-Gon licked his lips.

Obi-Wan stroked his fingertips across the bared expanse of his flat belly, following the ripples of the muscle and the barely visible gingerish hair.

Qui-Gon stroked his beard.

Obi-Wan stroked the firming length of himself.

Qui-Gon smiled. And said: "The answer's still no. You were the one who was responsible for keeping track of expenses this time, you can fill in the forms now that we're back."

"But Master—"

A wave of the hand, the mind trick being met with a wall of stubbornness and misery.

"I said no."

Obi-Wan opened his mouth to argue; thought better of it. Closed off the feeling of misery and pushed aside his conviction that he was going to



make a bigger mess of the finances than he already had. Squared his shoulders, tugged his trousers up to a respectable level, and raised his chin. "Yes, Master," he said levelly.

"But..." Qui-Gon smiled serenely at the young man who was willing to do something dreaded—and risk failure—than truly try to use their personal relationship to get what he wanted in their professional one, "if you wait until after I've finished my bath, I'll help you with it."

Obi-Wan's relieved—and brilliant—smile was worth dealing with the numbers and the chaos of seven months off Coruscant.

"Since you're going to help me with the figures," Obi-Wan said, stalking towards the bathtub, undoing his trousers as he came nearer, "I could help you with your bath."

And if the smile had been worth dealing with the numbers, the blow-job was definitely worth dealing with Accounting.



## Qui-Gon's Padawan

### Qui-Gon's Padawan

as the door opened and the bedraggled form of his padawan entered their designated quarters during this long-term assignment on Praxis. He remained in his seat, refusing the urge to fuss and coddle, knowing that such attempts would be irritating at best and misunderstood at worst. They'd known of the risk when Obi-Wan had accepted the mission; they'd both been fully aware of what could very likely happen, given the sort of place and the kind of people Obi-Wan was to gather information from.

Qui-Gon responded to Obi-Wan's wry smile, and allowed himself: "Are you all right?"

"I will be," Obi-Wan said, slowly shedding the brown pack and the grey cloak that covered his borrowed, ill-fitting clothes. "I'm not seriously injured, just sore."

The urge to coddle was stronger, watching Obi-Wan's wince as he flopped down into a chair. "If you're hungry, there's soup in the kitchen."

A slow smile, tinged with sweetness. "Oh, go on," Obi-Wan said, "I know you're dying to fuss."

Carefully, Qui-Gon asked, "Why d'you think I'm dying to fuss?"

A raised eyebrow, the familiar hell-for-leather glint in the eyes. "My first mission all by myself? And I get captured and hurt? Go on, *Master*, tell me you don't want to fuss over your fledgling padawan-knight!"

"All right, all right," grumbling and smiling, levering himself up from his chair. "You've seen

through my inscrutable facade—" a shout of laughter, the white slash of teeth in the dirt-smudged face, "and beyond my serene exterior. Soup," he said, ruffling Obi-Wan's hair as he walked past his splayed apprentice, "and a bath." Stopping, turning, going serious, looking at Obi-Wan. "If you're allowed to bathe?"

"Oh, they already took all the samples they needed," Obi-Wan grimaced. "I tell you, I think enduring the rape tests is worse than actually being raped—at least the bastards who raped me got something out of it!"

Black humour indeed, dark enough to make Qui-Gon check his padawan's emotional and mental condition again—but only briefly, as Obi-Wan continued:

"The poor technicians—I felt so sorry for them. They were tiptoeing around me, treating me as if they were trying to move a spider's web. I think," Obi-Wan stretching, flinching a little at residual pain, "they'd only ever dealt with civilians before."

"Your training helped."

"I'll say it did." A short whisper of laughter, and wicked amusement canted up at Qui-Gon. "Frustrated all Sith hells out of the men raping me. I was supposed to scream and beg, I think."

"They certainly didn't expect you to use their distraction to defeat all four of them."

"Without my 'sabre, too," Obi-Wan said, with pride.





“Why d’you think we like everyone to think the Jedi depend on our ‘sabres?”

A nod of agreement. “And it didn’t exactly hurt that they thought I was too pretty to be dangerous.”

The smile that accompanied that would have made a Hutt back up in caution, if not outright fear.

Qui-Gon dropped a light kiss on the tip of Obi-Wan’s nose, an old joke between them, and whispered, “If they thought you were too pretty, then they—”

“Should’ve seen me on D’rwoon!” Obi-Wan finished for him. Obi-Wan slid his fingers up the inside of Qui-Gon’s loose robe, stroked back down to the strong wrist, the pulse beating steady and

resilient against his fingertips. “After I have a bath...”

“We’ll do whatever you feel like doing,” Qui-Gon said softly, kissing him on the lips, lingering, tongue sliding sinuously into Obi-Wan’s mouth, just for a moment. “But supper first, then a bath.”

“Then,” Obi-Wan wrapped his arms around Qui-Gon and the Force around them both, lifting himself up out of the chair to envelop Qui-Gon, “whatever I feel like doing. And I think, *Master*,” Obi-Wan whispered just before darting his tongue into Qui-Gon’s ear, then nipping the lobe, hard, “you should bathe too. I believe,” a sudden thrust of the Force at Qui-Gon’s anus, “I know exactly what I want to do.”



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perfect picture of padawan calm, he threw a desperate glance at his master. Who ignored him. Again. One small wave, and not a single move to come to his rescue.

A deep breath then, trying to centre himself, reaching for calm. Which was a bit of a joke, really, when he thought about it: he was *this* close to screaming and running, absolutely *frantic* in his need for calm and reaching for that serenity with all the peaceful abstraction of a bantha in heat.

In other words, it was a lost cause.

Another look towards his master, who gave him another small wave and went back to ignoring him. He could all but hear his master remind him he was nearly a knight and had to learn to handle these things on his own.

So he smiled, and took one step to the side, even though he knew the Ambassador would simply side step with him, until they were doing a warped waltz, circling slowly around the edges of the room.

And still his master ignored him.

Another side step, and another. His Holy Majesty smiled like the cat about to get the cream and moved closer. And closer. Obi-Wan resisted the urge to cross his legs and don a chastity belt.

This was ridiculous.

Ridiculous enough to finally trigger amusement to colour the desperate ‘help!’ he tried to telegraph to his master.

Three steps away from his master, and he realised his master hadn’t been waving, but drowning: his master was in a desperate struggle of his own, only without the side-stepping dance around the room.

Her Imperial Majesty had obviously decided that the more interesting Jedi sabre was the one not worn on the outside.

Ducking just enough to ‘straighten my tunic’ and thereby avoiding another kiss, Obi-Wan caught sight of just where Her Imperial Majesty was trying to bestow the blessing of her hand.

In public.

Oh, his poor master.

Who, now that Obi-Wan was gazing at him instead of just silently begging him, was looking decidedly frayed around the edges of the famed Jedi serenity. And control.

Because the tunics of a Jedi were supposed to lie a hell of a lot flatter than Jedi Master Jinn’s were. Especially in public. Especially under the hand of one rival leader and under the eyes of the other rival leader.



Two steps away from his master now, and he could see the sweat trickling down Qui-Gon's temples to disappear into his beard. He could also see the stiffness in his master's back, and evidence of the stiffness elsewhere.

Never mind being rescued by his master, he needed to rescue his master before—

He very nearly squeaked. He'd been goosed, accurately and with enthusiasm, his gaze flying to His Holy Majesty who took full advantage of his distraction to kiss him. Also accurately, and with great enthusiasm. Not to mention two hands that seemed to multiply exponentially, touching him in places usually only touched in private—and by people invited to touch.

Diplomacy be damned, he was about to deliver a perfectly nuanced warning via a choicely placed pinch and/or bite when His Holy Majesty released him, and slanted a viciously triumphant look at Her Imperial Majesty. Who responded by pulling Qui-Gon down for a kiss that devoured and a hip-shimmy that took Obi-Wan's breath away, so he could guess what it was doing to Qui-Gon.

A final thrust of the hips and Her Imperial Majesty was looking at His Holy Majesty with an expression Obi-Wan could read all-too clearly. 'Top *that*,' it said.

Obi-Wan had a feeling His Holy Majesty could. And would.

Despite the looks and mutters and wave of disapproval pulsing from the assembled Senators who were looking for an excuse to depose their respective rulers, and from the Young Pretender, the Old Pretender and the One True Lord, all of whom were bearing down on them.

Remaining visibly impartial was going to be rather difficult, bedded down with only two of the claimants.

It would either be a rout, or an orgy, and Obi-Wan didn't particularly want to be at the centre of either. Not when he'd have to explain himself to the Council afterwards.

"Master!" he cried, which shocked the hell out of said master, who was now looking at him as if he'd grown a couple of extra heads. "How *could* you?" he murmured, perfectly grief-stricken, with an artistically stifled sob thrown in for good measure.

"I couldn't," Qui-Gon replied, reaching for Obi-Wan's hands, clutching them with a touch too much melodrama in his padawan's opinion. "But she's so beautiful, I was..."

"I was tempted too," Obi-Wan raised his voice

and pulled his hands free of his master's, then made a show of regaining control. "But I wouldn't..."

"Neither would I. You know I would never willingly betray you," Qui-Gon whispered, and Obi-Wan fervently hoped his master wasn't going to follow the rest of that particular scene: it had been bad enough sitting through the command performance play of two hours ago without trying to keep a straight face through his master's performance now.

"But..." he whispered, letting his voice trail off, hoping he sounded as if he were about to burst into tears.

"Really, Master Jinn," Her Imperial Majesty's Chamberlain said tartly, "you should have informed us that you and this young man were mated."

"It wasn't something I expected to have anything to do with deciding on the succession to the throne," Qui-Gon replied, imperturbable once more, now that Her Imperial Majesty didn't have her tongue down his throat or her hand down his trousers.

"But now we know," His Holy Majesty butted in before Her Imperial Majesty could speak. "And I must agree with Her Majesty's Chamberlain: you should have told us."

"If I'd known," Qui-Gon said carefully, with a sharp look at his padawan that did nothing for Obi-Wan's composure, "I would've said something."

His poor master just wasn't sure what he'd have said, Obi-Wan thought to himself, hiding his grin behind a hurt-but-brave chin-lifted facade. "Master," he murmured, touching Qui-Gon's forearm and turning a wickedly limpid gaze upon him.

"It's all right," Qui-Gon said, and Obi-Wan had only a second to catch the glint in his master's blue eyes before he was reeled in, cuddled and swaddled and yes, patted on the top of his head, like a beloved lover. Or a child.

Obi-Wan resisted the urge to respond with a kick to his master's shins. Just because his master was half a head taller than him...

Well. He couldn't kick his master, but he could snuggle with the best of them, and he gazed up adoringly, smiling to himself at Qui-Gon's double-take.

"Take me home, Master," he sighed, barely stopping himself from lisping on the 'master.'  
"Please, Master."

"If I may?" his master said, beginning the delicate task of extricating them from the various factions without causing any disharmony, distrust, or outright mayhem.



Her Imperial Majesty's Chamberlain, jostling for position with His Holy Majesty's Chamberlain, led them along the corridor to the sleeping areas.

The doors were flung open.

Qui-Gon's mouth dropped open.

Obi-Wan gazed at the communal sleeping room, the plethora of round beds spot-lit by the brightest of lights, and grinned up at his master. "Well, Master," he said evenly, trying valiantly not to laugh out loud, "I'd say we're screwed."

And as his master all-but squirmed, he took his revenge for the years and years of 'not till you're a knight,' and took his master by the hand, tugging him towards the nearest bed. "Or at least," his master's tunics *finally* parting under his hands to reveal bare skin, "I'm going to be screwed."

And he was.

Twice.



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clothes. It seemed appropriate, given the way the smell had gotten into them, given the source of that dreadful stench permeating every fibre. So he went out, alone, until the lights of the city were mere backdrop, and he lit a fire.

Primordial, atavistic, speaking to him at depths far beyond his mind's conscious reach, the fire drew him. One thing at a time, fearful of overwhelming the flames, he burned his padawan's cloak, his padawan's tunics, his padawan's leggings. Burned them all, slowly, as carefully as if this were a required ritual.

Naked, he sat in the night, and listened to the sounds of the crackling, snapping flames drown out the sounds of forest life.

Embers glowing hot and hard like pain in the heart of the fire; not much longer now before the flames would die. Dawn chilled the comforting darkness, bringing the day and responsibilities and reality.

He watched the flames burn. Watched them flicker, and begin to fail.

Almost at the end.

Almost.

He picked up the small knife he'd seen Qui-Gon

use a thousand times for a hundred different reasons, everything from cutting free a prisoner to slicing fruit, and he hefted it in his hand.

The flames, failing.

Slowly, dry-eyed, he clutched his braid in one hand, the knife in the other, and his lips moved, forming words that would never be spoken to him, following the words he heard in his mind, in a voice he'd never hear again.

He severed the braid, and the bond, and cast the weight into the fire.

A shower of sparks, and a crackling, snarling hiss as the fire consumed his hair and the beads melted.

He sat there, naked, and watched until the embers burned out and all was ash.

The end. It was truly over, and reality had to be faced.

There was nothing else left.

Nothing but one last duty, one last promise, one last wish.

Only then did he rise, and put on the new clothes, the new uniform, this new disguise of Jedi knight he would need to hide behind. Only then did he lift his face to the light of day, and only then did he square his shoulders and go back to the city, to fulfill his final promise.





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/// Sometimes, I swear, I hate him.

It's just the heat of the moment, I know that—I'm not about to slide over to the Dark, thanks all the same. But sometimes, I catch him looking at me, and I know he wants me. I *know* it, surer than I know my own name, but then he retreats, turns into the Great and Noble Jedi Master of Serenity and I'm...left out. He doesn't do it to hurt me, of course he doesn't—that'd be beneath him, and he's a good man. But the fact is, he either doesn't know (which means he hasn't stopped to think about *me* enough) or he doesn't care how it makes me feel when he pulls the "I'm above such venality" routine out and puts on his master's robes.

And sometimes... No, he'd never snoop; he'd never go behind my back and betray me by reading my journals. But sometimes, if I come back a bit early from practice, I can feel him in my room. Perhaps it's nothing more than bleed-through from his general presence—Force knows I'm that attuned to him, not to mention I'm obsessed with him!—or perhaps he needed to check if I had the data disk he required, but I can *feel* him, lingering, just a trace of him, as if it were perfume.

Him, in perfume.

Oh Force, now he's looking in the door at me, and he's got *that* expression on his face, the one that wonders what goes on in the minds of padawans.

Not a lot this one wants to share with his master, that's for sure.

I wonder how he'd react, though, were I to ask him? If I just wandered into our living area right now, interrupted him before he could settle to his reading, and ask—casually, of course—if he'd remembered to save the last entry of my journal after he read it because—oh, some excuse about the file being corrupted or something. Wonder how he'd react.

Same way he always reacts when I get too close and too personal. Master Serenity. He'd tuck his hands into the damned sleeves of his damned robe, look at me as if I were all of six months old and ask me a question instead of answering me.

All right, fair's fair, he doesn't *always* do that. But often enough. Especially when he feels guilty about something. And I hate to say this, but I think there's a distinct possibility he feels guilty about my journal.



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Behold the man. This came from wondering how a man could go from being teacher, father-figure, mentor, etc., to being that former-adolescent's lover.

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“a man,” Obi-Wan muttered under his breath for the fortieth or fiftieth time: he had long since stopped counting.

Every time, every blessed time, he tried to get his master to sleep with him, it was the same old story: not until you're a man.

So what was he? Bantha dung?

Not until he was a man, indeed, Obi-Wan thought to himself, a rebellious thrust to his jaw. What you mean, Master, is until *you* see me as a man.

And at this rate, he'd have to be as old as Yoda for that to happen.

There were definite, and significant, drawbacks to becoming someone's padawan at the tender, very unripe age of 13.

Well, there was nothing to help it; his master still couldn't see him as a man, despite the evidence right in front of his eyes, and there was no point in tying himself up in knots over it: he'd done that for too many years for it to hold either appeal or necessity.

The thing was, he knew his master wanted him. Knew, just as deeply, that his master loved him. The nature of that love was open for debate, but in Obi-Wan's opinion, love and lust combined to make a pretty damned impressive basis for a relationship. Certainly, love and lust trounced 'not until you're a man.'

Not that his master agreed with him.

He'd been waiting for 'until you're a man' for four years now, four years since he was old enough to vote (if Jedi were ever to engage in anything so partisan), five years since he was considered legally entitled to use the recreational drugs of his choice, even longer since everyone else on the blessed planet considered him old enough to have sex.

Quite honestly, if his master thought he wasn't old enough and therefore hadn't done anything, then his master was in for quite a shock.

At least now, instead of feeling unworthy or getting himself locked into a useless loop of 'what if' navel-gazing, he was just annoyed.

He cast a sour look at the stack of work his master had left him to correct, work that hadn't needed much correction after all. But his master had left it for him and he'd had to stay behind to do it while his friends went out for a night on the town.

Coincidence?

Yeah, and he had a nice bit of sea-front property on Dagobah if anyone wanted to buy it cheap.

At least the work was done. If he wanted, he could stay home and read or watch a holo, or he could even scramble around making himself look a little less obviously a trainee Jedi and try to find his friends.

None of it really appealed, and none of it would let him shake off this irritation with his master.

So instead, he headed straight for the aerial gymnasium, pleased to find it deserted, then stripped, slipping naked into a pair of brief gym shorts: no encumbrances, not for this. The equipment hung overhead, still and unmoving, danced upon by nothing more substantial than motes of dust in the air. He cleared his mind, opened himself up to the joy of the unifying force and the power of his own muscles, and *soared*.

Somewhere during his indulgence, he felt the presence of *other* entering the gymnasium. *Other*, but harmless, rather, a slight dissonance as the *other* sought harmony with Obi-Wan's own rhythm, Obi-Wan's own pattern of the force and within the force.

Ah, that was it, Obi-Wan allowed himself the momentary thought, it was Master Windu, and yes, there, at that point just there, Master Windu had caught the double-helix flow and twist of the unifying Force and had entered seamlessly. He could see the master now, stripped down to leggings, feet bare, chest and arms bare, for this exercise.



Soaring.

Soaring with him, weaving in and out with him, and the exhilaration of the force thrumming between them.

An exercise this, supposedly one most apprentices loathed learning and most masters avoided doing beyond the necessary teaching, but Obi-Wan loved it. It was incredibly difficult, yes, but the rewards—he grinned, embracing the parallel between this and his desires for his own master, and felt the whisper of surprise flowing from Master Windu.

Felt a flicker of surprise of his own, when Master Windu sent his own secret out through the force, that kernel of truth enveloped into the pattern of their movements and made part of their display.

There were little dots and blips on the outside fringes of their awareness, beyond this bubble of force they'd created: other Jedi, padawans from the dimness of their presences, but enough now that it was as if they were being watched by a cluster of strangely still, strangely land-locked fireflies.

But it didn't matter if those pinpricks of light were stuck to the ground: he was soaring still, exhaustion lurking at the edges of his mind, tugging at him to become gravity-bound again, but he couldn't quite give this up, not yet, and he could feel the same simple joy in Master Windu.

Knew, in that moment, that Mace had always loved this exercise, the one true freedom and indulgence he allowed himself, but something practised alone, always alone, no-one else ever taking this delight in the swooping, dancing difficulty of it and the raw emotional truth of it.

Their grins matched, Obi-Wan knew, just as their energies did, and he didn't have to telegraph or plan his next move; he knew—as surely as he knew his master had just entered the gym—that not only would Mace blend with it, it was the move Mace would've made himself.

And so he flew, tumbling around Mace, fingertips touching fingertips as they passed, and came round for the last configuration.

The final moment, the final, most difficult manoeuvre, performed near exhaustion, then the laughter burst from them, both of them, in perfect harmony, the long strings of unifying force glowing and alive and actually visible between them.

And then reality, as they lay breathless on the thick floor mat, flat on their backs, laughter and joy tickling them both, with Qui-Gon, taller than usual from down here, staring down at them.

Glaring at them.

It was about as welcome as night changing its mind and telling dawn to go to hell, because darkness was going to stay put.

The laughter and the joy faded.

"There's other work I required of you this evening, Padawan," Qui-Gon said, very clipped, his accent struggling through in odd diphthongs. "See to it that your indulgence in silly games hasn't impaired your ability to fulfill your duties."

Obi-Wan lay there for a moment, staring at the heels of Qui-Gon's departing boots and the elongated view of his long cloak. Beside him, he could still feel the fading resonance with Mace as it became Mace regathering his staid dignity and turning back into Master Windu, trying to distance himself to avoid adding to Obi-Wan's embarrassment.

What a way to come down after flying.

And what a way to speak to him, a senior padawan, and in front of another master. And padawans. Several padawans. Most of whom he knew, some of whom he had to work or socialise with—and worse, some of whom he trained and supervised.

Obi-Wan grabbed his stuff, 'sabre and cloak, boots and tunics, and set off after his master.

おは 扉開く時 歩 with Qui-Gon just as the 'lift doors opened, and slipped through easily, half a pace—as always—behind his master.

"That was a fine display," Obi-Wan said, looking straight ahead.

Qui-Gon didn't respond, just stood there, like a lump, Obi-Wan thought uncharitably.

"Definitely a fine display," he went on, knowing perfectly well that Qui-Gon would be thinking about Obi-Wan's and Master Windu's display, "to treat me as if I were a first-season padawan-learner in front of my peers and a master—a Council member upon whom I depend to be judged ready for my trials and passed a knight."

He got a sharp inhalation of breath for that: as good as a public display in most people.

"In fact, if I didn't know better," Obi-Wan went on, eyes fixed on the 'lift indicators, "I'd say that little display was born of jealousy."

And for that, he got a brief stab as he felt Qui-Gon's gaze flicker sharply at him.

"Yes, very impressive," Obi-Wan continued, as





they decanted from the 'lift and approached the door to their apartments, "very impressive. You tell me not until I'm a man, but you don't want me to so much as look elsewhere."

A low growl, the accent very strong. "You were doing a lot more than just looking."

Obi-Wan did look then, just look, his gaze very steady as he measured his master, the memory of the pure harmony between Obi-Wan and Master Windu brought up between them as yardstick.

"Have I told you lately, Master," Obi-Wan said, stopping for a moment in the open doorway, perfectly polite question delivering the most pointed of insults, "how much I respect and admire you?"

And then he walked away, into his own room, closing the door gently behind him, leaving Master Jinn to remember that it had been a very long time indeed.

of course they didn't let a minor detail such as personal upset get in the way of their missions.

On a planet, much like so many other planets, in a room, much like so many other rooms, caught between two warring factions, much like any other pair of warring factions, Master Jinn and his padawan sat long into the night, not letting it show that they were both just about choking on the b'tela root that was being smoked. Or chewed, the juice then spat out into small urns: another of the charming details that never seemed to make it into the reconnaissance notes.

"So we are agreed on this one detail," Master Jinn said, voice brooking no disagreement, a tiny, discreet nod of thanks as his padawan chose that precise moment to engage the 'dharl in conversation at the back of the meeting room: religious ceremonial niceties could be worked out later, when the worst of the dispute was settled.

Another unit of time, a long one on this planet, before they could retire, the two Jedi walking as outwardly calm and serene as any Jedi could be.

Not too long ago, Obi-Wan would've made a joke about them fulfilling their own stereotypes; there would've been a glint of humour, a flicker of smile, a twitch of amusement along their bond.

But beyond work, there was nothing.

A blank wall, concealing Jinn knew not what.

And after their last personal conversation, in Temple, he didn't particularly want to find out.

Jedi were trained to take falls, but he'd found that falling from his padawan's pedestal hurt far more than it ought.

They had, as was the case on so many missions on so many worlds, been given only one room, the locals no doubt believing that Jedi were as austere and martyred as monks, the room bare, bland, blank. No distractions. No comforts. No privacy.

Qui-Gon allowed himself to watch as his padawan went through the nightly routine of getting ready for bed, hanging clothes up to catch the air through the window, to blow the smell of smoke away; padding, nearly naked, to bathe, quickly, returning still damp, skin covered in small bumps of cold; sitting cross-legged to polish boots; kneeling for a brief, intense meditation, then stretching, murmuring a quiet "Good night," then the lithe roll and tuck of getting under blankets and pulling them up over his head for the night.

The same routine.

He'd watched it a hundred times on a hundred worlds, and while the details might vary slightly—clothes hung to remove the smell of smoke rather than brushed clean of mud or placed in a 'fresher unit—the physical routine remained.

The simmering *press* of feeling, though, that was something entirely new. It came from behind that wall, the one his padawan had constructed many, many years ago under Qui-Gon's own tutelage, but a wall that had only ever been used to keep others out. And this was the first time that Qui-Gon had ever been considered an unwelcome *other*.

With his padawan resolutely ensconced under covers, back turned speakingly to Qui-Gon's presence, Qui-Gon finally rose, stiff from days upon days of sitting, and began his own nightly routine.

Altered, too, in larger and smaller ways than Obi-Wan's. The same minor details about clothes, sleep facilities, snacks, and even the length of time he spent in the primitive water-shower that could never let him feel as clean as a proper cleanser unit, could, he supposed, be put down as a minor change.

If only because no-one had any way of knowing what was going on in his mind as he stood there, letting water pour over him, feeling the billions of tiny sparkles of bacterial life popping as they hit him. Thinking about the building pressure behind Obi-Wan's preternaturally calm, uncharacteristically banal wall of indifference. Thinking about what form the explosion would take, when it came, because come it would.



Wondered, and fretted, if the form of that explosion would be the small, bitter sound of his padawan telling him that he'd spoken to Master Windu or Master Yoda or Master Anyone-but-Jinn, and that he'd be finishing his training with someone else.

Well. If that was Obi-Wan's decision, then it would just prove Qui-Gon as right as this festering silence did. Not a mature response. Not the response of a man grown. Proof that he was right to turn down Obi-Wan's advances. Right. Absolutely right.

Standing there with the hot water failing to warm the chill within, Qui-Gon Jinn wished fervently to be proved utterly, and irrevocably, wrong.

“**QUGON-GON.**”

The marginally raised voice was loud as a shout within the Temple, effectively stopping both master and padawan.

Qui-Gon gave his usual slight bow, acknowledging Master Windu, but there was nothing else offered, unless Windu was willing to count the tiredness in Master Jinn's eyes as some sort of offering.

“I wished to congratulate you on your work this past season.”

“Thank you,” Qui-Gon said, bowing again, even more slightly than before. “Since you know what we did, then you know how long a mission it was and how recently returned we are. If you'll excuse us?”

“Of course,” Windu said, looking properly at Qui-Gon, taking note of the formality. “You do seem fatigued, Master Jinn. I won't keep you.”

“Thank you,” Qui-Gon repeated, turning back towards where they'd been headed, stopping when he heard Master Windu continue.

“If I might have a word with your padawan?”

Qui-Gon didn't even look over his shoulder at them; his back straightened—the tired slump, like contentment, only becoming noticed when it was no longer there—and he said, softly, “He is free to make his own choices.”

For a few seconds, there was only the sound of Master Jinn's measured footsteps disappearing down the long hallway.

“If there are difficulties—”

“Then they would be between my master and myself,” Obi-Wan replied sharply, blunting it almost immediately with: “although I thank you for your concern, Master Windu.”

“You do, do you?” Windu said, something suspiciously close to a smile in his eyes.

“Of course, Master.”

Master Windu observed the polite bow and the politer tone of voice; was smart enough to know that there were times when it was best to keep strictly out of other people's business. Time enough to prod—and pry—if things came to such a pass that the Council needed to notice. “What I wanted to talk to you about,” Master Windu went on, noting but not reacting to Padawan Kenobi's relief at being let off the proverbial hook, “was the two of us putting on a display of the Swirling Wind. I think it would be a good thing to let the younger padawans see that it's more than just hard work.”

“If it doesn't conflict with my other duties, I'd be very pleased to put on a display, Master.”

“Good. Perhaps it'd be best if you were to speak to your master about it?” An interesting flicker in the usually bright eyes, and an even more interesting tightening of the mouth. “Or I can, if you'd prefer?”

“No, no, that won't be necessary. If you'll send me a message with possible times, I'll co-ordinate with your schedule.”

“If,” Master Windu said, testing the water and one particular suspicion, “Qui-Gon has no objections.”

Ah. There it was again: the tightening of the mouth, the reflexive move to slide the hands neatly inside the sleeves, the nearly visibly deliberate relaxation as something was let go to the Force. “My master has always done everything he can to aid the teaching of the younger padawans.”

Yes, Mace Windu thought, watching Obi-Wan follow in his master's footsteps down the corridor, but there's more than that going on here. At least in Qui-Gon's mind.

**THE DOOR** to his master's private room was already closed. Obi-Wan gave it a dirty look, and went into his own room, closing his own door quietly.

After all, it wouldn't do for a Jedi to go around slamming doors.

Unbidden, Master Yoda's adage blundered into his mind, *anger leads to...*

Anger leads to nothing but misery, Obi-Wan paraphrased from his own experience. Still, the inequity of it gnawed at him, as irritating and incapable as midges at twilight.

There was, obviously, more to it than just his age:



Qui-Gon's insistence was obviously a trial, a test, and there was a way to win through. It was, he assured himself again, just a matter of working out what the hell Qui-Gon was looking for.

But still, Qui-Gon's behaviour left a lot to be desired right now—and not the usual desire, at that.

Not until you're a man, he thought again, hearing it in Qui-Gon's voice. Well, if your example is what I have to follow, we'll *all* be older than Yoda by the time I'm man enough to—

It slipped into his mind, sharp as a blade. Man enough? Was that what was really behind this shilly-shallying delay? He was lacking, in some way, not age, but...

It took him all of seven heartbeats and three blinks to come to his senses. There was nothing unattractive about him physically; the closest he came to lacking anything was height, and that was only because his master was—by Qui-Gon's own admission—'overgrown, like an untended weed.'

No, it was the age thing, it was still the age thing.

That, and jealousy and possessiveness: his master wanted him, but not enough to overcome his own stupid age prejudice, but enough to make a fool of himself when someone looked at his supposedly too-young padawan. The age thing, the jealousy, the possessiveness and horrifying though the thought was, it could just possibly be that his master couldn't see him as the man he was now for seeing him as the child he'd been then. Or maybe his master was insecure when it came to being a man himself instead of a Jedi.

Oh, who the Sith knew what it was. And he was *still* annoyed with Qui-Gon Jinn.

Obi-Wan rubbed the back of his neck, trying to get rid of the incipient headache before it could take hold. Meditation, that's what he needed; meditate, let all the dark stuff float off into the Force like effluent.

Now that was a charming thought, he decided, making a face. He left his room, heading for the kitchen and a snack—taking the spice cake and bread even though he knew it was a peace offering; let his master make what he would of the careful, *equal* division of the treats—to keep him going through meditation. We fill the Force with raw sewage and then immerse ourselves in it.

Meditation tonight was going to be interesting, with *that* imagery in his mind.

could barely hear his padawan return home. Coward, the thought to himself, skulking in your room like a naughty padawan-learner trying to avoid his master.

There was truth in that, he knew, a truth he'd really rather prefer to avoid.

Avoidance was easily enough achieved, with his padawan to listen to. The snick of door being closed with quiet restraint, the sense of vague movement in another room, the unexpected absence of music. But then, Obi-Wan was less obsessed with music these days; his padawan was just as likely to read or watch a holo or go out with friends. Or go to assignments with Mace in the aerial gym.

Perhaps his mood would improve if he concentrated on the sound of Obi-Wan in the kitchen, hungry again. He wondered, for a moment, if his padawan had found the peace-offering of favourite bread and a large hunk of spice cake.

More than silence, then, the settling stillness that comes only with meditation, a sense of a small node of harmony nearby, someone centred and in touch with the Force.

A fine example to follow.

Meditation, after all, leads to self-knowledge. Self-awareness. Enlightenment. Truth.

Very reluctantly, denying himself that small wedge of dread pressing at the back of his mind, Master Jinn comported himself on his meditation mat, and sank within himself, seeking knowledge.

*Perfect form, perfect motion, swooping and swirling through the air like eddies of snow in the wind, how could he not admire that?*

But that wasn't what had drawn him to the aerial gymnasium. Of course, it was the sight that had greeted him that—

No. A little knowledge was a dangerous thing, and a little self-knowledge was even more dangerous. So—

*A strong sense of his padawan, drawing him, luring him in like a fish on a line; following it before he'd identified it, realising that it was joy, elation, a bright shining happiness.*

*A moment, hesitating behind the press of apprentices, to feel the prick of shame at the way he devoured the joy, clutching it to him, nearly greedy.*

The form was superb, far better than anything he himself had ever achieved. Incredible, to see the Swirling Wind performed with such ease, such joy.

A teacher could be allowed a twinge of envy at being surpassed by his student and—

ㄐㄏㄨㄛㄨㄛㄨㄛㄨㄛㄨㄛㄨㄛㄨㄛㄨㄛㄨㄛ door, he





Obi-Wan went as still and quiet as the morning had been just a moment before. He'd felt, almost as much as heard, the movement behind him.

Someone in his room, sitting in the chair watching him. A stray thought wondered if yesterday's clothes had been dumped on the floor or sat on.

No sense of danger, of course, no need to call his 'sabre to him, because this was home, this was Temple, this was safe.

And that, behind him, was Qui-Gon.

Sitting, watching him.

Given the calibre of his master's recent behaviour, the watching presence was perilously close to creepy.

"I apologise if I woke you."

Voice clear and crisp, the absence of the usual day-off rumble and mumble telling Obi-Wan that Qui-Gon hadn't bothered to go to sleep in the first place, not if he was this awake this early, when they weren't on—

"Do we have a mission, Master?"

Another rustle, Obi-Wan picturing Qui-Gon, too big for comfort in that chair really, crossing his legs. "No mission that I'm aware of."

Which meant that this was personal.

Oh great.

What a way to start the day: facing a Qui-Gon Jinn who'd been up all night, probably meditating. Philosophy and ethics and analysing personal relationships before breakfast, yum.

Slowly, Obi-Wan rolled over onto his back and looked over at his master. Who was cross-legged, long, bare leg crossed at the ankle over the knee of the other long, bare leg. Very pale skin, with a curling softness of hair blurring the outline of the muscular legs, the hard curve of kneecap under the white-knuckled grip of hand, the shadows darkening between the legs, to where he thought he could catch a glimpse of pallid skin amongst the dark hair. A robe, his mind supplied belatedly after his libido had ceased dictating. My master's sitting in my bedroom naked but for a robe.

More bare skin; long feet, long toes, ligaments and bones elegant in their unabashed display of anatomy, forearms showing beneath the shadow of the wide sleeves, the twin bumps of bones on the exposed wrists; more twin bumps, on the sides of the ankles; the long lines of neck, the beginning sweep of collar bone, the sprinkle of hair on broad chest, the white edge of scar disappearing behind the crossed front of the robe, the edges of the ties

hanging down between the legs, the bob of Adam's apple, the sweep of hair, unbound, hanging loose, the tempting hint of paleness amongst the darkness between the legs—

He finally looked up, at the face, and the eyes.

Couldn't read the expression. Could see the patience, and the understanding; hoped he could see pleasure in the way he'd gaped and stared at his nearly-naked master, but wondered if that was resignation or disappointment lurking in blue eyes.

"Finished?" Qui-Gon asked him, in the same damnably calm tone he used for everything.

"No," Obi-Wan snapped before his brain could veto his mouth, "since we've never even started, how could I be?"

And before his master could say whatever he was opening his mouth to say, Obi-Wan raised his hand, stopping Qui-Gon. "I'm sorry, that was inappropriate. I'll work on my temper again today."

"You don't have to work on it too hard. You've been well-enough provoked."

"Yes." He refused to soften that. Lifted his chin, met his master's gaze with defiance, and succumbed to humour as he realised just how he must look, lying flat on his back in his bed, sheet showing his reaction to his master, and him, trying to look as powerfully disapproving as Yoda. "I should get dressed—"

"No," Qui-Gon said. "If I have to wait while you dress, I'll find an excuse not to say anything."

Obi-Wan gave Qui-Gon a look for that. "If I'm going to have to sit through a lecture before breakfast—"

Qui-Gon waved his hand, just enough Force to shut Obi-Wan up.

"Sorry," he said, releasing his padawan. "I just..."

Patience was a virtue, his master was fond of telling him, usually when he least wanted to hear it. So Obi-Wan waited, with some semblance of patience, while his master gathered words.

"I have behaved badly," Qui-Gon announced, hands on knees, braced as if facing a particularly hostile Council armed only with an excessively hare-brained idea. "Beginning with telling you that I wouldn't have...that we wouldn't..." A deep breath, a wry twist of smile. "I've been telling you that I won't fuck you until you're a man, when all the time what I was really saying was I didn't want you to become a man."

Obi-Wan blinked, and thought about that. "So you're saying...what, precisely, Master?" he asked,





too many possibilities running through his head for him to choose just one.

“If you were a man,” Qui-Gon began, slowly, “things would change.”

Virtuously, Obi-Wan resisted the urge to deliver several very sarcastic remarks.

Qui-Gon’s arc of a smile recognised that, and it brought back memories, of Qui-Gon’s patience and tolerance through some of Obi-Wan’s more wincingly embarrassing ‘learning experiences,’ the know-it-all years of adolescence for starters. With a bit of a lurch, perspective was restored, and Obi-Wan turned onto his side, propped himself up on an elbow, the most relaxed he’d been in far too long. He could give his master what his master had given him in the past.

As long as it didn’t take his master too long.

Patience was a virtue, but Obi-Wan could only be so virtuous and no more.

“Qui-Gon?” he prompted. “Things would change?”

Qui-Gon half-shrugged, tugged a little at the edge of his robe, covering his legs a little more. “Everything would change. If I see you as a man...”

*We could finally have sex*, Obi-Wan thought, but he kept his mouth shut, exercising some of the calm listening that Qui-Gon had used so often on him. “The changes?” he asked, voice pitched low and soothing.

Another arc of a smile, Qui-Gon obviously recognising his own techniques being turned on him. “A mountain of them, Obi-Wan. You’d be my equal, and what would that do to training you? You’d be ready for your trials, you’d become a knight, you’d be fair game for anyone who was interested—”

*Definitely jealous of Master Windu*, Obi-Wan thought with relish and a soupçon of pride.

A nod of agreement from Qui-Gon. “Including Mace Windu. I’d have no claim over you, no—”

“No claim? We’d be lovers! What’s that if not—”

“Nothing. You have the skills to pass the trials and you’ve had more diplomatic experience than any three padawans. The last requirement you have to meet is maturity. And if you’re a man—”

“Then I become a knight and your lover. Forgive me, Master,” and yes, his sarcasm had slipped through there, barely leavened by any warmth, “but I don’t see what the problem is.”

“You’d be gone.”

Obi-Wan narrowed his eyes and kept his immediate response locked away. Sorely tempting though it

was to call Qui-Gon a hundred kinds of fools for putting them both through this for what, essentially, was nothing. “What happened,” Obi-Wan asked with what he personally thought was laudable calmness, “to paying attention to the present? Living in the moment?”

“Do as I say, not as I do.”

“I think I can manage that.”

“Especially recently,” Qui-Gon said, and managed to sound noble and sad all at the same time.

Obi-Wan should yell at him for manipulating him like that, but with Qui-Gon sitting there looking so miserable, looking like he knew he was every kind of idiot under every kind of sun in the known universe... Damn it, but there were drawbacks to caring for someone.

“Only recently,” Obi-Wan finally said, and yes, soppy though it was, it warmed him all the way down to his toes that his master had brightened so much at his little bit of reassurance.

He was tempted to add: “only very recently. In fact, if you come to bed right now, we can get ‘very recently’ down to ‘never ever’.” Instead, he waited to see what his master was going to say next. Or if his master was going to cross his legs, or move, or otherwise give him a chance for a clearer look into the shadows under his robe.

His master wasn’t saying anything. Just sitting there—that lump thing again—saying and doing nothing. Waiting for Obi-Wan.

“I’d like to be very clear on this, make sure I understand you fully. You accept that I am, in fact, a man, and have been for some time, you just haven’t wanted to see me that way?”

Qui-Gon nodded.

“And you didn’t want to see me as a man because if you were to do that, then you’d have to accept that I was ready for my knighthood?”

Another nod.

“And when I become a knight, you don’t see that as the beginning of a relationship, but as the end of not only what we have now,” what little there was beyond the master-apprentice team, “but an end to even being with me at all?”

Another nod.

Helpful, Master, very helpful, he thought, annoyed again. “And so you stopped us from getting together because you thought I’d leave?”

Another of those Sith-begotten nods.

Obi-Wan flopped back on the bed. “Force save me, I’m in love with a fool.”



Ah-ha! Now that got a reaction.

“In love with me?”

“Of course I’m in love with you—why else did you think I’ve been pursuing you for this long?”

And damn it, but Qui-Gon was having the bare-faced (and bare legged and bare chested and bare *everythinged*) effrontery to look put out. “You never mentioned anything about love,” Qui-Gon said, standing—or rather, sitting—on his dignity.

“I never mentioned anything about love?” Oh, now that was rich! Bare-faced effrontery followed by bare-faced lying. “Never mentioned? What about that time on Eridanii 5?”

Qui-Gon frowned at him. “The time you tried to invoke local custom so we’d have to perform sex on the public altar in their main square?”

Well, put like that... “That was their *bonding* ritual.”

“That wasn’t their bonding ritual,” a very tart edge to the voice indeed, and just to make sure the disapproval was clear enough, the robe was twitched more firmly shut, “that was their mating ritual. Done by anyone feeling randy enough.”

Oh. “Well, what about that time at the Padawan’s Party?”

“When you groped me in public? You were drunk!”

“I wasn’t drunk, I was just...merry. And I didn’t grope you. I invited you to share a romantic, slow dance with me.”

“You invited me,” the neck of the robe was pulled shut now as well, “to stand there while you slobbered all over me and told your friends how you were going to fuck me silly.”

He hadn’t! Had he? Truth was, it was the first time he’d had the guts to approach Qui-Gon and he’d had to use a fair few intoxicants to get the courage up to say anything and he didn’t actually remember... “All right, all right. But there was the time on Hoth.”

“We were freezing,” said coldly, retying the belt of his robe tighter. And if this kept up, Qui-Gon was going to run out of things to symbolically close and would have to go fetch his slippers. “You crawled in beside because it was either that or freeze to death.”

“That’s not what I said.”

“What you said was, ‘I’m freezing, please let me come in beside you, Force, you’re warm,’ and then you stuck your tongue down my throat.”

“Well, that’s not what I meant.”

“The ‘you’re warm’ or sticking your tongue down my throat.”

Now Qui-Gon was just being difficult and sarcastic, and that never boded well. Anyway, this really wasn’t quite what Obi-Wan had expected. He’d been clear, surely, about his intentions? “Hah! You can’t deny this one! The banquet on R’rhdr.”

What the—

“Qui-Gon?” Obi-Wan asked, suddenly uncertain. He was willing to swear that had been hurt on Qui-Gon’s face, but it was gone now.

“I think that’s a night best forgotten.”

But—

His master looked at him, as impassive as Obi-Wan had ever seen him. “Look, I just came in to tell you that the problem’s been with me and I’ve realised that. And—” Qui-Gon looking away from him, nearly muttering, “that there’s no point in throwing away today because of what tomorrow will bring.”

Obi-Wan nearly missed that, he was so busy trying to work out what the hell had happened in Qui-Gon’s version of the banquet on R’rhdr. But then his brain caught up with what Qui-Gon had said. “You mean you want to fuck me now?”

“Not necessarily this second. I have things I need to do.”

Aghast, Obi-Wan stared at where his master had been sitting. He wished he were dreaming, because then it would at least make sense. But as it was... Yes, Qui-Gon had been sitting there waiting for him to wake up, presumably to finally—finally!—have sex with him, and instead, the bastard had left without so much as giving him a good look at what was under Qui-Gon’s robes.

“Force help me,” Obi-Wan said again in disgust, “but I am in love with a real fool.”

七村在沢五 山五沢五之七 巾丹之≡ perks to being a Council member, but not having to get out of bed on Temple schedule was one of them and probably the one Mace Windu appreciated most. Meetings could and did run according to necessity, which could mean real-time discussions or interventions for three different time systems. Contentious meetings in the middle of the night—in formal robes, no less—weren’t exactly conducive to being up before dawn to attend physical meditation classes.

But here he was, prowling through the pre-breakfast hallways crowded with Jedi-in-training. Because he was, quite frankly, going insane.

If he had to sit through just one more meeting





over trade, one more meeting over ‘but they said/no we didn’t’, one more budget hearing, one more resources review, he was going to scream.

Master Jinn didn’t exactly help. Two years older than Mace himself, but Qui-Gon was still out in the field. Qui-Gon wasn’t sitting on a damned chair numbing his butt while having to listen to reports about other people actually *doing* things.

Qui-Gon Jinn didn’t have to sit there, pretending constipation, just so he could behave like a proper Council member instead of jumping up and down and asking ‘but what happened next?’ like an over-excited acolyte.

He was definitely losing his mind.

Which was why he was up before dawn, or rather, here he was, still up instead of finally getting to his bed only half a day late, and why he was treading serenely down the lower gym level corridors.

There was a hum of conversation down here, which would silence soon; Mace found himself smiling at a neat double-row of littlest acolytes being herded along by three of the older initiates. Laughter and chatter, being shushed, the littlest ones unbearably adorable as they tried to be proper little Jedi.

His smile foundered, though, when he realised why the laughter had been shushed, and when the seriousness turned to wide-eyed worry.

Him.

He was damn near the bogey Sith of their nightmares.

Him.

He swirled his cloak around him—damned uncomfortable too-tight formals—and headed on down the corridor. He wasn’t here to look at acolytes anyway.

There should be several classes of older initiates farther down the corridor; that’s where he was headed.

He wasn’t absolutely going to take a padawan. Not definitely. But he wanted to see them. See if one of them resonated with him the way Obi-Wan had with Qui-Gon Jinn.

Not that he’d ever tell Qui-Gon just how much it made his heart ache to see the richness of the bond between master and apprentice: he had a suspicion that Qui-Gon wouldn’t see that as a sincere compliment about the pure bond, but would see it as someone trying to move in on his Obi-Wan.

As if.

Everyone in the Temple knew Obi-Wan would fuck anything that stood still long enough, or be

fucked by anyone who could catch his attention for five minutes, and everyone also knew that if you wanted anything more than that, look elsewhere. Everyone but Qui-Gon Jinn knew exactly where Obi-Wan’s affections lay.

Ah—the initiate classes should be next. But, hand on door to go into the upper observation balcony, Mace stopped. That looked like light coming out from under the aerial gym door. Which was ridiculous, considering how often they’d sent out directives about not wasting energy, which didn’t come free.

Even Jedi were prone to practical jokes when younger, and even good intentions could sometimes result in problems, so none of the light controls worked by anything other than actually pressing them with a real object.

No Force manipulations here; well, it’d only take a minute to turn out the light, he’d still be in time to see all of the initiates.

Oh Sith.

He was half-way back out the door, seconds from making his escape, when he was caught, fair and square.

“Checking up on me?”

Now that was an interesting choice of words. “Why, have you been doing things I need to check up on?”

Qui-Gon landed heavily, sweat pouring off him, his leggings translucent with it.

Mace propped himself against the door, in a pose he’d seen Obi-Wan use many a time, and waited while Qui-Gon mopped his face and arms with a slightly soggy towel.

“How long have you been down here?”

“Not long enough.”

Force, but he hated it when Qui-Gon tried to play mystical mysterious Jedi master with him. “Not long enough for what?”

No answer of course, because that would make it just too easy.

Well, if Qui-Gon was going to be like that, then Mace was going to go watch the initiates. But—

Qui-Gon Jinn was the best they had when it came to the Living Force, someone they could depend on to stay genuinely grounded no matter how bad the situation, someone who could always find enough serenity and calm to help two viciously opposing sides to see it from the other side’s point of view and get at least the worst atrocities stopped. So what was that Master Jinn doing standing sweating in the aerial gym, back muscles knotted in ways that made Mace



wince just to look at, and staring up at the equipment as if it was his worst enemy or a Hutt doing a belly dance?

“Qui?”

Even here by the door he could hear Qui-Gon struggling to control his breath.

He nearly spoke, but too many years on his butt in negotiations had at least taught him when to keep his mouth shut.

Finally: “Teach me.”

Mace barely kept his shocked screech inside.

“Teach you?” he replied stupidly, scrabbling for time to sort this out.

“The Swirling Wind. Teach me.”

“You’re a master, surely you learned—”

“Years ago. Never was any good at it, and it’s been so long...”

“Qui, the Living Force—”

“Is my greatest strength, I know, but should I limit myself to only one thing because it’s easy? I thought we Jedi were supposed to strive.”

Strive, yes, but not do something out of misery. And not try to master something that went against your main Force connection, and definitely not try to learn it for whatever warped Obi-Wan-related reason Qui-Gon had come up with “The Living Force is attached to living things—”

“Really?” Qui-Gon said sarcastically, still not looking at him. “Well, you learn something new every day.”

“You know what I mean. The Living Force grounds you, the Swirling Wind...”

The broad shoulders slumped. “Is beyond me. I’ve never been good at these Unifying Force disciplines. I can’t do the extended aerial somersaults or the suspension hovers, I just stand there like a tree stump—”

So it was exactly what Mace had dreaded it might be. Not a damned thing he could do to help. Not a damned thing he could fix. Not something even the Council could make a dent in.

Mace put a hand on one of the drooping shoulders, patted it, was even more worried when his avuncular sentimentality didn’t get him pinned by a glare. “Come on,” he said, offering the only thing he could, simple friendship, “let’s go and have breakfast.”

After all, the initiates would still be there tomorrow.

particularly the one Obi-Wan had called him. Trying to do the Swirling Wind—him! He’d never been able to do more than the most minimal level, the Living Force constantly drawing him back down. Maybe he should take Obi-Wan to one of the nature preserves, one of the big ones, where there were trees. He could do the Swirling Wind amidst living trees—which was foolish, and stupid.

He finished breakfast, wrapped his hands round his mug, welcoming the warmth as he finally cooled down after that fiasco in the gym.

And if he felt like a fool before, oh, he felt even worse when he caught Mace’s eye.

“You’re a fool,” Mace told him. Small wonder they’d taken Mace out of the field and onto the Council, the man had all the diplomacy of a hungry Hutt.

“Takes one to know one?”

“Now that’s the sort of mature, reasoned response one expects from a master.”

Yes, well, said master wasn’t feeling particularly mature or reasoned right at the very moment.

“Are you going to tell me about it?”

No. He didn’t want to talk about it, he didn’t want to think about it. He didn’t. “Is that a Council request?” Qui-Gon asked, making a point of calmly drinking his tea.

“No, and this isn’t a negotiation,” Mace said quietly. “You don’t have to out-face me. What the hell’s wrong, Qui?”

Oh, he was pulling out the ‘Qui.’ Reminding him of just how far back together they went. Reminding him, more pointedly, that under the master, he was just a man. Who was a fool. And being foolish.

“You said it yourself. I’m a fool.”

“Details.”

He shrugged, poured himself another mug of strong tea, spooning and pouring and stirring until he had it the way he liked it, and more importantly, until he’d had a moment or two to think. “I want more than I can have when I should be grateful for what I’ve got.”

“Obi-Wan?”

“Why d’you sound so shocked? Everyone else’s seen he’s a man—”

“For years.”

“So why be surprised that I want him too?”

“Because if you want him, then how can there possibly be a problem?”

“You’ve been spending too much time in the lofty spires.”

书五 宁五七七 上五伏五 every kind of fool,



“Does that make me out of it or does it just give me a better overview?”

And what was that supposed to mean? he wanted to demand, but Mace, as per usual, had impeccable timing and had made his dramatic exit, aided and abetted by a bleeping emergency comlink.

“巾着とては沢。”

“Padawan.”

Obi-Wan sat down again, turning his back on his master, still angry and all right, confused and upset too, over what had happened in the morning.

Shit! He was supposed to be playing the perfect padawan: if Master Jinn wanted to be a fool and stick to the dignified master routine, then Obi-Wan would give the idiot what wanted. That would teach Qui-Gon pretty damned quickly just how stupid an idea it was. But if he was supposed to be playing the perfect padawan, he should be—he should be—

““Qui-Gon?”

“What?”

“I’ve just realised something?”

“Oh?”

Well, he could at least sound interested—but hang on a minute. “Why are you limping?”

“I’m limping?”

Oh Sith, it was going to be one of those nights. Okay, leave that, come back to it later. “I just realised something interesting.”

“Which is *what*?”

“That it’s been so long since I did the padawan routine in here that I have to stop and think about what a padawan’s supposed to do.”

Qui-Gon was frowning at him. “What’s so surprising about that? I never required you to do any of that if we weren’t being observed.”

“No, but still. I mean, I thought recently that you were...”

Qui-Gon sounded immeasurably weary, and Obi-Wan started looking, really looking, at the man in front of him. “You thought what?” Qui-Gon asked him, and yes, the man was having trouble reaching up to hang his cloak up.

“I thought you’d been pulling away from me, being a formal master.”

“I was pulling away from you.”

But not to affirm the distancing role of master.

“Why?”

“Told you. This morning.”

And Obi-Wan knew that when he saw that

expression and heard that tone, he wasn’t going to get another informative word out of his master.

“You’re stiff,” he said instead.

“Ever observant.”

That had to be the oddest tone of voice Obi-Wan had ever heard: a combination of dry, wry, sarcastic and terribly, terribly tender. And sad. Miserable, really.

“Perhaps—”

“But it’s nothing a good hot bath won’t take care of,” Qui-Gon was telling him brightly. “In fact, about our conversation this morning?”

“Uh—yes?” What the hell—

“Once I’ve loosened up,” the most astonishingly flirtatious smile and yes, Qui-Gon had actually wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, “I was thinking we could go to bed?”

“Together?”

“Well, I’ve heard it’s big,” Qui-Gon laughing, a rich, warm sound, “and I’m no shrimp, but I think it’d be *easier* if we were in the same bed.”

“Uhm, yes, sure, that’d be fine.”

“Excellent,” Qui-Gon told him, heartily. The man even rubbed his hands together. “I’ll just go and have that bath then.”

“I’ll—I’ll just get things together in the bedroom...”

“Fine, excellent, great, I’ll just go and—”

And then his master had grabbed a towel and was heading out the door to the large soaking baths next to the gyms. Which left Obi-Wan standing in the middle of the room, wondering what the hell had just hit him, what had just happened, and why, when Qui-Gon was finally ready to go to bed with him, he was standing here feeling like he’d just lost something.

巾着とては沢 he thought Qui-Gon would be back, Obi-Wan had everything set. All right, so he felt as much a fool as he accused Qui-Gon of being, but he was nervous, he was entitled to do daft things. So he’d spent that hour getting food from the refectory (if there was one thing he knew about Qui-Gon, one thing he could still depend on, it was the man’s enormous appetite and grumpiness when not fed) and even, although he really felt a bit embarrassed about it, tidying up, putting clean sheets on the bed, having a shower himself, putting on civilian clothes that were easy to remove, no damned boots and...

He looked around the room and wondered if it



was just too much. Fine, so plenty of his partners had appreciated it, but that was when they'd all been younger, or the more romantic ones of more recent encounters. Perhaps candles and scents weren't quite the thing for Qui-Gon—

Too damn late.

"What are you doing?"

"Uhm, nothing," Obi-Wan told him, putting the armful of candles back down. Qui-Gon was standing in the doorway, unreadable expression on his face and dripping hair leaving dark patches on his robe. Obi-Wan hesitated, completely unused to being this dithering just because he had someone in his bedroom.

"Shall we get started?" Qui-Gon said.

Obi-Wan gulped. Shall we get started? That made it sound like a fucking training exercise! And this morning he'd confessed—he'd actually said it, right out loud, and it wasn't something he said lightly.

Fine. If Qui-Gon wanted it to be just sex, then fine. He could do that. He'd done it before, he'd do it again—but he'd wanted more.

Oh stop whining, he told himself, pulling the covers down to the bottom of the bed, the crumb-free sheets getting crumpled. You wanted to have sex with him, you're getting it. Just because he doesn't want more...

Obi-Wan started to pull his shirt off, then looked at Qui-Gon and thought about just how much hair there was and just how cold and wet and clammy it would be. "Can we dry your hair first, maybe?"

"Oh. Yes, of course, I should've thought—"

Obi-Wan looked at where Qui-Gon had been and tried to remember the last time he'd seen the man move so quickly when he wasn't actually being shot at.

When Qui-Gon emerged from the bathroom, his hair was dry, certainly, and Obi-Wan knew better than to laugh: there was a reason Qui-Gon usually left his hair to dry naturally, and this fluffy, static-y cloud was it.

"I got us something to eat."

Never failed: one look at the meal on the table, one whiff of the spices, and Qui-Gon was digging in. That should help, Obi-Wan told himself, wolfing down his own plateful: Qui-Gon was always much easier going when he wasn't hungry. And a man Qui-Gon's size was always hungry, if all he had were standard-size meals.

Not that he actually wanted to think about it, but Obi-Wan couldn't quite get rid of that niggles of

unease over what had happened this morning. Look at it clearly, he told himself, passing the bread plate to Qui-Gon. You told him you loved him, and he shot down every one of your examples. Including R'rhdr. How anyone could not think *that* had been the embarrassing emotional declaration to end all embarrassing emotional declarations was beyond Obi-Wan.

But Qui-Gon—

Fine. Great. Terrific. So he was going to have to figure that out. Sex first, then he'd ask. No asking beforehand, he reminded himself, tucking into dessert, not after the fool walked out this morning. Sex first, talk later.

No, sex first, then sleep, then talk.

No, no, sex, then sleep, then more sex in the morning, then talk.

Sex, sleep, sex, breakfast and bugger the talk.

Now that sounded like a *good* plan.

So how the hell did he end up kneeling astride a prostrate Qui-Gon with every intention of massaging him instead of fucking him?

Because Qui-Gon had looked tired, had winced when he moved and was being almost frighteningly cheerful and friendly. This was not the Qui-Gon he knew and loved, that was the Qui-Gon turning on the charm for strangers and negotiators, and that was the Qui-Gon putting on a mask.

And he wasn't quite desperate enough to fuck a mask. Well, not yet. Give him five minutes of running his hands over that gorgeous, massive back, and he would be more than desperate enough.

Okay, massage, sex, sleep, sex, breakfast. Good plan.

Which is why he could've kicked himself, sliding his hands over the broad planes of Qui-Gon's back, when he heard himself say, "So why don't you tell me your version of what happened on R'rhdr?"

Ouch. He'd thought the muscles were tense before...

"I wish you'd stop harping on about R'rhdr."

"I've mentioned it twice!" He started working on one particularly nasty knot. "Why does it bother you so much?"

He'd need a massage himself if he was going to think about that horrible day. The assembled Assembly, all those people in their finery, laughing uproariously at the stupid little padawan who'd actually—he really had, oh Sith, he had and Qui-Gon had just looked at him and walked away and they'd all laughed. Three years ago: you'd think it wouldn't hurt



quite as much any more. “I mean it, what do you think happened? After all, I was the one everyone laughed at.”

“You were? Don’t be stupid, what did they have to laugh at you for?”

“Oh, how about,” he dug his fingers in entirely too roughly, “I’d just all but asked my master to sort of marry me and he’d walked out like I’d thrown up all over his best robes?”

There was a deep, listening stillness in the body under him.

“Obi-Wan,” and that made him pay attention: it wasn’t often they actually used each others’ names, “that was their Fools’ Day.”

“And I really lived up to the event.”

“Obi-Wan, what was your understanding of Fools’ Day?”

Uh-oh. No, it couldn’t be—they couldn’t’ve been that stupid—oh Sith, if they’d done what he thought they might’ve done, he’d never live it down. “Fools’ Day is a sort of glorified opposites’ day, like we had when we were acolytes and initiates.”

“When acolytes dress like masters and you start with dessert and work backwards to soup?”

He recognised that tone of voice and even a fool could see where this conversation was going. Okay, so he was going to be mortally embarrassed but at least Qui-Gon had been just as big a fool. Obi-Wan stopped kneeling astride Qui-Gon and settled himself lower, knees on either side of Qui-Gon’s hips, his own ass now nice and warm against Qui-Gon’s muscular rump, rubbing just a little bit, that smooth, naked skin too good to resist. “Let me guess,” he said, sliding his oiled hands over the long line of Qui-Gon’s spine. “Someone played me for a fool and told me the wrong thing.”

“Fools’ Day is a sort of opposites’ day. But the joke is to say the opposite of what you mean. And the nastier the joke—”

“—the better everyone else likes it so when I stood there thinking I was turning the usual power balance on its head—”

“—the padawan approaching the master and ordering the master—”

“—you thought I was saying the absolute opposite of anything that could possibly be true.”

Oh Sith. If Qui-Gon had been thinking he meant the *opposite* of what he’d said, small wonder...

Qui-Gon sounded amused in a mortified sort of way. “Remember what you said this morning?”

“Which one?”

“I think the exact quote is, ‘Force help me, I’m in love with a fool.’”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said, grinning, running his thumb up and down Qui-Gon’s spine, dipping lower and lower each time, “I think that’s pretty much it.”

“And are you?”

Giddy. He felt giddy and nearly drunk and just—well, happy. “Well, you’re definitely a fool.”

“So we both want...”

“I’ve been trying to tell you that for years!”

Qui-Gon was twisting to try and see over his shoulder, and yes, that was a fatuous big grin on his face too. “Oh, and I was supposed to interpret ‘Sith but you’re fucking huge’ as *that*?”

“All right, so perhaps I need to work on my subtlety. But come on, no-one else lasts more than a few nights, and I was *still* asking you years later!”

Qui-Gon wasn’t looking over his shoulder at him anymore, and the grin had faded. “And I was still trying not to see you as a man.”

Obi-Wan slowed his strokes, slid lower, until he was propped up on one elbow, nestled between Qui-Gon’s wide-spread legs. “I won’t leave, you know.”

“You won’t have any choice.”

Obi-Wan ran his thumb down between Qui-Gon’s cheeks, circled and pressed the small hole, watched as Qui-Gon arched up, then leant on his elbows and let his head drop forward, long hair screening his face.

“Why won’t I have any choice?” Obi-Wan asked, pushing his thumb in, rubbing himself on the sheets, nearly barking his shins on the bottom of the bed before he moved up closer and licked, just the once, where his thumb had been.

“Because—” no sound at all, Qui-Gon utterly silent apart from the harshness of his breathing. Obi-Wan licked again, and again, while Qui-Gon pushed himself up onto his knees and onto Obi-Wan’s tongue, Qui-Gon the one to grab his buttocks and pull himself more open, Obi-Wan quick to take him up on the invitation.

“Because?” Obi-Wan prompted, not touching, tacit threat obvious.

“Because you’ll be a knight and knights go where they’re sent.”

“True enough.” And he felt nearly giddy again, drunk with happiness, because there was misery in Qui-Gon’s voice and he could fix that. He could fix that and they could both get what they’d been too stupid to realise the other one wanted. “Unless this particular knight chose you to do his two years as journeyman with.”





Qui-Gon's grin was back. As was his enthusiasm. Obi-Wan went back to licking, and Qui-Gon went back to being silent, just the wet sounds of Obi-Wan's tongue and the rough rasp of Qui-Gon's breathing, until Qui-Gon nearly shouted, "Oh for Sith's sake, fuck me!"

Obi-Wan blinked, and grinned: oh he'd been right, Qui-Gon was a man of voracious appetite. He slicked some oil over his cock and knelt between Qui-Gon's thighs.

"This isn't going to work," he muttered, pushing on Qui-Gon's hips to lower him. "Your legs are too damned long."

"Fine, fine," Qui-Gon muttered back, still smiling. Then he was spreading himself out flat, grabbing pillows and shoving them under his groin, raising himself a bit. "Can you reach *now*?"

"Don't start," Obi-Wan growled, covering Qui-Gon, rubbing his face against Qui-Gon's neck, stifling laughter, "or I won't fuck you."

"Yes you will."

Obi-Wan was grinning now, stroking his cock along the runnel between Qui-Gon's cheeks, dipping the head of his cock to kiss, briefly, the opening that was trying to suck him in. "No I won't."

"Yes," Qui-Gon pushed back, "you will."

"Oh, no I won't," Obi-Wan nearly laughed, pulling his hips back just a tiny bit, far enough and no more.

"Yes you will—"

He could hear the laughter in Qui-Gon's voice: such a delight to discover that Qui-Gon, of all people, could be playful in bed.

"No I won't," and this time, he slid his cock down between Qui-Gon's legs, rubbing against balls and cock.

"Yes you will—"

A big hand grabbed him, held him so nice and tight, that demanding grip guiding him, pushing him, putting him where Qui-Gon wanted him, warm hand holding him just so, oh, perfectly, to think it was finally Qui-Gon touching him—

"Uhm, no I won't," he said a couple of minutes later, rubbing his come into Qui-Gon's skin.

Qui-Gon, rampant, rolled over and glared up at him, spoiling the effect by breaking into another of those fatuous smiles. "I said you were too young."

"You were the one who grabbed me and anyway," he laid himself atop Qui-Gon and began a slow, perfect undulation, Qui-Gon's eyes going glassy with pleasure, "what I lack in stamina, I make up for in youthful enthusiasm."

Qui-Gon reached down between them, took Obi-Wan's soft penis between fingers and thumb. "You're not *that* young," he said, smiling.

"What've I been telling you for five years?"

Qui-Gon didn't answer him, gone quiet again as Obi-Wan squeezed and stroked his nipples.

Qui-Gon was holding him, guiding him again, rubbing him and stroking him against Qui-Gon's erection. Qui-Gon was nearly there, Obi-Wan knew, watching Qui-Gon's face, feeling the glorious tension in Qui-Gon's body. Nearly there, wouldn't take much, if he were to just rub him there like that—

Qui-Gon smiled up at him, expression breathtakingly unguarded, and with only a nearly soundless gasp, Qui-Gon came.

And then he kissed Obi-Wan. Long and slow and unhurried, and there was no doubt in Obi-Wan's mind what this was, as well as good sex.

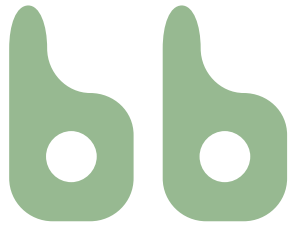
"You know," Obi-Wan said as a sleepy Qui-Gon tucked him into a warm, rather enveloping embrace, "there's another option for knights."

There was a rumbly, humming sort of noise that Obi-Wan took to be fervent interest. "A knight could choose to partner himself to a senior master."

He couldn't even hear Qui-Gon breathing, was tempted to check the heart was still beating, that he hadn't given Qui-Gon more than just a proverbial heart attack.

"And a senior master," Qui-Gon said at last, flicking the Force to pull a blanket around Obi-Wan's shoulders, "could heartily agree."





ଅନୁବନ୍ଧ





I was wondering where old Ben Kenobi had gone wrong and thinking about how small things can turn a life around. Well, that, and being thoroughly outraged by the callous cruelty and casualness bordering on contempt of a certain scene.

## THE BODY IN FROTH

/// of him was beginning to smell. He didn't particularly mind: death was commonplace, decay was simply the physical form's way of rejoining the natural cycle. Still, the smell would trouble Anakin, and once the burning began, it would be even worse. The trained Jedi present would have no trouble blocking out the stench, but a little boy, as yet untrained, would, at best, be upset by it, and would, at nearly worst, have old scars re-opened. Or would, at worst, be completely unmoved.

And what should he do if the boy didn't bat an eyelash at the sight and smell of a human pyre? If the sound of skin bursting and bones cracking didn't trouble him?

What should he do then?

Suspicion told him, but he had his orders.

*Train him.*

To do what? he wondered, anger heating his thought. To destroy us all with the knowledge taught to him? To give him all of our secrets to make it that much easier to hurt us?

Or—train him to care that it's a human body being burned, train him that never mind that there's no death, there's only the Force. Train him, as his master would, to cherish life, to give this Dark-dusted boy a reason to want to save lives, that when one of us dies, we are irreplaceable on this physical plane?

The Code was quite clear on several relevant matters: how to deal with death, how to deal with dead bodies, how to deal with a loved one losing their physical form, and so on, *ad infinitum*, but it all boiled down to one thing: it didn't matter. Only the Force matters, and we are all one with the Force, so there is no death, no loss—no grief, no regret.

*Feel, don't think.*

He gentled his fingers along flesh gone cold, skin that had lost its elasticity, hair that no longer rose on the forearm as he stroked his fingers through it.

Perhaps that was what he was to do. Train the boy to feel. Train the boy that it did matter, it mattered, it mattered so much—

He sucked in a great gulp of air, steadying himself, burying the tears. There is no death, the mantra repeated comfortingly in his mind, letting him lock away the pain.

A small voice came from the open archway.

"Obi-Wan?"

Not master. He was not Anakin's master, and never would be, no matter if he trained the boy up to knighthood and the rest of the universe called him Anakin Skywalker's master. He, and the boy, knew the truth.

His master—his, and the boy's—lay on a bier in front of him, beginning to smell of death, decay, and leaving.

The Code, he reminded himself, clutching at the last straw of his old certainties, had teachings for this. The Code had means to deal with this.

The Code was something his master followed only when it was right.

"Anakin," he said, his voice perfectly serene. "It's all right, you're not disturbing me."

He heard a few light steps, and then the boy was at his side, staring, as he himself was, at their master on the bier.

At the body that was beginning to smell.

He watched Anakin, saw the rough swallow jerk the vulnerable little throat that still had years to go before the Adam's apple would show. He saw the eyes widen, and saw them fill with tears. He was still looking when Anakin darted an uncertain look up at him, and he was seeing very, very clearly indeed as Anakin followed his lead, and pasted a mask of serenity on his tender features.

And the boy disturbed him, for on that face, he saw how serenity so closely resembled indifference.

Is that how we look? he wondered, gazing down



as the lower lip trembled and then was steadied, a frown appearing between the brows. If he were to reach up to his own face, he would feel the furrow between his own eyebrows, the mark of how many years of this outward serenity? Is this how the Council looked to a small boy being condemned for missing the mother left behind in slavery? *Fear leads to anger... there is no death...*

The Code had teachings; his master had insisted that it was right to use the Code, not allow the Code to use them.

He looked again at the chilling indifference on the boy's face, and wondered anew: what would this boy grow into? Made to abandon his mother, made to stand there stoic and uncaring as they burned the body of the one person who hadn't thought of him as a bad seed just waiting to blossom into nightshade? Made to grow under the cold light of suspicion, not the gruff warmth of the man who had saved him?

Wondered who he himself would have become, without the guidance and love of the man lying there, beginning to smell.

There had been only the briefest caress to his cheek, where the only tear he'd allowed had trailed. Only that, no words of love, nor regret, nor goodbye, from the man who'd been his life.

Instead had been asked to do something by that man. And finally, he understood why his master had asked that of him, why he'd been made to promise.

There was the Code, and it had its place, but *trust in your feelings*.

Oh Master, he thought, gazing at eyes he'd watched as they closed for the last time.

*Be one with the Force. Emotion, not intellect, can sometimes be the better guide.*

And the remembered sound of laughter, warming him, tearing him apart.

"It's all right to be upset," he said at long last, as he stepped slightly behind Anakin, resting his hands on the boy's shoulders.

Born a slave, the boy had already seen more than he ought, had learned the harshest of lessons, and all of them showed in his eyes. "It's all right," Obi-Wan repeated, finally giving them both the permission their master would've granted them so readily. He

got down on one knee, his face largely level with the boy's, and the smell was stronger down here.

Death, decay, leaving.

His master would be in the Force, always there, but never truly with him. Never. He wrapped his arms around Anakin, but the boy was mimicking the Jedi he'd seen in this room and wouldn't allow the hug, pulling away, just a little, but enough.

"Oh Ani," he said, using their master's name for the boy, and hearing the echo, his control began to slip, his voice breaking, just a little, just once, but enough to make Anakin whip round to look at him. "I miss him too," he whispered, and the truth of that hit him like a rock as he said it. "I miss him."

Anakin was blurring around the edges, until he blinked, and then it was the boy's face that shimmered; another blink, and Anakin's face was clear again, but the outline of the world was dissolving.

"It's going to be so hard without him," he said, and saw the boy's watery image nod. "But we have to just keep going, Anakin, we have to train you—"

"And make him proud," the young voice said fiercely.

"We will," he said, and this time, when he tugged the boy in closer, the comfort was allowed, small, still-weak arms clinging to him, holding on for dear life.

He held the boy, and kept him held close, face buried against his neck, even as he got to his feet and looked at the blurred shape that lay there, beginning to smell and awaiting the cleansing fire.

"It's all right to miss him," he said softly, stroking the newly-cut hair, remembering being first a boy then a man, his master ruffling his hair for him, and doing it all the more when Obi-Wan had first considered himself too grown for such treatment.

Anakin's voice was very small, very young, and Obi-Wan understood the edge of fear in the boy. "D'you think he misses us?"

Obi-Wan walked slowly from the pagoda, keeping hold of Anakin's hand after he set the boy down on his feet out in the fresh night air.

There is no death, there is only the Force, the Code said.

"He misses us, Ani," Obi-Wan spoke the simple truth, as the wind sighed sadly through the trees and ruffled his hair, "he misses us."



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To me, it's not the trappings or the accoutrement that are interesting or sexy, but what the characters think and feel and do. And I was a little tired of 'Sir Jasper made me do it!' stories (in many universes, over many years) that didn't lead to a little self-knowledge and a whole lot of enjoying what they were doing.

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/// of the room he lay, the onlookers silent and tense, the torches flaring fire, liquid and lissome, the sense of anticipation devouring all the air in the room.

He lay there, and waited.

Time flowed stickily over his skin, until the heartbeats surrounding him beat as one, a living drum, marking each second, each moment, drum roll leading to the moment.

Dissonance.

A click, sharp, too sharp a sound amidst the plummy roll of heartbeat, thrum, thrum, thrum, and then the shuffling whistle of bare feet against sandy floor.

And still he lay, waiting, in the middle of the room.

He could feel the surge of intaken breath, that excited gasp *en masse*, could feel it touch him, could feel the coolness of it across his belly and down, lower, to where he lay, exposed.

*look at me*

*look at him*

One mind and many, punching at him.

He opened his eyes, and looked.

His master.

In the eyes of these people, his Master. His owner.

Possible, it is, Master Yoda had said, within the sacred confines of the Temple. Possible, there, but probable here, in the profane expanses of this culture.

Master. Slave.

Master. Padawan.

Lying there, in the middle of the room, with Qui-Gon staring down at him, Obi-Wan learned just how little difference there was between padawan and slave.

Owned.

Was it so different from this *belonging*?

His master—his Master—stared down at him, master and owner, and both, Qui-Gon.

Still, he lay there, in the middle of the room, with all those eyes and minds and hearts and lusts pressing on him, and it excited him.

It should not: he was Jedi.

But excite him it did. Exposed, naked, cock rising up, supplicant begging for succour from its Master.

Master or master, he didn't know which it was who reached and took hold of him; he knew only that it was Qui-Gon looking at him with dark blue eyes; it was Qui-Gon's lips that parted, and Qui-Gon's tongue that moistened those lips; that it was Qui-Gon he wanted.

Not Master or master, but both.

Qui-Gon.

Beginning slowly, the punishment levied by this culture for a Master's breaking of their laws, the punishment meted out to the Master's prized possession.

Impossible, in this culture, to lay a hand on a Free.

And so Obi-Wan lay here, still, in the middle of the room, as the punishment meant for a Master was laid heavily on a master's shoulders, as padawan endured, and Obi-Wan found places in his soul he wished had stayed lost.

His erection was up against his belly, the tip of his cock leaking clear, glistening drops—red as blood, trapping fiery torch-light—into the shallow saucer of his navel. His erection slid, sideways, then up again, as the punishment increased.

He'd be bruised tomorrow, and in agony, but oh, for now...

His training held; take the pain, accept it within, let it go. One of the first tenets taught a learner, long before they became padawan; the basic tenet to get them through the falls and injuries of all other training.

Take the pain within. Accept it. Let it go.

And the rest of it: feel the flow of the Force.





The flow of the Force was a pleasure, spreading through his nerves, sinuous along his sinews, making him want to squirm with the sweetness of it all.

Take the pain. Accept it. Within.

And he lay there, in the middle of the room, taking the pain that Qui-Gon gave him. Accepting the pain Qui-Gon gave him. Taking it within.

Knowing himself better than all his years of training and meditation had pretended to reveal him to himself.

Pleasure of the Force flowing through him, taking the pain, accepting it, within.

Once known, a truth can not be unknown.

He lay there, still, looking up into those dark blue eyes.

He knew himself, now.

And he knew Qui-Gon.

Worse, Qui-Gon knew him. And knew himself.

More pain, twining with the tingle of the Force, flowing through him, and he let it go.

Knew, then, where it went.

Through their bond, channeled, taken in, accepted. Welcomed.

Dark blue eyes, staring down at him.

Master and master, slave and padawan.

And between them, pleasure.

And pain.

Punishment levied against Master, meted out by master, taken by slave, transformed by padawan.

Knowledge, thick and heavy as sludge, between them now, forever.

Perfection within their bond, giving and taking, blending and merging, rising, ever rising, amidst the pulsing *push* of these people watching, and the sucking *need* of the bodies around them.

Feeding, all of it feeding, taking and consuming, filling and sating, emptying to leave hollow, filling to overflow with contented fullness.

Filling, feeding, the background ebb and flow, tidal pull of push and need, and at its core, the two of them, still, in the middle of the room, and the pain that was pleasure.

So close now.

So very close.

And the last flurry, the last blows that hurt so hotly, so sweetly, and the padawan slave made his first sound, a gasp, a name, a truth:

“Master!”

The first movement of the body lying in the middle of the room: an arch, bow strung too taut, and pulse after pulse from the cock so hard up against his belly, eyes closing briefly only to open again, staring honesty up into dark blue eyes, as a cry, wrought from secret places, pulsed from him:

“I love you.”

And Qui-Gon, master and Master and fully owned, slumped over the damp nakedness of Obi-Wan, and thrust, once, twice, a blurred shuddering movement of need, his own truth ripped from him.

And still, he lay, in the middle of the room, the torches flaring, the people around noisy now, with the rustling of clothes and the whisper of skin on skin and the gasps of hunger being filled.

Still, he lay, as Qui-Gon stood again, tall, so tall; still, he lay, as Qui-Gon looked at him for a long moment, their truths raw and bleeding between them.

And still, he lay as Qui-Gon, master and Master, untied him, and lifted him, Force and strong arms, and carried him out from the middle of this room.



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Inspired by speculations on why one reaction to a certain event was missing from the film—and wanting to see Obi-Wan go through that first reaction.

## 山丹沢平上美、初五

approached the cloaked and hooded figure in the garden. Moonlight shone, dim in comparison to the endless lights of the traffic overhead. The light showed the pale features so clearly: the perfect balance of cheekbones, the arc of eyebrows, the vertical line on the forehead that drew the eye like a sculptor’s finger down the straight nose to the long deep shadow of the dimple in the firm chin.

The light also revealed the set of those lips, and the distress in those eyes.

Qui-Gon stood for a while, watching his apprentice, weighing his words. “You did well, Padawan.”

Not even a flicker of a glance to acknowledge the presence of his master; the preternaturally calm voice dropped words like stones into water. “I am aware of that, Master.”

“It is also well that you are troubled.”

“I am aware of that also.”

It was... Discomfiting was a word that would suffice, Qui-Gon decided. It was definitely discomfiting to have Obi-Wan engage such formality in private; one of their earliest lessons had been the differences between public necessity and private honesty, of barriers and rôles that were necessary as Jedi, and the private liberties that were essential to teacher and learner. “Tell me, then, why it is good that you are troubled.”

The first visible sign given of true distress; the bobble of Adam’s apple, the clench of tension in the stubbled jaw. “I took a life today.”

“Your first,” Qui-Gon said quietly, softening the blow not at all. “Not your last.”

“That, Master, is hardly reassuring.”

“It wasn’t meant to be. You killed today, and you will kill again.”

Another of those hard swallows, and a cacophony of clenched jaw muscles, light catching in the fair stubble, shuddering.

“It is the hardest lesson of them all, my young apprentice.”

Qui-Gon stood two paces behind his padawan and gave him time to think, to decide what else was needed this night.

Obi-Wan’s voice was thin as hope, deep as grief. “How old were you when you learned this lesson?”

“Me?” He gave in to the exhaled breath of laughter, hearing his own pain in it, offering it freely to ease his padawan’s suffering. “I am still learning that lesson and I honestly hope I never stop learning it.”

“Because if we stop learning it, we are sliding into the Dark, if taking a life means nothing to us.”

“It is well that you are troubled.”

“But it would be better if I had not killed.”

Another lesson, no easier to teach than it had been to learn. “Would it? Replay the incident, Padawan, and do not kill your opponent this time. What would happen, had she lived?”

The greatest warrior of her people, rising up against the new government, sworn to kill those whom she claimed oppressed her people, and ready to take her revenge right there in the halls of the Senate itself. There would have been chaos, many injuries, probably many deaths instead of just one.

“I know, Master. But still, I—”

There was a glister in Obi-Wan’s eyes, although tears were not imminent: it was just the glitter of pain, sharp shards cutting too deep.

“My first kill,” Qui-Gon said heavily, memory going back to a time when he had been younger than Obi-Wan, old enough to shave, young enough to feel immortal, “was cleaner than yours. He was a Hutt, a monstrous, ancient Hutt, and I had a choice. I could spare his life, or I could save my master and a child. An easier choice than the one you had today.”

“So it was cleaner?”

An odd timbre to the voice, a warning of a moment teetering on going wrong.



"A poor choice of word. I killed the Hutt essentially by making him fall and his own weight broke his neck. And that was hard enough. I have killed many beings, and it always disturbs me, but even with my experience, I would find it particularly difficult if I had to do as you did today."

Movement then, Obi-Wan looking down at his robes, the mid-brown of a near-knight black with blood in the cold light.

"I didn't expect..."

"The 'sabre usually cauterises, that's true," Qui-Gon said, watching as his apprentice slowly removed cloak, and startled, visibly, at the deep, dark gore staining his sleeves. "But the angle she was turning at, you merely nicked her neck."

"Just enough to open her vein."

Great gouts of blood, spurting in time with her hoarse, shrieking scream, spraying the hallway as she raised her arms to keep on fighting, to execute those who'd subjugated her people.

"You did well," Qui-Gon said again.

"I know," Obi-Wan's voice wan and shaken, his hands very nearly trembling as he removed his belt and sash, slipped off one tunic after the other, struggling a little with the tight sleeves sticky with blood.

"You do well to be troubled."

Shakier, a little perhaps from the cold of the night rippling his skin, but Qui-Gon could feel the cold chill spreading inwards, the pain and misery of facing this price of being Jedi.

"If I can't—" Another hard swallow and deep breaths, skin turned briefly crimson as the traffic overhead came to a sudden stop. "If I can't kill again—"

"No ill will be thought of you. You'll be released and sent, with our blessing, to whichever service fits you best."

"So the price—" Voice breaking on a bitter half-note of laughter, "of being a knight, of fulfilling what I've always *needed* to be, is to take life."

"And to save it. Nothing is free."

"Perhaps I should become an accountant, and tally up how many innocent lives need to be saved before a guilty one should be killed."

Certainty, no platitudes, just the blunt honesty of experience and trust. "Your conscience and the Force will guide you."

Pale arms curling around vulnerable belly, muscles bunching and tight as Obi-Wan stared down at the ground. "What if I don't listen well enough?"

"That fear is our greatest guide, Obi-Wan. Never lose it."

A flicker of a glance at Qui-Gon, a twist of lips that was probably an attempt at a smile. "Don't let Master Yoda hear you say that."

"Master Yoda's heard me say it before and Master Yoda," stepping forward now, able to sense how chilled Obi-Wan was becoming, "is no longer out there risking his life and others."

"I don't want to do this, Master."

Ice flooding Qui-Gon's veins, dropping into his stomach, a freneticism of words clamouring in his brain: too soon to decide, give yourself time, a first kill upsets us all, don't leave me—

"I don't want to kill. But I will. I will kill again, because I'll have to."

It was wrong, perhaps, to feel so much relief over that, and he was shamed to put his own need before Obi-Wan's equilibrium. "Yes, you will," Qui-Gon murmured, taking the last step forward, opening his cloak, wrapping his warmth around Obi-Wan. "You will regret it then as you do now. And I'm grateful for your regret, and for your safety."

"Master..."

He waited, listened to Obi-Wan stumbling and struggling to find a way to say it; took mercy on him, and said it for him. "We none of us want to die, Obi-Wan, and we all feel that burn to preserve our own lives when someone tries to kill us. The Force fills us with a need and a hunger to live. It's all right," whispering the last, brushing his lips against his padawan's long braid, there, just behind his ear. "You did what was right and what was necessary."

The first crest of distress passing, the tense body leaning back, a little, against him. The brush of cold skin against the open neck of his clothes, and finally, the creep of cold hands against his wrists. He brought his arms up to hold Obi-Wan, standing firm against him, supporting him, backing up his words with the comfort of closeness. After a moment, he felt Obi-Wan's hands on him again, fingers and palms sliding up his forearms as Obi-Wan slid his hands into the enveloping warmth of Qui-Gon's cloak sleeves. Embraced now as well as embracing, Qui-Gon stood there, and let his warmth flow into his padawan.

"Come," he said, when fatigue began tightening the muscles in his back. "Back to our quarters."

A pulling away, a sudden movement that instinct made him stop, and insight made him understand. "Only to rest, Padawan," Obi-Wan going still in his



arms and then a shift and a squirm as Obi-Wan turned to face him. "Only that, nothing more."

No hint of a smile, just seriousness in eyes made colourless by the night.

"It takes time to recover from your first kill, Obi-Wan."

"But it takes less time the more often we kill?"

Qui-Gon stroked his thumb across the smooth cheekbone, traced around the side of Obi-Wan's eyes where the finest of lines were showing, markers of age, a farewell to the last innocence. "I will not lie. It's not just the serenity and control of being a master that makes my reaction different. Yes, it takes less time, on the whole, and with each one. There are still some that are deeply troubling, but in time... In time, my Padawan, it becomes a regret over the loss of life, not the loss of the being."

"It becomes academic."

He took Obi-Wan's braid between his fingers, slid it through his hand, feeling the three coloured bands, struck by the sadness that tomorrow, he would add another colour of band to his padawan's braid. "Not quite. But no longer personal."

"Or very personal."

Qui-Gon looked questioningly at Obi-Wan, let his fingers run lightly over the reddish stubble on the unlined cheek.

"Personal, because to not regret causing a death would stain us."

Qui-Gon's hand stilled, thumb against Obi-Wan's Adam's apple, fingers splayed and feeling the slow, steady pulse. "Yes. And we regret that, too."

"But still, we kill."

"When we have to. Only when we have to."

He let go this time, as Obi-Wan pulled free of him. Stood alone, again, and watched as the pale

form stood in the night and looked up at the sky, the crisscrossing traffic, and then down, at the dark marks still clinging to his wrists, where the washing of hands had failed to erase the blood.

A very small voice, almost lost in the gardens. "What kind of man am I that I will willingly go forward, knowing I will have to kill?"

One answer, and one answer only: the only answer there had ever been. "It makes you and I and all of us Jedi."

"Balance."

Qui-Gon reached out, was allowed to wrap Obi-Wan once more in the warmth of his cloak, the chilled back against his warm chest. "Balance?"

"We have all of this—" the Gardens, the Temple, "we have power, the Force, everything that comes with our training and abilities."

A deep breath, steadying, before Obi-Wan continued: "And the suffering we endure is the balance. The check to keep us moral. And humble."

Qui-Gon said nothing, the faint question in Obi-Wan's voice aimed inwards only, no other answer needed. Or wanted.

A pause, and then he saw Obi-Wan nod, once, firmly. The mouth was still set, the jaw still tense, the body in his arms still cold, unyielding, but he could see the beginnings of balance, and peace. Qui-Gon felt a nearly guilty tendril of pride that Obi-Wan reacted so much to his first time at killing, that there was so very much good in this, his last padawan.

He wrapped himself a little tighter around the man in his arms, giving what warmth he could. He set himself to keep vigil, grateful that Obi-Wan wanted at least this much from him, and he stood very still, holding on, giving what he could, as Obi-Wan faced the night.



日本国政府の海外労働者に対する  
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with the Force, with all this—this imperative, this need to procreate. Or at least,” the laughter closer to the surface, “to plant your seed. Where I come from, there would be a party, Master.”

Qui-Gon blinked over that; tried to imagine himself, and his family, throwing a party to announce that he’d gone into fertile rut and couldn’t keep his sexual urges under control. A party, for this? Not something that would ever happen where *he* came from. And not exactly something most Jedi would celebrate either.

“In fact, on my last visit home, my youngest brother went into his Blessing,” the laughter out loud now, so much happiness shining through, “and it was a wonderful party. Not that he was allowed to get anyone pregnant, of course, since he was only 20 and that’s far too young to become a father.”

Qui-Gon had long since trained himself not to fidget. “And you, Padawan? Will you choose to father a child?”

The more familiar seriousness on those strong features, his honest question met with equal honesty. “I have thought about it, Master, quite a bit. There’s a certain appeal to leaving some part of myself in the physical presence of the Force but...”

Perfectly capable of utter stillness and dignity when required, here, in their quarters, Obi-Wan was not required to maintain such tight control. His fingers fiddled with cutlery, hands moving more slowly than the mind, the words forming quickly. “What have I to offer a child and a woman? I’m still training, I’m rarely here, and even if I were to give up becoming a Jedi, I could never give them more than a small part of myself.”

And that harked back to another conversation Qui-Gon wished he’d never had to have.

“So this time,” Obi-Wan went on, brightly, leaving the rest of it behind, “I shall restrict myself to males. Or at least, those beings who are infertile.”

“I was under the impression that the...act had to take place between those of compatible natures? People with whom you have an emotional bond?”

“That’s just something we tell people to salve our pride, Master,” Obi-Wan said, mopping up more of the spicy gravy with another hunk of bread. “After all, it would hardly do our interplanetary dignity much good if it were known that every five to ten years or so, depending on how lucky we are, we become randy little beasts who would happily mate with a hole in the wall if nothing else were available. Although,” a self-deprecating, entirely amused

glance slanted up at his master, “we do prefer a compatible, living, breathing being, who wants us as much as we want them. But—”

Qui-Gon had just enough time to wonder what his apprentice was hiding with that sudden shifting motion, Obi-Wan unlikely to drop bread like that.

Obi-Wan straightened up from plucking the bread up from the plain carpet, Qui-Gon catching a sudden ripple in his padawan’s Force

But then his padawan was continuing, serenely: “—that’s not always, or not even usually, an option. So we make do.”

“You make do.” Not quite a question, not quite a statement, the Force pressing at him like a thousand butterfly wings, a delicate pressure to tread carefully here.

“Yes,” Obi-Wan answered with bland calmness. “We make do.”

And just as Qui-Gon began to regret why Obi-Wan Kenobi, of all people, was as bland and sparkless as Windu himself, there was a sudden glitter of smile and bright blue eyes laughing at all the absurdities of the universe.

“Unless you’re offering, Master,” Obi-Wan said, barely containing a smile at such a good joke.

“I’ll leave that to Master Yoda,” Qui-Gon said dryly, rewarded with a sudden hoot of laughter.

“Yes, Master,” Obi-Wan told him, now the very picture of somberness, were one to ignore his eyes. “Perhaps I shall go to him this evening and tell him you volunteered him.”

“You do that,” Qui-Gon began, but then he changed his tone, deliberately meeting Obi-Wan’s good humour with his own, “you do that, my padawan, and I’ll ...”

“Run away and hide, Master?”

Master Jinn stood on his dignity, knowing it would get him another smile. “A Jedi knows when discretion is the better part of valour.”

“Yes,” Obi-Wan said with unexpected seriousness in his eyes, “yes, we do, Master.”

And before he had to respond to that, there was more laughter, Obi-Wan telling him traditional jokes that were surely more ribald than an apprentice should tell his staid old master, this mating fever reduced to an embarrassing racial quirk, best laughed at, dealt with, and left behind.

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The deepest of silences, focused on the still figure





kneeling at the window, a pocket of serenity amidst the frantic pulse and heave of life.

He had granted his padawan permission to leave the Temple grounds, although it was sooner than expected. Obi-Wan had actually winked as he had left to “seek the cure for my terrible affliction,” his cheerfulness lingering in this room like dawn in winter.

Now it was only the master, letting silence fill him, letting the chaos of thought leave him, his mind spiraling in on those matters he needed to meditate upon.

His padawan, nearly surer-handed than the master himself, dropping a piece of bread. Hiding from his master? Or sparing his master an embarrassment? His padawan was not himself embarrassed, no, not embarrassed at all by the hormone-driven imperatives of his heritage. His padawan—clear image of that vibrant face and the body encased in clothes that did not mark him as Jedi but labeled him absolutely available—had left tonight with a wink and a spring in his step.

So. Probably saving his master from embarrassment. A man of lesser control would have frowned, but Qui-Gon simply weighed the possibility that his padawan might, under it all, be ashamed of the sudden surge of sexual desire during dinner which had, perhaps, been aimed at his master; his padawan might even, under it all, have resentments for a master who would not take him, not even during something so long anticipated, something that was, for a T’chtar, regarded as special.

No definitive answers there, a lack of information making answers possible, probable, vague; leave it, move on to other questions.

A troubling moment, this afternoon, late in the day, when Obi-Wan was already...feeling his oats. “Or something,” Obi-Wan had flicked at him with a cheeky smile and glitter of eyes. And then pounced. Entered into the battle kata with a fervour not seen outside of real fights, embraced and relished the movement, the fire, the intensity. The aggression.

Another reason for the hormone suppressants for T’chtars: aggression that could be controlled by a man with Obi-Wan’s training, but in a boy? A teenager going through the normal turmoil of growing-up whilst also trying to go through the difficulties and hardships of becoming Jedi with the Blessing, in all its glory, thrown into the mix?

Even within the pool of meditation, Qui-Gon shuddered. Dealing with Obi-Wan back then had

been bad enough, to think of Obi-Wan then compounded with this, now, was enough to give anyone the absolute screaming willies.

And no, he wasn’t going to allow himself to dwell on that unfortunate choice of words.

So. Obi-Wan this afternoon, already showing signs of the suppressants wearing off, which led to the question of whether that lack of control was simply the result of Obi-Wan not expecting the... effects to begin until later, or whether it was the beginning of his padawan taking the wrong path.

Masters kneeling in meditation weren’t supposed to make such scornful noises out loud.

But how could he not, thinking of Obi-Wan’s response to *that* notion?

The only path Obi-Wan was starting on was a gleeful, winking, buoyant road to seek what he needed.

And there was the seed of Qui-Gon’s disquiet. What we need, Qui-Gon reminded himself, is not always what we want. Nor what we can have.

Time to learn another lesson from his apprenticeship, and discuss these matters out in the open.

He breathed deeply, slowly reweaving the reality of the world around himself again. His meditation had shown him that he needed more information to know exactly what was going on with Obi-Wan and exactly what, if any, were the risks his padawan was facing, no matter how ridiculous the idea was of Obi-Wan turning to the Dark or dying from this. And his meditation had shown him that he needed to talk to his padawan. Enough cause for some worry, not enough information to do anything about it. In other words, he’d learnt nothing he hadn’t already known.

Getting slowly to his feet, knees aching, Qui-Gon looked down at his meditation mat with something like disgust and muttered, “Sometimes, I don’t know why I bother.”

五七 卅卅五 卅五卅五 卅卅五, only the most troubled supplicants still attempting meditation in the Temple’s gardens, everyone else abed, and so it took no Jedi skills at all to hear his apprentice returning. Qui-Gon put his reading aside and rose from the low divan, pulling a robe on to cover his nakedness: Obi-Wan was trying to behave perfectly over this, no need to make things more difficult for the man.

“Obi-Wan,” he said, scarcely above a whisper, his voice and his presence brushing across his apprentice’s awareness.



"I'm sorry for waking you—"

"I wasn't asleep."

There was a hesitation, just long enough to give Qui-Gon more fuel for his worry, then Obi-Wan came into Qui-Gon's room and crossed over to Qui-Gon's sleeping alcove, the light touching him gently, showing shadows and lines, hinting at the passing of years and the burden of troubles.

"Did you find what you needed?" Qui-Gon asked him.

"Yes, Master."

Waiting, the Force a warm gentleness between them.

"Did you find what you wanted, Padawan?"

Obi-Wan's smile was surprisingly sweet, as always, his eyes very bright with affection. "You already know the answer to that, Master."

No shame there, Qui-Gon noted, looking at Obi-Wan, observing him with more than just plain eyesight. There was no shame anywhere in his padawan, nor resentment, nor fear. Not over this. "Then why did you hide from me earlier this evening?"

"Because, Qui-Gon," his padawan said, rich as honey, shocking him with the sudden intimacy of his given name, "it really is quite rude to lust after one's master over the dinner table."

Almost, almost, he let it pass, let this be explanation enough. But deception led to the Dark Side too and he owed Obi-Wan his honesty if nothing else. "You've looked at me with lust before."

"And much good it did me too!" Obi-Wan said, those bright eyes blue with laughter again. "You know my feelings for you, Master. You know what I want from you, and it's not within you." A brief flicker of sadness, banished almost immediately. "At least not yet."

"Look to the—"

"Moment and concern myself not with the future, I know," his apprentice told him, making Qui-Gon wonder just how many times he'd offered that advice of late. Obi-Wan shrugged, and the movement was liquid, lissome, and even as his padawan spoke, Qui-Gon was lending most of his attention to an unexpected need to catalogue the signs of sex and satisfaction littering his padawan like petals.

"That's what I was attempting to do this evening, Master. To focus on the now, on having dinner and a pleasant conversation with you, to put aside what hopes and longings I might have for the future."

He had counted two visible marks on Obi-Wan's

neck, four on his upper arms, three almost hidden behind his tunic, clustered around his left nipple, the languid relaxation of his energy, the—

"Master?"

Qui-Gon blinked and folded his hands into the arms of his robe, his expression perfectly serene, automatically falling into an old trick from the training salles.

"Oh no," Obi-Wan smiled at him, familiarity a two-edged sword, "you can't get away with that old saw, not in our own rooms."

Despite his supposed dignity as master and teacher, Qui-Gon felt himself smile, felt the familiar affection wash Light through him. "It appears it's my turn to apologise. I was..."

"I know, Master," Obi-Wan said, softly, and yes, that had been an aborted motion to tug the neck of his shirt more tightly closed. "I should've taken more care in choosing my clothing and availed myself of the bathing facilities."

Oh, Padawan, Qui-Gon thought ruefully, and I had been doing such a fine job of ignoring the scent of sex upon you. "Did he really fulfill you?"

Of course, Obi-Wan was not a man to let such a comment pass unmolested, a delighted glint in shimmering eyes looking right at him. Still, the answer was utterly correct and proper, marking the joke all the more. "There was certainly...fulfillment, although I'm not sure if it would be literally correct to say that it was he who fulfilled me."

More than he wanted to think about, for now. He softened his words with a smile: "If that's the way you're planning on taking this conversation—"

"I should take myself away entirely," said easily, discomfort either gone or buried. "Good night, Master. Sleep well."

"And yourself, Obi-Wan."

His back to the door, the coverlet soft in his hand, Obi-Wan's voice softer still. "Thank you, Master."

"For what?" he asked the serenely blank beigeness of his pillow.

"For not distancing yourself from me over this."

"It is simply the function of your genetic heritage—"

"For all of this, Master."

Since the first sproutings of hair, the first break in the voice, the first limpid gaze and wounded 'you don't love me' pout, the early days of uncontrolled erections pressing against him in training sessions, the painfully honest conversations, the fervent protestations of love, the ongoing years of unrequited



hope, all of it, all treated kindly. Fondly, when possible. “It wasn’t a heavy burden, Obi-Wan,” he said honestly. “And I always knew it would eventually end.”

“You could’ve told me that,” his padawan said, wryly. “Still, I thank you.”

“I accept your gratitude. Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to accept sleep as well.”

“Now that I’m home safe and sound?”

There was an edge to that voice, an edge that needed to be blunted: he had thought his apprentice might yet prickle over being waited up for as if he were but a boy. Qui-Gon straightened, allowed himself, for once, his full height over his apprentice. “I wished to see you home. As you would’ve for me.”

There was the barest instant of silence, and then Obi-Wan gave him the smallest, warmest smile and bowed, not deeply, but as an equal, as Qui-Gon always bowed.

One last look, and Qui-Gon recognised the edge had not been the prickle of youth too proud to accept the concern of others, but the sharpened voice of a man still feeling desire.

So, Qui-Gon thought, turning out lights and shrugging off his robe, Obi-Wan had fulfilled someone, but—

Had not been fulfilled himself.

We make do, Obi-Wan had said. And making do often required more, in the long run, than having what was needed.

Qui-Gon ran his hands over his hair, and went back to bed, to read, if not to sleep.

## **巾の涙と本心**

His own breakfast long since cleared away, Qui-Gon finally knocked on the door that led to his padawan’s room, a muffled sound and a sudden “What?” telling him that Obi-Wan was now awake, no matter how belatedly. He left Obi-Wan enough privacy to dress and to deal with that intimate matter Obi-Wan still needed to deal with most mornings and probably most surely this morning, and went back to making ready.

“Master, I’m sorry—”

“Why?”

That brought Obi-Wan up short, the frown quickly replaced by a sunny smile. “I definitely need to work on my controls again—I’d forgotten I had no duties today,” he admitted easily, that smile turning warm as

he saw that this day, the master waited on the padawan, a breakfast table already laden with treats.

“You think I need to keep my strength up?” Obi-Wan asked, seating himself cross-legged on the floor and reaching for the meat dish.

“You need to—” Qui-Gon shut his mouth with a snap, stopping the words. He kept his expression neutral as he poured himself a cup of tea, glanced up just in time to see a flicker of disappointment cross his padawan’s face. “You need to keep something up, certainly,” he said blandly, rewarded with the bright flare of delight and the uncommon burst of laughter.

“Yes, Master,” Obi-Wan told him, biting into a rich pastry, “although I don’t seem to be needing much help in that area!”

Qui-Gon watched a moment, his apprentice displaying an appetite not seen since that growth spurt in his 15th year. “You seem remarkably cheerful about this.”

“What’s not to be cheerful about, Master? I’m bursting with life and *finally* fertile, even if it’s years late and I feel—” Stopping there, dropping his gaze, lowering his head just enough to hide his face a little.

He couldn’t resist: Qui-Gon reached out, just the tips of two fingers, the prickle of unshaven chin against his skin, Obi-Wan’s eyes lifting to meet his as Qui-Gon let go.

And yes, there, staining the fair skin, was the faintest hint of a blush, something the fair-skinned Obi-Wan despaired of ever out-growing. “I feel like a man,” Obi-Wan said, very quietly. “Foolish, I know, I’ve been a man for some time, but this—” A mostly casual, somewhat abashed shrug. “It’s what finally makes me a man in the eyes of my own people.”

Always the teacher, and always haunted by the memory of past failures and past blindness. “Does that matter to you?”

“Not excessively,” Obi-Wan said after a moment’s consideration. “I certainly had no real regrets nor compunctions about using the hormone suppressants and I’ll use them again if I need to.” A frown, and a pause while Obi-Wan ate some more. “But if I need to use the suppressants again, then I’d need to review my training—I shouldn’t have any trouble controlling the Blessing, not after this first one.”

Qui-Gon stifled his curiosity: it wasn’t something he could ask, he couldn’t simply say casually, ‘what’s it like?’ Not that there was anything too personal for a master to ask a padawan: no, the question wasn’t at fault, only his motives for wanting to know, prurient curiosity no excuse to infringe on his padawan’s right to privacy.



Mouth full of another of his favourite meat pastries, Obi-Wan glinted at him, eyes smiling, knowing him all too well. A hearty drink of juice, an almost imperceptibly quick touch of fingers to the back of Qui-Gon's hand. "It's more than just being randy. It's more like being ravenously, omnivorously hungry," Obi-Wan said. "It's like..."

Qui-Gon wished Obi-Wan wouldn't look at him, wouldn't stare at him with such honesty and desire in his eyes, wouldn't run the tip of his tongue along his lower lip, wouldn't blink and show his lashes, wouldn't stretch for more juice and show his lithe-ness, wouldn't breathe and show another millimetre of bare skin under the tunic. Wouldn't speak with such a wistful warmth, as if conjuring memories.

"You know how it is when we've been on a mission? Tension, danger, no privacy, no time to meditate?"

Oh yes. He knew: his padawan a cyclone of contained energy desperate to burst free and Qui-Gon fending off both the backflow through the training bond and the sheer nuisance of an over-energised, tense Obi-Wan stalking at his side.

"And it's *there*? Simmering just below the surface, that need to..." a shake of his head, a frown of concentration as he sought the explanation. "It's more than wanting to fuck—" happy grin, gaze quickly darting back to his master, a tacit apology for his choice language, "although there is that! It's a drive, this intense need to pour myself out into someone else, to—to give them some of me. And..."

Qui-Gon swallowed, then looked enquiringly, slightly amusedly, at his apprentice. "Surely you're not turning shy *now*?"

"After what I've already said, it's pathetic that I can't just say this, isn't it? But then, this isn't very Jedi-like, Master."

"Then surely that's all the more reason to discuss it, Padawan."

Obi-Wan shrugged, liquid silver muscles. "Part of it's laying claim, Master. Leaving my mark."

A small tinge of relief, that it wasn't one of the Healers' much-heralded openings for the Dark. "Which makes perfect sense. Most mammals—the mobile ones, anyway—have some territorial displays, some way of claiming—"

"Most of them leave that behind when they reach sentience, though! I tell you," another pastry devoured, fingers licked clean of golden flecks, "this is the most amazingly primal experience. It's more intense than normal sex—" another wickedly

amused glance tossed at his master, "although I've not been indulging in anything bizarre. Actually," distracted, thinking, gaze coming only slowly back to his master, "I don't think I could. The need is..."

"Primal."

"And direct. There's no thought, Master, just being one with this—it's pure Force, just..." shrug, helpless to explain this in words. "I wonder if it's what you experience, when you're completely attuned to the living Force?"

Dryly, Qui-Gon replied, "I'll have to think about that. I admit, I've never compared being one with the Living Force to the mindlessness of orgasm."

And the second he said it, he knew he shouldn't have. Obi-Wan's pupils dilated, the eyes turning nearly black, only the thinnest rim of dark blue unconsumed by the hungry black pit of desire.

Stumbling, nearly dropping things, half-falling over a chair, stuttering something about master and later and sorry, and then his padawan fled the room, his erection all too visible through his light trousers, a tiny splotch of dampness showing darkly at the tip.

Qui-Gon sat where he was, as possible responses ran through his head fast as a river in spate. His attempts to think of the best thing to say were rendered moot as his apprentice emerged from his bedroom, sketched a quick, red-faced bow in his direction then raced out the door, and left him to sit there, trying very hard not to think about his own reactions.

Which lasted all of ten seconds, because as his padawan rushed farther away down the hallways and out of range, the burn of heat and lust faded from the master/apprentice bond in Qui-Gon's mind, as if it had never happened.

Thoughtfully, Qui-Gon finished his breakfast, and went off for another chat with the Healers before working his way through the long list of duties he had today.

## 几玉母村

It wasn't all that late when Obi-Wan returned, almost on Qui-Gon's heels.

There was a moment between them, uncommonly awkward as Obi-Wan took his master's cloak and hung it up with his own in the closet, such a mundane routine made so strange by what lay between them.

As the master, it was Qui-Gon's duty to address the issue, to begin solving it. "Padawan—"





Then he stopped, his prepared little speech dissolving into nothing but meaningless platitudes and things he'd already said. A year ago, he'd have tugged Obi-Wan's braid but now, that would probably be a cruelty: if words could have such an effect, then touch...

Voice carefully light, letting the warmth of his affection and his approval show through, he said, "You didn't warn me about this morning's particular side-effect, Obi-Wan."

Obi-Wan smiled in rueful response. "I didn't know about it myself."

"I suppose not," Qui-Gon said easily, heading off towards the kitchen, his apprentice automatically following, the ingrained habit of years. "But it did my ego no harm, I can say that."

"In that case," relief colouring the cheekiness, "I'll see what I can do about a repeat performance!"

"Now, now, Padawan," he said warmly, beginning the comforting routine of preparing food together, "that wasn't an invitation to—"

"I know," Obi-Wan said quickly, looking away, using getting plates out as an excuse not to look at Qui-Gon. "I've never...risen to the occasion that fast in my life before, and I really didn't mean to make such a—a production out of it."

Qui-Gon set glasses beside the plates on the table, and said, keeping his tone very gentle and free of judgment: "I wasn't talking about the physical display."

Obi-Wan gave him a look bordering on horror. "Master?"

Still very gently, "You were projecting."

Obi-Wan stared at him.

"Along the bond." Trying to tease, to ease the moment, just a little. "Loudly. Not to mention dramatically!"

The intensity of Obi-Wan's reaction took him by surprise, shutting him up when he should, really, have found better words, the right phrase to interrupt the sudden rush of words flooding from Obi-Wan.

"I was joking, Master, I thought you meant—" a graceless wave at his groin, which even now showed signs of arousal, the trousers pushed out just a little. "But I'd no idea I'd— But now I understand what you meant." An edge of fear sharpening the sincerity, Obi-Wan's voice low, rough, and in it, the cutting edge of a heart rubbed raw. "I won't intrude, I promise, today just took me by surprise, it won't happen again."

A deep breath, both of them, each sucking in air,

reaction thick between them, and it was Obi-Wan who beat Qui-Gon into speech. "Never, Master. I give you my word, my oath as your padawan, I will never do that to you again."

A swirl of white robes, the slash of braid scything through the air, and Qui-Gon Jinn was left standing in the kitchen again, asea in the backwash of his padawan's pain.

### 巾の沢に玉の光

It wasn't so much late as very early, dawn half risen, slow as a drunk the morning after. A small knock at his door, for politeness' sake, he assumed, and knew a moment of irritating indecision: to join Obi-Wan in the common room, or call him in, the way he had for so many years, and which would be better, after today?

A hesitant murmur from the other side of his door. "Master?"

"Yes?"

"I'll be in here, if you want to talk to me."

Well, at least that was one problem solved. He rose from his bed, still fully clothed, and resisted the temptation to put on his outer robe. His padawan was sitting on the couch as far from the window as possible, legs bent, arms wrapped around knees, a position Qui-Gon hadn't missed when it departed along with the last of Obi-Wan's adolescence.

He sat down, leaving his padawan the cover of darkness, and waited out the silence.

"I apologise for today. Yesterday."

A sudden glint, the flicker of Obi-Wan's glance in his direction.

"It's..." A sigh, heavy, Obi-Wan's fingers picking at the fabric of his trousers as he picked the right words. "I was prepared for the sex," said in such a neutral tone of voice, the one reserved for confessing failures and shortcomings. "I wasn't prepared for—for the rest of it."

Qui-Gon shifted, uncomfortable, wishing he could resort to the old solution for Obi-Wan's youthful agonies, but pulling his padawan into his lap and cuddling him certainly wasn't going to help this time. "The rest of it being," he finally said, since Obi-Wan seemed to have run out of steam, "the personal aspect."

A restless movement, better suited to a trapped animal than a Jedi apprentice, a dissonance that filled Qui-Gon's mouth with the taste of fear.



“Worse than that.”

Unease slithering through his belly, rising up to meet the fear he tried to swallow. “Tell me,” he said, calmly.

“I—”

Another judder of movement, of dissonance, as if Obi-Wan would sooner run than talk.

“Padawan,” he said, using the title as a leash, pulling Obi-Wan to heel. “Tell me.”

Obedience to the command, and yes, the shoulders slumping in apparent relief as the responsibility was taken from them.

Obi-Wan spoke then, soft and low. “I had no idea I was projecting. I thought my shields were up, in place, tight as I know how to make them. When you told me I was projecting, along the bond, right into you...”

Obi-Wan glanced up at him from under long eyelashes, no attempt at coyness, Qui-Gon recognising the old, unlamented hiding strategy. “It’s not the end of the world,” Qui-Gon told him, trying to ease his padawan’s tension without making too light of this.

“You think I’m over-reacting?”

Another of those moments when Qui-Gon really wished he could take the easy way out. “You did this morning.”

His padawan actually flinched. “Sorry. About the oath—”

“Rejected,” Qui-Gon broke in, saving his padawan from digging himself into a deeper hole, and saving them both from more awkward emotionalism. “It’s the beginning of the Blessing, and your first one. I’m not expecting you to sail through this as if nothing’s happening.”

“Unfortunately, that’s exactly what I expected.”

He couldn’t hide his smile. “And you do hate to be proven wrong.”

His padawan’s demonstrative face was torn between sour reproach and wry amusement. “It all seemed so straightforward when it hit Owen.”

“But?” Qui-Gon prodded as Obi-Wan trailed off into thought.

“You know how long I’ve wanted you.”

He knew almost to the exact second. In fact, he strongly suspected he’d known a few seconds before Obi-Wan had figured it out himself, if his padawan’s panicked attempt to escape the heretofore platonic wrestling lesson had been anything to go by.

Obi-Wan obviously realised he wasn’t getting an

answer to his question. Firmer this time, he asked: “But do you know how long I’ve loved you?”

Pinned like a butterfly by that gaze in the fading darkness, held still by the naked vulnerability in the voice, Qui-Gon couldn’t evade this issue any longer. “No,” he said. And that seemed as sharp and hurtful as a blade between the ribs, too much and not enough. “I don’t know exactly how long you’ve loved me.”

He saw the gleam of a smile, the slide of dawn lightening the room more and more.

“I didn’t think so,” Obi-Wan said, and the voice was neutral again, camouflage for everything or nothing.

Qui-Gon watched as daylight stole Obi-Wan’s protective shadows, as his padawan squared his shoulders and straightened out his legs, as Obi-Wan once more became a proper padawan.

“Which is as it should be,” Obi-Wan told him, hiding behind a smile. “A good master doesn’t notice his padawan’s importunate crush on him, after all.”

“A good master,” Qui-Gon said slowly, cautiously, hearing something behind those calm words, “doesn’t consider his padawan’s feelings importunate and a good master always notices his padawan’s feelings.”

“But you don’t know how long I’ve loved you.”

“You’ve loved me since you were a boy,” he said, careful of the tired, brittle edge of fragility just beneath his padawan’s urbane surface. “Despite this morning’s slip, you’re very good at shielding, and very private. I’ve no idea when it changed from the love of a boy to...”

A wry smile met his silence. “To being in love?” An elegant shrug, so casual, anyone but Obi-Wan’s master would be fooled by it. “I used to tell myself it was infatuation, that I’d outgrow it. Told myself that it wouldn’t matter in a year, in five years.” A genuine smile this time, and it warmed Qui-Gon, soothed some of the aching worry in the back of his mind. “And it truly was just infatuation, at the beginning. I found that enormously reassuring, you know, because it was immature and I’d grow out of it soon enough. And then...I recognised it for what it was. Something that wasn’t going to fade along with all the other ignominies of adolescence. It just sat there, and I watched it change.”

It was oddly fascinating, to discuss this again, calmly, as two adults meeting on level ground, such a very long way from the last time. “When did it change?”





“From the very beginning, really, although I didn’t realise that straight away. One moment, it was a harmless little crush, just another agony of puberty, and then it was infatuation, then it didn’t go away, and then a little bit of respect was added in...”

A familiar gesture, Obi-Wan playing with the end of his braid, undoing and redoing the last handspan. “All I wanted was you to love me. Not the way you do,” an apologetic smile cast in Qui-Gon’s direction, “but the way I wanted you to. I’d make up things, tell myself fairytales, about how one day, you’d see me as a man you could love, or—” a small rill of laughter, flowing over self-mockery, water over stones, “another favourite was that when I became a knight, you’d come to me after my investiture, sweep me into your arms and love me then.”

“And now?”

Such a sweet smile, to cover the bleached bones of lost hope. “And then I grew up. I have what I have, and I don’t want to destroy that because I can’t get rid of this need for more.”

“You understand why I can’t give you what you need?”

An echo of the smile, barely curving Obi-Wan’s lips, the eyes closing as Obi-Wan shut out the brightening day. “It’s all right, I remember that conversation only too well. Why d’you think I’m trying so hard not to—not to make this any worse for you than it already is?”

“This isn’t difficult for me—”

Sudden burst of motion, Obi-Wan sitting up straight, looking right at his master, and pointing, nearly laughing in shock. “You liar! Your people come in two classifications, prig and prude and you added a vow of celibacy on top of that! And here I am walking around with my dick leading the way, broadcasting lust along the bond and mooning over you like a love-sick fool—of course this is difficult for you!”

He felt himself bristle at that, stung by the sharp morsels of truth. “I’ve been perfectly capable of dealing with lust since before you were old enough to have any idea of such a thing. I think I can cope with it second hand along the bond.”

Obi-Wan had subsided again, slumped against the back of the couch, his voice a flat promise. “You won’t have to.”

“It took you by surprise—it took us both by surprise. But Obi-Wan—”

Eyes slitted open, lazy as a snake thinking about dinner, even though Obi-Wan’s voice was sharp when he interrupted his master. “Did it hurt?”

He wasn’t used to his padawan like this: interrupting, shifting topics and emotions. He fumbled, annoyed with himself, refusing the excuse of tiredness: he’d negotiated peace settlements more adeptly than he was dealing with this and at some point, he was really going to have to think about that. “No,” he said gently, knowing his answer would cause the hurt he hadn’t felt, “it didn’t hurt at all.”

Thoughtful frown, and Qui-Gon knew perfectly well his padawan was distracting him from however many things Obi-Wan wanted to avoid. Obi-Wan sounded almost academic. “I thought the bond was supposed to hurt if a master thought lustful thoughts about his padawan?”

“But I wasn’t. You were broadcasting—”

It was fascinating, in a painful, sickening sort of way, to watch the perfectly bland, blank diplomat’s face slide over Obi-Wan, covering everything, making this man into nothing more than a polite, distant stranger. “Of course,” Obi-Wan said to him, in precisely the same tone of voice used for small talk at diplomatic functions, “that would prevent any problems on your side. I’m sorry, it’s very late—” a polished, practised smile, “or rather, very early. I hope you don’t mind if I excuse myself.”

There were things he could say to that; he could even invoke the rule of obedience, but where would that get them? He’d trained Obi-Wan well; his padawan could be trusted to say a great deal whilst revealing absolutely nothing. “I’ll excuse you for the moment,” he said, and saw not so much as a flicker of reaction at the stern crack of his voice, “but I will expect a more honest and open conversation on this subject later. Padawan.”

“Yes, Master.” And there it was, the reaction: a nearly mocking bow, so deep it was a joke here, in their own rooms. “If I may be excused?”

He waved Obi-Wan away, and watched his padawan go into his own bedroom, the door closing so very quietly. He sat there, stroking his beard, thinking about what had been said, and not said. Thinking about the real reaction that had been hidden behind that nearly insolent bow. Thinking about why the Sith he was sitting here fulminating into a bad mood just because his padawan was considerate enough to shield so tightly his prude and prig of a master couldn’t sense him at all.

**Qui-Gon had gone to bed, slept even, although**



poorly, then he'd risen and bathed and breakfasted and caught up on his communications, only to groan at the news they were to attend the latest War Crimes Tribunal as Justices. It was perhaps the hardest part of being Jedi, to sit there, hearing and seeing and feeling the atrocities, too late to do a single thing about a single bit of suffering. He couldn't allow himself to regret helping others, but he could mutter to himself because this new assignment meant mastering an absolute nightmare of a tonal language.

Unfortunately, that wasn't his morning's only unpleasant surprise.

He should be the perfect picture of sedate master and sit here serenely, or perhaps he should just sit here like a dumpling, as his padawan strolled in through the front door. So much for a master's omniscience and sensitivity to his padawan's presence: all this time, Qui-Gon had thought his padawan to be in his bedroom, yet here his padawan was, strolling through the front door and hallway, crossing the common room, clothes rumpled, hair messy, chin unshaven, smiling and chatting as if it were perfectly normal for Obi-Wan to come traipsing home at this time of the day.

"—decided to go back out. I'm glad I did, too," a pause while Obi-Wan downed a large glass of cold fruit juice, "since I met a perfectly charming man. He was," Obi-Wan put the glass in with the rest of the dirty dishes, "very accommodating."

"I'm sure he was," he replied, looking beyond this display of cheerfulness. "But it was dawn when you left me to go to bed." Noted, and regretted, the way Obi-Wan flinched from that. "Why did you go back out?"

"Master, with all due respect—"

"—which usually precedes you being completely disrespectful," he said.

"I'm trying to make the best of this. I haven't handled it very well, I know, but I'm trying."

Which was either the simple truth or the best way to get Master Jinn off his padawan's back.

"I'll tell you what," he said, getting to his feet, putting his cup in to be washed, turning the machine on, the low hiss familiar, routine, nearly comforting amidst all the other changes. "I'll leave it at that, for today. We pick up our usual routine, see how you cope, and tonight, we discuss it."

A too-deep bow. "Yes, Master."

"Not so quick, Padawan. I mean it. A proper discussion, no matter how much we both wish we could avoid it."

There was a shimmer of humour smiling up at him, just a glimmer, behind the fatigue and the rest of it. "Something to look forward to, then."

"With breathless anticipation," he replied, and was rewarded with a real smile, one that warmed Obi-Wan's eyes and warmed Qui-Gon all the way down to his soul.


"Our usual routine, Master?"

His turn to smile, his turn to help Obi-Wan make this all the usual, mundane routine. "Oh, yes."

"And today being... That means..."

Obi-Wan groaned, and Qui-Gon grinned. "Yes. Sparring. Look on the bright side," he told his muttering padawan, "at least if you get through today, you'll have proved your stamina is up to par and we don't have to worry about you running amok with your *other* 'sabre in hand."

And his own embarrassment was worth the laughter of his padawan gusting in his wake.

 the practice salle, training 'sabre in his hand, he watched his padawan. Their usual routine, he'd said, and meant it, but they both knew this was just a way of measuring what Obi-Wan had to master to get through this—a way of gauging just how much work it would take to compensate for this damned Blessing.

He watched his padawan, and made comparisons, notes, judgments: liked not at all what he was seeing. Too much tension, there, across the shoulders, and there, down the back. And there, in the arms and in the frown marring the forehead. Tightness, too, not usually seen until Obi-Wan was tired and nearing the end of the training bout. To be expected, he admitted, and considered making allowances for someone forced to exert himself as Obi-Wan had been forced to.

Prude, he said to himself, in his padawan's voice. Prig. Can't even *think* that Obi-Wan has—which choice phrase would his padawan use? Fucked himself into exhaustion.

And why does that make you squirm, Qui-Gon Jinn?, he asked himself, really not wanting to get an answer.

He nearly missed a parry: perhaps Obi-Wan would put this distraction down to a worried master kept up too late by his troubled padawan.

Or more likely, given how hard Obi-Wan was concentrating on making his own moves, his padawan wouldn't notice.



At least there was some sign of progress, Qui-Gon decided. Yes, he thought, dodging a move that hadn't been completely advertised beforehand and was almost as smooth as usual, quite an improvement, considering. Yesterday's disquieting aggression had gone, replaced by a fiery intensity that wasn't violent, he almost had it, could almost put a name to it. Not aggression, but...

He dodged the sweep of Obi-Wan's lightsabre blade, dropped to the floor, rolled aside as the blunt tip of the blade came right at him. Not violent, for all Obi-Wan's thrusts and parries were forceful. No, it was more— He somersaulted, a move more usually used by his padawan, came down behind Obi-Wan, was met with skill and the stabbing of the lightsabre coming towards him.

A good move, that, better than usual for a practice. That was part of what was different, he decided: Obi-Wan was far more in touch with the Living Force than usual, letting it guide him, letting it use him and fill him.

Qui-Gon felt the first glimmerings of a headache, and pushed it back. He needed his concentration, needed to fight and teach and analyse this session, needed to parry and block and attack—

An excellent move, one Obi-Wan had been working on, unsuccessfully, for weeks. It usually took the bright flare of battle to bring Obi-Wan into such connection with the Living Force and this was the first time Obi-Wan had managed that manoeuvre in mere practice.

Interesting.

So was it this Blessing that was bringing Obi-Wan—

Obi-Wan's question, about the Living Force and sex and orgasm, the question he hadn't given another thought to. He didn't stumble, his training too deep-rooted for that, but he missed an opening, turned it into a mere feint, had Obi-Wan coming at him, lightsabre jabbing at him.

The headache was back, and Obi-Wan was coming at him, again and again and again, hard lunges and deep thrusts until he was scarcely able to hold his own against his padawan's pointed forays. He stepped back, and stepped back again, his 'sabre blurring with the speed of his defensive moves, and still Obi-Wan came on, and on. He'd never seen his padawan this attuned to the Force, and it made his heart glad: this was what his padawan would become, this was what he was training Obi-Wan to reach. His padawan would be a great knight, almost

certainly a master one day, magnificent, better than Qui-Gon himself, if only Obi-Wan could learn to mesh with the Force like this all of the time.

Thrust, parry, retreat.

He was losing. For the first time ever, he was losing. And he could sense no worrying triumph in Obi-Wan, just this glorious communion with the Force and still, even in losing, he was glad to see the fierce joy on his padawan's face. He leapt, and Obi-Wan was faster, just a fraction, but as in real life, that small advantage could be enough to tip the balance. He put every ounce of skill he had into deflecting the oncoming lightsabre, but it wasn't, quite, enough. He was blocked, and Obi-Wan was using the Force to hold his arm too far back. A routine part of their training now, and Qui-Gon smiled, as he reached, as always, for the Force and gave it a *tug* and...

And his arm didn't move far enough, Obi-Wan's control of the Force superseding his own, his own headache getting in the way of own connection with the Living Force. Obi-Wan came at him again, jabbing the blade at him, and he retreated ever farther, struggling to free himself, able to move only enough to stop the winning blow from being landed on him.

He had to twist to avoid the 'sabre, and if Obi-Wan had used a sweep of his blade instead of a thrust, the match would be over. But he had another moment, two, and he called on the Force, channeled it, funneled it and—

It was as if he had called Obi-Wan, not the Force, to him. Obi-Wan was over him, pressing him back, and down. Qui-Gon sank down onto his haunches, then looked up, into the face of his padawan who had defeated him.

And saw it in his padawan's face, saw it on his padawan's clothes, smelled it, sharp, in the air.

Not just arousal, not this time.

And the answer he hadn't bothered to look for. "Master—"

A look of absolute mortification gaping down at him, and then his padawan was backing away, 'sabre automatically clipped to belt, and hands automatically crossed in front to cover his groin, Obi-Wan backing away, and then very nearly running into the changing room.

Not that it mattered. Qui-Gon had seen the wetness, had smelled it.

Unmistakable. And had there been any doubts, Obi-Wan's reactions would've put them to rest.

It would, Qui-Gon thought as he slowly got to his



feet, be very nice to just pretend that hadn't happened. It would, he decided, be very nice to take a day off from being a master.

The changing room was nearly deserted, only one person present.

Before he could say a word, his padawan spoke. "You gave me until tonight."

He had indeed. A reprieve then, for both of them. "But this has to be discussed."

"I know." A determined smile, and a wry expression. "It's not supposed to be this complicated, you know," Obi-Wan told him. "It's *supposed* to be loads of uncomplicated sex. Fornication and rutting, and a good time had by all. It's *not* supposed to be worse than puberty!" The look of concern would've been as comical as Obi-Wan had intended if it hadn't been for the genuine unease lurking in the back of his eyes. "I mean, I wasn't ever this bad back then, was I?"

"Not even close," he said, following Obi-Wan's lead, getting this back into perspective. "Well, not that I noticed."

"Oh, and you think you could miss your padawan coming all over you in practice?"

He could feel the grin—albeit strained and somewhat false—on his face, could see Obi-Wan's gratitude that he was taking it so well. "Practice for what, Padawan?"

Another of his padawan's current sudden shifts of emotion, for there it was, back again: the blush Obi-Wan hated so. Actually, Qui-Gon decided, watching as his padawan ducked his head and pulled on a clean tunic, it was a very attractive blush, an unexpected vulnerability in someone so strong, so shuttered.

"Oh Sith," Obi-Wan muttered, muffled by the tunic he was pulling on. "He's going to start teasing me now."

"Teasing?" he asked, still grinning, pleased with how much this was helping his padawan keep things in check—this time, anyway. He spared a second for sympathy: if his head was spinning—not to mention aching—at how quickly this Blessing twisted things inside out, his poor padawan must be dizzy. "Teasing?" he repeated, sounding perfectly outraged, triggering one of Obi-Wan's small smiles. "But *I'm* the one fully clothed."

He got one of Obi-Wan's patented dirty looks for that, and it warmed him, although it wasn't nearly as fetching as the blush had been.

Absently, he rubbed at his left temple, and then

stopped. Obi-Wan had noticed; there was a riot of emotion in the nearly-hopeful eyes staring at him, making Qui-Gon abruptly and unpleasantly aware of just what the root cause of this headache might be. It was Qui-Gon's turn to be grateful for his promise to Obi-Wan. "Tonight," he said, surprised by the gruffness in his own voice.

"Yes, Master," Obi-Wan said, and it was an odd feeling, to be grateful to his own padawan for letting him off the hook.

## ⌘⌘⌘

Languages were one of his particular skills; with Obi-Wan calmer after this morning's far too interesting practice session and scheduled to teach basic katas to the beginner group just a corridor away, Qui-Gon was safely ensconced in the peacefulness of a small study room, headset firmly in place, trying to master the finer nuances that made this particular language such a diplomatic minefield. He should've been teaching a class of his own, basic Standard to new initiates from a half-dozen worlds, but he'd traded that with Master Per'Sa so he could have some more time with to get a decent grip on this. He triggered the repeat again; listened, again, to the differences between the tone shift for 'thank' and the one for 'give.' He frowned, hit the repeat again, and concentrated.

A nudging in the Force drew his attention; when he looked up, he saw the short-braid padawan standing in the doorway.

He recognised the posture, the darting gaze, the nervous fingering of the braid, the lack of stillness that would end up being an edgy shifting from foot to foot, if he didn't put paid to it right now.

Anyone would think he ate padawans for breakfast, the way they behaved around him. Just because he was honest enough to growl once in a while—

Now wasn't the time to start on the ills of over-protecting padawans. He smiled, kindly, and beckoned her over.

"Master Jinn," she said, bowing so deeply she came perilously close to overbalancing.

"Yes, Padawan?"

"My master sent me to ask you to please if it's not to much trouble if you could come down to the language classrooms right away Master Jinn. Please."

He couldn't remember his own padawan being this young, he thought, indulgently taking the girl's







tiny hand in his own. "I'll be happy to come straight away, Padawan," he said, shortening his pace for her. So very strange, to have someone else's padawan at his side; he'd had Obi-Wan there for so long, anyone else seemed downright alien. Her hand tightened on his; he realised that even being careful, he was going too fast for her. He slowed his pace even more, shortening his stride as if it were Master Yoda trying to keep up with him. When had he last had to cut his stride for a padawan at his side? He must've, at the beginning with Obi-Wan, but he honestly didn't remember ever actually doing so. Obi-Wan had been tall for his age, all knees and elbows, and the boy had kept up very well.

Or at least he'd assumed Obi-Wan had.

From what felt like a great height, Qui-Gon looked down at the child at his side, and thought about what it would be, to be master to her. The changes he'd have to get used to, the allowances he'd have to make, the understanding, the patience, the time to reassure and console...

It struck him then, with all the heat of a blaster in the belly.

When was the last time he'd done any of that for Obi-Wan? Oh, now, yes, he was being the perfectly thoughtful master, patting himself on the back for it too. But before that? Before this current crisis—and how he winced to admit it was, indeed, a crisis—when had he last made allowances for his padawan?

Made adjustments? Reassured?

His padawan was a long way from this small being smiling up at him, tentativeness giving way to hero worship already, the ogre tamed into being a great Jedi master smiling serenely down at her. His own padawan strode at his side—no, one pace to the side and behind him, paying him public respect, yes, but more, always protecting his back. Always.

And when was the last time he'd done that for Obi-Wan? Outside of battle?

He repeated the simple truth to himself: it was his duty as a master to foster independence in his padawan, especially this close to his trials.

But when had that turned into leaving Obi-Wan to stand on his own two feet?

A long time ago, he realised. A very long time ago. Going back to when his padawan had pulled away from a hug for the first time and given him the saddest of smiles. The last time, in fact, that he'd seen his padawan even close to tears.

Well, he thought, as he rounded the last corner, at least now he knew exactly how long Obi-Wan had

been in love with him. The little padawan at his side was hurrying forward, nearly skipping, heading towards a knot of people clustered in an untidy lump outside a classroom door.

"Master, I fetched Master Jinn."

Smiling, he handed the girl over to her master, watched, amused and warmed, perhaps even a trifle envious and sad, as the child was gathered in close to her master's side, Master Dzerz not even noticing what he was doing, just an automatic gathering in and protecting of the padawan.

His little interlude was interrupted when Master Per'Sa stepped in front of him, frowning up at him.

"Master Jinn, we have a problem."

"I hope I can help."

The look she gave him was...nothing he'd ever had from a fellow master before. "Your padawan," she began, and stopped, as a heated giggle rolled through the clustered padawans and knights.

"That's enough," she said, stern enough to silence even the infamous Knight Jak. "Your padawan," she began again, and Qui-Gon had been through enough of these awkward stop-and-start conversations recently to have a reluctant idea of where this was leading, "has been inadvertently leaking—"

Another snickering, even some jostling, so that Qui-Gon turned and stared, taken aback by such behaviour.

"That's it," Master Per'Sa said. "All of you, back to your schedules, or I'll find something to keep each and every one of you occupied till next year."

"I'll deal with them," Master Dzerz said, small padawan still tucked close to his side, half-hiding from the towering clutch of knights, padawans and masters. "Come on, all of you, with me—*now*."

Master Per'Sa didn't wait for them to disperse, she just grabbed Qui-Gon and pulled him along the corridor and into an empty classroom.

"Look, I don't know why the Sith you've let this go on, but you need to do something about him," she said, blunt at last. "He's projecting lust so much, I had to break up a near orgy in the gymnasium showers."

"There was a problem this morning, I admit, but he's sorted that—"

"What about this morning?" she demanded, glowering at him.

"A minor matter," he assured her, "something of a personal nature."

Which was true enough, although it was plain she knew he wasn't telling her anything approaching the



whole truth. It was all he was willing to tell her, though. “Now, what about this afternoon?” he asked. “What happened with my padawan?”

Which left her duty-bound to tell him. “I’ll be honoured to assist you with your padawan, Master Jinn,” she said to him with ostentatious politeness. “I was unaware of any events this morning,” she added pointedly, and it was all he could do not to squirm and offer excuses as he had when just an initiate in her beginners’ class. “So what I was talking about was this afternoon. Master Dzerz wanted to take the beginners’ kata class to ease his new padawan into things, so I put Obi-Wan down for teaching Basic Standard to the newest initiates.”

So there had definitely been another breach? Qui-Gon folded his hands into the sleeves of his robes, and listened, carefully.

“That bunch congregated outside his classroom and when I found them,” Per’Sa was continuing very nearly heatedly, “half of them had their hands inside their trousers and the other half were helping them. I wasn’t surprised, since I’d followed the waves of...intensity from my own study along the hallway. I almost blamed that bunch for the...emanations, but it was your padawan all by himself.”

He looked at her.

She looked back. “You didn’t know?” she asked, the implications dawning on her as quickly as they were dawning on him. “Oh Sith be damned, he’s sending it out like a beacon because he’s—”

He didn’t need her to finish that, thank you very much. “I’ll take care of it,” he told her, turning to leave.

“Qui-Gon,” she said, her hand on the door stopping him from leaving—or perhaps from making his escape. “Even I had some difficulty coping with the surges that are coming from him.”

“The children in his class?”

“Too young to react with much more than some poor discipline and too much energy, otherwise I’d’ve removed him before I did anything else.”

An indication of just how disruptive his padawan, probably blissfully unaware, was being. But at least she was letting him go and fetch Obi-Wan, protecting his padawan, instead of dragging Obi-Wan through the hallways. “Thank you,” he said, meaning it, and saw the impact of his smile on her, her dislike of him surfacing once again as if she thought he were trying to charm her. “This is a difficult time for him, he’s still adjusting.”

“Well, tell him to adjust his broadcast way down

and his shields way up. And until he does, he’s banned from group facilities.”

A sensible precaution, and he nodded, Per’Sa standing aside and letting him leave.

With one last shot hitting home: “And Master Jinn? I suggest you pay a little more attention where your padawan is concerned, and find out why you were the only one on this level who did not feel him.”

He simply nodded, and went to find his padawan.

The Jedi master who’d faced any number of armed opponents and fraught negotiations hesitated outside another classroom door. Inside, he could hear chatter and movement, and his padawan trying—unsuccessfully, from the level of noise—to instill order. Poor Obi-Wan, he thought. So blithely optimistic about this Blessing, and it was turning into a curse after all.

### “巾巾与与在沢?”

He could tell by the look on Obi-Wan’s face that his padawan knew he’d failed somewhere but didn’t know quite where.

“I require your presence,” he said, displaying none of his dismay at the strength of his own accent showing through, but he saw it register on Obi-Wan, saw his padawan recognise that this was definitely a failing, something more than a simple call to a mission.

“The class—”

“—are being given some free time in the tumble gym,” Master Per’Sa said, surreptitiously edging master and padawan out of the classroom. Under cover of the cacophony of excited young voices, she said to Qui-Gon, “Remember. Banned, until the situation is resolved.”

“Banned, Master?” Obi-Wan asked him the moment they were alone in the corridor, silence descending slowly in the classroom as they left.

“Just until...matters are resolved, Padawan.”

He expected something, a question, a look, one of those little smiles or at least a glint of amusement in the eyes.

His padawan simply paced sedately along, one pace behind and to the left, hands folded in sleeves. And eyes downcast.

“Oh, come on, it’s not that bad,” he said, stopping just long enough to be parallel with his padawan, nudging Obi-Wan with his elbow. “After all, Master Per’Sa got to the gym showers *before* it turned into an orgy.”

Obi-Wan stopped, a graceless halting, and stared at him for a moment. “From *me*?”







“As if that’s all it is,” Qui-Gon retorted, mildly surprised to hear himself sounding as if this were just another of their academic debates. Perhaps that was the secret to this, for him: depersonalise it, make it about a T’chitar, a Blessing, a master. Well, since being personal was tying him in knots, he might as well try. Outmanoeuvre his fears and help his padawan. Do his duty. “It would take more than just shields not being up properly to cause what happened today. The impulses of the Blessing were being projected this afternoon, in a general sense—”

“But I wasn’t projecting, Master.” Before Qui-Gon could argue the point, Obi-Wan waved his hand, continued: “I was doing what I’ve always done, what I’ve been trained to do. I was simply releasing it into the Force.”

That was what happened when it was just released into the Force? What would happen if it were actually projected? That didn’t bear thinking about. “But it didn’t dissipate.”

His padawan lifted his chin, and it might look like pride, to anyone who didn’t know every nuance of this man’s body language: the lifted chin was never more than compensation for, or a distraction from, Obi-Wan feeling far from proud.

Qui-Gon continued carefully: “You released...the effects of the Blessing into the Force, in exactly the same way you do other things?”

“No difference at all, Master,” Obi-Wan said, levelly, honestly.

Which meant... “The Blessing is a planting?”

His padawan closed his eyes, his lips tightening; Qui-Gon could all but hear the swearing that was going on behind that barrier, although he couldn’t tell if it was because Obi-Wan’s body was betraying him again at these words, or because Obi-Wan had taken his point.

“Laying claim, leaving part of myself, sowing my seed—it’s all *aimed desires* and needs. So when I released that into the Force—”

“Like lightning, it went to ground.”

The eyes were still closed, the face scrunched up slightly in mortified horror. “Everyone in the gym.” One eye opened slightly. “More?”

It really would be nice, just once in a while, to lie for personal gain or at least his padawan’s comfort. “The classrooms as well. From what Master Per’Sa said, she was surprised I hadn’t felt it all the way over in the study room.”

Both eyes were closed again.

“Sorry.”

“I know you are,” Qui-Gon told him. “Which is fruitless and pointless. We need to find you a way to release this or control this without channeling it directly to everyone within range.”

“I’ll work on some other techniques.” He watched as his padawan straightened up and shed his guilt and embarrassment. “Or perhaps I should simply take up residence in a brothel for a while, Master. I’m sure *they’d* appreciate the ripple effect—and pay me for it!”

“And I’d like to see how *that* income was notated in the Order’s records!”

“Services rendered,” Obi-Wan replied loftily, repeating the Jedi’s catch-all phrase for incoming sources best left unnamed. “I’ll just say it’s for services rendered.”

And there was the stabbing pain again, questions clamouring at the back of his mind, dancing with his fear. “Is there a reason,” he asked, if only to distract himself from answers he still didn’t want, and he gestured at the small vestibule of their rooms, “why we’re still standing here, Obi-Wan?”

“I thought you wanted to, Master. You seemed to be,” a pause while a smile lit those eyes up, “communicating with the door. I didn’t want to separate you.”

And through the pain in his head, Qui-Gon considered himself quite pathetically grateful for Obi-Wan’s light tone and gentle support; a sure sign that his padawan was hurtling towards knighthood, when the padawan with the problem was lending assistance to the master who was supposed to be solving said padawan’s problem.

“Very kind of you,” Qui-Gon murmured, for all the world as if they were exchanging chit-chat at a formal gathering; he recognised the banal formality, of course, as a paltry shield he wanted to hide behind. Formality was so soothingly impersonal, and for all Qui-Gon hadn’t wanted to let this conversation turn personal, it had gone that way almost immediately, his intention a useless thing, his impersonal words sparing him not one atom of intensely personal reaction. This loss of control was almost as disturbing as the implications of this damned headache. He rubbed at his left temple again, then forced his hand down as his padawan stared at him. Hungrily. With the tip of a pink tongue flicking at ripe lips, inviting...

“I need to think,” he said baldly, swerving around his padawan, wanting to go to his own room and lock the door. “Things are different—”

“But not necessarily intrinsic?”



More temptation, another seductive invitation to lie, to secrete himself away from this. But his padawan was dealing with all of this honestly, above board, and Qui-Gon had already accepted that it was time for the master to learn from the padawan in this. "I don't know," he finally said. "I just don't know if it's—" breaking off, sparing Obi-Wan's feelings as Obi-Wan had spared him his. "I need to meditate, think about all of this."

"Yes, Master," said to him with perfect dignity, and the warmest, kindest understanding. "And if you don't mind, I'd really like to..." A gesture towards the door, no sign of embarrassment now, nothing there for Qui-Gon to see but fond consideration. "I'd like to indulge myself in my Blessing again, and what's more, take it to where people will *appreciate* the bleed-through!"

"Take as long as you need," Qui-Gon offered, refraining from wishing that would be days and days, certainly more than long enough for this damned Blessing to be over and done with and neatly locked away in the past where it couldn't mess his life up. "Don't worry about being back in time to talk," Qui-Gon told him, feeling more than just a twinge of guilt over his hopeful relief that Obi-Wan would come home far, far too late to talk. "We can postpone that until you've dealt with...more pressing matters."

A sly glance, slanted at him, mocking, so mocking, a moment passing before he saw that the mockery wasn't aimed where it was deserved, but was aimed at Obi-Wan himself.

Obi-Wan's tone was as amused, still mocking himself. "And dealt with it where it won't inspire Jedi to the most un-Jedi behaviour? Yes, Master."

"And dealt with it," he said, eking out another little bit of openness, "for your own sake. And your own pleasure."

For a quivering blade-edge of a moment, he thought his padawan was going to kiss him. But then Obi-Wan's controls held, as promised; there was only the jagged spike and strobe of the Force frantic around his padawan, and a softly, gently voiced, "Yes, Master."

Qui-Gon watched the door slide closed behind his padawan, and even though it was frowned upon, he raised his hand and locked that door. Yes, they were all one with the Force, but for tonight, he wanted, quite desperately, to be all alone, for once. Far, far away from the threat of loving padawans and proffered kisses.

## 五ヶ五ヶ五ヶ五ヶ

He was a Jedi master, he wasn't supposed to be this confused. He wasn't supposed to feel this tangle of things he couldn't even put name to.

And he certainly wasn't supposed to feel any desire for his padawan. The bond saw to that, and it hadn't failed him thus far, or certainly, for many years. But now? Now it was there enough to punish him for desiring his padawan, but it wasn't stopping him. And it should. It ought. Damn it, it *had* to.

Qui-Gon settled himself for meditation, hoping that it would be more useful than last time.

Perhaps, he thought, the problem was that their bond had begun spontaneously? Most master/apprentice bonds began when a senior master joined a master to an apprentice, but their bond, forged in fire, had begun by itself, without intent, without planning. Without control, or restraints. It had just *happened*.

Which itself was something that wasn't supposed to happen.

Just like a master desiring his padawan wasn't supposed to happen.

But he had. And perhaps, he cringed a little, waiting for the pain, he still did. And would.

He forced himself to face the fear, to look at that desire.

Sneaky, that's how he'd describe it. It wasn't something that had just marched up and started. It was simply *there*, as if it had always been there, as if it had lived inside him for a very long time.

But he'd swear it hadn't. He'd never looked at Obi-Wan with lust, had never wanted to know his padawan carnally.

Couldn't be sure, he realised with a shiver of shock, that he had wanted that today.

So much for meditation leading to self-knowledge: unnerving, to realise how much he'd failed to see. And humiliating, to realise how much he simply didn't understand.

Dwelling on the negative builds nothing but miserable hovels, as his mother was fond of saying.

So. Face it.

He had been at the mercy of desire.

But whose?

Desire, yes, but different, so different from the desire he was used to shunting aside. Desire was something he knew; it was something so familiar that he no longer noticed when it tried to ensnare him, he simply rejected it, dismissed it, sent it off into the Force, and did so automatically, as automatically as he breathed in and out.



So why then, was he feeling the pain from the master/padawan bond?

It was a two-way street; these bonds always were. There were pairs who barely knew the other was alive, and managed to train the padawan up to knighthood anyway. There were the majority, who could communicate some intent or caution, some elemental conditions: safe, danger, hurt, secure, well, threatened...

And then there was his bond with his padawan. Different from the three bonds he'd known before, closer to the one he'd had with Yoda than anything else—and it was expected that a bond between the most ancient and most powerful Jedi and the most deeply gifted acolyte should be stronger than most.

So what the Sith could explain the bond between him and Obi-Wan?

They'd always been able to communicate simple basics and while no master/apprentice bond could ever communicate actual words, there was such a richness to what they could send to the other. All it took was a single look—

Oh.

Jedi master or not, he sighed out loud and seriously contemplated kicking himself or admitting himself to the Infirmary to have his head examined.

Between being ambushed by desire and not registering the nuances of the communication with his padawan, he wasn't exactly a sterling, shining example of Jedi masterhood.

Add his relief at the possibility Obi-Wan would get home too late for 'the talk,' and he was downright tarnished.

He hated having to have talks. Especially when it was this kind of talk about this kind of subject. Why couldn't his padawan have picked something nice and easy and straightforward to have problems with—such as being tempted by the Dark? But no, his padawan had to have this sex thing.

And while humour eased the way, it didn't alter the one basic fact, the main reason this was so difficult. It wasn't his padawan who had the problem. His padawan was simply merrily in the grip of a raging libido and was dealing very well with the attendant embarrassments—which were relatively minor and very temporary: after all, broadcasting a bit of lust wasn't in the same league as cavorting with the Dark, even if he and half the other masters behaved as if it were. The problem lay not with the padawan but with the master.

He, Qui-Gon Jinn, was having a problem with this.

So stop dancing around it, he told himself, and deal with it before you end up dizzy.

He had a problem with this.

Well, that was generic and evasive enough and he'd already used it once. So now, he prodded himself sharply, it's repetition as well as evasion. A darting thought, nailing him: Obi-Wan finishing his 'be mindful' comment. Oh, he was just the perfect Jedi master.

His padawan was behaving better all round.

Obi-Wan would just come right out and say it.

And if the padawan could do it, could the master do any less?

I have a problem with sex, he thought, and fought his body's urge to blush, and his instinctive impulse to look to see if anyone had overheard him thinking that.

Guilt.

Now there was an interesting addition to this recipe for disaster.

Guilt over having a problem, or guilt over the sex?

No doubt, no hesitation, 'sex' coming shouting back at him.

A problem with sex.

Which shouldn't be the case: he was urbane, trained, tolerant. He'd traveled the universe and seen pretty much everything there was to be seen and much that really oughtn't. But that was impersonal, distanced. That sex was simply *others'*, just another part of his work, no different from fact-finding missions or being Justice at War Crimes Tribunals. This sex, though, was Obi-Wan, and him.

It oughtn't to be, though: he was celibate, had always been celibate. In fact, he should actually refer not to his vow of celibacy, but his vow of chastity.

Nothing. Not ever. With no-one. Not even himself. Well, not to any degree that Obi-Wan would deem worthy of being called 'sex.'

Desire: something he shunted aside without even glancing at it.

All the energy that went to sex and lust and desire—and the pursuit of fulfillment, and the eventual act—he channeled into the Force. In fact...

He thought about that, looking at it carefully for the first time in years, another one of life's certainties turned into quicksand.

In the short time of activity before he'd made his choice, his desires had diminished him, and his sense of the Force—but that had changed when he channeled his sexual energy into the Force.

He should probably be grateful that at least one certainty remained.





And he did, indeed, dip into the Force whenever desire came upon him, letting it feed him, letting it bathe him in its Light. So he was as right now as he had been when first he'd made his chaste choice: channeling into the Force and calling upon it, a symbiotic cycle was part of what made him closer to the Living Force.

And giving into desire, acting on it, succumbing to lust, slammed the door on the Force, shutting him off from it.

Not a good thing for a Jedi.

He breathed in deeply, tried to resettle his mind, slowly found his equilibrium again, approached the problem with some measure of detachment.

In the years he'd known Obi-Wan, his padawan had changed, grown, as all living things do: was it naught but purest ego and desperation to assume that he himself, of all of them, had remained unchanged?

A question to which he should find the answer, but he didn't want to look at things anew; he didn't want to change things, to risk going back to what he'd done before...

And cowardice would get him nowhere.

Some certainties remained. Most of the things he'd built his life on were still there, still solid beneath his feet. If some things were to change, to dissolve under him, well, so be it. No need for melodrama or exaggeration. Just look at them, deal with them, move onwards, accept the changes in who and what he was.

But it was easier thought than done.

He breathed in deeply again, and it took him longer this time, to find both the equilibrium and the courage to go back to a wound he'd assumed was long gone.

His padawan wasn't as attuned to the Living Force as he, but was that a demerit from his padawan's ever-active sex life, or was it—a shiver of fear as the heresy slid slow and cold and oily through his mind—that sex had nothing to do with it and it was simply that there were precious few who had his own connection with the Living Force?

All right, so look at it. Dispassionately, he thought dryly, knowing he'd bring that small joke out later, for his padawan's amusement and ease.

His own failed attempts at sex had cut him off from the Force, his padawan's connection to the Force was unaffected by sex.

A buzzing pest of honest observation stung him, and having begun breaking down the walls, it wasn't quite so difficult this time to look at this. Obi-Wan's

connection to the Living Force unaffected by the sex? No. Not necessarily true.

Their practice today, that conversation, his padawan asking him if this—the Blessing, the sex, the anti-intellectual rut of it all—was how it felt to be one with the Force.

So examine the possibility, he told himself, amused to hear that command in his padawan's most teasing, master-impersonating tone. He had accepted that his padawan was never going to have the same connection to the Living Force as he himself did. But his padawan had had a moment—several moments, many moments, hours of moments, his mind supplied helpfully—that had prompted Obi-Wan to ask if this elemental moment was, finally, being one with the Force. Certainly today at practice, his padawan had been more fully attuned to the Force than ever before outside of fighting for his life.

So if his padawan's experience was an example, sex could enhance one's connection to the Force. Orgasm could be a moment of pure union—and how Obi-Wan would enjoy making puns on this!—between Jedi and the Force and the experiencing of desire could lead to a far stronger connection.

It just hadn't been that way for him. Far from it. Far, far, far from it, so far from it that even now, at the remove of many years, his nasty little experiences scuttled through him with the power to make him itch with disquiet and look over his shoulder to see if the Dark was pursuing him still.

And the very fact that he really, really, really didn't want to look at those memories cornered him into doing just that.

Sighing again, Qui-Gon resettled his body, muscles reflecting the restless discomfort of his mind, and started peeling back the barriers and walls which hid that time away.

Out of sight, out of mind, that was his basic premise back then.

But every single one of those memories was still in his mind and it was time to bring them back into sight and look at them.

Himself, too big, all huge paws and bruising knees, and the passion taking him, burning him, consuming him, nothing existing but the rush and push and lust and the drive towards *something*, until only the desperate Force push had brought him back to himself, and the bruises he had inflicted, unaware. And these hadn't been the small marks he'd seen on Obi-Wan's body, that first night of the Blessing; these had been ugly big



things, almost worse than any accidental injury from the training salle.

Being soothed, being hugged and held and told it was all right, it was just that he was too anxious, in too much of a hurry, perfectly understandable for a first time, shh, relax... And all he could see were the red marks turning into bruises in the shape of his hands. Even now, grown man that he was, the horrible nausea swamped him again, drowning him in the shame-filled misery of having neither memory nor awareness of having done anything to leave marks like that. And of having done that for nothing more than a bestial urge to rut. His own pleasure, causing harm.

He shuddered, stilled himself, reached again for calm. Instead, he moved again, restless, the urgent twitch of a trapped animal getting ready to bolt.

Talking to his father at home, that very weekend, and the shame. Thinking there could be nothing worse, until he'd found out his mother knew. The memory was bitterly clear: he could see her, standing beside his father, and just *looking* at him like that.

Wait—now that was interesting.

He cocked his head to one side, and replayed the moment in his mind, looking at his mother looking at him, and seeing her not as a shame-filled son saw her, but as a grown man could.

Thinking, for the first time, as a grown man could, about his mother's pride that he'd become a Jedi, her knowledge that it was more than just the robes that made so many Jedi appear monkish. Thinking about his father, and the awkward, shame-filled 'talk' that had amounted to nothing more than admonishing a boy not to be 'worse than the animals.'

Thinking about the world he grew up on, the regional Temple school he'd attended until he was twelve, the tacit and blatant lessons he'd absorbed there. Thinking about being sent to the central Temple on Coruscant, how shocked he'd been by such immoralities as communal showers and exercises done without shirts.

Thinking, as a grown man now, of how much all of that had shaped him, looking at it instead of simply putting it aside, 'releasing' it.

Prig and prude, Obi-Wan had said with some kindness, months after the one-and-only time his padawan had visited his home world. He could conjure clear image-memories of that, too, Obi-Wan's bright excitement when first they'd arrived to visit Qui-Gon's family quickly giving way to tight-

lipped tension and many hours of meditation on serenity and tolerance.

His padawan hadn't actually come right out and said what he thought of his master's family, society, and the Temple there. Hadn't needed to, for all Obi-Wan had striven for politeness and pleasant friendliness. No, his padawan's shock had been unhappily clear, and afterwards, safely en route back to Coruscant, there had been that one oblique comment about his master having come a long way.

But had he?

Something else to think about.

And whether he liked it or not, or rather, because he really didn't want to, he had to go back to thinking about just why the master/padawan bond had spiked pain through him today.

Desire.

Think about desire. Not just shunt it aside, not just 'release' it into the Force, not just rise above something that twisted his connection with the Force. Actually think about it.

He shifted again, trying to make his body still, trying to take the stillness of his body and use it to focus his mind into stillness, succeeding only slowly.

This, he decided, was ridiculous. There was no reason for him to be having this much trouble with something as simple as meditation. Which meant that despite Obi-Wan's best intentions, there was bleed-through along their bond.

It was almost a relief. He went into his mind, visualising the bond to make it easier to trace, looking for the tell-tale signs of Obi-Wan seeping desire into him through the bond.

And found nothing of the sort.

Which made no sense. He was off-balance, dithering, behaving more like a new knight than an experienced master; there had to be *some* reason for that. And why was the bond stabbing him with pain? He was familiar with desire, had felt it—

Actually, he hadn't felt it for a long time. He was accomplished and well-trained; dispersing his desire required no conscious attention from him.

He was supposed to be actually thinking about desire.

So had it changed?

Had the nature of his desire changed, had he himself changed, or was it something else? Or was the oath that had shaped this part of his adult life built on something that simply no longer applied, something he had finally outgrown, as he'd outgrown the clothes he'd worn back then?





Another thing Jedi masters weren't supposed to do: end up with painfully tensed muscles during meditation. They were supposed to serenely contemplate matters and come to dispassionate, placid decisions and understandings.

They weren't supposed to chase their tails like frantic puppies.

He sighed again, and settled himself again, and went back to the beginning.

The bond, the headache, the desire.

The bond wasn't seeing Obi-Wan's Blessing through to him, but Obi-Wan had been broadcasting, unintentionally. Yesterday, it had been directed right at his master—a partial answer amidst the questions. Yesterday's desire hadn't been his own, it had been his padawan's: he could use that, compare it to what he'd felt later.

Look at this morning. His padawan had been communing with the Force to a degree that Qui-Gon had never known Obi-Wan to do before, so Obi-Wan's needs and desires would have been part of the Force around him. And he himself lived in the Force, drew on it so naturally that he noticed it no more than air. So drawing on the Force with Obi-Wan so much a part of the pattern—another partial answer, it seemed.

Now, it had been different this afternoon, not actually dangerous but certainly not a good thing, with Obi-Wan not dissipating into the Force but—no, this wasn't about Obi-Wan, this was about himself, and his own problems. The first tenet drummed into them long before taking their first padawan, carved above the Padawans' Hall: Before teaching, there is learning.

Fine. He would learn first. He would help Obi-Wan later, if his padawan needed him to.

So, look to himself first.

He had had no problems when looking at his padawan and seeing the signs of what Obi-Wan had been doing. No problems when discussing what Obi-Wan needed. The headache had come only later, when he'd...

Oh, Force, this wasn't easy.

It had happened later, when he'd...noticed his padawan.

But how could he desire Obi-Wan? The bond was a protection, not only for the padawan, but for the master too.

Yet here he was, scrabbling around like a fool, behaving years short of his actual age. The bond was supposed to protect him from the temptations of

having someone so completely in his thrall; it was supposed to protect him from the appeal of fit and handsome youth; it was supposed to help him maintain the distance a master absolutely had to have.

Or perhaps the bond's protection was that it trained the master to avoid the feelings and the thoughts that led to the pain, and he was only coming late to this training.

That answer didn't feel right. There was more, he knew that much; he just didn't, quite, have it within reach.

He shifted again, his body complaining fairly insistently at him. Tradition dictated he remain where he was and meditate this through to the end, but Sith, surely it was enough that he was questioning his own oath of celibacy, the bond and the nature of desire?

Tiredness was ebbing his energies, the abbreviated sleep and the stresses of this entire situation a good enough excuse for now. He opened his eyes, but knelt there for a few more moments, feeling only the simplest, most honest desires: food, water, rest. And exercise. Something to blow the cobwebs from his mind, the comfort of movement, and anyway, sacrifice though it surely was, he did his best thinking when he was moving within the Force.

He rose, and this time, he didn't bother putting his meditation mat away: he had a feeling he was going to be spending an indecent amount of time on his knees in the near future.

And it very nearly scared him, a fully-trained Jedi master, what images and thoughts leapt into his mind at the phrase 'on his knees.'

### 几玉母村七

Qui-Gon's body was pleasantly tired by the time he came back to their rooms; the darkness and the silence telling him that the reprieve held, that Obi-Wan was out somewhere, doing whatever Obi-Wan needed to do.

Qui-Gon went back to work, practising the tonal nuances of the proper greetings he would need to have polished to perfection in time for their mission; concentrated on that, but still, there was a small part of him left over to watch the bond, and think about the nature of desire.

He'd long since abandoned work, had sought his bed, only to be woken later by nothing more than his



own restlessness. Of course, once awake, he couldn't sleep again, not until he'd checked that his padawan was home safe and sound. Quietly, he went to his padawan's room, careful enough to not wake Obi-Wan, just in case Obi-Wan had already returned. The large divan was empty, neatly made, a reader dropped carelessly on the coverlet, a pile of unwashed sheets in the corner. It was another temptation, to pry, to look through his padawan's private things, to go through diary and drawers. Not so much to seek secrets but just...

But just to know him. He had thought he knew Obi-Wan, and he did, really, in so many ways, in so many details. But right now, for all he knew the general facts of what his padawan was doing, he didn't know the specifics. Didn't know if Obi-Wan's comment about not doing anything kinky was just a joke, or a reference to that unknown side of Obi-Wan. Didn't know when, exactly, Obi-Wan had purchased the shirt he'd worn that first night out of the Temple; didn't know where Obi-Wan went, nor how Obi-Wan knew of these places.

He knew his padawan very well indeed; he was finding, to his dismay, that he wanted to know the man as well.

Stop being ridiculous, he told himself, amused against his will at the picture he must make, standing in the doorway like this, the way he'd found a doe-eyed Obi-Wan more than once, years and years ago. This wasn't exactly what he'd had in mind when he'd decided it was time for the master to learn from the padawan. And if he were going to look stupid, he could at least reserve it for when it would make Obi-Wan laugh.

Enough, though. He went into the kitchen, fetched himself a cold ale, went through to the common room, where the corner window showed part of the Temple and a fragment of the sky.

It helped, as always, to look out at that expanse, to know it was only a fraction of the sky, and that that sky was only the tiniest part of the universe, and he was tinier still.

His mistakes couldn't matter all that much, not in that grand scheme of things. He took a long drink of ale and smiled as a pulse of comfort went through him, as he stood there, feeling small.

He had very nearly made it safely back to the haven of his own bedroom, the reprieve from the talk very nearly in his grasp, when his padawan came home.

Years of practice kept the hasty words firmly

locked in his mouth: he doubted that Obi-Wan needed to be greeted with a blurted 'you look awful.'

Awful, though, was exactly how his padawan looked. The hair was a mess, the braid completely undone, but it was the eyes, really, that did it.

And there was nothing Qui-Gon could do about it. No matter where his meditations were leading him, no matter what he might end up wanting or willing to do, there was the bond, and there was his padawan's right to some dignity.

Pity, he knew, didn't become Obi-Wan, not the way the quiet confidence of his padawan robes did.

"Are you all right?" he asked, when his padawan just stood there, staring at him.

"What? Oh, yes, I'm fine. Just fine."

He was sorely tempted to repeat Obi-Wan's reaction of the night before, to laugh and point and shout 'liar.' Instead, he crossed the room to his padawan, stood in front of him, and let Obi-Wan look his fill.

After a few moments, Qui-Gon asked, simply, "What happened?"

There was no answer at first, the time stretching thin enough that Qui-Gon was half expecting his padawan to shrug and return the old, unlamented, pouted 'nothing' and then go hide in his room.

But: "I went with women tonight. No, it's all right, I was careful, there's no chance I got any of them pregnant."

Any of them? The phrase burned in Qui-Gon's mind, turning into pain, turning into a heated blade cutting through him.

"I thought—" a smile composed entirely of weariness and defeat, "—I hoped it would take my mind off you."

"But it didn't," Qui-Gon said evenly, while it raced through his mind, he was thinking of me, he was thinking of *me*.

"Didn't make the blindest bit of difference. It was still you I was—" Embarrassment then, for a moment, and Qui-Gon watched as his padawan dealt with that, put it aside, stood up to the whole thing.

"Not that I suppose it's much of a surprise to you that I was using you in my mind. I try not to, you know," said so mildly, "it doesn't seem very fair. But—" a shrug, and another small smile, another taste of the rueful self-mockery, "—no matter how well I succeed in banishing you somewhere after Yoda on my list of people to think about, there comes that one unavoidable moment and there you are, Master. Front and centre."



He was torn, between dealing with Obi-Wan here and now, and examining this painful urge of desire. Obi-Wan, of course, won. "I don't mind," he said, forcing a smile, tugging his padawan's undone braid when Obi-Wan looked at him in rank disbelief. "Honest. I'm a prude and prig, I know, but I'd not make this any harder on you than it already is."

He was measured by eyes gone indeterminate grey in the near-darkness, and then his padawan leaned in closer to him, and whispered, conspiratorially, "It's just as well I'm all fu—worn out, Master, if you're going to use words like 'hard' around me."

'Worn out.' 'Any of them.' "So that's what it takes to get this under control?"

"No, I think I've got it pretty much in hand," Obi-Wan told him, and even in this dim light, Qui-Gon caught the glint of that smile. "Is there anything left in that?"

"What?" Oh. The bottle, forgotten, in his left hand. "I think there's a mouthful or two."

Then he had to decide whether the glance slanted up at him was coyly seductive, or just downright kidding.

"Only a mouthful or two, Master?" A nod downwards, Qui-Gon not willing to follow Obi-Wan's gaze. "I'd've said you had much more than just a mouthful."

And that was a lot farther than he was willing to go. "I can't, you know that."

"But I can hope, can't I?"

It was, again, the eyes that did it. Qui-Gon knew when surrender was the only course left. "I'm not going to get out of having a talk with you tonight, am I?"

That got a suitably serious expression onto Obi-Wan's face. "Do we have to?"

"There are things we need to discuss. Such as shields, and dissipating things into the Force."

He followed, as Obi-Wan walked slowly away, sat down near his padawan on the settee.

Obi-Wan's voice came to him softly, greily dispirited. "Did anything come through the bond tonight?"

"Not a thing. And as far as I know, there were no near orgies in any of the Temple buildings."

"I made sure of that—I went half-way across planet. And I was very careful. I made sure my shields were in place, and I didn't just send it off into the Force, I grounded it."

Grounded it? "That's quite an accomplishment, Padawan."

Obi-Wan's expression wasn't proud, it was more a

brief grimace, and then back to the grey tiredness that saddened Qui-Gon so. "Needs must," Obi-Wan said flatly. "I didn't think I had much choice."

"I could've helped you."

A gentle voice, and a gentler touch to his arm. "No, you couldn't. This isn't something you need, this isn't something I can put onto you. Anyway," another shrug, "I'm a grown man, I'll be a knight soon enough, I won't have you at my side to hold my—" a wicked little smile, frayed only a little around the edges, "—my hand when next my Blessing comes over me."

"At least the next one won't be as bad as this one."

"This one's not bad!" Obi-Wan told him. "Believe me, the Blessing's absolutely wonderful, it's only that it's mortifying to have to learn to control the side-effects amongst a horde of Force-sensitives who can sense my every...mood."

"Then if this is so good, then why do you look like you've just spent six months negotiating with Hutts?"

"Why, oh why," Obi-Wan asked the ceiling in exaggeratedly patient tones, "couldn't I've been given a master who wouldn't notice an emotional turmoil if it bit him on the arse?"

"Pure good fortune," Qui-Gon said dryly. "I believe you about the shielding and broadcasting. Now tell me the rest."

"You already know the answer."

"Making do?"

"What else? But really, it's not that bad. It's just going to take a little bit of adjusting to. It's not even been two full days—give me a chance!"

"So you think it'll get better with time?"

"Master," the word both caress and reproach, "I have lived with my feelings for you for years and for most of those years, I've done a damned fine job of keeping everything under control. Give me time with this, and you won't notice this any more than me being in love with you."

No doubt his fellow masters would have him reproach Obi-Wan, for the love and the pride both, but Qui-Gon was deaf to everything but the sere resignation.

"Obi-Wan," he began, with no idea of what he was going to say, trusting the Force to guide him.

"Please," his padawan interrupted him. "I've got my controls and shields in place, there will be no more unscheduled orgies in the gymnasias, there'll be no more bleed-through along our bond. May we leave it at that, at least for tonight?"



He wanted, so much, to stroke his fingers along Obi-Wan's forehead, to soothe the frowning lines there. It was the purest of impulses, as pure as when his padawan had been but a boy, but even so innocent a touch was tainted now, by Obi-Wan's rampant desires and his own shameful secrets coming crawling out like lepers.

"I doubt I'd've dealt as well with all of this as you have."

"I know for a fact that you wouldn't!"

Putting on his dry, academic voice, so perfectly deadpan, Qui-Gon mused, "Now, would it be the prude or the prig that would be the most troublesome?"

"Oh, I'd say it'd be the oath, myself."

He knew something must've shown on his face, for Obi-Wan was looking at him, suddenly intense.

"Master?"

"What?"

"I— Nothing."

This was one time Qui-Gon Jinn was glad of the dark: Obi-Wan obviously hadn't been able to read him clearly. It was bad enough to be questioning his oath, but to have someone else know it? Shame trickled hotly down his spine.

Well, when you can't sort yourself out, sort out an entire planetary system or one padawan. "You keep telling me everything's fine, but I've seen you when everything's fine, and there's more going on than that."

A real edge of anger scything the words home, unusual to hear such harshness in Obi-Wan's voice. "Stop trying to be obtuse! We've been through this, I've made it perfectly clear what it is, I've even *said* the actual words to you, so you know perfectly well what's wrong, and if you don't, well—use your imagination!"

"I imagine," Qui-Gon said slowly, into his padawan's embarrassed silence, hoping he could handle Obi-Wan's emotional needs with the aplomb Obi-Wan was rapidly bringing to the sexual side, "that it's dissatisfaction? Not with the physical," he dredged up a smile, "I know you're enjoying that. But with the emotional."

He sat patiently, and waited for Obi-Wan to choose his words.

Eventually, the truth was spoken, soft as snow. "I spoke to my father earlier. He told me what I suspected. The Blessing's...a bit difficult, emotionally, if you've got your heart set on someone and you can't have them. So you make do, and you deal with it. It won't be a problem, you know that—you know you can trust me on this."

"I know I can trust you on everything," Qui-Gon corrected, sharply. "This is part of you," and even saying that small truth made his world lurch, as sex and personality and the Force were commingled, "and I can trust *you*. Do you trust me?"

"That's a bloody stupid question!"

"I'll take it that's a yes," Qui-Gon said. "Then trust me with this, too. I can't help you with the physical—"

A low, wryly muttered: "Oaths and bloody bonds!" which he talked right over.

"—but perhaps I could do something to ease the rest of it?"

He could almost feel Obi-Wan's gaze upon him, a physical thing, ticklish as a feather, light as breath, and under it, already, the heat of Obi-Wan's desire returning again.

"Just be here," Obi-Wan told him.

"That's it?"

Obi-Wan stood, and stretched, Qui-Gon torn between watching the play of muscle and skin and the sharp stab of pain in his head.

His padawan, blessedly too wrapped up in his own lusts to notice the oddness of his master's behaviour, quoted one of Qui-Gon's teachings, so oft repeated during Obi-Wan's somewhat tumultuous adolescence. "Sometimes, doing nothing at all is the best thing to do." A quick, bright smile. "And if I'm to do anything at all tomorrow, Master, I need to get some rest."

"Then good night."

"And to you."

He watched Obi-Wan leave the room; sat on the settee and listened to the sounds he'd heard thousands of times before: his padawan getting ready for bed. Wondered, briefly, why Obi-Wan—who had so obviously bathed before returning home from "any of them"—was having another shower.

Use your imagination, Obi-Wan had said.

And it was fear that he'd do exactly that that drove him hastily to his own bed, where sleep escaped him no matter how assiduously he hunted it.

In the morning, it would be the master and not the padawan who would look as if he'd spent a night on the town, but at least there was a chance, at last, that all the answers he feared were also answers he craved.



He'd done nothing, as requested. Their days had





slid easily back into almost their usual routine, but Obi-Wan took far more personal time, disappearing every day for hours. And hours more, only to finally return physically exhausted and hollow-eyed, with shields firmly in place.

Therefore it was something of a shock for Qui-Gon to have the Healers take him aside, to ask him with careful delicacy when, precisely, his padawan's Blessing had ended. He had allowed himself a moment or two to just wallow in reaction, shock at the Healers' question and illicit pride in his padawan's skill at shielding, before assuring them he'd see to it that they got their answer. Which answer took the form of Qui-Gon sending a grumbling Obi-Wan along to the infirmary later.

He was now reaping what he had sown, his padawan glaring at him as they prepared for their sparring lesson.

"I don't see why I had to go to be poked and prodded by the Healers."

Qui-Gon finished his stretch before he could turn enough to see his padawan. "It's not just that. What's wrong?"

"You know, once upon a time, you used to lead up to these things delicately."

"Delicately?" he retorted, eyebrows raised. "You still expect 'delicately' after the discussions we've been having?"

"Not to mention," no hint of blushing now, "the sparring sessions."

"Then I shan't mention them. But I'm still—" a sudden swing of his blade, nearly catching Obi-Wan by surprise, "going to get an answer. What's wrong?"

A parry, no thrust, not today, just a long sweep of the blue-tinged blade, and a leap that nearly left Qui-Gon's back at risk.

"The Healers."

Qui-Gon lunged, neatly breaking his padawan's defence. "Apart from the usual gripes and grumbles against the Healers, what was it this time?"

A somersault over his head, a feint to his left and then Obi-Wan was coming at him from his right side, sliding in close.

Too close. Qui-Gon frowned over the clumsiness of the move, for it had been months since last he'd seen such a failing from Obi-Wan in 'sabre practice. "Padawan," he said warningly.

"I thought I'd gained better control," Obi-Wan told him, dropping to the floor, rolling in under Qui-Gon's guard, using a simple kick when most would expect a scything from the 'sabre.

"Oh, so it's stung pride, is it then, padawan?"

Annoyed that the Healers saw through your shields?"

A sharp glance told the master just what the padawan thought of such clumsy 'teaching' amidst the 'sabre lesson. "You know me better than that. But if they realised I was still in my Blessing, then I'm going to have to come up with even better controls."

A convoluted move, Obi-Wan twisting and darting around Qui-Gon like a leaf whirling around a tree in the wind. "And?" Qui-Gon prompted, easily blocking a whistlingly-fast arc of blade coming at his head.

"And I don't know—" a move that should've been all elegant energy but was clumsy force, "—if I can do any more."

"First, pay attention to the here and now and close your defense—an Ewok could out-fight you today. Second," he pressed forward, watching Obi-Wan's moves, noting the depth of the frown on Obi-Wan's forehead, a warning of how difficult even this mid-level pattern was for his padawan right now.

"Second," he repeated to get his padawan's attention, capturing Obi-Wan with the Force, holding them both still for a moment, "remember that if you can't find the answers or the strength yourself, you come to me." A flash of rebellion met him, and he softened, smiled, made the Force a warmth enveloping them rather than a chain to bind them. "And if I can't help or you can't come to me, there are other masters who will help you. We are Jedi, we stand—"

An unevenness in the breath that fed the single word dropping from Obi-Wan's parted lips: "Together."

"Yes."

For a moment, there was stillness, as if hearts had stopped, as if time had paused, as if the Force had halted the Universe for a moment to make them mark this moment.

All that existed was the two of them. Together.

Obi-Wan's assertion, and Obi-Wan's question, and it was from Qui-Gon too; the two of them, standing so close, each awaiting the other's answer, each giving an answer.

Yes.

The word lingered, caressed by the echo of Obi-Wan's 'together,' and then Obi-Wan blinked, their hearts beat, and the Universe moved onwards and Qui-Gon could see his own discomfiture equaled in Obi-Wan's expression. Yes, they'd both said, but Qui-Gon was none too sure either of them was entirely certain what they'd just agreed to.





Awkward now, clumsy, mere mortals after what should have been the grand climactic moment, the big dramatic finish, they hesitated, face to face, 'sabres crossed, Qui-Gon's command of the Living Force encompassing them.

"They didn't know," Qui-Gon said, retreating back to the overt conversation he was sure of. "The Healers asked me when your Blessing had ended. Your controls are excellent, my padawan. Worthy of a master."

Quicksilver as always, Obi-Wan's eyes brightening with delight. "Not merely a knight? Perhaps we should petition the Council to allow me to go straight from padawan to master."

"Oh, Council Member at least," Qui-Gon replied in kind, testing Obi-Wan's physical strength with a push and Force-mergence with a probe.

Liking not at all what he found there, wondered anew at the sense of rightness that had passed between them and the ill-fitting skin of Force around Obi-Wan.

He freed Obi-Wan, stepped back, saluted, giving his padawan a brief period of grace. Then he attacked again and while his padawan's skill was still underused, the defence was better.

In the midst of a flurry of attacks designed to teach his padawan to protect himself from something other than carefully rehearsed moves, he asked again: "What's bothering you about going to the Healers? And don't tell me about your controls, we both know it's more than that."

He was given a very speaking look for that. "I think I preferred it when you didn't pay attention to my moods, Master."

Qui-Gon took that morsel of pain and tucked it away, to be thought about later, the seed he would use to examine the roots of why his padawan felt such a thing.

"It was the poking and the prodding," Obi-Wan told him, poking and prodding himself, using a most unconventional twist on the usual defence response. "Having them actually *touch* me and to have them examine me like that..."

A downright clumsy move, one that would've got his padawan killed if this had been a real fight.

One consolation: Qui-Gon didn't need to say anything, Obi-Wan's awareness of that flaw all too apparent. Another attack from Qui-Gon, and this time, he could see the intentness of his padawan's concentration, could feel the shields and controls firming.

Time to test those controls, much though Qui-Gon would love to just let it slide, to accept the progress already made as enough.

But such indulgences, while they might prevent a sharp twitch of pain on Obi-Wan's face, could get his padawan injured or killed: the man would have to defer to the master. Qui-Gon kept his voice level and calm, all the more taunting for being off-hand. "They touched you. Intimately. In a way you couldn't help—" a reasonably quick parry to his lunging attack, "but feel sexually. You responded—" and this attack was beaten back with more force than necessary, but no hint of the Force, "and their response was so clinical you felt bestial."

This defence was better, but he could see the strain in his padawan's muscles, could feel the effort it took to control and Qui-Gon still had to make sure that aggression was tamed. "And then they continued their physical exam of you. Touching you inside."

He could see his padawan's lips move slightly, sensed what Obi-Wan was repeating, a mantra often used by his volatile padawan whilst trying to control himself. 'There is no passion, there is serenity.'

"You have controls, padawan, and methods to cope now. Use them."

There wasn't time for his padawan to do much more than glance at him, but rapidly, Obi-Wan's defensive moves flowed more smoothly, the accomplishments of training showing through, taking over more and more.

"They went inside you," Qui-Gon said, watching Obi-Wan closely, choosing his moment to attack both verbally and physically, choosing words and movements to outflank his padawan's defences, "as if they were fucking you."

Only a slight tremor in his padawan's swift reaction, but against an opponent intent on killing rather than teaching, that tremor could cost Qui-Gon his padawan.

No opponent would offer quarter, nor step back while Obi-Wan regained his emotional equilibrium, so Qui-Gon was instantly pressing forward, pushing, always pushing, hard as he could.

"Is it so much against your Blessing, to have someone inside you like that? Did it feel like they were planting themselves in you? Laying their claim to you?"

No tremor for this sally, but this was still a far cry from the last time, when Obi-Wan had been one with the Force. An easy defence to breach, Qui-Gon





stabbing forward, foregoing the usual elegant sweeps of 'sabre in favour of blunt and brutal lunges.

It was, he knew, an almost perfect recreation of Obi-Wan's own style that last time, a deliberate mimicry of thrusting sexuality. His padawan yielded before him, a smooth, if lacklustre, routine series of moves, as Obi-Wan began to merge with the Force at last, drawing on it. There was no tremor now, no dangerous openings.

Apart from the one in the carefully locked door of Qui-Gon's own desires. Thrusting forward, Obi-Wan yielding, so yielding, as Qui-Gon thrust his 'sabre—an extension of himself, his own Force thrumming through it, up the blade, back down into himself, endless cycle of energy, of himself—and thrust his 'sabre, until his padawan stopped yielding, until his padawan's control firmed and hardened, and until the pain in Qui-Gon's head became an incessant agony.

When had duty become this illicit pleasure? Pale substitute, surely, but his 'sabre thrust forward, and Obi-Wan pushed forward to meet it, green and blue crossing and humming, sending a surge down into Qui-Gon's arm, all the way down into his body.

He could feel his padawan's connection with the Force again, felt that before he could read the arousal in Obi-Wan's eyes.

Felt the pain inside his head grow and expand, as he thrust forward and forward and forward again.

Obi-Wan fell back, struggling now, against a master's skill and a master's strength; Qui-Gon could feel Obi-Wan drawing on the Force, and could see there was something wrong, some barrier this time, blocking his padawan from merging with it fully.

Qui-Gon simply pushed forward again, Obi-Wan retreating, to the rim of the room, then sideways along the wall, and still Qui-Gon pushed and thrust and came on, and on.

The pain in his head was billowing, wild and thunderous as a storm, but he didn't care, couldn't care, because he was alive with the Force, and he was one with the Force, and it was wonderful and powerful—

Obi-Wan dropped to his knees, 'sabre extinguished.

"I yield," his padawan said, staring up at him.

Yes.

Qui-Gon raised his 'sabre, brought his body forward, nearer, closer, so close, so hard, needing, needing, his 'sabre stabbing forward, the last little bit, oh, so little more—

And the look of horror in Obi-Wan's eyes penetrated before his 'sabre could. Or would, for Qui-Gon had aimed it, not to kill, but stake the ground between Obi-Wan's spread knees.

Obscene, the green blade quivered as it struck the floor, power shimmering along its length.

Sucking in a long, shuddering breath, Qui-Gon switched the 'sabre off, and stumbled as his support disappeared. Legs weak, he straightened, drew in another of those breaths he told himself were simply a sign of overexertion and bore no resemblance at all to a man swallowing anything even vaguely approximating a sob, and then the pain in his head exploded, and he stumbled, half-blind, from the room.

何事 七村五 七五巾五 he met anyone in the corridors, he was little more than the familiar figure of Master Jinn on the metaphorical warpath, his frown unremarked upon, his unwillingness to chat no doubt put down to yet another dispute with the Council or someone over something. Ironic, really, that he was known for his passions.

Meantime, his real passions were nearly crippling him.

Behind him, he could hear his padawan's footsteps; knew, without looking, that Obi-Wan would be one step behind and to the left; suspected that Obi-Wan's expression would be utterly, flawlessly blank, even though his poor padawan was probably a maelstrom of very unserene passions of his own.

What in the seven hells of Sith were you thinking? Qui-Gon thought to himself, the pain receding as rapidly as his arousal. To do that to Obi-Wan, in *his* condition?

As if using Obi-Wan's condition as an excuse to examine his own condition was all that much better.

They reached their rooms far too quickly for Qui-Gon's taste, although he wanted to just go in, lock the doors and hide himself away for a few millennia. The only problem with that, he acknowledged, seating himself heavily on the settee, elbows on knees, head in hands, hair falling forward to hide his face, was that to hide for a while, he first had to deal with his padawan. And what he'd done to his padawan.

"I'm sorry."

Qui-Gon looked up so quickly he nearly gave himself another, more natural headache. "For what?"

"I thought I had myself under control but—"

"You did," he said, lowering his head, hiding his



face, hiding his shame, again. “I’m the one who had a headache.”

There was an odd little silence then. Reluctantly, Qui-Gon forced himself to look up, and get it over with. He met Obi-Wan’s eyes. Eyes with pupils widely and wildly dilated, mouth slightly parted.

“You want me?”

“If you’d asked me in the middle of that—” there wasn’t a word to describe that. “If you’d asked me in the middle of the *salle*, I’d’ve said yes.”

“But now?”

He could see the courage in Obi-Wan, the bravery to accept whatever truth there was. “I don’t know. It didn’t start until you started using the Force.”

Now he could see the pain, could see it being accepted and tucked away, the whole thing so neat and tidy, it wept of years of practice.

“Until I started using the Force. Well,” not quite a smile, not yet, “at least now I know how to seduce you.”

“So it would seem.”

“But until then, if you don’t mind?” Obi-Wan asked, gesturing towards the door, both of them knowing what he meant, of course.

It seemed there was precious little he could do for his padawan these days, but at least he could give Obi-Wan all the time he needed. “Consider yourself free for the rest of the day.”

“Of course, Master.”

Qui-Gon acknowledged his padawan’s sketchy bow, and watched Obi-Wan leave. Half-way through the door, his padawan turned and grinned at him.

“After all, I never have charged anyone.”

Qui-Gon gave the expected smile, kept it in place until Obi-Wan had closed the door behind himself. He sat on the settee, and wondered at his own disappointment that the desire had come through the Force from his padawan.

And then, with a look of disgust that would’ve earned him many hours of penitential duties in his own days as a padawan, he took out his meditation mat, and knelt.

## 五ヶ五ノ本ノ心

It was an even bet, which he wanted to avoid most: what he’d done today, or what he’d done all those years ago.

Unnerving, to put it mildly, that there was so little difference.

He breathed in, deeply, and slowly, so slowly, found his way to enough peace to face this.

Were both times the same? After his first sexual *débâcle*, he’d been so determined he’d never do that again, never lose control like that, never hurt someone again. It hadn’t been easy, but he’d learned to recognise that first waver in his self-control as the beginnings of desire, and he’d learned, so many hours on his knees in aching meditation, to disperse it to the Force.

He remembered his panic receding, until it had seemed almost foolish. It couldn’t have been as bad as he’d thought, he’d told himself in youthful vanity, the overweening confidence of youth bolstering him.

Passion and pride had ever been his downfall.

He’d been so certain that he’d conquered that tinge of Dark in himself. So positive, so serene in his certainty. So smug.

Standing under the heat of the shower, hands sweeping circles on his stomach, supposedly washing himself, but feeling another heat.

Kneeling on his mat now, he still remembered that feeling, remembered letting his hands go lower, lower, feeling the first daring coarseness of hair against his fingers, feeling how even his own touch made him feel heavy, there, the flesh hanging between his legs.

The man looked on his younger self, and smiled, perhaps sadly, that there hadn’t even been a name given to ‘down there.’ He’d known the words, of course, the clinical and the obscene, but one was too cold and one too crude, and those words weren’t used in his home, or his home temple.

He’d heard them used on Coruscant, of course, more of that shocking immorality, nudity and crudity and the lure of sex; the man stopped smiling, as he remembered touching himself, all those years ago, touching himself ‘down there,’ in the communal showers.

Qui-Gon could feel himself frowning, deliberately smoothed his forehead, and in his mind, he stepped back, to look at himself.

All long legs, knees and elbows, the provincial yokel with the accent that made his Basic Standard sound odd. And the master that made him an outsider, for who could relax around the padawan to not just a Council member, but Yoda himself?

The man looked at the youth he’d been, and admitted: he’d been no boy by then, not in years, anyway. An outsider, yes, but how much of that had been his own doing? He’d never known what to say,





had never had the easy social glibness that everyone else had seemed so blessed with. He'd come to the main Temple mid-year, the chosen padawan of Master Yoda, towering over his odd little master, and so painfully aware of how they must look walking down a corridor together. So painfully aware that others already had friends, and social groups, and that he was different.

And after that first fumbling attempt, he'd thrown every ounce of his being into his training. A human master might have thought that odd—for all his own vow of celibacy, he would have noticed if Obi-Wan had taken the same path, and would've questioned him, to make sure it was the right choice. But a master, regardless of species, nearly 800 years old? So many Jedi were celibate, what would seem odd that another, even one so young, had made the same choice?

As with today, he'd been thinking about that choice, all that time ago, hand on his belly, so very close to touching himself. And then someone else had touched him. Someone else had touched his rising hardness, touched him where he hadn't dared touch himself.

Someone? he mocked himself. The closest thing you had to a friend, not just 'someone.'

A hand on him, a kiss on his shoulder, a warm body pressed wetly to his back, a hardness nudging between the cheeks of his bottom, and the next thing he'd remembered was a sickening crack that had sounded like a bone breaking.

Worse than the bucket of cold water he remembered so well from his home Temple, no need for that old treatment: that sound had been enough to cool his ardour, to bring him back from the haze of lust. Not a bone, thankfully, just a practice stave cracking from the Force pouring from him, pummeling the storage closet where they were. No memory, even now, of how they'd got to that storage cupboard, but they were crammed in there, hard against each other, devouring each others' mouths, and he'd gone from contemplating perhaps maybe questioning his oath, to having lost control—again. And having used the Force to break something.

He'd run. He remembered that; remembered grabbing his clothes and shouldering into his cloak and simply running. He'd left behind—at the time, he'd thought it was a horror to equal his own, a sick fear brought on by his uncontrolled, unleashed Force. A fear to match his own, that his lust had led him far from serenity, far even from passion.

A fear, like his own, that he'd touched the Dark. Even now, he shivered.

But now, for all he'd done nothing since, he had a lifetime's knowledge to guide his eyes: he looked back, at the expression on Anan's face, and realised it wasn't fear. Disappointment. Regret. Guilt. Anger.

But not fear.

The fear had been all his own.

And now, he had Obi-Wan to look at.

Today, his padawan had regained and retained control, while he himself had lost it. Yet again, the only Dark had been his own fear. Obi-Wan had been untainted, the Force had been untainted.

Even lost in his own lust, there had been no Dark in him: there had been no hint of intent to hurt Obi-Wan, nothing more than making his mark.

Which was what the Blessing was all about: making a mark, laying claim, planting some part of oneself, and he'd been in perfect control until Obi-Wan had started to become one with the Force.

So the desire that had overcome him today was the Blessing bleeding through, after all.

He remembered Anan's disappointment, and told himself, calmly, that that was the odd mist of regret drifting through him. He was relieved that the passion had been Obi-Wan's. Yes, he was distinctly relieved.

Serenity, so rare of late, seeped through him.

He couldn't help his padawan much with this Blessing, but he could, and would, not make it any worse. He would have to filter the Force for himself, actually be aware of the Force in a new way, but he could do that, for Obi-Wan. Apart from that, he would do the only thing his padawan had asked him to do: he would do nothing, he would simply be there. A rock, an anchor, the emotional ballast Obi-Wan couldn't find anywhere else.

Serenity, yes, cool and clear, something newly treasured after its elusive absence. Something that lasted while Qui-Gon got to his feet, made himself something to eat and caught up with his mail and messages. Lasted all the way through till bedtime, when he sought his rest, and fell easily, blessedly, asleep.

### 几至昏忒

He woke suddenly, with the jolt of alertness usually reserved for their more dangerous missions. He felt a tiny tendril of hunger in his belly and mind;



allocated it a source; took his padawan's excess of lust and dissipated it into the Force.

Wondered why his padawan was shifting it to him, since Obi-Wan hadn't been doing that and anyway, his padawan was presumably in a good position—oh, don't think that, Qui-Gon Jinn, he told himself, don't think that, don't—

It took several minutes for him to control the pain from the bond, the headache receding grudgingly.

All right. So there was no reason for his padawan to be within the Force: Obi-Wan was out indulging his Blessing, so why was any of it being funneled through like this?

Lowering himself back down, the covers warm across his shoulders, the pillow soft under his cheek, he dumped the risk-alertness as quickly as he could: sleep was so often a luxury, he wasn't going to give up a single moment of it. His padawan was safe, there was nothing wrong, there was no reason for him to be awake, he should be sound asleep.

He pulled his pillow more comfortably under him and closed his eyes, determinedly settling back into the warmth of his bed and the cosiness of sleepiness. Waiting for sleep to reclaim him, he gently, unhurriedly, contemplated this bleed-through of desire, and decided there could be several reasons he'd shared that pulse of desire, although he preferred that it was nothing more than the overflow automatically seeping through the bond. Just the overflow.

He did not want to believe that it was his padawan thinking about him, nor his padawan wanting him: with Obi-Wan's controls so strong, for there to be this sort of overflow based on Obi-Wan's needs, it meant his padawan wasn't just indulging in sexual fantasies of his master. No, Obi-Wan had learned to deal with that. For Obi-Wan to break through to him like this, it would mean such a depth of feeling, of need—and so much hurt for his padawan.

He didn't want it to be that. Nor did he want it to be the beginning of an endless loop of desire being fed from the one to the other, a collusion of Force and Blessing.

And he certainly did not want it to be his padawan responding to any surge of desire on the master's part.

Not that. No.

There was the bond, Qui-Gon told himself, rubbing his face against the pillow, grumbling a little as that wasn't enough and he had to move enough to

scratch his beard properly. There was the bond. A comforting thought, lulling him back towards sleep. There was the bond, and his oath, and the unnerving loss of control earlier had been Obi-Wan's Blessing blending with the Force.

He rubbed his face against his pillow again, this time to get some of his hair out of the way. It didn't work, so he rolled over, onto his back.

That wasn't comfortable either, and now he was awake enough that he couldn't ignore his bladder, and he couldn't ignore the little crackles of alertness still jangling through the back of his mind.

And he couldn't ignore this...awareness of his padawan.

He wasn't worried, he told himself, standing at the toilet.

He wasn't worried, he repeated, in the kitchen, making tea and slathering preserved fruit on bread.

"I am not worried," he said aloud to his reflection as he looked out the window into the pattern of night-time traffic. "I'm not."

He really wasn't. Not worried, not quite, but he would admit to a tiny, trifling concern. Something just wasn't quite right. He was used to Obi-Wan being private, and the bond being deep but carefully channeled: he did it himself, after all. Most recently, he'd become used to the muddying of the bond, as if sound were muffled, as Obi-Wan had tested and perfected controls and shields. But tonight...

Tonight he found himself standing looking out the window, waiting for his padawan to come home, safe and sound, even though he knew perfectly well Obi-Wan was in no danger.

Still, it was a relief—albeit a small one, he assured himself—to hear the door open, and the clear sound of his padawan's boots on the floor.

Nothing was said to him, and he began to turn, to see—and was stopped, a gentle hand on his shoulder, stopping him from looking at his padawan. Nothing said, still, but a gentle hand on each of his shoulders now, and the pressure, faint, light, heartrendingly tentative, of a forehead being rested against the back of his neck, so little weight placed on him that it barely tightened his hair against his scalp.

"Obi-Wan," he began, and felt the rub of forehead against him, not so much telling him 'no' as asking. So he stood there, saying nothing, as Obi-Wan slowly slid his hands down and around until he was encircled in his padawan's arms; he was hugged from behind, his back tingling as Obi-Wan drank in





his presence. The Force simmered between them, shimmering from Qui-Gon to Obi-Wan, his padawan's need and hunger feeding on him. Qui-Gon waited for the headache to begin, but there was no lust in the Force this time, Obi-Wan's body seemingly sated, the need and the hunger purely of the mind, this time.

Do nothing, Obi-Wan had asked him. And 'we make do.'

He stood there, silent, simply giving, feeling Obi-Wan's sadness, feeling his own uselessness, painfully aware of what it would take to stop Obi-Wan from having to make do. To give Obi-Wan what was needed, and wanted. How little it would take, in some eyes, the eyes of those who weren't Jedi.

But there was the bond, and his oath, and he feared that the need for the oath hadn't changed.

He felt Obi-Wan sigh against his neck, stirring his long hair, the breath barely reaching his skin. More weight leaning on him now, pulling his hair painfully, but when he moved, Obi-Wan shifted, as if to let him go, hurriedly, as if ashamed, or thinking himself unwelcome. Qui-Gon took half a step backwards, tugged his hair free, Obi-Wan understanding immediately. Against his bare nape, his padawan's forehead was warm; against the top of his back, there was the scratch of Obi-Wan's stubble as the collar of his robe was nudged aside; against his skin, there was the soft whisper of breath, a wordless murmur of comfort as Obi-Wan settled more closely against him.

With Obi-Wan heavy against him, body and soul, Qui-Gon stood there, the physical weight so easy to bear.

Would it be such a high price to pay, if he could ease all of this for his padawan? The bond could inflict a terrible pain, yes, but bonds had been broken before, when the Council deemed it necessary. Even that wouldn't be enough, for there would still be an oath between them, and the reason for that oath.

As quiet as treachery came the memory of Obi-Wan, lush with sex, becoming one with the Force, the padawan a match for the master. Obi-Wan could cope with whatever Qui-Gon might try to do, surely?

And for all he'd been taught so long ago, surrendering to lust wouldn't lead to the Dark any more than a brief spark of anger would. Anger leads to suffering leads to the Dark. But this denial was leading to suffering, and even then, Obi-Wan still wouldn't fall to the Dark. Obi-Wan was wallowing in

sex, yet his padawan had never been closer to the Living Force, never purer.

Qui-Gon stilled the urge to shift again, to pace, restless as his thoughts wore away his foundations as surely as water hollowed stone.

The two people he'd tried to be with before had been padawans like himself, only a handful of years into their training. But Obi-Wan...

Control, grounding the Force, a feat most couldn't master until, well, until they were masters: it was one thing to be trained and competent with the Force, to be knights and stewards and servers of the Force, but there were few who could truly be considered masters of the Force.

Obi-Wan could well be one of them—a sunburst of pride that his padawan had actually grounded the Force!—

If he were to have the bond severed, if he were willing to break his oath—suspend it, actually, just a temporary break while he gave Obi-Wan what was needed...

He could, almost, see himself turning, lowering his head, just a few inches, touching his lips to Obi-Wan's...

The pain was slower this time, molten, flowing sluggishly through his mind.

But never mind Obi-Wan's strength of body and mind: none of that erased the harsh truth that he was Obi-Wan's master, his word was Obi-Wan's law, his guidance Obi-Wan's only map, his power absolute.

But still, still, the sadness ached behind him, soaking up his presence, the loneliness that was only now beginning to blunt, but sharp, so sharp, cuttishly painful; if he broke the bond, if he suspended his oath, it would only be for a few days, just for the duration of the Blessing, and then they would be master and padawan again.

The steady breath against the back of his neck was speeding up; he felt Obi-Wan hug him tighter, there was a shiver of movement against his hips and a sliver of unbearable loneliness cutting through Obi-Wan's shields, gutting him.

Qui-Gon made a choice, the Council and the Code and his own pain and the future be damned. He reached for Obi-Wan's hands, and he couldn't be sure if his padawan had misunderstood his small movement, or if it were simple coincidence that his padawan chose that moment to move.

"Thank you, Master," he heard again, as he had so many times since this began, whispered this time against his neck, with another, fainter whisper as





Obi-Wan's hands slid away from him, letting him go. Almost hidden, the briefest, tiniest brush of lips against his nape. It shocked him, that chaste little caress, the emotion of it burning hotter than any bond-induced pain.

He'd known his padawan loved him; knew that Obi-Wan, the raw core of the man himself, loved him. But he *felt* it, in that one tiny kiss.

Qui-Gon turned then, and saw Obi-Wan turning, too, into his room; saw then, too, the curving desire beginning to fill the front of Obi-Wan's civilian trousers before the bedroom door slid shut.

He stood there for a moment, until wry amusement at his own behaviour struck him, and he could hear Obi-Wan's 'communing with the door' comment all over again.

If his padawan hadn't turned away from him, would they be in that bedroom together? Entwined on Obi-Wan's big bed? Would they have gone between the sheets or simply fallen atop the bedspread, clothes tugged open just far enough for what Obi-Wan needed?

He had nearly broken his oath, and violated the bond.

It seemed wise, with Obi-Wan in his own bedroom, such a short distance away from Qui-Gon's own, to seek one of the small meditation rooms on the lower levels.

He sat down on the sand, barefoot, legs crossed comfortably in the familiar, soothing position. Using only the Force, he moved the round rocks, smoothed or patterned the sand as his instincts told him, until all was perfectly serene.

It had been how many years, since he'd had to come here to meditate? He could, as Obi-Wan was fond of saying, meditate in the middle of an active volcano, but for tonight, it was easier, to be down here.

Far away from Obi-Wan, and what Obi-Wan was no doubt doing in the privacy of his own bedroom, in his own bed, dark blue blanket and off-white sheets, a bed big enough for Obi-Wan to sprawl in, a bed big enough to accommodate Obi-Wan and one of his companions, but Obi-Wan would be alone tonight, lying on his back, probably, his hand moving beneath the blanket.

The image was too clear to be just imagination.

He tested the Force, and could feel Obi-Wan, there, just on the perimeter of his awareness. Qui-Gon began to partition off that part of his awareness, but something caught his mind's attention, bringing him back. There was lust, yes, but it was all woven

around and bound with the tenderness of that one small kiss.

Qui-Gon had never sensed anything so beautiful in all his years of wandering. This connection through the Force had to be coming from Obi-Wan, almost certainly against Obi-Wan's will, sneaking out from behind his shields. Or perhaps it was simply the strength of Obi-Wan's emotions and passion, or the intensity of his focus, and Qui-Gon's own connection with the Force.

But there it was; non-visual, but still 'seen,' so clearly in Qui-Gon's mind. He centred himself, focused inwards, to break this connection.

Instead, will he or nill he, some part of his awareness crept closer, tentative, for all the world like a whipped puppy expecting another kick.

Idiot, he scolded himself, pulling back a little.

Focus. Inwards.

And tiptoe off once more to Obi-Wan.

No.

Focus.

Inward.

He had as much hope as iron had of resisting a lodestone.

Be like that, he muttered to his own recalcitrant instincts. If you're that obsessed with Obi-Wan then go on, look.

It wasn't looking that was drawing him. It was to bask in the love shaped like him. It cocooned him, touched him deeper than he could imagine possible. He didn't want to leave; he reached out, to the connection in the Force—

And would've fallen if he hadn't already been sitting down.

Obi-Wan, it seemed, had just noticed the crack in his shields.

Quite incredibly strong shields at that—far beyond anything even the hardest taskmaster could dream of from a padawan.

Qui-Gon pressed lightly, a finger touch on the bruise in the Force where Obi-Wan had slammed everything so tightly shut. Tender, not quite painful, more that awful moment just as numbness threatened to wear off and the full impact of injury was about to hit.

He pressed again, paying close attention. That certainly explained the bruised tenderness: Obi-Wan was compressing the bond, unable to cut it, of course, but stomping on it. Hard.

Well, they'd never had the most standard of bonds anyway.







Still, he'd have to mention this, to Healers and Council both. There were too many things Obi-Wan was doing too well to ignore: Obi-Wan was closer to knighthood than anyone had anticipated, it was time to decide what Obi-Wan's trials would be. Once more, Qui-Gon tested the Force around him, and found only the gentlest echoes of Obi-Wan.

He'd evaded the issue for as long as he could, happily distracted in Obi-Wan's love and his padawan's accomplishments. Time now, to think, again. About this evening, and his willingness to set aside his oath.

Altruism, or his own desires, disguised?

Or simply Obi-Wan's nascent arousal seeping out into the Force again?

It was so clear and plain and simple: he felt desire when Obi-Wan mingled with the Force.

And yet, and yet...

He wanted to want.

He wanted to feel desire the way Obi-Wan did, to revel in the Force and rejoice. He wanted to be able to embrace desire with the exuberance of Obi-Wan's excitement, he wanted to be able to let go and simply feel.

There is no passion, there is serenity.

But Obi-Wan's passion was what led to serenity. And a lack of passion, a lack of consummation, was leading to coiled misery in his poor padawan.

Still, they were not the same person: Obi-Wan had never hurt someone and Obi-Wan's one major failing had always been his inability to blend with the Force. He, on the other hand...

But he wanted to want. He wanted it to be as simple and joyful as Obi-Wan had anticipated.

He wanted, he realised with a stab of shock, to make Obi-Wan happy.

Oh no, enough was enough, he'd deal with sex and lust and loneliness, he wasn't going to start poking and prodding like a bloody Healer at a perfectly platonic and innocent urge to do what was best for his padawan. Of course he wanted to make Obi-Wan happy: he was a Jedi, apart from anything else, he certainly wouldn't want to do anything to cause hurt or harm to anyone, now would he?

Nothing at all hidden or wrong with a simple concern for one's padawan. Perfectly natural, to want to make an unhappy friend happy.

And that, he decided, cleared everything up nicely, and he got to his feet, not even noticing the sand and rocks scattered by his hasty departure.

## 巾中沢凡本凡巾

His padawan had already left for the day, a message left flashing on Qui-Gon's computer. A routine message, the details of Obi-Wan's schedule, the whens and wheres that would allow a master to find a padawan if needed. The normal hectic routine for Obi-Wan, who spent so much of his time out in the field, classes and assessments had to be crammed in whenever possible.

A routine schedule, a routine list, apart from that one final word.

Sorry.

Nothing else, not that Qui-Gon needed any help working out what Obi-Wan was apologising for. Again. He was growing heartily sick of that word. Especially since it should be coming from him at least as often as from his padawan.

Well, there was still work to be done; he would see Obi-Wan later, and they could both endure another of the dreaded talks.

## 几巾巾几

Qui-Gon was immersed in the differences between saying the same word with one of seven different tonal intonations (the third one being enough to get a person either raped or arrested, depending on the rank and gender of the person to whom it was said) when he felt Obi-Wan's presence.

He swiveled round on his chair, pulling the headset off, the teaching programme buzzing tinnily through the earpieces.

"I brought us both something," Obi-Wan smiled at him, lifting the tray a little in display. "I had a feeling it'd be better than going to the refectory."

He really hated having talks. Really, really hated it. But they were going to have to: he knew it, Obi-Wan knew it, and Obi-Wan had even brought food to sustain them through it. He smiled at his padawan, and went to fetch drinks. "I think we'll eat first."

So they did, and they spoke lightly, easily, of mundane things, the small daily details that were suddenly precious, even Obi-Wan telling him a small tale of yet another of his friend's mishaps.

"Which meant, of course, that when he added the bromothymol, which is supposed to be inert..."

Qui-Gon finished for him: "There was yet another minor explosion in the chemistry labs."

Obi-Wan laughing, with him, Qui-Gon tucking



the memory away to be savoured later, unable to resist tucking a little happiness away in case he needed it later. He smiled again at his padawan. "I'm sure the master was delighted to have another explosion."

"At least it was very minor," Obi-Wan replied, taking another slice of bread. "It was actually rather nice."

"That smell was *nice*?"

"Not the smell. But that it was so normal. Almost reassuring."

Oh damn. So much for having lunch before the damned talk was inflicted upon them. "Are things changing so very much for you?"

His padawan's movements and expression were very studied, stinking faintly of rehearsal, as Obi-Wan settled himself to talk, cup in hand. "I've been giving some thought to what happened yesterday, Master."

"I think I want to be comfortable for this," Qui-Gon said, getting to his feet. "Leave the mess—it'll still be there later."

He settled himself on the settee; looked at the expression on his padawan's face, sighed, and took his boots off. "Well," he said in response to Obi-Wan's reaction, "this isn't going to be quick, is it?"

Obi-Wan gave a snort of laughter. "It'll have to be—I have a tutoring session later."

"Then I suppose that means we'll have to get on with it."

The first sign of unease, his padawan rubbing his hands along his thighs. "I wasn't aware my shields weren't working."

"But as soon as you realised, you slammed them shut."

A faint stirring of unease, as Obi-Wan frowned at him, obviously puzzled. "No, I didn't. We were sparring—"

"So not last night?"

Obi-Wan was looking at him oddly: quite justifiable, really, Qui-Gon admitted. Here Qui-Gon was talking about last night which obviously hadn't been anything at all to Obi-Wan—what was it like, for sex to be so normal, so routine as to not be carved in memory?—while his padawan was thinking about the not-so-minor display he'd put on yesterday.

Cautiously, Obi-Wan asked him, sounding as if, perhaps, he was repeating the question: "What happened last night?"

"You were..." Oh come on, Qui-Gon chided himself, you've been thinking about violating the

master-padawan bond, you've said the word out loud to him, and you're blushing like a—a—yes, well, he was, to all intents and purposes, a virgin, so he supposed he was entitled to blush and dither like one.

"I was masturbating," Obi-Wan said for him.

"Yes. Thinking about me."

He watched as Obi-Wan fidgeted, glanced up at him. "You said that was all right."

Damn. "I wasn't complaining or criticising," he said quickly. "But you were thinking about me, and when you're—" 'having sex' didn't sound quite right for just masturbation, not when he thought about what Obi-Wan had been doing recently, "aroused, you seem to be part of the Living Force."

"And you're always in touch with it, so..."

"Exactly. Last night, when you weren't distracted by anyone else being there, the connection was...stronger."

Obi-Wan sighed harshly, annoyance on display. "Sorry," he said, again, and Qui-Gon wanted to surgically remove the word from his padawan's vocabulary. "I hadn't planned on that."

"Even if you had, you wouldn't have to apologise." Slowly, then tasting the truth of his words as they passed through his mouth, "and not only because I gave you permission."

He could feel the impact of those words hitting home; could feel the flurry of hope so quickly tamped down. "Tell me about last night, when you came home."

He watched Obi-Wan look away and gather himself before his padawan was willing to look back. "I needed that from you. It's all right, I'm not going to ask you for sex, but I just needed..." Obi-Wan's words drifted off into a stiff-shouldered, embarrassed shrug.

"You needed the other part of the Blessing."

"It'd be easier if it were just sex," Obi-Wan said, soft as a kiss. "I could just go out and fuck my way through this. But it's hormonal so it affects the brain as much as the body."

"And it's about planting your seed. Even the sex isn't entirely simple." Qui-Gon paused for a moment, reluctant to say out loud a truth they neither one of them wanted to face. "Because you're in love with me, the Blessing can't be fulfilled by sex with strangers."

His padawan assayed a cheerful grin, even if his eyes gave lie to the uncomplicated cheerfulness. "But you have to admit, I really have tried."



“Repeatedly.”

“Well, if a man can’t have quality,” Obi-Wan replied, making fun of making do, “he can at least enjoy the quantity.”

“If I were to…”

“Don’t, Master,” whispered so gently at him. “You can’t, you won’t, and right now, it’s been too long since my last,” a quick flash of a smile, “encounter with quantity for you to be taunting me with what I can’t have.”

And that stung, badly, hurting him more than he’d expected. “I’m not taunting you!”

An easy shrug, although Qui-Gon could see the tension beginning in his padawan’s body. “Teasing me then,” Obi-Wan said. “You no more intend to get me started than I mean to affect you. Look, can we get back to the point? I have classes and I’ll need to—”

“Quantity.” Qui-Gon heard it in his own voice: the self-righteous echo of his youth.

Obi-Wan’s gaze was very level, and Qui-Gon felt its reproach. “You don’t mind what I did last night, but you could sense me even though my shields were up. Yesterday,” and Qui-Gon wanted to fidget, to discover a forgotten Council hearing that required his presence right now this very instant, any excuse to leave here as fast as he could, “you came at me with your ‘sabre as if you were going to fuck me with it. So.”

He was the master; he should be the one guiding this conversation, sorting all of this out, but he sat there, and let Obi-Wan deal with it.

“So both happened *after* I started merging with the Force?”

“Yes.”

He felt his padawan’s gaze upon him, and opened himself, just a little. Just enough for Obi-Wan to see that one layer of truth. As for the rest? Well, there was no need to taunt his padawan, was there?

“And for me, the sex is doing wonders for the physical aspect of the Blessing, but the only mental comfort I have is when I’m in the Force.”

*With you.*

Obi-Wan didn’t need to say that; Qui-Gon could hear it quite loudly enough.

“I could,” very slowly, his accent making the words suddenly thick in his mouth, “request the Council to suspend the bond for a while.”

Not the reaction he’d expected: Obi-Wan’s mouth half open in the broadest, most open of grins, a delighted—and entirely delightful—giggle spilling

forth. “It’d be almost worth it just to see their faces! Can you imagine Master Windu having to talk about sex?”

That wasn’t a topic Qui-Gon wanted to go within ten parsecs of. “Almost worth it?”

Very kindly, as if to a slightly slow infant: “I would have you for a very short time, and then I’d lose you, but still have to stay at your side.”

“And?”

The rest of it, not quite so slowly this time and far less kindly. “I don’t want your pity.”

Ah. Pride. No—he paid attention; did as Obi-Wan had instructed him, and used his imagination. A bit of pride, which was only to be expected and they could work on such an inappropriate selfness later. A lot of hurt, too, the pain it would bring to seek someone in love but to be met with only pity and a master’s fondness.

There was an answer pummeling at the back of Qui-Gon’s mind, but he had quite enough to deal with at the moment, he decided. “Then if that won’t help you, what would? You’re not the first T’chitar this’s happened to, so what would you do if you went home?”

“If I were at home?” Surprise in that, as if the possibility hadn’t occurred to Obi-Wan. “My family would be there, and usually, we’d expect that intense emotional bond could carry me through.”

“So when you came in last night, and leaned on me, that helped?”

“Of course it did—even if I weren’t in love with you, I do love you. So being with you like that helps balance the chemistry the Blessing’s hormones bugger up.”

His padawan was fidgeting again. Qui-Gon braced himself for another something to deal with.

“If I’m to be honest,” Obi-Wan began, as Qui-Gon conceded that honesty amongst Jedi was a vastly over-rated virtue, “I’m closer to you than to anyone else in my family—even without being in love with you, I think I get more mental comfort from you than they could give me. After all, I’m not my brother Owen.”

An old joke between them, that, and Qui-Gon smiled dutifully, while thinking, closer than his family?

“Last night really helped—I actually got quite a bit of sleep. But I’ll try not to do that to you too often.”

“Why not?”

The extreme gentleness was back, and Qui-Gon finally recognised it as the tenderness usually kept so



carefully hidden. “Because it makes it easier for me, but harder for you.”

Very dryly, Qui-Gon said, “I can cope, you know.”

He was given a smile that could only be described as downright sappy, enough to make Qui-Gon wonder if Obi-Wan realised how much his controls were slipping.

“I know you can. But I don’t want you to just cope. I want... I knew I’d no chance of outgrowing this when I realised I’d rather see you happy than see you with me. So I don’t want to do anything that’s going to make you just cope.”

He found himself fidgeting like a boy, glanced up, caught the warmth in Obi-Wan’s smile; decided not to exert control over his anxious fingers. He played with the nubby texture of his clothes, running the edge of a fingernail over the small bumps, uncomfortably aware this old habit of his would look like Obi-Wan’s. Wondered, for a moment, if this were another bleed-through. “It does make it more difficult for me,” he said finally. “But I confess...” Looking up, meeting Obi-Wan’s gaze, trying to borrow courage enough from the approval he saw there. “I find that I’m not quite as loathe to experience your desire.”

A pause, neither one of them drawing a breath, just for a second, two, three. Then: “And my own.”

The world didn’t end. The Dark didn’t leap out and devour him whole. What did happen was that Obi-Wan sat there and stared at him as if he’d grown an extra head or three.

“Master?”

The moment was entirely too fraught and Obi-Wan’s voice had broken like an adolescent’s, and Qui-Gon could feel the entirely too inappropriate laughter bubble threateningly inside. He was a Jedi master, he had better control than this.

But Obi-Wan was staring at him, mouth working as he tried to find something to say, and it was funny to see his urbane, sexually sophisticated Obi-Wan at a loss for words over the mere mention of desire. Plus, he’d said it. He’d admitted it. And the Force was still there and the Dark was still elsewhere. “I feel foolish,” he said, knowing he was grinning. “And I don’t know how much of this is coming from me or from you, but it’s—”

“If you say ‘liberating,’” Obi-Wan told him quietly, still looking at him as if there entirely too many heads sprouting from his neck, “I shall have to hit you.”

“Then I shan’t say it.”

The shock was obviously wearing off, his

padawan looking at him thoughtfully. Thoughtfulness shifting to speculative. Speculation blending into something else, a banked heat that curled and undulated around Obi-Wan. “Obviously, I have ulterior motives for persuading you that sex isn’t a bad thing,” Obi-Wan said, probably unaware of just how husky his voice had become. “Perhaps,” Obi-Wan grinned, wicked and alluring, “a practical, hands-on demonstration would be the best course of action?”

And that had Qui-Gon up and off that settee faster than thought. He paced quickly over to the window, running a hand down the back of his hair—where Obi-Wan had rested his forehead, where Obi-Wan had kissed him with a wealth of tenderness—and stood looking up at the bright sky and the shifting mass of traffic.

“Sor—”

“Don’t even think about it,” Qui-Gon growled, turning on his heel to face his padawan. “Don’t apologise. It’s not your fault, it’s not mine, it just— Force, what kind of master am I? You’re in your Blessing and I’m behaving—”

Obi-Wan interrupting him, just as harshly. “Like a man forced into sex. It’s happened again.”

Qui-Gon stepped closer, reluctant, but he had to see more clearly.

“I wanted you, I was sitting there, *wanting* you, and—” a helpless gesture of Obi-Wan’s hand. “It happened again. You only want me when I corrupt the Force around you.”

“Don’t—” the last few strides Force-enhanced and he hadn’t even intended that, nor had he planned on grabbing Obi-Wan by the chin, holding too tight, giving no quarter, no option but for Obi-Wan to look up at him, to look right up into his eyes. “Never, ever say that you corrupt the Force, Obi-Wan. Only the Dark corrupts it.”

“But you don’t want desire. Unless I’m filling the Force with mine.”

He realised he wasn’t holding Obi-Wan’s chin any more, but caressing it, letting his thumb slide higher until it was almost touching Obi-Wan’s lips. He let go then, tucked his hands into his sleeves where they couldn’t complicate matters. Where they couldn’t confuse him by wanting to do what his mind was still running away from.

Obi-Wan was right; he hadn’t wanted until Obi-Wan had wanted. And the first hint of real sex and he’d run: not quite what you’d expect from a man willing to embrace desire. “It could be coming from



you," he said, trying not to add to Obi-Wan's hurt. "Or perhaps it's letting me see things completely differently. Freeing things I'd trapped for the wrong reasons."

Obi-Wan shook his head mutely, and Qui-Gon had a horrible sinking feeling that it was because his padawan couldn't trust his voice.

"It could be," Qui-Gon said. "I think, perhaps, that your desire is my excuse."

Another mute headshake, and yes, Obi-Wan's voice was rough, unsteady. "I deserve better than pity and we're both worth more than my damned Blessing corrupting you."

"I told you not to use that word."

"This isn't between us as master and padawan, I'm not going to obey your every word on this." Deep breath, both of them, breathing in unison, the Force an odd flickering ache between them. "And can you tell me, honestly, no tricks, no obfuscation, none of that fucking nonsense that you don't see any corruption in this?"

Before he could answer, Obi-Wan's voice hammering on, gaze sharp as a scalpel, "Can you honestly tell me you don't think there's something just a little immoral, a little *corrupted* about all the people I've been fucking? Can you?"

He couldn't lie: he'd heard it himself, and so had Obi-Wan. "It's not immoral for you, but it would be for me and your sexuality is all tied up with this for me—"

"My point exactly," Obi-Wan said with a sudden calmness that chilled Qui-Gon to the bone. "I have a class I'm late for."

A perfectly polite little bow, although it was a miracle the tension in Obi-Wan didn't make his vertebrae crunch into dust.

The door shut, and yet again, Qui-Gon found himself staring at it.

Well, he thought rather venomously to himself, that went well.

### 五ノ五ノ五ノ五ノ五

He'd done half a list of things and finally mastered the eleven tonal variations for one vowel; there were times when the diphthongs of his own accent actually came in useful. Ironic, really, that it took being upset to bring out his accent so strongly it had finally cracked the intonation problem for him.

He glanced at the time display on his computer;

he didn't need to check Obi-Wan's schedule to know that his padawan still had another hour or more before the last class was over.

Leaden, Qui-Gon got up and went over to where his mediation mat lay on the floor.

He stood there and looked at it.

He was a Jedi master, he should meditate. That, after all, is what Jedi did. Acolyte to initiate to padawan to knight to master, Jedi meditated. Sorted out their problems. Looked at things clearly and dispassionately. There is no passion, there is serenity; anger leads to suffering leads to pain leads to the Dark Side; release your feelings into the Force.

Didn't seem to be doing much good when Obi-Wan released *his* feelings into the Force.

But still, after the dyspeptic conversation after lunch, he really ought to meditate.

He put his hands on his hips and stood there, staring at his meditation mat. It didn't look any better than it had a couple of moments before.

Meditate. Take today apart, dissect it. Dissect Obi-Wan, dissect himself.

And for what? he wondered, mutinously. So he could realise he didn't know if he truly wanted Obi-Wan or if it were Obi-Wan's influencing the Force? So he could recognise that he wanted to want Obi-Wan but was scared to death what giving into passion would do to his connection with the Force? That for all he was supposedly a powerful Jedi master and an iconoclast to boot, he was having trouble shaking the influences of his past? To have to kneel there and admit that somewhere, hidden away deep inside, that once he'd made his great pronouncement of desire, he'd expected Obi-Wan to fall at his feet with gratitude?

Oh, he didn't need to meditate to understand any of that. And look how far meditation had got him up to now.

"Waste of bloody time," he muttered, turning on his heel and leaving his meditation mat behind.

He was going to *do* something.

For their sakes, he hoped the Council had had an easy day, because he was about to give them all a headache.

### 几五廿廿七

It was very late when his padawan came home. Qui-Gon wasn't even pretending to be doing anything other than waiting up for Obi-Wan, but the





only response he got was a polite bow and a serene, “I’m making some supper, would you care for some, Master?”

This wasn’t what he’d expected either. Feeling uncommonly unsure of himself, he followed his padawan into the kitchen. There were no marks of sex, no rumpled clothing or messed hair. In fact, if Qui-Gon hadn’t known better, he’d have assumed his padawan had spent the evening in sedate meditation.

Surely not?

“Did you...go out this evening?” he asked delicately, treading carefully around this strangely distant Obi-Wan.

“Yes, Master. I’m sorry—”

And was that apology a deliberate barb, delivered with flawless irreproachability?

“I should have checked with you, rather than assuming that your previous permissions stood.”

“Unless you have duties, you’re free to do as you please in your down-time.”

“Thank you, Master.”

Qui-Gon propped a hip against a countertop, watched uneasily as this puzzlement moved around, making a simple snack.

“I can’t sense you at all.”

“Good!” Obi-Wan said cheerfully. “I’m pleased that technique works. I won’t intrude upon you again, Master.”

But I rather liked being intruded upon, he thought before he could stop himself. Bad as a spoiled child, he chided himself: wanting something if only because it’s been taken away. “I told you, I don’t mind. And it helps you.”

“The emotional closeness helps me,” Obi-Wan corrected quickly, and was that an edge of sharpness? “The sexual intrusion doesn’t help either of us.”

Qui-Gon’s eyes narrowed, and he noticed the tiny, tiny jerk of his padawan’s hands. So either the talk of sex was getting to Obi-Wan or it’d been a flat-out lie to claim the sexual connection through the Force didn’t help. “Don’t lie to me, Padawan,” he said silkily.

And Obi-Wan obviously heard the threat in that dulcet tone. “You said—”

And there it was, the crack in the façade.

—that you wouldn’t make this harder for me.”

The satisfaction turned to ashes, clogging his throat. “Is that what I’m doing?”

No lying this time. Brutal, painful honesty, stealing all the colour from Obi-Wan’s face.

A master shouldn’t find it this difficult to dredge

up full control. Slowly, he straightened, and bowed, formally, to his padawan. “My apologies. Until you ask otherwise, I’ll do nothing.”

And it shamed him, to hear the fervent relief in Obi-Wan’s simple “Thank you.”

Supper was the most peculiar, uncomfortable meal he could remember in a lifetime of peculiar, uncomfortable meals. This was worse than any diplomatic minefield, because this was personal. Intensely personal. Yet here they were, pretending there was nothing personal going on. As if there weren’t a personal history between them.

It was a parody of lunchtime, a melancholic reminder that he’d been right to store away the easy happiness of Obi-Wan’s laughter.

They ate supper together, cleared up together, said their goodnights, a repetition of hundreds of evenings on dozens of worlds. Different though.

Qui-Gon’s fingers itched to reach out, to recapture what he hadn’t even felt slip through his fingers.

He almost called Obi-Wan back, but the memory of Obi-Wan’s fragile distance stopped him.

This wasn’t something he could kiss and make better. All he could do was keep his promise not to make it any worse, and to do nothing.

He lay in bed, awake, and wondered if he should even tell Obi-Wan what the Council had said.

### 巾Φ沢ノ玉ノ心

At least the brittle distance had eased somewhat, Obi-Wan greeting him with a slightly abashed smile and no bow.

And that, it seemed, was it. They had a perfectly normal, only slightly strained conversation about what each of them had to do that day. Obi-Wan didn’t mention the night before, and Qui-Gon didn’t mention the Council’s refusal to suspend the bond.

Neither of them mentioned the walls around Obi-Wan. Neither of them mentioned the careful way they were thoughtful of each other. Neither mentioned they way they’d steal glances when they thought the other wasn’t looking.

It wasn’t as peculiar as supper had been, but it was close enough to normal that they could pretend, if they wanted. It seemed, Qui-Gon thought, leaning back in his chair and sneaking a look as his padawan got himself more fruit juice, that Obi-Wan wanted to pretend.

So be it.





They would pretend, for a little while anyway, and see how things went. Not quite what the Council had in mind to sort this out, but Obi-Wan was Qui-Gon's padawan, not the Council's, and he was the one who'd decide what was right for Obi-Wan. He'd answered to the Council before, he could answer to them again. Especially when he could make half of them squirm with one bluntly honest description of the situation.

Once his padawan (and he himself, he added honestly) had settled down and they didn't need to pretend or indeed, when this was nothing more than an embarrassing memory, he would tell Obi-Wan all about his Council meeting, and what colour Master Yoda turns when he blushes.

### 五ノ五ノ五ノ五ノ五

It was supposed to be over by now. A discreet word with the Healers confirmed that; an even more discreet chat with the Senator from T'chtar had told him a great deal about her two sons, her husband, and the expectations of half the population of her world. It should definitely be over.

But there was Obi-Wan still, smiling at him, winking at him, bright and cheerful, grabbing another snack on his way out the door. It was, all in all, Qui-Gon thought as he settled himself down to watch a holo, a very convincing performance, even to someone who knew all about the pretense.

They'd settled into a routine these last few days, as Qui-Gon finished his preparations for being Justice at the War Crimes Tribunal and Obi-Wan finished an impressive slew of classes and courses. Perfectly normal, or so it would seem to anyone else. Even the Council had been placated by Obi-Wan's calmness and flawless behaviour; the Healers had obviously believed Qui-Gon's 'idle curiosity' about general facts regarding the T'chtar Blessing. He started the holo, waiting a second while it found the scene he'd been watching before Obi-Wan had borrowed it.

Oh yes, a normal, mundane routine, with everyone thinking Obi-Wan's Blessing was over, while Qui-Gon watched his padawan slip out in the evenings with that wink and that smile. But these last evenings, the strain was showing, creeping in around the edges of Obi-Wan's smile, tightening his eyes, stiffening his spine. It really should've been over by now. Instead, his padawan had shut him out, had put up barriers nothing could escape, and for all they

looked so much like their usual close, comfortable master-padawan pair, Qui-Gon felt like an orphan on the doorstep.

It hadn't helped that his mother had sent him a holo asking when he was next coming home, since it had been so long and neither she nor his father were getting any younger. He couldn't help but remember details, and that couldn't help but make him think about things he'd much rather pretend didn't exist.

He told himself it was ridiculous to feel hurt just because Obi-Wan was getting on with life without him. Even more ridiculous to feel slighted because his experienced, casual, oh so sexually sanguine padawan had declined to take him in hand and take all the sexual responsibility for him. No, it seemed Obi-Wan was leaving him to come to his own decisions on all of this. Or that Obi-Wan was truly convinced that any sexual desire on Qui-Gon's part was nothing more than the influence of Obi-Wan's own lust on the Living Force around them.

The worst of it was, Qui-Gon couldn't be sure.

Damned bond.

Either the pain from it had finally trained him to avoid carnal thoughts about his padawan, or it really had been all from Obi-Wan. Or it had been Obi-Wan's desire that set his own free. Not that he could feel even the faintest hint of Obi-Wan's Blessing any more.

He knew Obi-Wan was still in his Blessing; not from anything through the Force, but simply from his padawan's nightly disappearance and that too-chirpy wink and smile leave-taking.

We make do, Obi-Wan had told him. Making do, it seemed, was taking far longer than anyone had expected. And was taking a far greater toll than anticipated.

A toll he was in no position to pay: Obi-Wan had made that quite clear. Qui-Gon took another drink of ale, turned his attention back to his holo and tried to think about nothing much at all. And most determinedly, to think not at all about the misery he thought was hiding behind those winks and those smiles and all these hours of pretending.

A noise disturbed him, so that he woke with a start, surprised at himself: a sign of his own stress, that he'd dozed off watching a holo. And while he had few delusions of his masterly image with his padawan, it would never do to be caught bedraggled and half-asleep on the couch, waiting up for a grown man. He hurried to the window, looking out just as



the main door closed and his padawan's footsteps came closer.

He heard Obi-Wan hesitate; heard the footsteps stop just inside the door.

Come to me, he thought, helpless, trapped in doing nothing.

The footsteps resumed, heading off to the side, where Obi-Wan's room lay.

"Please," Qui-Gon heard himself whisper.

And there it was: a whisper in return, the mistiest trace of emotion from Obi-Wan.

The sound of someone walking slowly, as quietly as they could in boots. The susurrations of clothing moving, and the sigh of breath against his hair.

The first moment of contact, and a jolt running through him, as if a limb had been lost and reattached. The ache left him, and he relaxed, tension dropping down his spine, dissipating through him into the floor.

He waited till arms crept around him, stealing a hug; only then did he wrap his own arms around Obi-Wan. He stood there, feeling comfortable for the first time in days, Obi-Wan's arms around him, his own arms resting on top of Obi-Wan's, his hands feeling the warmth of Obi-Wan's under his palms.

He breathed out, the last of the tension leaving him, and he closed his eyes, content for the moment. No weight pulling his hair this time; as he welcomed Obi-Wan's embrace, he felt his hair pushed clumsily aside.

He smiled then, reached around and pulled his hair out of the way. Obi-Wan's face smiled against his nape, the bristle of stubble prickling him, the curve of the smile soothing him.

Making do. They were both making do, Obi-Wan with his long list of strangers, Qui-Gon with this mere physical presence where his sense of Obi-Wan should be. It was better than nothing, he reminded himself, refusing to allow himself to miss the other time Obi-Wan had done this, the tingling exchange of Force and feeling between them. Obi-Wan had barriers now, better than any Qui-Gon had ever seen in anyone other than a master. Necessity, his mother would say, was the mother of invention. Or the mother of mastery.

There was no Force between them; time to rely on words. "Are you all right?"

There was no answer for a while, the silence stretching thin and wan between them. Qui-Gon settled more deeply into Obi-Wan's embrace, doing nothing as requested, but still, he could no more cut

himself off from the Living Force than he could stop breathing. He was sending out waves of comfort, of home, of belonging, knowing that those would sate Obi-Wan's mind the way the sex sated his body.

Then, when he no longer expected anything other than Obi-Wan to pull away and separate them again, Obi-Wan answered him.

"I'm so lonely," the words whispered against his neck. "I feel so hollow. I even tried letting someone fuck me tonight, and it didn't work—the Blessing's about planting, not reaping. But I was so empty." A soft gust of self-mocking laughter, and strong arms tightening around him. "I've fucked myself dry—" even now, Obi-Wan was offering reassurances and promises. "I think I'd have to put a stick down it to get it up again," another breath of laughter as Qui-Gon winced involuntarily, "so my body's perfectly happy. But me..."

It was only the tiniest of chinks, letting out only the thinnest blade of all the melancholic misery dammed up behind those high walls surrounding Obi-Wan. Only the tiniest amount, and even that hurt, beyond words, beyond comfort.

This time, he ignored Obi-Wan's protests, and turned around, wrapping his arms around his padawan, holding tight, hugging so hard he knew he must be hurting Obi-Wan, if only a little. But he needed to do this, perhaps more than Obi-Wan needed to feel it. He held on, held on tight, and engulfed Obi-Wan in all the warmth and love he possessed. Wrapped him up in it, cuddled him, cradled him, and wanted to do more.

More.

He felt desire, low in his belly, the blood beginning to flow, to gorge itself on his flesh. A startled sound, and a startlement of movement, Obi-Wan looking at him with the choicest expression, a rueful mixture of shock, joy, dismay and sheer amusement.

"Oh, Master," Obi-Wan said, stepping back, "you really pick your moments. I thought I was safely limp and you..."

But at least there was genuine warmth in the eyes looking at him, something other than the controlled friendliness that had starved him so these last few days. And at least there was comfort being taken, and Obi-Wan letting him help.

"I spoke to the Council days ago," Qui-Gon said, even as Obi-Wan sat on the settee and began taking off boots and cloak.

Obi-Wan gave him a questioning look. "They refused to suspend the bond."



"Oh, I'm truly shocked."

"They were concerned about undue influence."

Qui-Gon's response to that had been to think 'stupid bastards,' but Obi-Wan simply nodded, agreeing. "I can see their point. I've been fixated on you for years and—"

"No, not me influencing you."

"Oh. The incident in the gymnasium?"

"That had something to do with it."

"I can't really blame them."

Qui-Gon had no such difficulty. "I can."

"Oh come on! It's *my* desire getting into the Force that starts you! It just happened again, in case you hadn't noticed."

"Your desire," Qui-Gon chose his words carefully, "triggers my response. We don't know if it is the sole cause."

He could see and hear the weary defeat in Obi-Wan. "But it certainly seems likely. I don't want false hope." A very clear, level-headed look aimed at Qui-Gon. "Anyway, regardless of anything else, there is still the bond. And your oath."

"I've been—"

"No."

That flat, harsh denial stopped Qui-Gon in his tracks.

"I'm tired, and I just don't want to talk about it any more."

"But—"

"No. We talk about it, and we talk about it, we go round in circles and we're still not there. And I'm tired."

This was, supposedly, about his padawan; about Obi-Wan and his Blessing, not himself.

"Very well," he said, withdrawing into himself as Obi-Wan had, needing the protection of distance. "If that's what you want."

"What I want, I can't have," words dragged out as wearily as body was dragged up, boots and cloak left puddled beside the settee. "So until the Universe rearranges itself according to my whim, I will make do. And right now, I'm going to bed."

Alone.

Unspoken, probably even unthought by Obi-Wan, but Qui-Gon could feel the guilt of it. Alone. Shoulders bowed, and a confession of loneliness.

He should, no doubt, be generous and understanding. But all he could think was why the Force Obi-Wan had chosen tonight to be a fool. What Obi-Wan wanted had been all-but handed to him, and the fool had refused.

Qui-Gon was really looking forward to this damned Blessing being over.

## 几平与七七

Qui-Gon woke up mid-thrust, his cock pushing into the softness of the feather bed, balls tight and heavy with lust, his mind full of nothing but pleasure and Obi-Wan. Awareness dawned as fast as the shock of that hit him, whisking his breath out of his lungs. He choked for breath and then the headache hit him, vicious and cruel, ripping his erection away, a painful wrenching pull inside, his flesh suddenly limp, dejected.

He half-knelt, half-lay there, an awkward position, his back bowed and bent with agony and defeat, his penis a pathetic bit of soft flesh, skin hanging loosely at the tip, his testicles low, but heavy, feeling hot with the lingering aftermath of his near orgasm.

Well, he was pretty sure he'd been near orgasm; everything he'd read and seen told him that, and his body, oh, his body was screaming at him for cheating it.

Of course, if he had any doubts as to how close he'd been to orgasm, he could always go and ask Obi-Wan.

If Jedi were supposed to bet, he'd wager Obi-Wan had just masturbated himself to another climax built around his master.

Sith, he'd bet anyway, every credit in the Order's coffers, and he'd win. If he were to go to Obi-Wan's room right now, he'd find him...

Lonely?

He lay back down, his eyes going wide as he felt the hint of dampness where he'd been rubbing. Fingers not quite steady, he touched the sheet, lifted his fingers to his nose to smell himself.

Hard to describe, he thought, but unmistakable.

And so very like Obi-Wan, in the practice salle.

He lived in the Force, and right now, it was urging him, insistent as a child tugging on its mother, to go to Obi-Wan.

It was cold, this late at night, temperature controls turned off in all but the meditation rooms and infirmary at this hour. He pulled on his cloak, left his feet bare, and padded softly to his padawan's room.

"Obi-Wan?" he called, very quietly, just in case.

There was a pause, but he could feel the night listening to him. Slightly muffled through the door: "Is this another of the times I'm not allowed to apologise to you?"



Not an invitation, not by any stretch of the imagination, but he wasn't going to let that stop him. His eyes had adjusted to the night, so he winced when he opened the door and was hit in the face by the bright light.

"How long since you've been able to sleep well at night?"

"Since it began. But it's all right, I just wake up a couple of times, take care of myself, then I go back to sleep."

"Obi-Wan—"

"Has there been a shortfall in my performance?" They both winced at that double entendre.

"Can I apologise for that one?"

"We'll be here for the rest of the night if we apologise for the likes of that." He came farther into the room, to where Obi-Wan lay in that bed as he'd envisioned him nights ago, naked shoulders above the off-white sheet, bordering the dark blue bedspread. "I wish I could help."

"Don't we both. And you are."

"Tell you what," Qui-Gon said, sitting on the edge of the bed, safe in the sharp smell of Obi-Wan's so recent relief, "since you're not apologising any more, how about I won't beg for reassurance?"

He saw his padawan know exactly what he was up to; was allowed it anyway, Obi-Wan probably fully aware of how horribly helpless Qui-Gon felt. "We can sign the agreement in the morning."

"You seem...easier. More comfortable."

A supple shrug, covers sliding lower unevenly, one brown nipple half-exposed. "It's better when you're near. I can feel you—" Sudden stab of dismay in Obi-Wan's eyes. "Did you feel me?"

"No," Qui-Gon lied easily, readily, "I needed to pee, and I noticed your light was still on."

There was no mistaking the relief then, Obi-Wan sagging back onto the bed. "That's all right then."

"But it's easier when I'm near?"

A nod.

"Well then, there's your answer."

He made himself sit there and look calm. Noted, with surprise, that he actually was as calm as he pretended.

"I should think of you?"

"I already told you you should."

"But to be just a room away from you and lying here masturbating over you?"

He shrugged, not quite as smoothly as his padawan did. "Why not? It's not as if it affects me, is it? You're not sneaking into my room at night and

having your wicked way with me. You're just lying here."

"Thinking about you."

Yes.

He didn't really want to ask, but there was a compulsion to know.

"Please don't," Obi-Wan's edged tone forestalled him. "Not right now."

"True. You need your sleep—we both need some sleep. I'll see you in the morning."

Still, he sat there, reluctant to leave, not ready yet to be alone again.

"Good night, Master."

A none-too-subtle hint, one he took, albeit ungraciously. He lumbered to his feet, off-balance, needing to push himself to leave when all he wanted was to crawl into that big bed beside Obi-Wan, pull Obi-Wan in close against him, hold him tight, so tight and warm, and never ever let go.

He blinked. Tasted the Force. Nodded a good night and closed the door just as Obi-Wan turned off the light.

So now it was more than just Obi-Wan's desires coming through the Force to him.

The loneliness was still there, a bitter flatness on the back of his tongue, a taste as foul as blood. Hormones in charge of the body could be easily sated, but what those hormones did to the mind, and the mood, and the emotion...

He was more than ready for this damned Blessing to be over.

Qui-Gon went to bed, alone, and spent far too long staring at the ceiling and thinking before exhaustion finally let him find sleep.

## 巾中沢丸玉丸母

He couldn't get rid of the taste in his mouth. He woke with it there, it was still there after he'd cleaned his teeth, had breakfast and cleaned his teeth again. The memory of it simply wouldn't leave him, and he worried at it, poking and prodding it like Healers let loose on Obi-Wan.

There was no sign of his padawan: the bed was neatly made, there were no sheets piled in the corner, the recycler had been cycled, everything was pristine.

It was unpleasantly sterile, as if no-one lived there. Even the music disks were tidy, the player empty, as if Obi-Wan hadn't been listening to them.



Which made sense, Qui-Gon supposed, putting the clean dishes away. Between studies, practice, fulfilling at least the sexual part of the Blessing and the endless talks, Obi-Wan probably hadn't had time for anything as frivolous as music.

Perhaps that's why their quarters seemed so quiet.

Well, it had seemed like a good enough rationalisation to at least try.

The truth was far simpler: he missed Obi-Wan.

Use your imagination, Obi-Wan had told him, what felt like a lifetime ago. His imagination wasn't much good, but his memory served. Obi-Wan, talking, and talking, and himself, not hearing. Everything filtered through his own obsession, his own fears, his own needs. Sex. It all boiled down to sex for him, because too many years ago he had taken an oath that he was fairly sure he'd outgrown. So he'd looked at Obi-Wan's Blessing, and had heard only what his padawan said about sex.

Hadn't really listened to the rest of it. The emotional, psychological needs. The love. The dreams of one day being loved, not as a padawan, but as a man.

And said so early in all of this: in the eyes of my people, I'm finally a man.

Manhood. It didn't matter that Obi-Wan had been a man in the eyes of the Jedi for years. In the eyes of his people. Unstated: in the eyes of Obi-Wan himself. And the dreams, confessed: that when I was a man, you'd want me and love me.

He knelt on his meditation mat, not to meditate on anything, but to simply feel. He settled himself into the proper position, and braced himself before he faced this. Took a deep breath. Centred. And didn't even have to reach out: the Force was there, around him, in him, part of him, as it always was. Unchanged.

Something deep inside unclenched, and something else unfurled, spreading warmth and light and beauty.

Himself, last night, before the bond had lashed him with agony: sharing an almost unbearable pleasure that was so closely tied to Obi-Wan. More than sex. So much more. And he'd been fool enough or blind enough or bond-ridden enough not to even suspect.

Nascent it was, still, but there, that tiny unfurling deep inside of him. Seeing not a padawan, his head aching dully, but seeing a man.

His head throbbed, but the Force was still in him.

The Force would not leave him over this and there

was no Dark to rot this. There was only possibility, ripe and lush as Obi-Wan's Blessing, and the hope that if Obi-Wan could tame the Blessing, then surely a Jedi master should be able to control himself?

He drifted through the rooms, looking at things anew, touching this, moving that. There was a stack of Obi-Wan's data beside Qui-Gon's computer, since the master had the more powerful machine. There was a holo Obi-Wan had been watching, weeks ago, before their last mission and the Blessing. There were clothes in the cabinets, the familiar padawan outfits, and other clothes that were slowly becoming almost as familiar. Interloper though he knew himself to be, Qui-Gon looked through the clothes, touching fabrics, catching snatches of scent from some of them, a trace of personality from others. These clothes were imbued with the musky lure of Obi-Wan's Blessing, as if his pores had secreted pheromones and Force.

Probably had. At least that would make a convenient excuse for Qui-Gon lurking in here like a pervert, feeling his padawan's clothes.

If Obi-Wan caught him...

He had just got himself back into the main room when his padawan came through the front door.

"I needed some quantity," Obi-Wan breezed into the room, grinning over at Qui-Gon.

"You don't need to pretend."

Qui-Gon watched as the cheerful expression collapsed, and something else, very different, showed through for a moment, mournful as a skull. "Actually," the voice was very dignified, "I think I do need to pretend."

He had sworn he was going to learn from his padawan. "No."

Obi-Wan simply looked at him.

"No hiding, no pretending, not from me. From everyone else, yes, you've earned your dignity and your privacy. It's nobody's damned business but yours. And mine."

"Not yours."

"Yes."

Qui-Gon walked forward, inexorable, holding Obi-Wan not with the power of the Force, but with the force of his power, a big man, fit, strong, trained, and the centre of Obi-Wan's universe. "It's no-one's fault," Qui-Gon said, close enough to hear Obi-Wan's ragged breathing. "But if you weren't in love with me, this Blessing would've been what you expected."

Unexpected, a pristine memory: his own hand,





his own fingers, two fingertips raising Obi-Wan's chin, right back when this had all begun.

"If you didn't love me the way you do," he said around the memory and the hitch of Obi-Wan's breathing, "you could go to your family for the emotional satisfaction the Blessing makes you crave. I am what you need, and I am what's in your way. So this is mine, Obi-Wan, as much as it's yours."

His padawan frowned at him. "You're talking nonsense, Master. The Blessing only affects you because—"

Immutable, breaking in on Obi-Wan's arguments. "Are you my padawan?"

"Yes. Always."

"Then this is mine."

He watched Obi-Wan struggle for words, waited it out, patiently.

Finally: "Why?"

The truth, frighteningly simple and simply frightening: "Because even if the desire isn't mine, I want to feel it."

He watched Obi-Wan's eyes dilate and his throat work. "But the bond—"

Another tiny bit of foundation chipped away, and there to fill the gap was Obi-Wan, with the tenderness of one small kiss and all the possibilities of hope. "You'll be raised to knighthood soon."

"If I can survive the Blessing, the trials won't be much of a trial at all."

"The bond will be severed then."

"Yes, Master?"

He could see it then, warring with the instinct for self-preservation: the beginnings of hope, warm and brilliant as sunrise.

He couldn't necessarily fix the Blessing, but he could this hope. "I've made a decision. About my oath."

So much uncertainty staring at him, hope fighting common sense. "Qui-Gon?"

"Once the bond is severed, if you're still willing, if you still want me..."

"Oh, I can see why you'd doubt that, I've been so fickle and this is all so sudden." Obi-Wan shoved his hands into his sleeves, and Qui-Gon did not need his imagination to know that it was because Obi-Wan wanted to touch him and hug him. Or something along those lines. Abruptly, harsh, demanding the truth. "You mean this? This is what you want?"

He was trained in any number of languages and could make flowery speeches in every single one of them. But he said all he and Obi-Wan needed. "Yes."

No quick response; no falling at his feet, in gratitude or otherwise.

"Are you willing to take on the universe's oldest virgin?"

The humour irrepressible, if a trifle distracted. "I thought that was Master Yoda?"

"No, I believe I hold that ignominious honour."

"I'm sure there's someone older than you." All the right words, the right level of levity, but there was more to it than that.

Flatly, sensing the truth of it: "You don't want to."

"Of course I want to and of course I'm willing. I've spent years trying to get over you and it didn't work. D'you think the prospect of sex is going to cure me?"

No, he didn't think that at all. But there was something else here, something lurking just beneath the surface. He could probe, he could skillfully lead the conversation, but he simply asked. "What's wrong?"

All traces of humour dropped away. "The only thing I've ever wanted more than being with you is being a knight. What do I do if I believe in this, and then when my Blessing's over, there's no more desire on your part? What if you go back to your oath? What would I do then?"

Suffer. He could see it in Obi-Wan's eyes, could feel it in the Force between them.

"I want this more than you can imagine," Obi-Wan said. "But I don't know if you want it enough."

He was left standing there, gaping like a caught fish. He was staring at a closed door again, a habit he really should try to break. The conversation was apparently over, but he wasn't finished: he wanted to grab Obi-Wan and tell him it's not supposed to be like this. I want you, I've said I want you, you're supposed to agree and we're supposed to live happily ever after.

It seemed that Obi-Wan's fairytales were as infectious as his desires. Happily ever after? They were Jedi, they didn't even have a guarantee of an ever after, let alone a happy one.

And Obi-Wan still hadn't fallen gratefully at his feet. Which was a worse habit than staring at closed doors.

Fine. So Obi-Wan needed some time and some convincing.

Given how many years it'd taken Qui-Gon to get to this stage in his life, he could hardly complain if Obi-Wan needed a little more reassurance than an abrupt volte face from his master.









keep up with his padawan, until he gave up his own restrictions on his skills and let go, went after his padawan full tilt.

Exhilarating, to fight like this, where skill and perfection were the only goals; no death, no injury, just this fiery, fearsome dance, the two of them a matched pair. Qui-Gon drew on the Force, as he always did, at one with the Living Force, feeling Obi-Wan there with him.

It was...

Unlike anything he'd ever known before. Desire, yes, but not as before. Sexual, yet not; emotional, yet not; purely of the spirit, yet so firmly rooted in the flesh.

He had no words for this, only feeling, and he gave himself over to the Force.

It began as simple heat, a lengthening and thickening of flesh he usually ignored. Old habit would have had this desire dismissed long before it could show in his body, but new habit noticed, observed, watched with a suspicious curiosity.

And enjoyed.

There was no pain in his head, not yet, for this was as much Obi-Wan as himself, more, perhaps. His padawan was aglow, his 'sabre much brighter than usual, humming with power and every move was smoothest, cleanest harmony, merging seamlessly with Qui-Gon. Balance, too, unlike anything he'd ever known before. No barriers between his padawan and the Force, just the same perfect connection that Qui-Gon knew.

He met his padawan, an equal, a man to match him, the completion of the pattern the Force wove through him. Their moves were purest artistry, effortless, and he heard Obi-Wan laugh with the joy of it, felt that same joy burst through his chest and tangle happily with desire.

No pain yet; the desire all Obi-Wan's or buffered by the Force, Qui-Gon neither knew nor cared. He had this moment, lived in it fully, all else excluded.

And the desire grew.

His flesh grew, hardened, and he could feel it inside his trousers, rubbing and being rubbed, pushing and being pulled. He could feel his testicles move, could feel every minute flex and contraction of muscle, could feel every pulse of blood and thrill of nerve.

It was happening, to him, and the Force was still there, nothing going wrong; he was dancing with Obi-Wan, dancing with 'sabres drawn, green and blue drawing a borealis of Force in the air; green and blue merging to the most exquisite turquoise.

Obi-Wan was laughing again, laughing and leaping, joy and desire pouring from him in wave upon wave, cresting against Qui-Gon in a spume of Force.

And then Obi-Wan stood still, legs spread wide, arms spread wider still, head tilted back, mouth open, and the waves of the Force coalesced on him. Qui-Gon watched as Obi-Wan shuddered and shivered and went very still, ran forward quickly, catching Obi-Wan as he fell forward.

His padawan slumped against him, then looked up at him, an open-mouthed smile, eyes dancing with delight. "Thank you," he heard, felt the breath of the words passing.

The last thing he heard, as the pain hit him, sickening crunching jolt burning through his head and his eyes, bringing him to his knees.

His 'sabre went out and he fell forward, too unaware to notice where Obi-Wan had gone or why his padawan wasn't ensnared with him, falling in the same tangle of arms and legs.

For a long time, he lay there, until the pain slowly ebbed, and he could hear a voice murmuring softly to him, and feel the hand gently stroking his hair back.

"I'm all right," he muttered, coughed, tried again, managed to make it clear enough to be understood this time.

The murmuring stopped, but the hand kept stroking his hair, the thumb rubbing gently across his forehead. "I won't say I'm sorry," he heard, Obi-Wan's voice a caress.

"Good."

"Yes," laughter lilting through the voice still, "it was very good."

Qui-Gon opened his eyes then, his vision filled with the happiness enlivening his padawan's face. "You certainly seemed to enjoy it."

"So did you. For a while, anyway."

"Damned bond," he muttered, wishing he had the energy to smile as Obi-Wan muttered exactly the same phrase in the same aggrieved tone.

"It'll be gone eventually," Obi-Wan told him, that thumb circling one temple now, easing the last traces of pain. "And even if it's my desire, if that's what we can have..."

"I don't know if we can. Some of this could be the intensity of the Blessing."

"Excuse me, but you're supposed to be agreeing with me. This is where we talk about our rosy future when everything's perfect."





The thumb moved down to rub against his lips, lightly. "Or perhaps this is where we talk about what you felt, and your oath."

Qui-Gon closed his eyes again, and sighed. "If we're going to have to talk again, then I want food first."

"Delaying tactics?"

"Survival instincts. Help me up." He noticed the ease with which Obi-Wan touched him; none of the tensing or avoidance of days past. It'd be interesting to see how long that lasted, before the Blessing started making its demands felt.

Food, and something to ease the parchedness of his throat, and then, Force help him, they were going to have to talk again.

It would be nice, really nice, to skip all of that and just go off into Obi-Wan's rosy future.

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He was more than mildly surprised to see just how much time had passed, although his body was telling him all about the amount of exercise he'd put it through.

They were in the main room together, stretched over settee with feet on table, plates balanced in their laps, glasses hovering at their sides. It was, oddly enough, a very comfortable silence. The harmony lingered, the talk dreaded, but not feared. It was simply never pleasant to have to bare emotions and failings.

And it was time for him to do both. "My oath," he began, then stopped, a swell in the Force pushing him on. "You know what it's like on my planet."

"Ten days had me feeling guilty for everything, I don't know what twelve years would do."

"Shaped me. The earliest teachings I can remember were about what led to the Dark."

"Passion being the number one road, right?"

"It was the root of all Dark. Not so very different from the teaching here, just rather pointedly focused on what 'passion' meant."

"Sex."

"Lust," Qui-Gon corrected. "Because lust was base and was a loss of control."

Obi-Wan was quiet for a moment. "Was it a loss of control for you?"

And so he sat there, and told Obi-Wan things he'd never told another person. His father knew some of it, but to Obi-Wan, he told everything.

"You'd been bottling it up for so long, it's not surprising things got a bit wild."

"A bit wild? It was more than that."

"Was it? You were inexperienced, it's a time of uncontrolled surges, you didn't know quite what you were doing... It sounds fairly standard."

He was shaking his head before Obi-Wan had finished speaking. "You didn't see it. I know about getting carried away at first, I know about Force surges before experience brings control. This was more than that."

"Because you're so strong in the Living Force?"

"Channeling it, you mean?"

"And feeding on it."

He thought about that. Played back his paltry experiences, considered his reaction to Obi-Wan's Blessing. "Not just my own uncontrolled Force, but theirs."

"Because they were nearly as inexperienced as you. Uhm," pausing theatrically, waiting for Qui-Gon to look, and smile, "I think we can safely say lack of experience won't be a problem with me."

"Quantity."

"And lots of it." An unexpected tinge of shyness lowering Obi-Wan's voice. "Even before the Blessing."

"I'm a prude and a prig, but I try not to spread it about."

"No, that's my job, isn't it?"

"I was trying to make a joke," Qui-Gon answered the unwarranted sharpness in Obi-Wan's voice. "Not judge you."

Obi-Wan was fidgeting again; not long then, Qui-Gon assumed, before the Blessing would stir to arousal.

"But it does bother you, doesn't it?" Obi-Wan asked him.

"I'll get over it." As he intended to get over a few things. "Give me time."

"Returning the favour?"

"Well, I hope you'll give me a bit longer than the length of your Blessing."

Something else he could've bet money on and made a handy profit: Obi-Wan looked down at himself, then looked back up at Qui-Gon, raising an eyebrow in amusement. "My blessing? Is that what you call it?"

Qui-Gon stretched out, touched Obi-Wan's hand lightly. "I think this has been a blessing for both of us." Then he cringed at just how sentimental he'd sounded. "Although I think you've had more benefit so far."



“But you,” his padawan said, low and deep, “you’ll be getting the quality.”

Qui-Gon closed his eyes for a moment, replaying the tapestried richness of that voice. “Obi-Wan, are you aroused?”

Of course, Obi-Wan just had to make a show of looking down at himself for that. “Not that I can notice. Why?”

“Because,” Qui-Gon said happily, “I have a headache.”

Caution kept expression from Obi-Wan’s face, an obvious attempt at keeping hope in check and everything in perspective. “It could just be an aftereffect of our practice.”

“Perhaps. But I have a headache.”

A finger stroked slowly down his arm, from shoulder to elbow to wrist, thence to follow the tendon down the back of his hand to his finger. “Getting worse?”

Qui-Gon leaned back, closed his eyes to better concentrate on sensation. “Do it again and I’ll tell you.”

Oh yes, definitely getting worse. The caress stopped as he flinched.

“So it’s not necessarily just me?”

“Doesn’t look that way.”

Qui-Gon could feel the affection in Obi-Wan’s touch and the fretted fear in his voice. “You seem remarkably undisturbed by this.”

“For a prig and a prude who took an oath of celibacy, you mean.”

“Well, yes.”

He lay there, with pain in his head and pleasure in his body, and thought about the man beside him. “I’ve meditated myself into knots over this, but there comes a time when you just have to...”

A breath of laughter gusting across the side of his face. “You just have to say ‘fuck it’ and look to the moment.”

“And accept that the future will bring what it brings.”

He could feel the shifts and rebalances of the padding on the settee, could hear the rustle of clothing, could feel the physical warmth getting closer. He was expecting it, when it came, that brush of lips against his own. Expecting it, but not the shock that came along for the ride. It was only a brief touch, almost unbearably chaste, but it took the breath from him: Obi-Wan kissed me, an aria rising through him, pure and clear and stunning. He opened his eyes, Obi-Wan too close to see clearly, and they stayed that way for a moment.

“I need to go,” Obi-Wan whispered to him, one finger touching him there, at the side of his mouth where his beard began and the old flicker of nervousness returned, until he pushed it under, drowning it. “Until the bond’s severed, I can’t—”

A pulse in the Force, an arcane key seeking its lock.

“Then go,” Qui-Gon told him, closing his eyes again, freeing Obi-Wan from the pull of his gaze. Movement, beside him, the settee cushions shifting as they lost Obi-Wan. “Obi-Wan!”

“Yes?”

“Think of me.”

Even across the room, he could feel Obi-Wan’s reaction to that.

No spoken answer, but none was needed. Qui-Gon heard the door close and lay there, feeling the echoes of both pleasure and pain. Both receded into nothingness, and he sat there for a while, thinking: Obi-Wan hadn’t called him master for a while, and for the first time, ‘padawan’ felt alien on his tongue.

## 几玉与中

Qui-Gon looked up, startled: Obi-Wan wasn’t due back for hours yet. He was still putting his language equipment down when Obi-Wan came to him, and very simply, very gently, inserted himself into Qui-Gon’s embrace. His arms went around Obi-Wan, one hand rising up to pull Obi-Wan lower, to tuck Obi-Wan’s head under his chin.

And it felt right all the way down in his bones. Atavistic, yes, something Jedi were supposed to shun for fear of the Dark, but this was purest Force, light and bright and a coruscating blue and green merging into something new.

He closed his eyes and breathed deeply, smelling other people and outside pleasures on Obi-Wan, but strangely—

“You haven’t been with anyone?”

How could someone have such a beatific smile and look so wickedly gleeful at the same time? “You said I could think about you. Have you any idea how few people measure up to you?”

Qui-Gon dared to run his hands through Obi-Wan’s hair, shifting at the last second to avoid the braid. “Go to your room.”

Obi-Wan was deliberately heavy in his arms, Qui-Gon bearing the full weight, the muscular body pressed tight and hard against him. “I’m not a boy to be sent to my room.”





“Why d’you think I’m sending you there?”

Incandescence and lust, and beautiful, beautiful eyes looking up at him with such knowledge, such experience. Such promise.

The weight left his arms, Obi-Wan standing up straight, a powerful, compact figure, well able to deal with anything an inexperienced Force user might do in the heat of the moment. “Please,” Qui-Gon whispered again, his lips so close to Obi-Wan’s forehead, just exactly the right height, tall enough for anyone, tall enough to make Qui-Gon feel manly but not beastly. “Go to your room.”

“And think of you,” Obi-Wan finished for him. A long look, deep as a kiss, and then Obi-Wan was walking away from him, not looking back, too wise to tempt them with another instant’s contact.

He was contemplating closed doors again, more nervous this time than ever before.

Stop it, he told himself, giving himself a mental shake. It’s only sex. It’s only...

He turned away from his thoughts, headed for his own bedroom. He could feel Obi-Wan in the Force, a growing presence.

His imagination, suddenly competent, provided a perfect picture of Obi-Wan’s growing presence.

Was Obi-Wan stripped and under the covers already? Or standing against the door, both hands down the front of his trousers, mouth open in pleasure, hands filled with his own hardness, his own desire?

Qui-Gon’s hands clapped his mouth shut; shock shivered through him. He’d *groaned*. Like something in one of Obi-Wan’s holos, he’d *groaned*.

Get used to it, he told himself, shedding tunics and socks and trousers. You’re going to be doing a lot more than just groaning.

Funny, though: he’d never imagined himself noisy. Obi-Wan now, he could see his Obi-Wan being noisy. That generous mouth, the occasional bursts of laughter, yes, Obi-Wan was used to making noise, he’d be loud in bed, in his pleasure.

Might even be verbal, talking about how he felt, what he was enjoying. Telling Qui-Gon what to do.

Not Obi-Wan’s desire then, but his own, pain knifing through him again.

But—

It should’ve hurt more. He ran a touch over the bond, the way others would run their tongue over a tooth, sensing it, the feel of it different from the five main senses. The bond was there, but...crimped. As

if it hadn’t quite recovered from being stomped on the other night.

He still didn’t know quite what had happened there and he wasn’t about to let the Healers in to find out. Not yet, anyway.

He ran contact along the bond, tasting it in his mind, feeling it, trying to understand what was different. Ah. That was it: he’d been on enough planets under every kind of condition, to see many, many babies—Force sensitive and trained, as all Jedi were, as a field medic, he’d even helped deliver babies. Not all of them joyous occasions. The bond was like that; umbilical cords rich with the very essence of life, slowly shriveling as the baby waved its fists and fed from its mother or a nurse, and other times, when the birth had not gone well, the umbilical cord sinewed and shriveled like an old man.

Their bond was dying. By itself. Without the intervention of a senior master.

He laughed then, out loud, letting go in a most undignified way.

Without the intervention of a senior master? Then what the Sith was *he* now?

Oh, the Council would have his head for this.

Let them. At least then he wouldn’t have a headache getting in the way of Obi-Wan’s desire. The bond could do what it wanted; there was only so long that even a T’chitar in his Blessing could be expected to last.

Qui-Gon thought that perhaps, Obi-Wan was lying naked on his bed, completely exposed, both hands working on his penis. But then, Obi-Wan had a great deal of practice at that; Qui-Gon finished stripping, and slid into bed, pulling the covers right up under his chin. Flat on his back, with the weight of the blankets upon him, he lay there, and breathed in the Force.

Obi-Wan.

Not drifting, no gentle tendril, more like a tackety boot to the belly. Or the head. Qui-Gon pushed his own desire back, quietly amazed at how different it was now from what it had been all those years ago. Slower, warmer, less frantic, but still more than he was quite ready to face.

Obi-Wan.

Obi-Wan’s pleasure, thrumming through him, surrounding him, seeping in through his eyes and ears and mouth and nose and pores. He could feel hardness, as if it were his own—perhaps it was, it didn’t matter, it was all Obi-Wan’s pleasure, Obi-Wan’s desire—Obi-Wan thinking of him. It was there





in the Force, and it was controlled, a good thing, no destruction in it. Only a forging heat, building pleasure.

He was aware of his own body; considered touching himself as he knew Obi-Wan was touching his own hardness. Reached for himself, touched unbearably soft, loose skin over unimagined hard heat, and the wonder burst through him: is this how Obi-Wan would feel?

The pain lopped off some of his pleasure, an unpleasant feeling and unpleasant imagery; he slid his hands down his sides until all he was touching was the well-washed softness of sheets.

His fingers clenched, as Obi-Wan's desire rose, tightening the Force around him another notch.

His toes curled, as the desire suffused him.

And there—a sudden surge, drenching him. And then it was over. The pleasure ebbed slowly, the levels dropping in swooping curves, until there was only an ache in his fingers as he unclenched them, and an ache in his head as he assimilated Obi-Wan's desire and felt his own lap at him.

A knock at his door.

"Qui-Gon?"

"I'm fine."

"I just wanted to make sure."

And he just wanted to invite Obi-Wan in, to pull him into bed, and see if they couldn't kill the bond between them. He knew Obi-Wan was still lingering on the other side of the door: this contemplating of doors was obviously spreading. "I'm fine," he repeated, and smiled, realising what else Obi-Wan needed. "And you're wonderful."

His door opened then, Obi-Wan peeking at him. "You liked that? It didn't put you off?"

He wanted to stretch his muscles, amused himself with his impulse to preen, like an animal in front of its mate. "Didn't scare me off either."

"So, once the bond's severed, we'll..."

"Fuck," he said, pleased with himself.

And wondered what he'd done wrong *this time* as Obi-Wan's expression stiffened for a moment before dissolving into the expected grin. "At least I'll finally master patience," Obi-Wan said lightly, looking at him just a little oddly. There was something...

"I'm going back to bed," Obi-Wan said, still smiling. "Mind if I think about you again?"

"As often as you like."

"I can't do that—how about as often as my poor body can manage?"

He didn't know what to say next: he had no

experience in this sort of chat either. Obi-Wan took pity on him, of course. "Good night. I'll see you in the morning."

The door closed quietly on his own 'good night.' He switched off the light, let the anonymity of the night surround him. The Force was still tingling a little, languid little ripples against him, and he set his shields tighter than usual: the bond was dying, he'd lain here and engaged in Obi-Wan's desire; that was quite enough for one night, he decided.

He turned onto his side, pulled a pillow up to him, wrapped an arm around it. Not as warm or firm as Obi-Wan, but considerably safer, until the bond was severed or died. Still caressed, faintly, by the Force, he drifted easily into sleep, only a small part of his mind wondering at the odd expression he'd caught on Obi-Wan's face.

In the middle of a dream that was full of Obi-Wan, he realised what had caused that expression, and even deeply asleep, Qui-Gon Jinn smiled.

He had got it wrong, yes, but oh, this was going to be a joy, a simple, easy, straightforward joy, to fix.

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He tutted like mothers the galaxy over, getting the laughter he hoped for. "I know you're having it cut off today, but that's no excuse for a sloppy braid."

"Then why don't you fix it for me?" Obi-Wan leaning in close, close enough to kiss if they wanted.

He did, of course, fingers lingering in the soft hair, noticing the change in texture as he got closer to the ends, more brittle, coarser, as rough against his fingers as the hair on Obi-Wan's chest. Finished with the braid—as Obi-Wan was nearly completely finished with what the braid signified—he ran his fingertips up the side of Obi-Wan's neck, up behind his ear, round the rim, back down to the lobe. The familiar shiver ran through Obi-Wan, and Qui-Gon fed on it. "Soon," he whispered, tongue-tip barely touching the inner edge of Obi-Wan's ear. "Very, very, very soon."

Hands clutched his upper arms, pulling him in closer, strong muscles pressed against him, a nascent hardness against his thigh. "Not now," he said, stepping back, getting an even more expected glare for his restraint.

"Bastard," he heard behind his back, muttered at him with more affection than heat.





"Don't say that in front of my mother."

"Because she'd kill me, right before she fainted delicately away."

He was *not* going to argue with Obi-Wan today; he could let that slide, this time. His parents weren't hypocrites, just prudes. And prigs. As he'd been, for far too long.

He picked up Obi-Wan's new belt, handed it to him, was drawn in by the laughing seduction that was Obi-Wan and came in close, wrapping the belt and his arms around Obi-Wan, pressing a kiss to the forehead positioned so conveniently in front of his lips. "You're going to be a fine knight," he murmured, securing the belt, slouching enough that he could lean his forehead against Obi-Wan's affectionately. "And it won't be long at all before you're a master."

"I don't know why everyone's so impressed by how I handled the Blessing. It's just the Blessing, it's not anything strange or difficult—"

"You grounded the Force," Qui-Gon said quietly, starting to tuck the small tools and equipment into the belt pouches. "You controlled yourself, you taught yourself, you stood on your own two feet. And no matter how much you try to dismiss it, you grounded the Force."

"But that wasn't an accomplishment, it was a necessity."

He slipped the last tool into the last pouch, fastened it with steady fingers. "It's not often I get to be smug and proud without being nagged half to death for it, so will you just shut up and let me wallow in a shameful amount of pride?"

And for the first time in a long time, he heard Obi-Wan murmur, "Yes, Master."

He met Obi-Wan's eyes, touched the long braid. "Come along, Padawan," felt an unexpected press of nostalgia and sadness at using the old familiar term, "it's time we made you a knight."

### 五廿五小本小

The investiture was over, Master Windu's pomposity indulged to his heart's delight, Master Yoda happily intimidating padawans and new knights, and everyone else was enjoying the buffet. There were four new knights today, an unusually high number, the investitures gathered together as an excuse for a real celebration.

Qui-Gon leant against a wall, and watched the

millling browns and creams and whites, not really seeing, just feeling.

Living in the moment, because if he looked to the future, he'd be ploughing a fast furrow across this room, grabbing Obi-Wan, and leaving. Now. This second. To take Obi-Wan back to their rooms, sever what little was left of their bond and—he drew in a deep breath, glanced around to see if anyone had noticed.

Someone had, of course; hardly surprising in a roomful of Force sensitives.

That someone was coming towards him, moving in a perfectly straight line, the browns and creams and whites parting before him, butter before a blade.

Obi-Wan said nothing, just stopped in front of him and reached out a hand.

He hadn't blushed in years. In fact, he didn't remember ever blushing. But he was doing it now, thankful that his beard covered so much of his face. Qui-Gon took Obi-Wan's hand, and felt every single person in the room looking at them. Hand in hand, side by side, feeling like a romantic fool, he crossed the room with Obi-Wan, preternaturally aware that every single person in that room knew exactly where he was going and exactly what he was going to do and with whom he was going to do it.

He was sorely tempted to use the Force, break into a Force-enhanced run and disappear in a blur of motion. But Obi-Wan was at his side—not half a step behind, not a step to the side—looking almost prouder of this than of becoming a knight.

There was a rising murmur of voices behind them; by this time tomorrow, never mind every Jedi in the Temple knowing, every Jedi in every regional Temple, every Jedi on missions, every Jedi in the whole enormous universe would know.

Well, the ones who kept up on the gossip would. Which meant every Jedi in the universe.

It didn't matter, he told himself, walking through the last of the celebrants; it didn't matter that everyone knew he was going to go with Obi-Wan, to have sex. To fuck. Be fucked. It didn't matter. Embarrassment was purely temporary and minor, and anyway, people had sex all the time all over the galaxy. Just because he was a prude and a prig amongst a horde of prudes and prigs who knew about his oath didn't mean there was any good reason to wish the ground would open up and swallow him.

"Almost there," he heard, too subdued to be right. Not for Obi-Wan, not today. "I'm sorry, I should've thought, I just wanted..."

Embarrassment was temporary, and minor, and



people did what they were going to do all of the time. And Obi-Wan, for all his control, still had fragments of the Blessing, lingering. “You just wanted to make your claim,” Qui-Gon said, stopping right there in a public corridor, cupping Obi-Wan’s face between his big hands. “You just want to plant your seed.”

“Let me go!”

He did, stung.

“Otherwise,” a long slow caress of voice from Obi-Wan, the lush mouth dangerously close, “I’ll forget my supposedly special controls and rip your clothes off right here.”

Qui-Gon tucked his hands neatly into his sleeves, but his eyes were twinkling as he looked down at Obi-Wan bristling before him with need and possessiveness. There were other people in the corridor trying to pretend they weren’t ogling and goggling at the sight of Master Qui-Gon Jinn being nearly ravished by Knight Kenobi. Master Jinn loosed his most guilt-inducing stare on them, then gathered Obi-Wan to him with an altogether different look. Together, they continued on towards their rooms, Qui-Gon increasing his pace unconsciously, responding only to Obi-Wan’s need to be there *now*.

He had barely got through the door when it was shut and locked behind him.

“I don’t care,” Obi-Wan forestalled him, “I don’t want anyone coming to congratulate me on my knighthood or to just gawk at us. We are *not* opening that door.”

“Do you hear me arguing?”

“Did I give you time to argue?” Obi-Wan asked him, taking him by the arm and tugging him, ungentle, hurriedly, through to Obi-Wan’s bedroom.

He’d barely got through this doorway as well before the door was shut and he was pressed against it, Obi-Wan right behind him, leaning heavily against him, so much like the quiet loneliness of nights past. But this knight was here and now, not the least bit lonely, nor the least bit discreet. This knight was pressing against his back, an erection palpable even through two layers of clothes and a full cloak. This knight was mumbling words against him and nipping at his neck, scraping teeth along the rim of his shoulder and kneading him with powerful hands.

The sudden cessation shocked him more than the onslaught had.

“Am I going to fast? Sith, I know I’m going too fast, I shouldn’t be doing it like this, I had it all planned—”

Qui-Gon couldn’t help it, standing there contem-

plating a door yet again; he began to laugh, turning round to reel Obi-Wan in, to pull him close and hold him tight. “Yes, you’re going to fast and I’m touched you had a plan, but I’m not going to break. But slow down for me,” he asked, stroking his palms across Obi-Wan’s cheeks, “I don’t have your experience controlling this.”

There was such fierceness in the way Obi-Wan was looking at him, such an intensity of emotion, and devotion. “It will be fine. You’ve been fine thus far.”

“Ah, but that’s been your desire. This—this will be the first time I’ve dared unleash my own.”

Obi-Wan was stripping him, peeling away the layers of his formal robes, laying him bare to the waist, the door so chilly against his back, Obi-Wan’s hands so hot against his front.

“I want to thank you.”

Obi-Wan looked at him for that, obviously convinced he’d taken leave of his senses. “I’m finally getting to bed you and *you’re* thanking *me*?”

“I said I *wanted* to thank you. I’m just—” He cupped his hands around the back of Obi-Wan’s head, lowered his own just a little, and tried to put every morsel of his boundless gratitude into that first touch of his lips to Obi-Wan.

It was different this time. Obi-Wan had kissed him twice, both chaste, once to his nape and once to his lips, but this was different. There was no chasteness here; there was gratitude and hunger and a need to own. It fed from one to the other, claiming, owning, possessing, and served purely to make them each feel as if they belonged. “Thank you,” Qui-Gon whispered, each word he spoke brushing his lips against Obi-Wan’s. “I want this so much but—”

“But you didn’t dare before, I know,” Obi-Wan’s lips kissed the words back to him.

Holding Obi-Wan firm, making sure Obi-Wan could see the honesty in his eyes: “I didn’t have anyone who mattered enough to question half my life and risk the Force.”

“Risk the Force,” Obi-Wan mocked gently enough. “As if you could lose that—as if the Force cares whether you indulge or not. Your people, *Master*,” the name a caress, a promise, a belonging, “have a lot to answer for.”

“Prudes and prigs,” Qui-Gon said into the curve of Obi-Wan’s ear, pausing to lick and kiss there, relishing the shiver of pleasure that went through Obi-Wan. “It’s a miracle we haven’t died out.”

“People like me wouldn’t let you.”





Cupping Obi-Wan's face again, looking carefully into his eyes. "You know it's more than just discovering sex, don't you?"

Mocking again, even more gently than before, Obi-Wan's hands sliding down his chest, round his waist and up his back, fingertips painting shiveringly sweet pictures up and down his spine. "I admit I was an idiot for a bit but then my brain started up again. And you," nails now, the very edges of them, running up and down his back, defining his muscles, dancing exquisitely along his nerves, "made it perfectly clear. Wonderfully clear."

"Then you realised almost as soon as I did." He could see something—not quite pity, closer to regret—that he knew himself so little. That he'd grown to shut himself off so much from not only sex but the passion of love.

Obi-Wan's voice was very soft, sighing against his skin. "I think that's probably the only thing the Council disapproves of more than a master wanting to fuck his padawan."

He was nuzzling his mouth along the curve of Obi-Wan's jaw, tongue tasting skin, finding a tiny rough patch where the depilatory had been wiped off too soon. A tiny imperfection, and another, there, one of Obi-Wan's moles. He turned Obi-Wan around, pulling off the brand-new knight's robes, baring Obi-Wan's back to his gaze. He knew this body so well already, from seeing it in a hundred exercise rooms, infirmaries, bathing facilities. He knew every muscle, every line, every mark, but he'd never known them like this. Where before his eyes had seen, now his tongue tasted. A mottling of brown moles, dusted like dark stars across Obi-Wan's shoulders and back, and he tasted those. A small crescent scar, no bigger than a thumbnail, and he tasted where that blade had clipped Obi-Wan's rib. He was crouching down now, his mouth open against the dimple above Obi-Wan's right buttock, tongue out, wetly tasting, shaping, learning the feel of Obi-Wan's skin.

And it seemed the most natural thing in the world, now, his past so resolutely cast aside, to stroke his hands across the muscular rise of Obi-Wan's buttocks. Perhaps it was because he had been feeding so much on Obi-Wan's desire of late, but his own passion didn't drown out Obi-Wan's response; he could feel it through the Force, could feel it through his hands, a quivering as Obi-Wan struggled to remain still.

The generosity of it was nearly his undoing,

emotions roiling up inside, so very, very far from the proper serene control of a Jedi master.

"Obi-Wan?"

Was that truly his voice, sounding so unsure?

Apparently yes, for Obi-Wan was turning, raising him up, smiling at him, all but whispering 'there, there,' and leading him to the bed. "It's always a bit much," Obi-Wan was telling him, sitting him down and beginning the irritatingly unromantic task of removing boots. "When it's the first time and both people are Force sensitives."

And that was just the sex side of things.

He wriggled his toes, unaccountably pleased that it amused Obi-Wan to see him sitting here, bare-chested and bare-footed, wriggling his toes like a child at the beach.

"I do believe you," Obi-Wan said, "are a secret hedonist." Clad in nothing more than the bright new leggings of a knight, he sat astride Qui-Gon, bringing their chests together, Obi-Wan's firm arse fitting so perfectly against Qui-Gon's groin.

He couldn't actually think clearly enough to muster a reply; made some noise, while his hands learned the play of muscle on Obi-Wan's back and down his arms.

"Hmmm, yes," Obi-Wan whispered against him, "and if not, then I shall surely turn you into one."

He agreed with that, wholeheartedly, hoped that the enthusiasm with which he was sucking on Obi-Wan's earlobe would convey that, because he was, frankly, too worked up to be anything approaching coherent.

He clutched at Obi-Wan, filling his hands with Obi-Wan's arse—and saw Obi-Wan wince.

Next thing he knew, he was on his feet, Obi-Wan was sprawled on the floor and he was standing contemplating a damned door again.

"It's all right," Obi-Wan told him, pulling him back to the bed. "It's not the end of the world, come on—"

And no, it wasn't the end of the world, and he hadn't hurt Obi-Wan.

"I've had bruises before and inflicted quite a few but you know something?"

He shook his head, mute under the impact of Obi-Wan's hands undoing the ties of Obi-Wan's trousers.

"I've never noticed until afterwards. Don't worry about it—"

He was dimly aware of Obi-Wan's voice, but he couldn't spare enough attention to make out the



words. Obi-Wan was sliding those trousers off, bending down, and Qui-Gon wanted to shove Obi-Wan's shoulders out of the way so he could see. There—a glimpse of shadow that had to be hair, and a rising blade of hard flesh, rosy, pink, the head a different shade from the shaft, look at the way the head flared out, the slit widening at one end just a bit, curved at the other, almost like a teardrop and what must it taste like—

He had Obi-Wan in his mouth. He didn't remember moving, but here he was, on his knees, with Obi-Wan in his mouth.

The taste—he couldn't describe it, didn't want to think that much. Just wanted to taste, and feel it against his tongue, feel the way it yielded to the pressure of tongue and lips, feel the strangeness of something so large inside his mouth.

Smell, too, this close, an intensification of the way Obi-Wan always smelled, and a precursor to the sharp scent in the training salle that day. He nearly went cross-eyed trying to see, but there was a reddish burn to the hair curling at the base of Obi-Wan's...

It was as if Obi-Wan could hear him, or perhaps Obi-Wan simply understood. Perhaps Obi-Wan had used his imagination, and knew better than Qui-Gon himself what Qui-Gon would need, for Obi-Wan was talking, and Qui-Gon heard some of the words, the ones that mattered.

"...cock, suck me..."

He'd thought about this, but hadn't been truly prepared for the reality. He wanted everything all at once, and he touched everything he could, everywhere he could. The curl of hairs on the crinkled skin of Obi-Wan's testicles, the smooth skin of the shaft, the hairs that were so tactile and coarse amidst his fingers, there, where the incredible smoothness of skin met the thatch of pubic hair. And there, oh, there, a slight ridge, enticing him, luring him on, between Obi-Wan's legs, a dusting of hair there, and the sudden shock of smoothness, the opening to Obi-Wan's body.

He felt Obi-Wan's flinch, and wanted to apologise for forgetting the unyielding need of the Blessing. But he was tired of the sound of 'sorry,' so he did as Obi-Wan asked, that voice crooning Obi-Wan's pleasure as he sucked.

He didn't think he was very good at this, knew that he'd caught Obi-Wan a couple of times with his teeth, but at least he was enthusiastic. Enthusiastic enough that his beard was wet and his jaw was

aching, mouth and muscles unused to such sustained exertion.

Perhaps, he thought, he should add this to their routine exercise régime.

"Shh," he heard, as hands smoothed along his hair, "it's all right."

It was only then that he realised he'd been beginning to—not panic. Just not calm.

"I don't want to come in your mouth," Obi-Wan told him, fingers rubbing his earlobes in a caress that felt unexpectedly good. "But if that's what you want, we can do that. But when I warn you, let me pull out."

Qui-Gon finally let Obi-Wan out of his mouth. "I think I can cope with your cock—" he stroked his fingers along Obi-Wan's cock, fascinated by how it looked, intrigued by the effect his saying 'cock' had on it. "Cock," he said again, and yes, there was a definite pulse, a little jump of the cock against his palm. He looked up, delighted, inordinately pleased with himself. "I can cope with you coming in my mouth," he said, and it was such a sweet pleasure to see Obi-Wan react to that. Obi-Wan's cock nudged his palm again, and he went back to touching it, tasting it with long licks, touching it with his hand. "It's so different from mine," he murmured, experimenting with what happened with his mouth open against it.

"Please—"

He looked up, saw the rawest need painted on Obi-Wan's face.

"Let me touch you."

His heart thimmed in his chest, rapid heartbeat, pure nerves. It had been almost all Obi-Wan's desire till now. Wouldn't be if he let Obi-Wan touch him.

He might as well be transparent. Obi-Wan was standing him up again, backing him up to the bed, pushing him down, leaning over him, smiling. "It'll be all right. You can't hurt me, because I won't let you."

He lay still, allowed Obi-Wan's fingers to stroke across his chest, from one nipple to the other and back again.

"You can't control me with the Force," and it was only when he heard Obi-Wan's confidence that he even realised how afraid he'd been of that.

"I'm strong enough that you can't use the Force to get me to do anything I don't want to do."

He could relax a little then, ease up a few of the controls he'd slammed into place when he found himself on his knees in front of Obi-Wan.







“You can let go,” seductive voice, cherishing, promising. “Let go, because I’ll catch you.”

Looking into Obi-Wan’s eyes, seeing the truth. Feeling Obi-Wan’s touch on him, and wanting to know pleasure of his own, nothing second hand. Just his.

“I’ll always catch you.”

And Obi-Wan would. He had trusted Obi-Wan with his life for years, he could trust him with this.

He’d thought there were no more clenched fists of emotion still inside him, but something gave, something loosened, some hoarded knot of fear came undone.

“You have controls, and methods to cope now,” his own words being given back to him. “But you don’t have to use them, because I’m here and I can control for you.”

Obi-Wan’s hands had left his chest, slid lower, carded through the dark brown of his pubic hair, the sensation not quite itchy but infinitely erotic.

“There is passion,” Obi-Wan told him, and it was true, as those hands touched him finally. His cock. Taken in Obi-Wan’s hands, the calluses from work and practice a little bit rough, too much, unexpected, so intense—

“There is serenity.”

No there wasn’t. There was tension and the Force gathering and fear and all this lust that was burning him—

“Feel the passion, go on, don’t shut yourself off from it.”

As if he could. It was devouring him, eating him alive, dissolving him into nothing but passion and lust and the Force and—

“Control it, use it, shape it, find your serenity with your passion—”

He couldn’t control anything. Obi-Wan’s hands wouldn’t let him stop, wouldn’t let him push the desire aside, there was nothing in the universe but Obi-Wan’s hands on him, too intense, the pleasure too much, building, building—

“There is serenity in passion.”

No there wasn’t no there wasn’t no there wasn’t there was only losing himself in this hazed heat of lust—

“Let go.”

He couldn’t, he couldn’t—

“I will catch you.”

Breath catching in his throat.

“I will control for you.”

Pleasure, from Obi-Wan’s hands, on him. Stroking.

Looking up, meeting Obi-Wan’s gaze, an entire library of meaning in the eyes looking down so tenderly upon him.

“Let go. Just feel.”

He was close—

“Trust me.”

And then he was spilling, pleasure spurting from him, his entire being dissolving, coruscating, the Force, Obi-Wan, pleasure—

**七村五沢五 卍卍卍 卍 卍卍卍** soothing idle circles on his belly when he came back to himself. He must have moved, or something, for Obi-Wan leaned up over him, grinning, looking incredibly, smugly, thrilled with himself.

Qui-Gon supposed he should probably say something. Only problem was, his brain had turned to mush, turned inside out by pleasure.

“No permanent damage,” Obi-Wan told him cheerfully. “Only the wineglasses I’d brought through, and that ugly crystal ornament the Regent gave me. Thank you,” a quick kiss to the tip of his nose, “for getting rid of that for me.”

“I broke things?”

“Not much, and only crystal.”

He watched, intrigued, at the way one nipple rose higher than the other when Obi-Wan shrugged one shoulder.

“You know how brittle crystal glass is. Force always shatters it. I should’ve known better than to bring the good glasses in here.”

“I didn’t—”

A long lick up the underside of his neck, stopping where his beard began. “How could you hurt me? You were lying there in the palm of my hand and anyway, I wouldn’t let you hurt me.”

No, Obi-Wan wouldn’t. But he’d lost control— and nothing bad had happened.

He repeated that. Nothing bad had happened. He looked at Obi-Wan, who was neither bruised nor distressed but was, in fact, still grinning at him, still insufferably pleased with himself.

He could kick himself, to think of all those years he’d wasted, based on what he’d done too long ago—But the past was past, and he had his future lying here beside him.

“I want you,” he was told, a hand sliding between his legs, one finger touching him, fleetingly, in a place where only a Healer or two had touched him before. “But if you don’t want to,” another kiss, to the



side of his mouth, Obi-Wan leaning over him, weight and naked skin settling over him, “we can do other things.”

“And where else were you planning on planting your seed, hmmm?”

Obi-Wan’s eyes were wildly dilated, and now that he was paying attention to something other than his own body, Qui-Gon could see the tremour in Obi-Wan’s hand as it stroked the side of his face.

“I’ve been controlling this for weeks, and I’ve hardly fucked anyone.”

That didn’t make sense; he knew Obi-Wan had been working his way through every infertile being on Coruscant—

“Since I started thinking about you,” the two of them, a single room apart, Obi-Wan masturbating, the Force flowing between them, emotional satiation of the Blessing while Obi-Wan had taken care of the sexual alone. “I need you more than I need to fuck some anonymous hole.”

A finger pressed his lips closed.

“Don’t. I can control this or I can talk nicely, but I can’t do both. Don’t make me feel dirty.”

Now that shocked him. To think that anything could make Obi-Wan feel soiled—Well, perhaps even Obi-Wan had insecurities when it came to sex.

There was a cure for that, and it would put Qui-Gon in the position he needed to be in to feel safe: on his back, under Obi-Wan, unable to pin or hurt or damage anyone. Qui-Gon moved suddenly, pulling Obi-Wan all the way on top of him, his own body reacting to the slick hardness of Obi-Wan’s cock against him and the wavering gasp of pleasure forced from Obi-Wan.

“It’s all right,” he said, running his fingers up and down Obi-Wan’s back exactly the way Obi-Wan had done for him. “You can let go.”

“You’ll catch me?”

“You’ll be in me.”

Obi-Wan’s cock jolted against Qui-Gon’s belly, and Obi-Wan trembled in his arms for a moment, until control was re-established and Obi-Wan was grinning down at him.

“You’re going to love this,” Obi-Wan told him, moving him this way and that, until Qui-Gon was lying there with his legs spread obscenely wide and his body completely exposed.

He had a horrible suspicion he just might be blushing again.

And if he weren’t, the lush adoration of Obi-Wan’s hungry gaze would make anyone blush.

Certainly, by the time Obi-Wan had used the Force to call a bottle of oil to him and started slicking it *inside* him, he was blushing furiously.

Which only seemed to endear him to Obi-Wan, judging by the endless murmur of compliments and endearments. “I’m blushing now,” Qui-Gon said, then gasped as Obi-Wan touched something *inside* that felt far more marvelous than seemed possible even after reading some of the best descriptions.

“Hmmm?”

Oh. Yes. He’d been saying something. “I’m blushing now, but you’ll be blushing afterwards.”

Obi-Wan obviously wasn’t paying any more attention to his chatter than he’d paid to Obi-Wan’s earlier.

“Hmmm?”

“Later, when you remember what you’ve been saying to me.”

A sudden flash of grin, the mouth open, unbridled delight. “Oh no, it won’t be me doing the blushing. I *know* what I’m saying, I’ve been wanting to say every last word for years. You,” and his breath was snatched away but the sudden press of *thickness* at his opening, “will be the one blushing as I repeat every last one of them to you.”

A stretching, blinding heat, thickness, big, pushing in, pushing, pushing—

He’d expected it to hurt, but he hadn’t expected the pain to be as satisfying as the burn of muscles mastering a particularly challenging kata. He’d expected to feel filled, but not swollen like this, as if there was too much inside him for mere flesh to contain. He’d expected to feel moved, but he hadn’t expected to feel as if he were the most important person in the history of the universe ever. Obi-Wan was staring at him, mouth open still, but not in a smile; a breathless gasp, a pause, a suspension of everything but the intensity of pleasure.

More.

Obi-Wan was laying claim, finally, after weeks of denial. Weeks of making do were being replaced in one long sliding thrust of having everything. Needing and wanting coalesced into the sinking of one body into another. And through it all, Obi-Wan was staring into his eyes, soul laid bare.

He could feel Obi-Wan’s passion as if it were his own; it was more familiar, certainly. But so different to see it, to feel it not only through the Force but through the goosebumps on Obi-Wan’s skin and the heat of the flesh buried within him.

Qui-Gon lay there, nearly overwhelmed, too





many sensations, too many emotions, to know which to feel.

And then Obi-Wan started to move.

It was as it had been in the practice salle. Only better. Much, much, much better. He groaned, and Obi-Wan kissed away his embarrassment, joining them at the mouth as they were joined lower, and the Force was part of them, passing between them like kisses, thrusting from one into the other like tongue and cock and love.

Definitely better than it had been in practice, for now there were no barriers, no false faces to subsume desire and passion, just the honesty of what Obi-Wan wanted and needed, and what Qui-Gon was giving back.

Taking, too.

He hadn't expected to enjoy it this much. Hadn't expected the indescribable intensity of having Obi-Wan's skin sliding against his; his cock between their bellies, Obi-Wan's tongue against his, and the Force being fed back and forth between them.

Qui-Gon lifted his hips, wrapped his long legs around Obi-Wan, realised it didn't work quite right, despite what everyone said. He let his legs fall open instead, no discomfort, too many years of stretching and training for something so mild to be uncomfortable.

"Like this," Obi-Wan whispered against his lips, and lifted his legs up, holding them up. Tilting his hips upwards and oh—

Something gave, and Obi-Wan was all the way inside, so deep, inexpressibly deep; he could feel Obi-Wan's testicles rubbing against his bottom as Obi-Wan stayed inside him, all the way up inside him, Obi-Wan just pressing against him as if he could get even deeper into him.

Qui-Gon put his arms around Obi-Wan, held him, cradled him and rocked against him, astonished at the pleasure of this.

He could feel it building, in him, in Obi-Wan, in the Force, and he wondered who would control this time.

And then Obi-Wan smiled at him, and kissed him, and laughed again out of sheer happiness. Pressure built between them, pleasure banked like a fire, smouldering, ready to ignite.

But it felt different this time. The Force was coiled between them, but even so, there wasn't the same bottomless well of intensity in him. Too soon after that first time, with Obi-Wan's hands on him, so now there was only pleasure, and more pleasure, and

Obi-Wan inside him. He could relax, trust himself as much as he could trust Obi-Wan.

He could feel the Force, dim though, compared to the blunt passion of Obi-Wan buried deep inside him, Obi-Wan's back slick with sweat under his hands as he ran his fingers and nails up and down Obi-Wan's back.

Tension pulled the passion in tighter, and he knew, from Obi-Wan if not entirely his own experience, that it was going to be soon, very soon—  
"Touch yourself."

Qui-Gon gasped, and gaped up at Obi-Wan.

"Touch yourself. Make yourself come."

So that Obi-Wan could offer him control, and safety. Qui-Gon raised up, his stomach muscles rippling, stroking his cock, and his moving shifted Obi-Wan inside him, touching him somewhere new. He kissed Obi-Wan, deeply, with all the honesty he could muster, and then lay back again.

"Watch me," he said, and knew from Obi-Wan's reaction it was something Obi-Wan wanted.

He touched himself, as Obi-Wan had touched him, as Obi-Wan had touched himself, for all of those nights. He stroked himself, and rubbed his thumb over the head, wondered how it would feel when Obi-Wan put his tongue there. Stroked himself, in time to Obi-Wan stroking his cock inside him, and felt the passion building.

It took him almost by surprise, the white splattering over his belly and dripping down his hand, and while he gasped, Obi-Wan groaned, and moved, hard and fast, pounding need and Blessing into him.

And after the passion, there was serenity. Deeper than he'd ever known it, fed by the Force, satiated by Obi-Wan inside him, made complete by knowing that he had done this, and everything was all right.

Better than all right.

So much better than all right that he might never move again.

Obi-Wan groaned in his ear, and moved, his half-limp cock sliding wetly, embarrassingly, from Qui-Gon's body.

Oh Sith, they hadn't got beyond lying on top of Obi-Wan's bed, the bedspread would be a mess, the laundry would see and know—

And Obi-Wan grinned at him, supremely, uncomplicatedly happy.

Oh, let them know. They'd all just be jealous anyway. Or envious, since Jedi weren't allowed jealousy.



"I'm rambling, you know," he said easily, kissing Obi-Wan lightly on the lips.

"You're not saying a word."

"In my head. Rambling. I feel..."

Obi-Wan leaned down, nuzzled his nipple, and that was another fine pleasure, seeping through him.

"Are you all right?"

Qui-Gon stroked Obi-Wan's back again, loving the feel of smooth skin under his hand. "I'd say we were both wonderful."

"Oh no," Obi-Wan groaned, but he was grinning still, "I've created a monster."

He nipped Obi-Wan's earlobe, checking that yes, that was one of the things that made Obi-Wan squirm with delight. "I'm just following your example."

"That's what I mean," Obi-Wan told him, sliding over him to lap at his belly, shocking Qui-Gon just a little when he realised that Obi-Wan was licking up his semen.

Qui-Gon moved again, not as quickly as before, too lax and sated to be in any kind of hurry. He was under Obi-Wan again, Obi-Wan spread over him like a living blanket, all muscles and knees and elbows and wonderful skin. Qui-Gon undulated under him, exploring the feel of them together, the way their skin slid or clung together, the way their softened penises lingered against each other, damply reluctant to let the other leave. He undulated again, then spread his legs, Obi-Wan sliding down between them, his penis and testicles nestled snugly against Obi-Wan's belly, Obi-Wan's genitals snug up against him, where he was still open from before.

He stifled the urge to feel shame that he had oil and Obi-Wan oozing from him. Chose, instead, to remember how it had felt to have Obi-Wan inside him.

"I want you inside me again."

"Give me a chance," Obi-Wan told him, rubbing gently against him. "I know I've still not quite finished my Blessing, but I am only human."

"Not right now. But soon."

Obi-Wan leaning up on his elbows over him, their groins pressed warmly together. "So you liked it."

"A Jedi never rushes into a decision," he said, in his best Council-pompous voice. "I thought I should try it a few more times before I make up my mind."

"Ah, I see. A very sensible decision. I'll be honoured to help you with this matter."

"As often as required?"

"Absolutely. Of course, I would have to recommend an additional input of information."

"And what would that be?" he asked oh so calmly, pinching Obi-Wan's bottom while Obi-Wan tried not to collapse into gales of laughter.

"You should try it from the other side. Often."

There was so much tenderness in him for this man. "Can you?"

"As soon as the Blessing's satisfied. Which," a nibbling row of kisses across his collar bone, a deeper kiss filling his mouth for a long moment. "Uhm, where was I?"

Qui-Gon resisted the temptation to point to his mouth and say 'right here.' "Satisfying the Blessing."

"Oh, I'm doing that," throaty voice, lithe surge of body rubbing against him. "I don't think the Blessing's going to need much more before it's satisfied."

"So after that?"

"If you want to."

"I think I could be persuaded."

"You'll like that too."

"I still want you inside me again."

Obi-Wan kissed him then, tongue thrusting into him; another pleasure, this, to indulge in these languorous kisses. To feel Obi-Wan feed him love and the Force until he couldn't tell the two apart.

"Inside you?" Obi-Wan asked him, beginning to slide against him again.

Qui-Gon didn't bother saying anything: he simply wrapped his arms around Obi-Wan and pulled him in close, and kissed him, as Obi-Wan rubbed against him. The Blessing was making Obi-Wan hard again, the cock firming against Qui-Gon's own softness, and then he could feel Obi-Wan's desire through the Force again, building the passion between them again.

## **沢ノ本ノ**

He awoke to something entirely new: a naked body wrapped around him. A muscular thigh lay between his own, nudging his genitals. A strong arm banded his chest. A heavy head lay against his shoulder.

He ached. Every inch of him ached. Muscles were tired or strained, his back ached, his shoulder was numb where it was weighed down. He ached in places he'd never ached before—places he'd never thought would ever ache.





If he paid even the scantest attention to his body, he could feel where Obi-Wan had been.

He was a Jedi master. He had duties, responsibilities, obligations.

Just this once, it was nice, no, splendid, to take the easy way out, and lie here, ensconced in this sated warmth, and simply allow himself to be happy.

He stretched, contentedly, and Obi-Wan woke.

“Good morning.”

“Huh,” Obi-Wan said, scratching his head and blinking down at him.

Then, still sleepily, but waking rapidly: “Morning.”

Obi-Wan shifted, leaned up on one elbow to look down at him, then grinned, slowly. “Weren’t we going to give you additional input before you decided whether or not you liked this?”

And then they began the dance all over again.

