

# STAINED



BY  
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Thank you to my lovely beta, Maeve Pendergast. However, I couldn't help making some tweaks, so any errors are purely my own doing.

~STAINED~

“Obi-Wan?”

“It’s... not... mine.”

It took the master a few moments to process his apprentice’s meaning as he looked to the scene before him. It had all the trappings of a nightmare.

Qui-Gon Jinn had come in search of his padawan the moment he felt the unsettling burst of emotions rush through their bond. First fear, then determination, then... horror. He had rushed into the small office building knowing his padawan was inside. The Force nearly shivered in the air the moment he entered the hall and went down the short stair. He slowed his pace and approached the open door carefully. When he reached the room, what he saw, he knew, would be forever burned into his memory. Obi-Wan was kneeling in the middle of the room. His face, his tunic, his hands, and leggings were all covered in blood. Blood pooled around him on the floor making the thirteen year old seem like a desolate island in a sea of crimson.

Qui-Gon dropped to a crouch and moved closer to the still kneeling child.

“Padawan?” he said gently. Obi-Wan was staring at his hands, his palms up and covered in the darkening ruby liquid. He glanced up at his master, his blue-gray eyes were wide and bore a half-glazed look.

“It’s not mine,” he repeated and then returned to staring at his hands. Qui-Gon looked to the left of the boy for the first time and noticed an unmoving body. The figure wore the black and grey uniform of the rebels currently terrorizing the capital city of Rhys on Xjasso’pia. The pair of Jedi had been sent to help broker a truce between the government and the rebel group, but negotiations deteriorated rapidly when the sister of the Xjasso’pian Prime Minister was found dead. Poison was suspected. After that, it was all Qui-Gon could do to try to get himself and his padawan out of the palace and to the spaceport, but they were ambushed and separated. Apparently, Obi-Wan was attacked by one of the rebels and was forced to kill him. Qui-Gon didn’t see Obi-Wan’s lightsaber nearby only a vibroknife covered from tip to hilt with, presumably, the rebel’s blood—the same blood that now encased much of his padawan’s form like a second skin.

“It’s not mine,” the boy repeated once more. Qui-Gon nodded slowly as he moved closer to his apprentice.

“I know, Padawan,” he said gently as he continued to move forwards. “Obi-Wan, are you injured?” he asked. The boy didn’t speak. He only stared at his hands and shook his head. Finally, Qui-Gon was close enough to touch him. He carefully put his hands on the boy’s tremulous shoulders.

“Obi-Wan, you’re alright. You’re safe now,” he said as he sent waves of comfort and reassurance through the bond, but all he felt from the other end was an odd sort of static—an uncomfortable white noise with only traces of emotion, namely horror and disbelief.

“It’s not mine,” he whispered. He raised his gaze to look into his master’s eyes. Qui-Gon stared into the eyes of his padawan and saw in them nothing he recognized of the boy that had lived with him for the past few months. Those eyes had held a light, a twinkle that seemed to reflect the compassion and warmth of the boy himself. But, these eyes... these eyes that stared at him now were dull, empty. They were dead eyes.

“It’s not mine.”

“I know, Padawan. I know,” Qui-Gon said as he placed a hand on Obi-Wan’s forehead, only dimly noting how clammy the boy’s skin felt under his touch.

“Sleep now, my Padawan. It’s time to rest.”

\* \* \* \* \*

That night was not an easy one for the Jedi. With so much violence still erupting in the streets, Qui-Gon knew it was unsafe to try to make it to the spaceport and their ship carrying an insensate padawan in his arms. Instead, the master carried his apprentice to the temporary refuge of an abandoned warehouse. There he watched over the sleeping boy keeping a wary eye out for rebels or others out to harm the pair.

During the slow passing hours in the warehouse, Qui-Gon did not sleep. He allowed himself only to drift into light meditation so he could maintain a high level of vigilance should the Force warn him of danger. It was several hours before Obi-Wan began to wake from his Force induced slumber. He stirred quietly, blinking a few times before opening his eyes completely. Qui-Gon was immediately at his side the moment he felt Obi-Wan pushing his way towards consciousness. Obi-Wan did not sit up. He did not attempt to move in anyway. He simply lay there, his eyes open staring blankly at the dilapidated ceiling above him.

“Padawan?” his master called out softly. Obi-Wan’s gaze did not shift, but his mouth opened, then closed again as if he were going to say something, but had suddenly decided not to.

“Padawan, talk to me. Are you alright?” Qui-Gon asked, not at all successful at keeping the worry out of his voice.

“So much blood, Master...” the boy whispered, then he turned to look at his master. “There was so much blood. I didn’t mean to... I never intended...”

“Ssshhh, young one,” Qui-Gon said pulling the boy up into a seated position and drawing him close to his chest. “It is alright,” he soothed, but even as he spoke the words he could feel Obi-Wan pulling away from him, his head shaking in disagreement. Obi-Wan looked down at his hands. They, like the rest of him, were still covered in the man’s liquid life now dried to the color of rust.

“Still there...” he whispered. “It’s still there.”

Qui-Gon sighed sorrowfully and took the smaller pair of hands into just one of his larger, calloused ones.

“I’m sorry, Padawan, but there is nothing here to wash with,” he answers. “Padawan, look at me,” he ordered gently. Slowly, the blue-gray eyes rose to meet his midnight blues. “You have done nothing wrong. The extinguishing of a life is always regrettable, but you were defending yourself as you should have. You have done nothing wrong.”

The boy said nothing, but continued to stare at his master for several seconds as if he were trying to will himself into believing the words. The child’s gaze finally dropped back to his blood encrusted hands.

“I took his life with these and now... they’re stained,” he said and then he looked back at his master. “I’m stained.”

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For over an hour the two sat, Qui-Gon with his back against a wall and Obi-Wan curled into his side, blanketed in the embrace of his master’s cloak and arm. During that time, neither Jedi spoke, Obi-Wan’s sad declaration hanging unchallenged in the air. What was the master to say? Taking a life affected the Living Force as much as it affected the one who did the taking and when the taker was a Jedi the effect was doubly so. Qui-Gon hated to admit it, but on some level Obi-Wan had spoken the truth—he was stained just like every Jedi there ever was or ever will be, for all at some point were forced to strike down a living being in service to the Force. It was a grim rite of passage faced by every padawan, some early some late, but none were spared its harsh reality. Usually death was delivered by saber blade, swift, clean, and efficient. The cauterizing feature of the blade made kills... well, tidy, an aspect the master had never really considered a blessing until now. Obi-Wan had not the luxury of a tidy kill. The boy didn’t have his lightsaber when Qui-Gon found him and the apprentice had yet to speak more than a few chilling sentences as he still reeled from the shock of the event. No, that death was close, personal, and messy. Obi-Wan was still covered in the evidence of that. Oh, how the master wished they were at the Temple so he could plant his padawan in the nearest ‘fresher, banish the gruesome evidence from his body, and dress him in the pure, white, clean robes of his station. But even if he could physically cleanse his apprentice, the master knew excoriating the stain left inside the boy would be a much harder task.

“Master?”

The soft dulcet tone of his padawan’s voice broke the uneasy silence and startled the master from his increasingly despondent ruminations.

“Yes, Padawan?”

“You have killed,” Obi-Wan said. It was a statement, not a question, but the master felt compelled to answer anyway.

“Yes, I have.”

“How many?”

“I don’t know,” Qui-Gon replied with a deep sigh. “Too many, but sometimes the Force requires us to take a life in its service, to protect the greater good. To kill in self-defense or the defense of the innocent is not wrong, Obi-Wan. Jedi do not murder, but yes, we sometimes must kill.”

“Murder or defense... the end is the same. Death,” the small voice intoned. Qui-Gon put a finger under the boy’s chin forcing him to look at his master.

“There is no death, Obi-Wan. There is only the Force.”

“There is death, Master,” he whispered. “And I brought it.”

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Eventually the master felt his charge’s breathing change to the slow and steady rhythm of deep sleep, but with sleep came the inevitable nightmare of recent memory. Obi-Wan lashed out in a frenzied panic, his arms struggling wildly against Qui-Gon’s grasp, his face covered with tears.

“No! No! Stop! I don’t want to hurt you! No! No!”

“Obi-Wan, wake up, you are dreaming,” Qui-Gon called, but the boy was still enthralled within the dreamscape unable to hear his master’s plaintive commands.

/Padawan! You’re dreaming and now you must wake. Wake, Padawan!/

The child’s movements started to quell as he relaxed into his master’s hold. Eyelids fluttered open revealing bloodshot eyes still sparkling with tears waiting their turn to trace silvery trails down flushed cheeks. Slowly, the boy calmed down with the aid of the Force and subtle suggestions over the bond from his master.

"I-I killed him again... I didn't want to. I tried to make it stop, to... do things differently... but it still happened. He still died because of me," Obi-Wan whispered. Qui-Gon gently wiped the newly shed tears from the boy's face.

"We cannot change the past, Padawan. We can only accept it."

"I cannot accept it..."

"Why not, young one?"

"Because, I am a... killer," he finished as new tears threatened and his voice choked. "I-I don't want to ever accept that... but it's the truth, isn't Master?" he said as he looked up into his master's eyes. For several moments, Qui-Gon was unable to answer then, eventually, his mouth seemed to move on its own accord.

"Yes Obi-Wan, it is true in that you have killed," he paused. Obi-Wan lowered his gaze and nodded his head as the expected confirmation was delivered. "But as you pointed out earlier, I too am a killer in this regard, as is Master Uvain, Master Gallia, Master Windu, and even Master Yoda."

To that his apprentice said nothing, only blankly stared at his bloodied and filthy robes. His eyes fell again to his stained hands.

"When I realized we were separated I didn't know what to do. I looked around for you, but I couldn't see you anywhere," Obi-Wan began, his eyes still glued to his hands. "Where I was standing was very exposed, so I backed into the building figuring I would find better cover and wait for you to find me."

"A wise course of action," Qui-Gon offered, but his praise went unnoticed.

"There were lots of people in the building... civilians... innocents. They were so scared. They ran past me screaming, terrified. They pushed past me as I pushed deeper inside. I was so overwhelmed by their fear that I... I didn't realize someone had followed me in." Here the boy paused, taking in a deep breath. Qui-Gon didn't speak, allowing him to continue with his story in his own time.

"I didn't know he was there until it was too late. He attacked me from behind. I stumbled at the top of a short staircase. I fell, my saber was gone from my hand... I don't know where I lost it. Then he charged at me. He had a knife. He tackled me to the ground. We... struggled... Somehow I got the knife from him and..." he paused again, this time to swallow the large lump in his throat. "He was so heavy on top of me... lifeless. I could f-feel the blood pouring from his body onto mine. Warm. Slick. I couldn't breathe under him. I couldn't breathe... I couldn't..."

Suddenly the boy was hyperventilating, his breath coming in short, hitched gasps. Qui-Gon leaned the child forwards placing his head between his knees and rubbing soothing circles across the boy's back.

“Deep breaths, Padawan.”

Slowly, the boy’s breath got under control and he leaned back into his master’s side, his head laying between his chest and shoulder.

“I never wanted to kill him, Master. Truly, I didn’t.”

“I know, my Padawan. You did only what you had to do and for that I am grateful, otherwise I would have lost you today and I am not sure if that is something this old master could bear.”

“I know it was my life or his, Master, but...”

“But what?”

“But it still doesn’t seem fair.”

Qui-Gon sighed.

“Life is not fair or unfair, my Obi-Wan. Fairness or unfairness lies in how we treat others. It is in our choices, Light and Dark, right and wrong, defense or murder. Do you understand?” he asked looking down at his apprentice. To his surprise and delight the boy returned his gaze, the dullness of his eyes washed away with last hour’s tears.

“I... I think so, Master, but I still feel... wrong about it.”

Qui-Gon gave his padawan a gentle squeeze.

“And so you should. It is only your compassion you feel, Padawan. Though at times like this it will bring you pain, I hope it is something you never lose,” the master finished softly.

With the coming of dawn, Qui-Gon noticed that the streets have quieted, the sound of blaster fire fading out some hours previous. At daybreak, he decided, that they will return to their ship and finally make their way back to Coruscant and back to the serenity of the Temple. There the boy will discard the tattered remains of his robes and a piece of his innocence. He will step into the warm waters of their ‘fresher. He will watch the stains disappear from his body and travel down the drain as he expels his grief and guilt into the Force and the master knows that then his padawan will finally be cleansed.

Or so he chose to hope.

Fin.