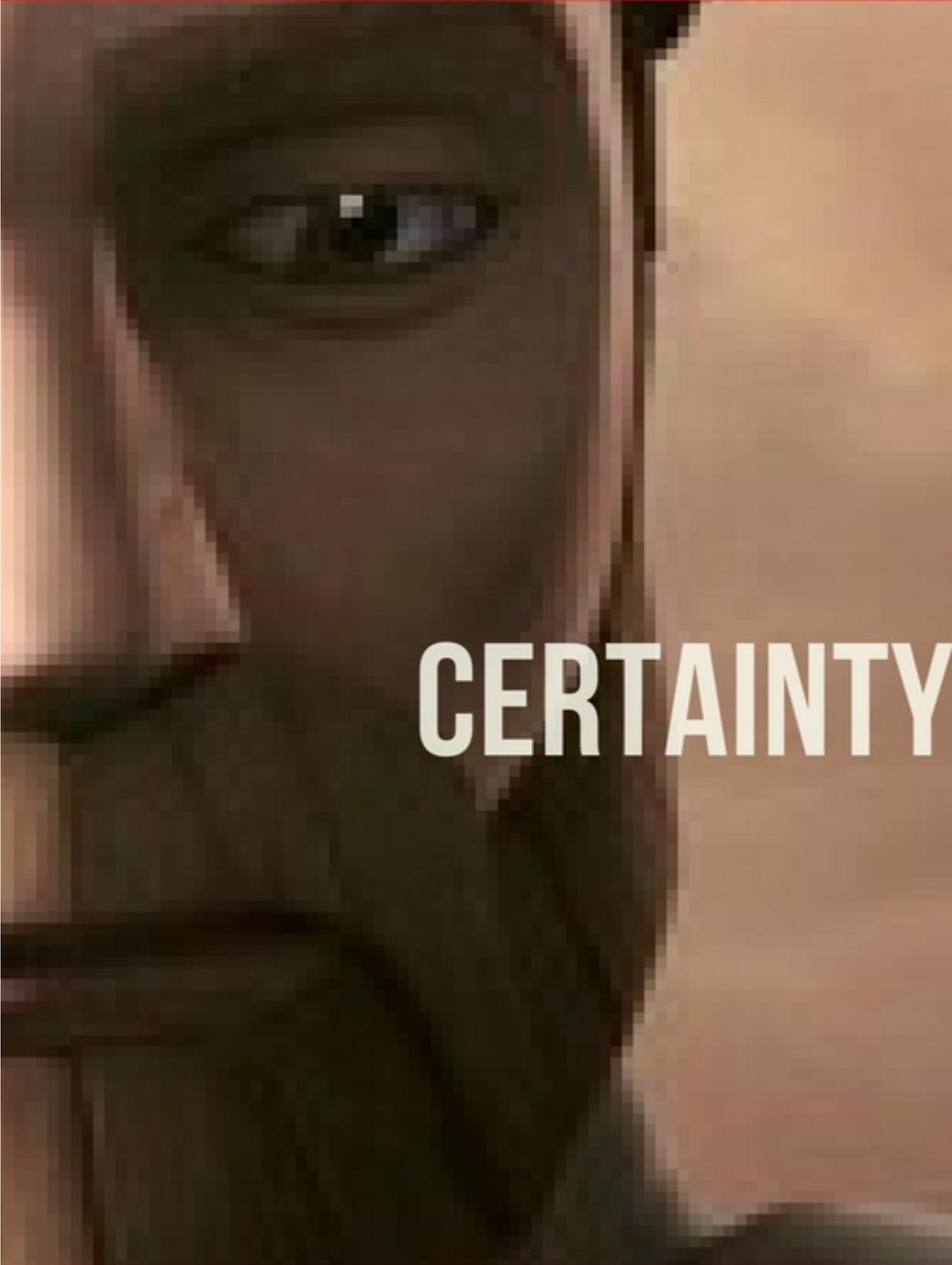


IT WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE
LIKE THIS



CERTAINTY

QWAE29

I neither own these characters or the literary universe in which they live, though there are a few new faces and places that are of my own design. I neither make nor intend to make any profit off of this writing, but indeed I expect die poor, clutching a legal pad and pen to my chest, a half-written chapter scribbled on the fading yellow page.

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

~CERTAINTY~

It is not supposed to be like this. No, not like this. None of this is supposed to happen. Nothing about this is right. Nothing about this makes sense. It simply is not supposed to be like this. The Chosen One is not supposed to be dying...

Except that the Chosen One is dying...

And it is all Obi-Wan's fault...

Chapter 1: Split Decision

*** Two weeks earlier***

"Sir, we've got to get out of here now!" Captain Rex yells over the constant barrage of blaster fire. Anakin deflects the incoming blasts from an approaching super droid before slicing it into three distinct pieces. He moves on to his next target while yelling back at Rex.

"Prep the ship! I'll contact Obi-Wan!" he replies as he blocks four more blasts. Anakin takes a moment and falls into cover behind one of the hanger's support pillars. He taps his comm. link.

"Obi-Wan, where are you?"

"I... I'm in the east corridor... I seemed to have picked up a few friends along the way to the rendezvous. Not to worry though... I won't be late," Obi-Wan answers over the comm. Anakin can hear the sounds of battle over Obi-Wan's transmission, but he isn't concerned. He knows that if his former master needed help he would have asked for it. Instead, Anakin focuses on the present and the present requires that he gets his men on the shuttle before the whole factory explodes and collapses on top of them.

"On the shuttle troopers, double time! Move it!" Anakin barks as he and Rex provide his unit with cover. Once everyone is on board, Rex starts his own backwards walk up the ramp still firing his dual pistols at the few remaining battle droids. Suddenly, both Anakin and Rex are knocked off their feet as a massive explosion violently rocks the factory.

"It's the generator, sir!" Rex yells as he gets to his feet. "This whole place is going up any second!"

Anakin rises as well occasionally blocking blasts from three or four still functioning droids. He activates his Jedi wrist comm.

“Master, where are you?” he yells as another explosion rockets through the increasingly fragile structure. “Master!” Anakin yells again, but his only response is static. Finally, Obi-Wan’s familiar voice comes over the link.

“Anakin! I’m cut off from the hanger!” he yells, his thick Coruscanti accent giving his speech a dignified quality that belied its urgency. Obi-Wan is still talking, but Anakin cannot make out what he is saying over the sound of two more explosions followed by the groans of overly taxed durasteel. Anakin doesn’t even try to understand what his former master is saying.

“Master, stay where you are. I’m coming for you!”

“No!” Obi-Wan yells. “There isn’t any time! Get your men out of here! That is an order!” he yells, desperation nearly dripping off his words, but Obi-Wan’s plea/demand falls on deaf ears. Anakin is already moving down the ramp.

“General Skywalker, we must leave,” Rex says holstering his pistols as the last droid falls.

“Rex, take the shuttle and get out of here. I’m going to find Obi-Wan.”

“But, sir...” Rex starts. Anakin quickly cuts him off.

“You have your orders, Captain!” Anakin all but growls. Rex immediately snaps to attention.

“Sir, yes sir!” he replies crisply. He goes into the shuttle without a further word. Anakin races down corridor after corridor not knowing which way is blocked or whether the section he is in is about to collapse. He’s operating purely on his instincts, something he had learned to trust long ago. He runs into very few droids as he makes his way to Obi-Wan. Most are damaged from explosions. Others are crushed beneath equipment or slabs of durasteel. Anakin rounds a corner and nearly slams into a fallen brace. He skids to a halt and carefully makes his way down the partially caved-in hall. He looks further ahead and sees that the end of the corridor is completely blocked where the ceiling has given way exposing several floors above. Anakin is trying to decide his next move when something catches his attention. A few meters away beneath another beam is a pile of rubble and droid parts and... a head of auburn hair.

“No...” he whispers as he runs over to Obi-Wan’s body. “No, no, no, no, no...” he repeats in hushed tones like a sacred chant. He kneels beside Obi-Wan’s upper body. Everything below his mid-thighs is buried, trapped under the remains of the ceiling.

“Obi-Wan,” he says. At first his voice is just above a whisper. “Obi-Wan,” he repeats this time much louder. Anakin’s heart leaps gleefully in his chest when the second call gets the response he so desperately needs to hear.

“Ana... Anakin?” Obi-Wan rasps, his voice soft as he rouses from his involuntary unconsciousness.

“Yes, Master. I’m here,” Anakin answers. Just as he is about to say something to reassure Obi-Wan that he is going to be okay, another explosion sends a thunderous, shockwave echoing through the factory. This time the source is much closer. Heat and razor-sharp pieces of debris tear down the hallway as deadly shrapnel. Anakin uses his own body to protect Obi-Wan’s exposed frame. When the immediate danger passes, Anakin surveys the debris pinning Obi-Wan. He looks down at his former master.

“I’m getting you out of here.”

“No,” Obi-Wan groans. “The ceiling... it will cave in if... if you move it...”

“You let me worry about that. You just be ready to move,” Anakin replies. He closes his eyes and focuses all his concentration on the singular task in front of him. He slowly begins to raise both arms and as he does so he uses the Force to command the debris to lift itself slightly into the air. All around the Jedi can hear the groaning of the little remaining structure struggle under the shifting pressures. It is a delicate task. Anakin can feel tiny tremors begin to run through his arms and beads of sweat form and drip from his forehead. He only needs to raise it a little more... just a little higher...

“Now,” Anakin orders through clenched teeth, but his order isn’t necessary. Obi-Wan has already begun to drag himself out from the heavy debris. Once he has pulled himself clear, he tries to stand, but neither leg will support him and he crashes back to the floor with a pain-laden grunt.

“Master?” Anakin calls out. His eyes are still closed and his whole body is trembling with the effort of holding the hall together.

“I’m clear, Anakin, but I can’t walk,” Obi-Wan informs him as he pulls himself up on his elbows. He doesn’t even want to look at his mangled legs. His peripheral vision lets him see the blood staining his trousers and the waves of pain he is actively suppressing confirm the seriousness of his injury. Anakin begins to tremble more violently, but he manages to hold everything in place.

“I’ll help you,” he responds simply though his teeth remain tightly clenched. “On the count of three. One... Two... Three!” he yells. He lets his arms fall and with them every piece of stone and metal he had been supporting. For a brief moment, the sudden release throws him off balance and leaves him light-headed. He fears he may pass out, but he quickly recovers and turns to pick-up Obi-Wan. Anakin pulls Obi-Wan’s arm over his shoulder and

then Anakin wraps his own arm around Obi-Wan's waist. He immediately starts into the quickest "run" he can manage as he drags Obi-Wan through the crumbling complex.

"I thought I ordered you to not come looking for me," Obi-Wan says mildly irritated, but mostly pleased.

"No," Anakin replies smiling through his exhaustion. "You ordered me to get to my men out of here and I did."

"I suppose I shall have to learn to be more specific," Obi-Wan says as Anakin reaches the eastern entrance. The two Jedi slowly make their way outside and attempt to put as much distance as they can between themselves and the droid factory. After only traveling a dozen or so meters Anakin slows to a halt. Before them sits a deep ridge. Though it is only about ten meters across, its depth is considerable. Alone Anakin could easily jump the ravine using the Force, but while carrying Obi-Wan, he has his doubts. Before he can ask Obi-Wan to prepare himself for the jump, the factory behind them gives one final metallic groan as its death rattle. The final explosion erupts from deep within its bowels tearing across the landscape and cutting a path directly to the Jedi.

First Obi-Wan feels the intense wave of heat that threatens to sear him to the bone. Next is the blast wave, an invisible wall that slams into his body and pins him to the ground under its crushing weight. Only then comes the noise, the unmistakable guttural roar of "BOOM!" followed immediately by darkness.

Obi-Wan doesn't know how long he is out. Time is not an aspect his senses can interpret at the moment. His only perception is a world of high pitched silence and the ever-present shades of pain traveling through the muscles and sinews of his body. Obi-Wan pushes himself up on his elbows, coughing as he chokes on air thick with dust debris. In the distance to his right he sees a figure approaching. He squints in an attempt to sharpen the image, but his vision remains stubbornly blurry. The figure is definitely coming closer.

"Anakin?" Obi-Wan croaks, his voice hoarse from the dust. The figure quickly runs to Obi-Wan's position and kneels beside him.

"General Kenobi, are you badly injured?"

"Captain?" Obi-Wan replies, his brain and his vision finally working in tandem. Rex takes off his helmet setting it to his side as he helps Obi-Wan to his feet. Even with Rex carrying most of his weight Obi-Wan cannot help grimacing from a pain that seems to encompass every part of him.

"Let's get you back to the ship," Rex says as he taps his comm. link. "I need a medical team to my position. I've found one of the generals."

"One of?" Obi-Wan repeats. "You don't have General Skywalker?"

“No, sir. We haven’t been able to locate him. We were hoping he was with you.”

“He was,” Obi-Wan starts. “It doesn’t make any sense. He must be nearby.” Obi-Wan closes his eyes and concentrates. After a moment, Rex sees his eyes pop open. “There!” Obi-Wan says pointing to the edge of the cliff. Rex helps Obi-Wan move closer to the edge. Both begin to scan the ravine with their eyes. It is Obi-Wan who sees him first.

“Oh no,” he whispers as he looks down upon the broken and bloody body of his former pupil. Rex is quick to respond.

“I need a medical evac! I’ve found General Skywalker and he needs that evac now!” he barks into his communicator. Obi-Wan is only dimly aware of Rex’s call for help. He doesn’t notice the team of troopers that gather around him or the ones descending into the ravine with jet packs and medical supplies. All of Obi-Wan’s awareness is focused on one thing—the convergence in the Force known as Anakin Skywalker. Obi-Wan centers his mind on the point of light that is Anakin’s life. To his horror he watches helplessly as that light pulls away from him like a star blinking out of existence. A cold terror creeps across Obi-Wan’s mind and settles heavily in his stomach. Anakin Skywalker is dying... and it is his fault.

Chapter 2: Upon Waking

Obi-Wan Kenobi suspects he has blacked out again as, once again, he wakes up confused in his surroundings. Waking this time is particularly disconcerting as he finds himself completely submersed in some fluid. His body's first impression is that he is drowning, but Obi-Wan is able to use his years of training to quickly ignore the momentary brush of panic. Instead, he calmly assesses his situation. He is breathing. Breathing is good. Breathing is definitely not drowning. So, he is not in immediate danger, but Obi-Wan still feels confused and exposed. He tries to focus and free his head of its fog; a last vestige of his blackout. He instinctively touches his left hip. No lightsaber. No robes for that matter. Obi-Wan realizes he is naked both figuratively and literally save for his diminished wits and an embarrassingly small pair of white shorts and yet... something is familiar about his situation. "I know this place... I've been here before," Obi-Wan thinks as he studies the fluid around him. "Bacta," he thinks. "I'm in a Bacta tank." That's when Obi-Wan remembers...

Everything.

Obi-Wan feels the cold panic return. It strangles his limbs and clouds his thoughts. Below him and outside his tank he sees various Jedi healers carrying out orders and monitoring patients. Obi-Wan bangs on his tank until a young healer, a Zabrack, looks up at him. Obi-Wan points to himself and points up trying to indicate to the young healer his need to get out of the tank; his need to see Anakin. The healer, however, looks more startled and confused than understanding and quickly calls out to someone beyond Obi-Wan's field of vision, but soon he sees exactly who the healer has summoned—Master Healer Vokara Che. The Twi-lek master healer walks over to Obi-Wan's tank and once again he frantically gestures his need to be released. Vokara studies him for a moment and then inputs a set of commands to the console controlling his tank. Obi-Wan breathes a small sigh of relief, but as he does so he notices that the air in his breathing mask tastes... different... Suddenly, Obi-Wan realizes what is happening. He is being betrayed! Vokara is not releasing him. She is sedating him! Obi-Wan begins to bang his fist against the duraglass once more, but within seconds he strength leaves him. He finds it hard to keep his hands curled into fists. His eyes won't stay open. He glances down and sees that Vokara is still watching him; her gaze as soft as stone.

"Blast that woman," is the last thing Obi-Wan thinks before he is once again forced into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

Whatever it was that Master Che slipped into his oxygen supply must have been designed to put rancors down because Obi-Wan Kenobi doesn't stir until mid-afternoon

two full rotations later. He is no longer in a Bacta tank. At some point during his drug induced slumber he had been transferred to a bed. Though he still misses his Jedi robes and the comforting proximity of his lightsaber, Obi-Wan is grateful to now wear simple white pants with a matching white tunic. He looks around his room. There is another bed to his left, but it is unoccupied thankfully. Obi-Wan knows that the last thing he wants at the moment is a roommate... unless it is Anakin. Anakin... Obi-Wan briefly considers calling for a healer, but the threat of alerting Vokara that he is awake makes him think better of it. He pulls back his bed sheet and blanket and swings his legs over the side of his bed. He carefully puts one barefoot on the cold floor, then the other, testing their stability. He tentatively begins to apply weight and he stands. Both his legs are aching terribly, but they are holding. Satisfied, Obi-Wan walks slowly to the door keeping one hand in constant contact with a wall for support. The door slides open to his approach. He carefully checks both directions of the hallway before venturing out of his room. Slowly and with a noticeable lack of grace, Obi-Wan continues through the healing wards allowing his instincts to lead him to Anakin. His instincts are right. Obi-Wan steps into a room on his left and sees a familiar figure, eyes closed, floating in a tank of Bacta. Obi-Wan nearly runs to the tank, his recklessness causing the muscles in both his thighs to scream in agony. Yet even as they shake and tremble to support him, Obi-Wan's only focus is on the being in front of him. Anakin is unconscious. His hair floats around his head like a golden-brown halo. His expression is serene, but his body... his body is a different matter entirely. Obi-Wan stares at the body in front of him in horror. Nearly every inch of skin is covered in burns, the flesh twisted, raw, and mangled despite the prolonged immersion in the healing liquid. Even his prosthetic hand is damaged, its metal laced with scorch marks and deep dents and gashes. His neck and the lower half of the right side of his jaw are badly burned as well; his delicate features lost under skin that more closely resembles ground meat. Obi-Wan can feel the bile rising in his throat just as his legs finally give out and he sinks to the floor landing in an unceremonious heap. He wants to cry aloud. He wants to scream, to pound his fists and throw curses at anything that may hear him, but he doesn't do any of that. He simply sits there—dumb with rage, numb with grief. He is only vaguely aware that someone is behind him. He only truly notices when he or she begins to pull him away from the floor, from the tank, from Anakin...

“No!” he roars. Even to his own ears his voice sounds strange, almost foreign. He wrenches his shoulders and shakes loose from the hands that try to hold him, the hands that want to steal him away. Free of those evil hands and their support, Obi-Wan collapses back to the floor. His legs hurt. He doesn't care. He drags himself lamely back to the tank. He places one hand on the cool duraglass as he gazes sorrowfully at his former padawan. So intent is his stare that Obi-Wan never feels the cold metal pressing against his neck. He only knows that his eyelids are suddenly very heavy as they begin to close...

* * * * *

Days. So many days. Seven days since the droid factory. Six days in the healing ward. Three days since he had seen Anakin. So many days and yet, in truth, it was only a few, but those few days felt like years—years stretched taut over Obi-Wan’s aching memory, his tortured thoughts, and his broken heart. For three days he has tried to meditate and for three days the quiet calm he sought eluded him. As a result, Obi-Wan resigned himself to simply sit in his bed in the healing halls. To others, he appears still, calm, almost serene, but it is a mask; a mask to disguise the oppressive burden of his guilt.

“Do you find me incompetent?” comes a stern voice near the door to his room. Obi-Wan turns his head and meets the durasteel melting gaze of Master Vokara Che. He had not even sensed her presence.

“Do you find me incompetent?” she repeats. Obi-Wan’s brow wrinkles in confusion. Was there a prelude to the question that he missed?

“Um... no, Master,” he stutters slightly. Vokara crosses her arms over her chest and steps closer to Obi-Wan’s bed.

“And my staff, do you find their assistance inadequate?”

“I... no, Master,” he responds, his confusion still dominating his features. Vokara steps directly beside his bed.

“Then why do you persist in disregarding my instructions?” she asks plainly. There is no anger in her voice, just a cold, harsh edge of indignation laced with iron purpose. Obi-Wan finds himself shrinking under her intense scrutiny. He turns away, a blush rising in his pale cheeks. He knows she is right. He has not been a very good patient.

“I am sorry, Master. I will endeavor to be more... cooperative,” he says as he looks at her again. Vokara sighs and uncrosses her arms.

“Is there still pain?” she asks. Obi-Wan smiles weakly. He knows she is asking about his legs, but the thought that he could exist without pain—particularly the pain in his heart—is so incredulous he finds it amusing.

“Yes, there is some pain,” he replies. Vokara Che does not share his amusement. Her eyes scan his recumbent form. After several uncomfortable minutes of silence she returns her gaze to Obi-Wan.

“You need to eat and get out of your bed for short periods of time to stretch your muscles. If you do, you could be released in a couple of rotations and you would cease to waste valuable bed space,” she finishes reprovingly as she heads to the door. It slides open as she approaches, but suddenly she stops without going through. She looks back at Obi-Wan over her shoulder.

“You may want to know that Skywalker has been removed from the Bacta tank.”

Obi-Wan opens his mouth to speak, but a sharp look from Vokara keeps him in silence.

“When you have recovered you may see him,” she says evenly. “Not before.”

“Of course,” he says. Satisfied, Vokara Che nods and exits the room once again leaving Obi-Wan alone with his thoughts, but this time he feels something more than guilt. He feels hope.

Chapter 3: Following Directions

He knows he should wait, but he cannot. He must see Anakin for himself. He moves to the edge of the bed and carefully tests his stability. His thighs ache, his knees wobble, but he doesn't fall. Obi-Wan takes his time moving down the hall. Once again he relies on his instincts to navigate, driven by his need to see that Anakin is okay. He feels himself drawn to one room. He enters and finds his friend lying quietly on a bed. It is a dual occupant room like Obi-Wan's, but also like Obi-Wan's there is no roommate. They are alone. Obi-Wan crosses to Anakin's bedside. Anakin is taller than Obi-Wan, significantly so, but right now Obi-Wan cannot help but think how small and vulnerable Anakin looks now. Anakin wears an oxygen mask that covers his mouth and nose and he reeks of the sickly sweet smell of Bacta. The horrible burns are gone. All that remains are numerous pink splotches on his pale skin, echoes of the seriousness of his injury, but those too will heal in time. Cautiously, Obi-Wan brushes an errant curl out of Anakin's face.

"Anakin, can you hear me? Anakin?" Obi-Wan asks softly as he gives him a gentle shake, but Anakin makes no sound or indication of stirring. Obi-Wan tries again this time his voice a little louder.

"Anakin, please wake-up."

"You're supposed to resting," a voice says from behind. Obi-Wan turns to find himself staring at another young healer, this one a Togruta male. The healer places his data pad on a nearby counter and lightly grabs Obi-Wan's upper arm.

"Come with me, Master Kenobi," he says as he tries to lead him off. Obi-Wan snatches his arm out of the young healer's grasp.

"I'm not going anywhere," Obi-Wan snaps, his voice much louder and his anger far more evident than he intends. The healer steps back awkwardly clearly startled at the Jedi Master's outburst.

"That will be quite enough, Master Kenobi," Master Che says flatly as she steps into the room and stands behind the young healer. She places a hand on the healer's shoulder and gives him a slight nod. The healer bows his head graciously and leaves the room as swiftly as his legs will carry him.

"Tell me, how long before he wakes from the sedatives?" Obi-Wan demands. Vokara Che crosses her arms over her chest, one eyebrow raised in clear defiance of Obi-Wan's order for her to speak. Obi-Wan glares at her for a few seconds before realizing the futility of his challenge. His shoulders slump as he closes his eyes and takes in a slow, deep breath.

"Forgive me, Master Vokara," he says contritely, his voice returning to its normal volume. At this change, Vokara nods her approval and steps to Anakin's bedside directly across from Obi-Wan.

“When will the sedatives wear off?” he asks again, this time calmly. Vokara stares at Obi-Wan for several seconds as if she is debating something with herself.

“Master Skywalker has not been given any sedatives,” she answers finally. Obi-Wan’s brow wrinkles. He looks from Vokara to Anakin and back to Vokara, an unspoken question hanging on his lips.

“Master Skywalker is in a coma,” she says, answering the question that Obi-Wan could not ask.

“When... when will he wake-up?” Obi-Wan asks, his voice scarcely more than a whisper. Vokara sighs heavily and shakes her head.

“We do not know if he will ever wake,” she replies sadly. Obi-Wan lifts Anakin’s right hand, now gloved to hide the metal, and holds it delicately between his own.

“He will wake-up from this and I will stay here until he does,” Obi-Wan says as he stares down at his friend. Even though he isn’t looking at her, Obi-Wan can feel Vokara’s oppressive glare upon him.

“You most certainly will not. If he is to recover, Master Skywalker will need his rest as do you, Master Kenobi.”

“Then transfer me,” Obi-Wan says. He looks behind him and points to the empty bed. “I’ll sleep there,” he offers. Vokara studies Obi-Wan closely.

“If I permit this,” Vokara says speaking very slowly, “you will agree to remain in your bed for the remainder of your convalescence?”

“More or less,” Obi-Wan smiles. Vokara re-crosses her arms, her left eyebrow raised in minor annoyance.

“See that it is more,” she says as she turns to leave. She pauses at the door. “And Master Kenobi, should you find the need to yell at one of my healer’s again you will find yourself in need of more healing,” Vokara jokes as she leaves the room, at least he hopes she is joking, but he isn’t at all sure.

Obi-Wan pulls a chair beside Anakin’s bed. He sits down and once again covers Anakin’s hand with his own. Were it not for the mask, Obi-Wan could have convinced himself that Anakin is merely sleeping. In fact... yes, that is exactly what he is doing. He is sleeping and when he wakes he will be fine... healed... recovered. He has to because he is the Chosen One therefore he cannot die. He cannot. Obi-Wan plants that certainty securely in his heart and then he begins his vigil.

* * * * *

Obi-Wan sits at Anakin's bedside, his elbows resting on his knees, his head in his hands. He has been there for some time, several hours at least, half a rotation at most. He will sit there unmoving as long as he has to... as long as Anakin lies there... also unmoving. He will do it because he cannot do anything else.

* * * * *

Obi-Wan," a voice calls softly. "Obi-Wan."

He knows that voice. It is familiar and warm and yet upon hearing it, Obi-Wan's blood runs cold. He slowly brings his gaze up from Anakin's resting hand to a face; a pair of blue eyes staring back at him.

"Master?" Obi-Wan whispers. Qui-Gon nods then he turns his sad gaze to Skywalker's prone form. Obi-Wan's mouth hangs open. He tries to speak, but his throat is dry and no sound escapes. He closes his mouth and then he closes his eyes.

"You're not real. You're dead. I'm dreaming," he says finally as he opens his eyes. He half hopes that his former Master will be gone, but he admits to himself that part of him yearns for Qui-Gon to remain.

"Perhaps it is a dream. Perhaps not," Qui-Gon answers without looking at his former padawan. Obi-Wan studies the figure in silence. He looks just like Obi-Wan remembers, same tall, regal bearing, same lightly crooked nose, same smell on his skin, same fall of his robes, same leather tie in his hair... it is all as it should be... except it shouldn't be.

"Do you remember what I said to you on Naboo, Padawan?" Qui-Gon asks. The questions tears Obi-Wan out of his thoughts and back to the seemingly impossible moment.

"Of course, Master."

"I was dying. You held me in you lap and you promised me you would train the boy."

"I did... I did train him, Master," Obi-Wan stammered awkwardly like a child begging for his parent's approval. Suddenly, Qui-Gon snaps his gaze to Obi-Wan.

"Should I have made you promise me not to kill him as well!"

“I...,” Obi-Wan starts, but he doesn’t know where to begin. The vehemence in Qui-Gon’s voice has unnerved him, but then just as suddenly Qui-Gon’s expression softens as his eyes once again flicker over Skywalker’s face.

“This was too important. It never should have been entrusted to you,” he sighs. “That is my failure. Now there will be no balance... and no peace,” he says then he turns to Obi-Wan his eyes hard not with anger, but with a certain sad finality. “Your selfishness has doomed us all.”

Obi-Wan awakes with a gasp. It is a startled cry that dies in his throat. He was dreaming, but even though he is awake the dream still hangs on him heavily like a wet cloak on a cold night. A lump rises in his throat and Obi-Wan has to force back a gag as a dark, cold something churns in his stomach and grips his intestines. He feels out of control, his emotions vacillating rapidly among self-loathing, despair, anger, fear, and guilt. The bile rises in his throat again. He is going to be sick. Obi-Wan limps his way to the refresher and falls clumsily to his knees. He dry heaves over the toilet, his empty stomach spasming violently under the strain. By the time the spell passes, Obi-Wan is trembling. His head hurts, but the ache in his heart is far, far worse.

Obi-Wan sits on the cold floor of the fresher for several minutes, partly because the throbbing in his legs has increased two-fold, but mostly because doing something... doing anything just seems too hard. Qui-Gon’s words echoed in his head like a sickening and ceaseless mantra. “This was too important. It never should have been entrusted to you.” “Your selfishness has doomed us all.”

Obi-Wan thinks he will be sick again, but this time the nausea passes without incident. What is he going to do? What can he do? If only he had lied, told Anakin he had found a closer exit, he never would have come searching for him. Yes, he would have died, but Anakin would be fine. Anakin would have grieved for him, perhaps even grown to hate him for his deception, but he would have been safe; not lying helpless in the Jedi Healing Halls perilously dangling off the precipice between life and oblivion.

No, he is going to be sick. Obi-Wan hovers over the toilet again this time choking and sputtering as the stomach acid he vomits burns and rips at the soft tissues of his throat. With the back of his hand he wipes the spittle from his dry, cracked lips.

“Anakin,” Obi-Wan whispers, his throat raw and aching. “I am so sorry... I failed you and now... I’ve failed us all,” he finishes before collapsing onto the cold floor and giving himself up to the coming darkness.

* * * * *

“Kenobi. Obi-Wan.”

“Go away.”

“That is not going to happen,” Master Mace Windu says matter-of-factly. “Here, sit up,” he gently commands as he pulls a recalcitrant Obi-Wan into a seated position, his back against a wall of the refresher. He places a cool cloth to Obi-Wan’s forehead and Obi-Wan’s face relaxes slightly as his eyes close.

“Feel better?”

“Mmm hmmm,” is all Obi-Wan can manage. Mace eyes him warily for several seconds. Obi-Wan’s face is pale and his simple white tunic is damp with sweat. Strands of auburn hair stick half-hazardly to his forehead and Mace sees a slight grimace cross Obi-Wan’s expression every time he moves his legs no matter how slight the motion.

“Let’s get you back in bed.” Mace says as he places an arm around Obi-Wan and lifts him onto his feet. In mere moments, Mace has Obi-Wan in bed and is reaching for the sheets.

“I think I can manage without being tucked in,” Obi-Wan says with a light smile. Mace leaves the sheets where they are. He remains standing by Obi-Wan’s bed, but he looks over his right shoulder towards Anakin.

“Has there been any change?”

“No,” Obi-Wan answers. His chin is on his chest and his voice is so low Mace has to strain a bit to hear it. Mace brings his gaze back to Obi-Wan. Without lifting his head, Obi-Wan can feel Mace’s heavy stare upon him. Obi-Wan suffers in silence for several minutes trying to outlast Mace’s quiet challenge, but, finally, the silence and the glare get the better of him.

“If you have something to say, Mace, then by all means, please say it.”

“I think you allow your attachment to Skywalker to cloud your judgment and that you would have recovered by now if you were not content to wallow in your own self pity and despair.”

“I am not wallowing,” Obi-Wan snaps bitterly. Mace sighs deeply.

“Obi-Wan, this isn’t you and it isn’t Jedi.”

“I know,” Obi-Wan answers. He stares at his hands unable to hold his friend’s gaze; ashamed of the words he is about to utter. “Mace, you don’t understand... I’m not blaming myself because of some misplaced grief. I blame myself because I’m guilty. I blame myself

because it is my fault. I caused that!" Obi-Wan yells as he points a shaking finger at Anakin. If his emotional outburst is a surprise to Mace, he doesn't show it.

"Skywalker made a choice to come after you. He understood the risk. He wanted to save you and he succeeded."

"You still don't get it," Obi-Wan answers nearly laughing. "I knew that if I told Anakin I was trapped he would come for me. All I had to tell him was that I would meet him at another entrance—a simple lie, but I didn't. I wanted him to come find me! I didn't want to die! My selfishness caused this! My fear caused this! And it makes me angry, Mace. I'm angry and terrified and so full of sorrow it burns in my chest!" Obi-Wan hisses through clenched teeth; striking hard against his own chest to drive home the point. "But more than that I feel guilty. Guilty that I'm awake and he isn't. Guilty that I may have killed the Chosen One! Guilty that my actions will keep the Force from balance! Guilty because I failed the galaxy, Mace! THE GALAXY! And I know," Obi-Wan continues, his rant gaining speed and intensity as he gesticulates wildly. "I know I'm a Jedi. I should let these emotions go, but how can I? How can I when it is my fault? How do I let that go, Mace? Tell me, please! Tell me!" Obi-Wan finishes his words shrinking into shaking shoulders and silent tears. Mace opens his mouth to speak, but then closes it again not knowing what to say.

For a long time the room is silent except for Obi-Wan's occasional sharp inhalations as he slowly regains his composure. Finally, Mace speaks.

"Feel better?" he asks. Obi-Wan nods sheepishly.

"I... apologize for my outburst. This isn't my best moment," he sighs. Mace clasps his hands behind his back and wanders around Obi-Wan's bed. He stares out the small window looking out onto Coruscant busy skyways. He stares for several seconds in silence before speaking.

"As Jedi, we have learned it is best to allow ourselves to feel strong emotions, but then let them pass through us and into the Force. However," he pauses turning back to Obi-Wan a faint smile on his face. "Sometimes one just needs a good cry and a ready shoulder."

Obi-Wan's nods his head in both understanding and gratitude.

"Thank you, my friend."

"Anytime."

Chapter 4: The Return

Master Vokara Che is pleased when she visits Master Kenobi. She had been closely monitoring him over the past two rotations and had found herself pleasantly surprised that he had held to his agreement. He was eating again, though still too sparingly for Vokara's liking and several times a day he would walk with a healer down the halls and back again to stretch out his healing muscles. He is calmer, she notes as she walks into his room for the first time today. The midday meal had just been served and Kenobi sits half-eaten near his bedside. He sits cross-legged on his bed, his eyes closed, the back of his hands resting comfortably on his knees. Vokara studies him in silence for several minutes.

"I can feel you thinking," he says as he opens his eyes and turns to look upon the healer's face.

"How long have you not been able to meditate?" she asks. Vokara Che, always straight to the point. Obi-Wan doesn't even take the time to wonder how she knows of his trouble meditating. When it came to the Healing Hall, the Master just seemed to know everything.

"Since the incident," he replies. He speaks plainly and honestly, but his voice is softer than usual. Vokara nods, a subtle acknowledgment and appreciation of his candidness. Obi-Wan takes in a slow, deep breath and then releases it just as slowly.

"It is a continuing endeavor," he amends lightly.

"I am not concerned," Vokara answers. Her eyebrow raises slightly. "Yet," she smiles. A smile from the Master Healer is a rare gift and Obi-Wan is honored and surprised to have earned it.

"And here I was beginning to think," Obi-Wan started, but another voice stops his. The moan is so quiet it is barely audible, but both Jedi hear it. More importantly, both Jedi sense it. Vokara moves quickly to Anakin's bed. Obi-Wan is slower and less graceful, but he follows right behind her. Between and below them, Anakin's brow wrinkles slightly and his eyes squeeze tighter shut as he struggles toward consciousness. Vokara busily checks monitors and readouts glancing between their data and her patient, but Obi-Wan never takes his eyes off of Anakin.

"Mmmmm," he moans again. Vokara, satisfied at whatever the various readings have reported, carefully removes his breathing mask. Obi-Wan takes his hand.

"Anakin. Anakin, it's time to wake-up. Anakin..." he says sweetly. Anakin grimaces. His eyes open slowly, blinking several times against the harsh glare of the lights. Obi-Wan turns away for a moment. He reaches out with the Force and lowers the illumination in the room. He turns his attention back to his friend and former padawan. Anakin's eyes are open. He tries to speak, but his throat is dry.

“Wa... wa... ter,” he rasps weakly. Vokara already has a glass in hand, anticipating his needs. Anakin raises his head slightly and takes a few slow sips, his face relaxing with each draw of the cool beverage. Anakin falls back from the offered glass and turns to look at his former master. Waves of relief pass through Obi-Wan’s body as Anakin’s blue eyes settle on his own. A crooked smile creeps across Anakin’s mouth.

“If I’m here, I guess I should expect an I told you so,” he jokes. Obi-Wan shakes his head and brushes a curl off Anakin’s brow.

“No I told you so. Just happy that you’re here.”

“Oh,” Anakin says, his face suddenly serious. “It must’ve been bad. What happened?”

“What is the last thing you remember?” Vokara asks. Anakin closes his eyes, concentrating on bringing forth his memories. Suddenly, his eyes open wide and he turns sharply back to Obi-Wan.

“Obi-Wan, are you,”

“I’m fine, Anakin,” Obi-Wan says, his voice calm, his hands still clasped around Anakin’s. “I’m fine now,” he repeats and for the first time since he woke up in the healing ward he knows he speaks the truth. He is fine now. It is a certainty.