

A little idle talk of this and that

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A little idle talk of this and that

by [victoria_p \(musesfool\)](#)

Summary

On his way to Tatooine with Luke, Obi-Wan makes an unexpected stop for tea in Ba Sing Se.

Notes

Title from "A Little Gossip" from *Man of LaMancha*.

Obi-Wan programs the navicomputer with the most roundabout route to Tatooine that he can and still arrive in a somewhat timely fashion. He's not sure he can spend more than a week cooped up in a ship with an infant, even an infant as amiable as Luke seems to be. Or perhaps it's just that Obi-Wan can sense him in the Force, as strong as his father ever was, and so always knows when he's hungry or wet or tired before he even knows himself. Obi-Wan doesn't know and he doesn't want to take any more chances. He is already as attached to Luke as he was to Anakin (to Ahsoka, Satine, Qui-Gon), and can't bear to hear him cry.

He traded the ship Bail gave him for an old freighter on Yuvern, and traded that for an even older, more nondescript personal cruiser on Dantooine. He still has a long way to go, but he feels sufficiently off the radar now, in a ship that could never be connected with Bail, Alderaan, or the Jedi.

He's half asleep when the hyperdrive hiccups and reverts them to real space, dropping them in the exosphere of a planet.

None of the star charts look familiar at a glance, and the planet they're heading for comes up as 'unknown' on the computer. Astronavigation had never been Obi-Wan's forte, and it's possible the Force is just screwing with him. Then again, if the planet is truly unknown to the Republic, perhaps it will be unknown to Palpatine's Empire as well.

The sensors spit out data—the planet is inhabited, and safe for human habitation, but no ships or shields are detected, in the atmosphere or on the ground. Obi-Wan searches for a spaceport, but there aren't any. He spends a few minutes struggling with the controls, trying to slow down enough to land safely. He's had enough experience with crash landings over the years, and doesn't want to get Luke started on them so young.

He makes it to a broad grassy field outside the largest city on the map, and hopes the planet is advanced enough to provide parts to repair his ship, even if he has to serve as mechanic himself. It's been a long time since he had to do his own ship repairs, but he still remembers how. He tries to forget why, though, tries not to long for Anakin or Ahsoka or even Artoo.

Luke, picking up on his sadness, starts to snuffle, and Obi-Wan reaches out with the Force to calm him. He takes Luke from his basket and works out a makeshift sling from the webbing and blankets there, so he can rest cradled against Obi-Wan's heart.

And it's then that he notices the Force—it's unsettled here, but free of the unrelenting darkness it had been drowning in when he'd fled Mustafar. Perhaps they truly are beyond Palpatine's reach.

Before they leave the ship, he tries to contact Bail. The signal is patchy, but he does finally get through on their secure frequency. He leaves a message that he's experiencing delays and the package is not yet delivered. He'll try again, depending on how long repairs will take. It wouldn't do to fall out of touch completely, even if some small part of him wants to, especially if this world is free of the darkness and sorrow he's been living with for the past three years.

And yet, as he walks towards the towering walls of the city in the distance, he sees clear signs that this place is not untouched by war or strife. There are burned fields in the distance, and discarded tanks lying where they've been disassembled. The tanks are old-fashioned—outfitted with treads rather than repulsor lifts—but the symbol painted on all of them looks like an old-fashioned Jedi starbird. He wonders then if this is some long-forgotten colony from before the founding of the Republic, and hopes they still speak some language he understands.

His hopes are mostly fulfilled—the signs are unreadable, but the language is an older form of Basic, still spoken on a handful of colony worlds. He'd spent three weeks on Berelden VI once on a mission with Anakin, early on in his apprenticeship, and Anakin had picked up the dialect more quickly and easily than Obi-Wan had at the time. It's rusty now, but he still remembers it, and he is not at all wishing he'd kept Threepio around to translate.

There's a long line of refugees waiting at a large hole in the wall while gruff, green-clad guards ask them a series of standard questions and stamp their papers (actual papers! Not identichips or even the new scandocs that were implemented just before Palpatine's takeover) before waving them through a makeshift stone gate.

Luke is stirring from his nap by time Obi-Wan reaches the kiosk.

"Papers?" the guard asks in a bored monotone.

"You don't need to see my papers," Obi-Wan replies with a gentle wave of his hand.

"I don't? I think I do," the guard says, brow furrowing and then smoothing out. "I do need to see your papers, sir."

"Is there a problem, Shu?" The speaker is a young woman in an armored green dress and elaborate makeup that reminds Obi-Wan of Padme in her days as queen. He has no doubt the gold sticks tucked in her hair and her belt are razor-sharp, and who knows what else she's concealing under her dress. He glances behind her, past the gate, to see two other women in similar outfits and wonders if these are royal handmaidens of some sort.

Luke chooses that moment to wake with a soft cry, and Obi-Wan sends another soft pulse of calm over the bond he absolutely should not be forming with the child at this time and yet can't seem to stop. Hopefully Luke has Padme's sense of timing and her charm, rather than Anakin's, which often got them into more trouble than out of it.

"My nephew," Obi-Wan says before the guard can respond. "I need to—My brother's family is—" He stops, because it's the kind of lie he likes best—the truth, with a healthy fudging of the details, and right now it's hurting so much he can barely breathe.

"Of course," the girl says. "Shu, I'm taking this one with me."

"But his papers."

"I take full responsibility," she says. "Sir, please come with me."

"Am I in trouble?" he asks lightly, cupping one hand around Luke's head and resting the other at his waist, where his lightsaber hangs beneath his robe.

"That depends on you." She's smiling but her words are serious. "But I think I know someone who can help you."

"I—That's very kind of you."

She nods and makes some unseen signal to her companions, who remain behind as they walk through the gate.

Inside the walls, the city is bustling, full of people and animals and wheeled carts, but people defer to his guide and get out of their way as they follow a dusty but smoothly paved street. The city rises in rings, and the street circles up and up.

"How old is your nephew?"

"A week," he says. "His parents are—dead." He blinks away the image of Anakin, burning on the bank, of Padme, dying on the gurney.

"I'm sorry. At least he has you. The city is full of refugees and—"

"Suki!" A young man dressed in blue, his hair pulled into a nerf-tail high on the back of his head, jumps out of the crowd at them, grabbing the girl's arms. Obi-Wan flinches, hand on his lightsaber, but his guide—Suki, apparently—knows him. At least, she doesn't draw any of her weapons.

"Sokka! What—"

"Did you see the airship? There was an airship, higher and faster than I've ever seen one fly, and it landed somewhere outside the city." His eyes are wide and his voice is full of excitement and Obi-Wan bites back a sigh. His ship is not worth this amount of excitement in the general run of things, but on this planet, it might stand out.

Suki's gaze cuts towards him and then back to Sokka. "Why don't we discuss it after I've brought—" she pauses and gestures, so Obi-wan says, "Ben." She nods. "Ben, here, to the Dragon?"

"Oh! Okay." Sokka gives Obi-Wan a quick once-over and his mouth twists in a frown. "You didn't just deliver that baby, did you?"

Suki laughs. "No, Sokka. They came as a set."

"Okay." Sokka falls into step beside her. "I'll go with you." He holds up his hands. "Not because you can't handle yourself, but because I want you to come with me to look for the airship afterwards."

She slips her arm through his and smiles. "I know."

Sokka's ready chatter about everything makes the walk pass quickly and doesn't allow Obi-Wan to fall back into his morose contemplation of everything that's brought him here. He also wonders who this Dragon is and whether it's really safe to take Luke to see him. Some local crime boss or kingpin? This world is unlikely to be free of crime, but he hasn't seen any security forces out and about either. Not that he has a choice. There isn't anyone he could leave Luke with even if he wanted to.

Luke cries softly and even through her makeup, Obi-Wan can see the way Suki's face softens. "We're almost there," she says, offering Luke a finger, which he immediately puts in his mouth. She laughs. "We'll feed you soon enough, Luke." She glances at Obi-Wan, her eyes narrowing. "You must also be hungry, Ben."

"I'm fine," he replies.

She hums skeptically but doesn't dispute it, and he wonders when he became so transparent to teenage girls.

They're in the upper part of the city now, the boulevards wider and less crowded, the storefronts cleaner and more expansive. When they arrive at their destination and lead him to an empty table, he can't help but laugh.

"A tea shop?"

"Not just any tea shop," an old man with a beard and a topknot informs him with a twinkle in his eye. "The Jasmine Dragon is the best tea shop in Ba Sing Se." He smiles broadly. "You look like you've come a long way and could use a cup of tea. Nephew!" This last is called over his shoulder, and another teenage boy appears, this one with a large burn scar over one of his golden eyes, and it's all Obi-Wan can do not to lunge at him, lightsaber in hand.

But he's wedged into a chair with Luke in his lap, and the boy is carrying a tray full of used teacups, so even if he *is* a Sith, he's not looking for a fight.

"Yes, Uncle?"

The old man's eyes have narrowed at Obi-Wan's response, but he still can't feel anything but a natural wariness in the Force. "The war is over," he says. "Please, relax."

"You should listen to him," the nephew says with the rueful grimace of one who's learned the hard way. It's an expression Obi-Wan is intimately familiar with. "He's very wise."

"And you are the light and joy of my old age, Nephew." The old man beams with pride, and Obi-Wan's chest aches with loss.

"This is my nephew," is what he says, though, cupping a hand around the back of Luke's head. "Luke. And I am Ben. I thank you for your kindness."

"I am Iroh, and this is Zuko. I see you've already met Sokka and Suki." He smiles at the two of them. "Toph is waiting for you in the back." Sokka and Suki sketch bows in their direction

and head off to the back of the shop, talking quietly. Zuko hovers, still holding his tray of dirty dishware.

"Uncle?"

"The oolong, I think, to start. And, perhaps, pai sho?"

Zuko's nose wrinkles but he says, "Yes, Uncle."

"I don't wish to pull you away from your work," Obi-Wan says.

Iroh smiles. The Force settles warm and peaceful around him, though it reminds Obi-Wan less of the Jedi Temple and more of the Temple of Kyber on Jedha, and he remembers Qui-Gon telling him that all is one in the Force, despite any apparent outward differences.

"Serving tea and aiding those in need are my work, Ben. And," he takes a chip out of his apron pocket and flips it, "the occasional game of pai sho." The chip doesn't move like it's made of plastic, but something heavier. Horn, perhaps, or a shell of some sort. It's painted with a white lotus blossom. "The white lotus opens wide to those who know her secrets."

It's clearly a passphrase of some sort, but not one Obi-Wan recognizes. "I'm afraid you have me at a disadvantage," he says, dropping his gaze for the first time and stroking the fine, soft hair on Luke's head.

"You are tired. I understand." The chip is tucked back into Iroh's pocket. "The tea will help. And some moo-sow milk for young Luke."

"That's not necessary. I have some formula in my pack."

Iroh shrugs. "It is no trouble, and moo-sow milk is quite delicious and healthy. Just what a growing boy needs."

Obi-Wan inclines his head, knowing when to give in gracefully. It reminds him of tea with Yoda, and he wonders how he's doing in his exile.

Zuko comes back with another tray, this one containing two clean teacups, a steaming teapot, and other accouterments of tea service, as well as a small bottle of what must be moo-sow milk for Luke. He sets it on the table between them, bows slightly—more to his uncle than to Obi-Wan—and leaves.

The crowd in the teashop has thinned out, and there's a soft murmur of conversation interspersed with occasional sounds of people drinking tea and eating pastry. It's lulling, and Obi-Wan's lack of sleep starts catching up with him; he hasn't slept in at least two days and hasn't slept *well* in the three years before that.

Obi-Wan feeds Luke, who drinks greedily and then falls asleep, while Iroh fusses with the teapot a bit before pouring a cup for Obi-Wan and a cup for himself.

"Please, Ben, drink up."

The tea is dark but mellow, somehow both grounding and bracing. Obi-Wan feels both calmer and more awake after the first few sips. "This is good."

Iroh laughs. "Don't sound so surprised. I *am* the best tea maker in Ba Sing Se!"

Obi-Wan inclines his head graciously and admits, "I'm new in town."

"Yes. And from a long way from here, if Suki has guessed correctly." Iroh's face doesn't lose any of its good cheer, but his eyes are sharp and assessing. "It was your airship that Sokka tracked."

Obi-Wan sets his teacup down, breathes in deeply through his nose, and centers himself in the Force. "Yes." He swallows hard past the sudden lump in his throat. "There was a war and my people...lost." He strokes Luke's soft hair again. "We're all that's left."

"Ah." There's sympathy and understanding in Iroh's gaze now. "Our long war too has finally ended, in a much better way for us, though there are still loose ends to clean up." He leans back in his chair and calls out, "My friends, would you join us, please?"

Zuko, Sokka, and Suki are accompanied by three other teenagers: a girl in blue, who resembles Sokka so strongly they must be related, a small girl in green with the milky white eyes of the blind, and a boy with a blue arrow tattooed on his shaved scalp; he has them on his hands as well.

If Iroh is a warm spot in the Force like a Guardian of the Whills, the boy with the tattoos is a blazing light, almost completely unshielded, the Force moving in loving currents around him. How had the Order never found this planet, this boy?

"Sokka, you were correct," Iroh says, and Sokka raises his arms and flexes while the others roll their eyes, and the girl in blue covers her face with her hand.

"You know we never tell him that," she says, dark brows drawn together forbiddingly before her expression clears. "It makes him insufferable." She smiles brightly at Obi-Wan and Luke. "I'm Katara. How old is your nephew?"

"A week," Obi-Wan answers automatically.

"Oh, he's so sweet. Can I hold him?" The lemur creature riding her shoulder chitters excitedly when she makes a gesture towards Luke before she pulls her hands back and folds them together at her waist.

"Sorry about my sister," Sokka says, leaning in like he's telling a secret. "She really likes babies."

"Well, someone has to take care of them while you're fainting like an old lady," Katara replies. The lemur chatters at Sokka now, who rolls his eyes.

"That was one time. One time!"

The little blind girl huffs, impatient and amused, and turns to Obi-Wan. "I'm Toph. Sokka and I were talking, and I think between us, we might be able to fix your ship."

"It's broken, right?" Sokka says, suddenly all business. "I'm not an airship expert but it looked like it was erratic on the way down."

"Yes," Obi-Wan says. He hasn't been around anyone but Luke for a week and he's starting to feel a little overwhelmed at being the center of attention.

"And if we can't do it," Sokka continues, seemingly oblivious to Obi-Wan's growing distress, "the Mechanist will be here in a few days, and he can. He's a mechanical genius."

"Yeah," the tattooed boy says, with somewhat less enthusiasm. "He's great." He watches Obi-Wan with wide grey eyes that seem a lot older than they should. "Why don't you guys give him some space?"

"Of course, Aang." Katara grabs Sokka's elbow. "You can talk about mechanics later, Sokka." She smiles briefly at Obi-Wan again. "If you're injured and you need any kind of healing, or if you just need a break from the baby, let me know. I can help."

It would take a lot more than a bunch of overly helpful teenagers to make Obi-Wan forget his manners. "Thank you, Katara." He offers a bow of his own, which wins him grins all around before she bustles everyone but Aang and Iroh into the back of the shop again.

The low murmur of conversation around them rises—they are definitely talking about Aang—and then falls again when Aang glances around the room.

"Sorry," he says, with the shrug of one skinny shoulder. "It's Avatar stuff. Sokka says people come to gawk sometimes."

"Avatar stuff?" Obi-Wan asks carefully.

"You know, master of all four elements, bringing balance to the world," Aang says nonchalantly, but there's something else underneath that, and Obi-Wan's breath catches at the familiarity of it, of a powerful young boy subjected to the whims of prophecy and fate. This one, at least, doesn't appear to have broken. Perhaps his own hopes for the galaxy are not as forlorn as he'd thought.

"Don't forget you are also a bridge to the Spirit World," Iroh says. "That is perhaps your most important role, Aang, though defeating Ozai and ending the war was the most urgent."

Obi-Wan ignores, for a moment, the statement about ending the war (ignores the memory of Anakin boasting of his new empire, and the madness in his eyes), and says, "The Spirit World? Do you mean the Force? The energy that binds the galaxy together?" He twists his wrist and the teapot rises a few centimeters into the air and rotates once around before settling back down onto the table.

"Chi, yes," Iroh says, looking not at all surprised or impressed by Obi-Wan's small display. He snaps his fingers and a small tongue of flame leaps from his fingertips, which, Obi-Wan

must admit (silently at least), is a lot showier. "It is through channeling our chi that we are able to bend the elements. This is a gift from the spirits."

Obi-Wan nods. It's not his understanding of the Force, but it *is* the Force.

"As the Avatar," Iroh continues, "Aang is the most gifted of all, able to bend all four elements, instead of just the one granted to the rest of us. He is also the last of his people."

"I'm so sorry," Obi-Wan says with an upwelling of empathy. He can feel the boy's pain in the Force and recognize it as a mirror to his own.

"Thank you. It still hurts, but I've been lucky enough to find a new family. I hope you are, too."

"You are welcome to stay with us while your ship is being repaired," Iroh adds.

It's Obi-Wan's turn to say thank you. He's not sure he still believed such kindness remained in the galaxy, and he's glad to have been proved wrong on that count. "I appreciate that, Iroh. I need some time to center myself after everything that's happened."

"You can meditate with me if you like," Aang says.

Obi-Wan blinks in surprise at this offer. "I would like that very much."

"Really?" Aang is surprised in turn. "No one else ever wants to meditate with me!"

"Really." Obi-Wan laughs softly, so as not to disturb Luke. "Believe me, I understand." He reaches for his cup of tea but Iroh takes it first.

"Let me warm that up for you." He doesn't do anything, not that Obi-Wan can see visually, but he feels the small stirring in the Force, and then his tea is hot again.

He leans forward. "That's fascinating. I can use the Force to regulate my own body temperature—to keep warm when it's cold and cool when it's warm—but I've never seen it applied like that."

"You don't have bending where you're from?" Aang asks.

"Not the way you seem to have it here. I can use the Force to manipulate objects, if necessary, but mostly it's a way of sensing things—people, intentions, actions before they happen."

"Toph can tell when people are lying. She can sense their heartbeats," Aang says.

Obi-Wan nods. "Yes, that is one way of using the Force. My old master used to say that no matter the tradition, it's all one in the Force."

"Guru Pathik says that too! Separation is an illusion. Everything is connected. We're all parts of the same whole. Hey, maybe if it takes a few days to fix your ship, I could take you to the Eastern Air Temple to meet him."

"Maybe," Obi-Wan says. "I would like that." He glances at Iroh. "Perhaps you can teach me to play pai sho, as well."

Iroh laughs. "I would also like that very much." He leans back in his chair and calls, "Nephew, please bring us some egg tarts and pineapple buns. Ben has come a long way and needs sustenance."

Zuko appears moments later with a tray of pastries. "I've brought enough for all of you, Uncle. I'm sure you and Aang need sustenance too."

"You are such a good nephew, Zuko. I hope Luke is as good a nephew to you, Ben."

"I hope so too." He already loves Luke more than he should. More than he'd have thought possible. He won't let Luke grow up without knowing it. He can't make the same mistakes twice. But he can't dwell on that now. He raises his teacup. "A toast to nephews."

"Hear hear," Iroh replies, and they dig into the tarts with gusto. Obi-Wan hadn't realized how hungry he was, how much he's missed the homely pleasures of tea and cake, and for a few moments, the ache in his heart recedes.

He knows he can't stay here forever—he has other responsibilities (even if sometimes he wishes he could be rid of them) and so do Aang and Iroh—but the Force has brought him here and given him this respite, which he needs more than he wants to admit. He can take some time to mourn and begin to heal (and perhaps, make friends and drink excellent tea), before continuing on his way to Tatooine. He has a long road ahead of him, and this is just one of many steps he'll take before he reaches his destination.

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