

## ~MISCONCEPTIONS~

Qui-Gon sat down heavily on his sleep couch and was forced to admit he was a foolish old man. An old man who knew better than to get his hopes up, who knew better than to trust the whispers of dreams and the betrayals of his aging body. He *knew* better damn it! And yet he had let himself believe...

He had let himself be carried away by the beautiful lies of faith and destiny. He had allowed himself to seek and cling to thoughts of future happiness as a youngling would cling to the promised safety of his mother's skirt. A deep sense of despair pressed against the edges of his mind, looking to gain footholds in his heart. It was his own damn fault.

Foolish old man.

He had had twelve days of unabashed happiness, of a dream nearly realized. It should have been enough. He should have *let* it be enough. Instead, he had opened his arms and invited in another chance for the pain that had nearly broken him to return and finish the job. Qui-Gon wondered idly if it would this time.

He looked down at the datareader still in his hand. Most of the words it displayed were meaningless to him now, scribbles and scratches that he had once understood but now seemed disjointed and alien. But there were two words that stood out amongst the incomprehensible rabble. Two words he understood.

**Not pregnant.**

Reading them now it was almost impossible to remember the sudden lightness and joy he had felt not twenty hours ago when the datareader had displayed a distinctly different message – a message that told him that he was, in fact, with child. That message was still there, saved in the reader's memory, but it hardly mattered now. This new reading had obliterated any peace, any joy, any hope for the future that had been his only yesterday.

Thank the Force he had not told anyone, not even Obi-Wan.

Qui-Gon snorted, tossing the reader to the floor with a flick of his wrist and a little more force than necessary. *Thank the Force* indeed. For what? For holding the promise of a child before him, *within him*, only to cruelly yank that promise away not once, but twice? Oh, and let's not forget the damnable irony of it all, that he should find and lose hope on the very anniversary of that first found hope and first deep loss.

Little gods! How was he supposed to handle this? Qui-Gon covered his face with his large hands. He had literally scraped together every credit he could, sold what meager possessions he had, and did it all so quietly and carefully as to not alert his friends or his bondmate. He knew the risks of this pursuit, the cost, and he refused to bring Obi-Wan back into this hurt. Even now, he had to protect him. He would have to take this pain, this...

agony gnawing at his heart and hide it away lest Obi-Wan feel it and ask him questions he could not, would not answer.

Why had he done this? This whole course was madness! The galaxy, the gods, the Force, the great and mysterious entities that governed the lives of lowly mortals like him, *whatever* and *whoever* they were they all had already made their inclination clear in this respect. It was only his persistence, his continued arrogance that pushed past these warnings, plowed through these barriers, and sought to impose his will, his wishes on his life.

And was that so wrong?

Was his personal pursuit of happiness, of completeness the wrong path? It had to be if this pain was the cost. Qui-Gon lowered his hands from his face and let his arms rest on his thighs, his hands hanging limply near his knees. Because of his choice to go further, to try again, another life had been created and ultimately destroyed. It didn't matter that his rational self knew that his body's destruction of the tiny life was likely for the best, that it had likely suffered from some genetic or chromosomal abnormality. What did matter to Qui-Gon was that he had put the events in motion to create this life only to have fate snuff it out. A child, or at least the heavy potential of one, was gone waiting to be flushed unceremoniously from his body and no one but he would know. No one but he would mourn.

Qui-Gon allowed a deep and shuddering sigh before heaving himself off his bed and moving into the common room then on to the small kitchen. He opened a cabinet and reached for the container of his favorite sapir tea with one hand while absently rubbing against the tender ache in his chest with the other. The end of his short pregnancy did not take with it the long list of his pregnancy symptoms. Qui-Gon placed the container on the counter and removed the top. Immediately, the fragrant green bouquet of the leaves wafted into the small space. Just as immediately, his stomach heaved, and his expression shifted into a grimace as the once pleasant, now putrid smell assaulted his senses. He closed the jar with a muttered curse. Even the simplest comforts were denied him. He closed his eyes and took a deep centering breath through his mouth not his nose as the heavy scent of the tea still hung in the air. He opened his eyes, placed the container back in the cabinet, and walked back into the common room. He sat down in his favorite chair, his fingers tapping on the cushioned arm in restless energy, his stomach still roiling uneasily from his misadventures in the kitchen. The headache that never ever left him, surged from its recess in the back of his skull to a point directly between his eyes causing him another grimace. A hand raised to pinch the top of his broken nose. The sore chest, the headaches, the fatigue, sith hells even the *nausea* had all been borne happily when he knew them to herald the conception of a child. But now... now, all they did was serve as a reminder of what was lost and each pain or little biological indignity (like the spontaneous demands of his bladder) poured salt into the open wound of his heart.

Prepared to sit and wallow in his pain like a pig in slop, Qui-Gon was surprised at the sounding of the apartment's door chime. He rose from his chair to the soft chorus of

popping knees and crossed to the door. It slid open to reveal the tall, bald, and familiar form of Mace Windu. He was carrying a small stack of books and wearing an expression that bordered somewhere between amusement and concern.

“Are you going to let me in?” he asked dryly. Qui-Gon nearly started at his question but was able to suppress the reaction in favor of stepping aside to let his friend pass. Mace walked into the common room heading straight to the tall bookcase on the apartment’s rear wall. Qui-Gon, thinking nothing of Mace’s actions as the man had been a welcomed and frequent visitor to his rooms for decades, stood in frozen stillness by the door as he considered whether he should offer tea to his guest. It was something he would normally do upon receiving a visitor so the absence of it would undoubtedly be noticed. And questioned. That more than anything decided it for him. Qui-Gon went into the kitchen to begin the process of heating the water and brewing the leaves of the spicy Rylothian chai blend Mace favored and that he kept on hand just for these occasions. The sickly, sharp scent stung his nose and threatened to disrupt the tenuous truce he had reached with his stomach, riling it up once more towards open rebellion.

He poured the water and steeped the leaves before picking up both cups and heading back into the common room. Mace turned to see him carrying in the tea as he replaced the last of the borrowed books. Qui-Gon placed Mace’s cup on the low table before the couch and then retook his seat in his armchair. He brought his cup up to his lips before a swift turn of his stomach forced him to place his cup on the table as well. Mace strolled around the sofa, taking a seat and picking up his cup in one smooth motion. He closed his eyes as he sipped his chai, relishing it for several quiet seconds before opening his eyes – eyes which traveled from Qui-Gon’s empty hand, to Qui-Gon’s tea cup, and back to Qui-Gon again.

“If I were on Malastare, I might suspect the tea was poisoned.”

“What?” Qui-Gon responded somewhat belatedly. A furrow appeared on Mace’s brow as he sat down his own cup.

“Alright, something *is* wrong. Care to share?” The concern evident in the man’s rich baritone compelled Qui-Gon to speak truthfully, even if he was not wholly forthcoming.

“It’s nothing really. Just feeling a bit out of sorts,” Qui-Gon replied with a shrug. He had intended the comment to be placating, but if anything, Mace’s frown grew harder.

“If you are giving even that small confession...” Mace paused as his eyes drifted back down to Qui-Gon’s untouched cup of tea. “I’ve only ever known you to ignore your tea for two reasons and since you clearly haven’t caught that Rodian spotted fever virus again...” Mace’s face split into a wide grin. “Congratulations, my friend!”

Regardless of his years of training, Qui-Gon could not help the instinctive flinch at Mace’s heartfelt words. He wanted to speak, wanted to negate or correct or dismiss the other man’s statement, but Qui-Gon’s mouth was dry, his throat all but swollen shut. Mace’s

smile slid off in his face in increments as he took in the subtleties of Qui-Gon's body language and realization dawned.

"Oh... oh Qui, I'm so sorry," Mace spoke softly. Qui-Gon, who had mostly recovered himself in those short intervening seconds, attempted to shrug off his friend's condolences. He leaned back in his chair and forced himself to meet Mace's pitying gaze.

"It's fine. I'm fine."

"Bantha shit," Mace exclaimed rather surprisingly. Qui-Gon wasn't certain if the uncharacteristic use of profanity was to express vehemence or startle him into more honesty but he suspected it was the latter.

"Mace,"

"No, Qui. I know you remember? I know how much it means to you, how much it is wanted."

"Then you also know how my wants don't mean a damn thing!" Qui-Gon snapped leaning forwards in his chair and slamming both hands against the armrests. "I don't get what I want, not in this! Not ever in this!"

As befitting a Jedi Master and Council member, Mace didn't flinch or give the slightest outwards reaction to Qui-Gon's emotional explosion. Instead, he weathered the sudden tirade like a rock endures the waves that crash upon it. Qui-Gon heard the words he had spoken, understanding what was said only after he had uttered it. His eyes widened and the air in his lungs seemed to collapse in on itself making him gasp. He shot out of his seat so quickly the movement made him dizzy, but it did not slow him as began to pace around the room like a prisoner in his cell. He wrapped his arms tightly around himself, partly in defense, partly in self-comfort, and wholly subconsciously as the only thing that commanded Qui-Gon's attention right then was the coming fallout from his unintentional moment of honesty. He had to get control of this conversation, get control of his tongue and his emotions, and behave like a proper Jedi dammit!

Qui-Gon forced himself to stop pacing. He stood facing his balcony doors, his back to Mace who still sat on the sofa. He took a deep breath, then another, then finally a third before he trusted himself to speak.

"I apologize for that," he said at length, his back still to his guest. Behind him, he could hear Mace shift, likely turning to look over the back of the sofa since his voice did not seem to be any closer when he spoke.

"You have nothing to apologize for," Mace replied easily then his voice took on a somber tone. "How recent?"

Qui-Gon did not pretend to not understand his question, much as he might have wanted to. He hugged himself tighter as he stared out at the beginnings of a Coruscanti sunset.

"Yesterday I was pregnant. Today I am not." He gave a tiny shrug at the last then fell into silence. The quiet lay undisturbed for several minutes, neither man willing to move or dishonor the tragic reverence due that moment. Then, as all moments do, it passed.

"Does Obi-Wan know yet? I know he's on assignment on Alderaan, but arrangements can be made for,"

"No, Obi-Wan does not know."

"When are you going to tell him? You *are* going to tell him, aren't you?"

"There is no need," Qui-Gon began then he paused and loosed a deep sigh. "I had hoped to tell him... It's of no matter. Nothing has changed so nothing need be told."

"I think quite a bit has changed, Qui-Gon, and Obi-Wan has a right to know of it." Mace's words had been softly spoken, but even so they struck at Qui-Gon piercing his flimsy facade of calm with little effort, but tremendous impact. He spun around quickly, pinning his friend beneath his heated gaze.

"A right to know has he? Does he have a right to have his heart ripped out of chest, again? Does he have a right to know of yet another life, another part of him is gone and dead for no reason at all save fortune's spite? Does he have a right to be repeatedly wounded, to be left bleeding and dying with no hope of reprieve or rescue? Is that what he has a right to?" He was shouting again, but he couldn't stop himself. It was like Mace had removed a single, crucial bolt from a faltering dam and now Qui-Gon's pain, his heartache, his anger poured through the gap, bursting forth in a frightening deluge and breaking the dam into splinters.

"Is that the *right* you would grant him?" he hissed through clenched teeth. Mace stared back at him, his face and voice as serene as ever.

"Yes," the Councilor intoned and Qui-Gon's mouth fell open in shock. He hadn't the words to counter that... idiocy, for that was what it surely was. Eventually, he was able to close his mouth then reopen it to speak, though what he uttered was well less than his usual eloquence.

"Wha... what?"

"I said yes. He has a right to feel all of that, as do you," Mace answered as he rose from his seat on the sofa. He crossed over to his friend and placed a hand on the arms Qui-Gon still had protectively wrapped around himself.

“It’s alright to feel angry, Qui. You should feel angry and hurt and sad and confused and,”

“Alone,” came the whispered interruption. The hand resting on Qui-Gon’s arms tightened slightly.

“No, not that. Never that. You are not alone in this, Qui.” Mace stepped closer and into Qui-Gon’s personal space. Though both men were nearly the same height, the long-haired master could not bring himself to make eye contact with his dark-skinned friend. A few moments passed where neither man moved or spoke before Mace broke the fragile silence between them.

“You truly believe that, don’t you?” he began, his voice fairly dripping with incredulity. “Qui-Gon, you can’t,”

“I know, Mace,” Qui-Gon interrupted finally turning his head to meet his friend’s eyes. “I know. Obi-Wan loves me. You and Yoda, Ar and Adi, and others do too, I know. I know you are all...” his voice trailed off as he searched for the right word. “I know you all... are concerned for me.”

“We care for you,” Mace corrected.

“Still, you cannot... you are not... there is nothing you can do in this.” Qui-Gon rushed forwards when Mace looked to interrupt him again. “There is nothing you can do. You can talk, offer support,” he paused smiling ruefully, “indulge my outbursts of temper... but, ultimately, you simply cannot understand.”

Mace did not respond immediately, giving the words his characteristic thoughtful consideration.

“There are support groups outside of the Temple that gather similarly situated people. They would understand. You could talk with them.”

“I could,” Qui-Gon conceded. “And we could talk, but over time those who bodies failed them like mine has would only seek to find mutual misery in one another and those who succeeded would earn our bitter envy and resentment. These are not traits that I would choose to foster, but there stands the truth of it. So, you see, Mace, I *am* alone. This is a burden I cannot share, and if I cannot share its weight I will not share its pain. Not even with Obi-Wan.”

“This... course you’ve chosen, it does not seem wise. To isolate yourself,” Mace continued, but Qui-Gon had heard enough and pulled away from the other man’s gentle hold. He stalked over to the balcony doors and resumed his examination of the setting sun.

“I do not isolate myself. I *am* isolated. I am trapped in a body that will not work, in a system I cannot overcome, with a desire that I can neither ignore nor satisfy. Every rational

analysis tells me I should stop and let go of this coveted impossibility, but I cannot. I was promised... the Force, it showed me time and again the face of that child, our child, and yet every time..." Qui-Gon took a deep, shuddering breath. "You fear this pursuit may destroy me and yet I would rather destroy myself than fail at it."

"Qui-Gon,"

"Don't worry," he replied. He turned to face the stricken expression of his friend. "I won't say I haven't thought about it. More than once. But I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do that to him. I won't choose to die if I can't have a child, Mace, but I don't know how to live without having one either." He let loose a mirthless laugh. "A fine Jedi Master I am."

Mace stepped backwards unsteadily until he felt the sofa against his thighs. He sat down on its back and stared at his friend, shaking his head.

"You're right," the Korun Councilor muttered, his wrinkled brow displaying his bewilderment. Qui-Gon cocked his head.

"I must not have heard you correctly as you have never admitted when I was right before."

"But you are right. I... cannot understand... this. I thought I could but..." Mace started but his voice trailed away to nothing as a hand came up to rub his brow. The hand dropped away and he looked up again.

"But you're wrong too. You don't have to be a Jedi Master in here," he said directing a waving hand to the quarters they currently occupied. "In here, you are just a man. Whatever that entails."

"Do you..." Qui-Gon paused and swallowed thickly. "Do you think I'm wrong to pursue this?" The question was hesitantly posed, and the questioner shuffled and fidgeted after the asking. Mace, to his credit, did not answer quickly, and when he finally spoke his words were given slowly and chosen carefully.

"Most of the times you have given me my greatest headaches involve you arguing with the Council over how you handled some aspect or another of your mission. Those times, more often than not, you wield your instincts and the promptings of the Force as both your saber and shield against our mandates. The truth is, while I often disagree with your decisions, I cannot plainly state they are wrong." Mace sighed and looked into the wounded eyes of his friend. "I guess what I'm trying to say is that is a question only you can answer, Qui-Gon. But I will say this, you've always trusted your instincts and the Force before this. You should continue to trust them both now."

"How?" Qui-Gon quietly asked, his hands outstretched and upturned as if he were pleading for the answer. Perhaps he was. It was Mace's turn to shrug.

“Faith. You must have faith,” he answered and Qui-Gon’s hands dropped to his sides as he stepped away from his friend.

“Today, I lost that too,” he said as he turned to the balcony windows and the darkened cityscape.

The sun had set.