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Flowers For the Rebellion

By L. C. Wells

Even in the heart of the Empire, the memory of the Jedi never dies for those that they helped before the purge. First appeared in Millennium #2, in 2004.

The Jedi came to Mercio to help police it .

Several generations back space traders had discovered the planet with its broad plains, three vast oceans and volcanic mountains, and figured it was worthless except as a way station to more populated sectors. They built a port, installed machinery and settled in. The first year brought a revelation – after a series of powerful storms, dish-sized flowers bloomed across the plains. Some traders thought they'd make a good export, if they could be cultivated properly, but the storms died out, the plains dried and the flowers vanished.

After a three-year drought, most of the traders left, leaving only a small space port built on the edge of a sea.

Then the flowers bloomed again, and the remaining natives tried distilling them with wine, and a miracle occurred. The resulting liqueur was tested on passing traders, and found to be highly exportable. The discovery drew a swarm of shady traders and raw farmers out to exploit the planet. The ensuing battles between the natives and the newcomers drew the guardians of the Republic who tamed each side and helped set up a government who produced regulations for the importing and exporting of both flowers and liqueur. Commerce flourished.

The Jedi established a meditation retreat of domed clay buildings on the top of cliffs overlooked the space port to one side and an ocean on the other. Terraced gardens filled with native and non-native vegetation spread down to the outskirts of the retreat. Several times a year, Jedi rotated through Mercio to train, regain

their balance, and explore meditation techniques. The natives grew used to the constant change, enjoying the different races that made up the Jedi.

At one point the government wanted to broach the underground aquifers to make the planet livable for more people and provide irrigation for the blossoms but after one disastrous attempt, they gave up. The settlers prayed for rain so they could harvesting the blossoms, combine it with the expensively-imported Alderaani wine, and make the liqueur that made them famous throughout the galaxy. Otherwise they tended to the port and fished the oceans.

But then the universe changed. The Republic became an Empire and the Jedi were destroyed. Only five Jedi were on Mercio when the Empire swept down, like a flame-tipped raptor, on their retreat. Their names were Tolk, Amber, Roblez, Mzzarn and Shawan.

* * * * *

Storms raged among the tall green and blue metallic towers that stretched into the dark clouds. Miles and miles of docking bays had been abandoned during the torrent, their Stormtroopers guards huddled inside out of the rain. The water of the nearby ocean was rising crashing against the cliffs and staining the stones with acrid chemicals.

Jon had built a restaurant on Mercio to cater to the Empire. The multi-leveled establishment sat on a cliff-top, commanding a prime view overlooking a sprawling city that had grown with the building of a space fleet to control an entire galaxy, and on the other side, a sea no longer potable.

A tall dark-skinned man with silver hair, a lined face and scarred hands, Jon started at the torrents of rain as he closed up his eatery for the night. Around him, and across the imported marble flooring, lights from the towers flickered through the patterned glass of the restaurant's windows, adding harsh color to the structured etchings that had been carefully drawn to his exact specifications.

Someday, he decided, he'd give up this restaurant and go and live in the mountains beyond the docking bays that serviced the Imperial fleets that now prowled restlessly around this area of space. Jon knew that the Imperial officers who patronized his restaurant preferred food from anywhere but Mercio. They'd drink its exotic liqueur, but sneered the native foods and felt much the same about the few natives that were left on Mercio. To the Empire, this was just a way station on the way to rising ambition.

But now these same officers speak in hushed voices about the destruction of their Death Star. They say they'll crush those who did it, but have unease in their

tones. Orders have gone out to build more Star Destroyers, more fighters, more transports. The Empire is scared.

Jon had heard that there was growing rebellion against Imperial rule -- something called the Rebel Alliance. *If it is so easy to crush these rebels, then why hadn't the Star Destroyers done it?* Jon wondered as he walked across the bottom level of the restaurant where the floor was a patterned star with purple flares edged with white. *It isn't so easy to destroy people when you don't outnumber your enemy and they can fight back, is it?*

"Master?"

Jon glanced up at gangling young human who leaned over the balcony of the third level. One hand, wrapped in a napkin, was stained red with blood. "Rasse? What have you broken now?"

The boy was barely out of his teens. He'd been caught up in the arrest of Alderaan after the destruction of their planet, and sold into slavery on a freighter that landed on Mercio three months before. The boy, once landed on a planet where he could breathe, didn't want to go anywhere else. He was doing his best to please. Jon had seen in him the possibility of replacement for another waiter and bought him but he wasn't sure if he'd keep the boy. Rasse was a fast learner but Jon wasn't sure he was up to the job. Still humans were better than the current crop of 'droids. The officers preferred to be served by their own kind so they could feel superior.

Why do I keep him? Is it because Rasse is from a planet that I remember every time I see our wine? Jon could only imagined Alderaan's scent from the varying wines that came to Mercio. Or because he reminds me of me at that age?

"I was replacing the flowers in the Shawan vase, Master, and the glass broke," Rasse said apologetically. He flinched when Jon frowned.

"Show me."

They climbed to the top of the five levels of the restaurant. Here the light was a soothing yellow-brown reflecting like golden streams in the etched glass walls. In the middle was a pillar as tall as Jon, topped by a rod holder which had held a crystal vase, the remains of which were still in place. Two cleaning 'droids buzzed around the broken glass on the floor. Lying on a table to one side were the fresh pale green blossoms.

Jon sighed. "Downstairs you will find a new vase in the storeroom. Get it, bring it here, then go to bed, boy. I will install it."

Rasse stepped around him. "I will get this one out, sir," and, before Jon could stop him, the boy climbed on a chair which tilted crazily. Losing his balance, he grabbed on the rod, then fell, the metal coming free in his hands.

Immense shock, and fear, flooded Jon sweeping away the ennui he had felt seconds before. *How can this have happened?*

Rasse looked at the rod in his hands up at Jon, his face showing terror. The outside lights glittered off the glass on his serving jacket, the floor, the rod in his hand -- green, blue and yellow lights dancing off the burnished metal.

"Give that to me," Jon finally ordered holding out his hand.

"What is it?" Rasse asked tipping up the rod. "There're etchings of flowers on every side. Where did you get it?"

Jon repeated in a quiet, dangerous tone, "Give it to me now."

Rasse looked down again. "Master, isn't this the pattern of the windows?" He waved his free hand at the wall etchings. "I know this thing, I'm sure I do. It's a lightsaber, isn't it?"

Jon focused his eyes on him and the boy quailed at the intense anger. "Who are you, boy?"

"It's from the old Republic, isn't it? Is it . . ." Rasse dropped his voice to a whisper. "Something from the Jedi?"

"What do you know about the Jedi?" Jon asked sharply stepping closer to loom over Rasse.

The boy cringed, his shoulders hunching as if he expected to be hit. "I've heard the stories. They weren't magical beings, were they? They died like everyone does. No one could save them from the Empire."

"Magical? No, they were as real as you or I. When the Jedi were alive, they policed the galaxy. There was freedom."

Rasse cocked his head. "You knew the Jedi, Master?"

"I knew them when I was younger than you are," Jon replied sadly. "On the last day, they saved my life."

"The last day, Master?"

"The day the Empire came to Mercio."

"There were Jedi here?"

"Yes. They all died."

* * * * *

Tolk was looking for Shawan. The Jedi master from Hasani-Ante was the nominal leader of their little meditation retreat and accustomed to being able to sense anyone of the other five who were currently in residence, but there was only one place where she was likely to be at this time of day. He headed for the kitchen.

The slim wiry woman with ash-blond hair was cooking in a red-bottomed skillet over a fire of aromatic woods. A small boy perched on the chair beside her listening in delight, as she explained what she was cooking. Adding some meat, she commented, "Mzzarn will love this one. What did I tell you about Wookiees, Jon?"

"They like the meat well-done," Jon piped up.

She added some herbs to the pan. "If you gave this to Amber, she'd gag since she eats only vegetables. Different worlds, different cultures, different races. Remember them all. Learn from them all. Don't put the herbs in too soon, Jon, or they'll affect the final taste. Finally, add some of your Mercian wine. " She poured the wine from a clear jug, making sure that a blossom came with it, and the skillet sizzled sending up clouds of steam and a wonderful smell. "It will evaporate, if all goes well, and the alcohol and flowers will make it delectable to people from what planet?"

The boy's forehead wrinkled, then he smiled. "Alderaan! And... Hixo?"

"Close. Try Kessel. However, don't add Kessel spice because it's too strong a taste for this meat." She looked up in surprise. "Tolk? What is it?"

"Shawan, we've been ordered out of here."

"Out of here? Why? Where?" Half of her attention was on the food as she swirled the skillet around.

"Back to Coruscant."

She glanced up at him. "Are you sure that it's a good idea?"

"The Council has called the Jedi back."

"The Galactic Senate has authorized the creation of the Army of the Republic which is basically taking over our work. Why should the Council suddenly call us all back to Cosecant?"

He shrugged. " Maybe they have other jobs for us. How would I know?"

Her answer was cut off by Jon bouncing on his chair. "Is it done, Shawan?"

"You're quite right," she said, tipping the skillet's contents of roast meat and long yellow and red beans, onto a plate which she set in front of the boy. "You see now how it's done?"

"Yes. Will you show me another today?" he said hopefully as she set the skillet aside.

"I don't think we'll have time for more lessons," Tolk said harshly. "We need to get ready to leave, Shawan."

She laughed and gently patted Jon's wiry dark hair. "Duty calls, young man. But I've taught you a lot in the last few weeks and you've taught me some of your recipes as well. That's the key to this all, Jon. Trading knowledge."

"You're leaving?" Jon said suddenly realizing that she was leaving him. He put down the fork he'd lifted in anticipation of digging into the hot food. "For good?"

They heard the sound of engines overhead. "That's the transport," Tolk said. "You have barely time to pack, Shawan." He turned and left.

She put a cover over the fire and stepped back, wiping her hands free of oil. "There will be other Jedi coming to stay, Jon. And now you can cook for them. Just remember to always learn something new from everyone you meet. You'll do fine."

His shoulders slumped. "They aren't like you. They may not want me to cook."

"Convince them." She smiled at the boy who wasn't cheered up. After patting the edge of the cooled red-bottom pan, she held it to him. "I bought on Alderaan. I give it to you. What did I tell you about it, Jon?"

He took it with a bit of awe. The inside and the bottom were etched with flowers and vines, and it weighed less than it looked. "You taught me that if I put in the proper oil, it will sit in the carvings and accent the taste. That was the first thing you taught me."

"Yes, I did start you from the top end of cooking spectrum, didn't I?" she mused. Wiping off the , she added, "Jon, do me a favor, will you? Clean up in here. I don't have time. And eat that," she said pointing to the filled plate, "you need to grow up strong. The universe may be a darker place in the next few years."

"I wish you weren't going away," he said wistfully taking the cloth. "Will you come back again?"

"I don't know. But I leave you my favorite pan." She placed her hand on his shoulder, and he looked up into her brown eyes and bright smile. "And always keep trying something new."

He watched her leave then picked up the fork. A roar overhead made him look up. It was unusually loud for something heading for the port.

Blam! Crash! Boom!

The roof of the outer room fell in as a bolt of energy came lancing down. A cloud of plaster choked him and covered the food.

Jon fled as he heard the clatter of metal and the hiss of energy bolts. Mercio had never seen an attack but Jon knew the sounds from news reports.

Hugging the saucepan to his chest, the boy ran towards the back gate. He tripped and rolled down the stairs that led to the lower garden terrace, while overhead there was the roar of invaders.

He felt an energy blast go past his sleeve and scorch the trellises of tangled vines. The lush vegetation fell over him as he dived for the dirt.

Lifting his head, he heard the familiar hum of a lightsaber. He'd often seen the Jedi at practice and knew the sounds that told the five of them apart. Tolk's saber was deeper in tone and a vibrant green as befitted the master. Shawan's blade was a faint green, almost yellow. Amber's was white and sparkled with light blue edges while Roblez's was so blue that it trended towards purple and sang as the man would when he was asked. Finally, the Wookiee, Mzzarn, had a brilliant blue lightsaber. Jon heard Mzzarn's and the sound of power bolts. Clutching the pan to his chest, his face covered with dirt, he rolled over and saw the Wookiee.

Mzzarn stood by the outer gate facing both 'droids and white-clad troopers, his saber held ready against a sky full of assault ships and attackers. He fended off several bolts, but when troopers landed behind him, and fired, the Jedi fell, his lightsaber falling from his paws onto the earth. Additional bolts singed the dark fur and the smell of his death crawled across the battleground along with the ozone of the power bolts.

Looking to the right, Jon saw Shawan fighting off two troopers. She whirled, took the head off of one, blocked the shot of a 'droid, then de-armed the other trooper who crumpled. Darting inside the building, she appeared a few seconds later at an upper window that overlooked a wall, her saber in her right hand and a blaster in the left.

He felt the ground rock under the energy blasts of the transports, then several troopers came around the corner, one pointing his gun at Jon, who lay frozen with fear.

Her blaster went off and the trooper fell. She smiled as she saluted Jon with a flick of the lightsaber, and turned away.

Jon scrambled back knowing she had saved his life, maybe at the cost of her own since more troopers were landing around them. He heard a deeper hum, and saw Shawan jump from the window to join Tolk who had appeared on the top of the wall. The Jedi master nodded acknowledgement, then jumped down on the other side. The boy heard the sound of blasts redouble. There were attackers there as well.

Looking at Shawan's expression, Jon knew escape was hopeless. He saw the troopers take aim at her, fire, and she fended off the blasts, retreating back into the building. She probably planning to go out the back.

He was going to join her. He didn't know how to fire a blast gun but he'd do the best he could. The trooper's blaster lay at his feet.

Before he could pick up the gun, he heard a ship whining above him. It was headed for the building where Shawan had taken refuge. Jon fled downhill.

A force bolt lanced down through the top of the building's dome and the impact blew out the clay walls. The air was full of flying stone and clay and the cliff top crumbled. The transport moved to the next building, and destroyed it, then on to the next.

In five minutes the Jedi retreat was destroyed.

The troopers picked up the stunned Jon shunting him into crowds of slaves to be sold for whoever or whatever would buy them. They claimed the Jedi's lightsabers and took them to the Emperor, stacking the dead bodies in a mass grave and burning them.

For the next ten years, Jon toiled on space freighters. Given an opportunity, he showed his cooking skills, and was welcomed into the kitchen. He kept quiet about how he came into space and had learned to cook but his reputation grew.

Finally, one captain, and in a gesture of largess, since Jon saved a major contract with a magnificent dinner, set him free. Several years later, he had earned enough money to return to Mercio a rich man.

He found the planet now an imperial building hub for their Star Destroyer fleet. The Empire had broken into the aquifers and used the water to power their machines and their buildings, but they had no facilities for an increasing number of officers to socialize and, more importantly, to eat.

The boy, now a man, bought land in Mercio City, outside of the Imperial base, on top of a cliff where there was a ruin of old buildings and tangled brush, and set to building his restaurant.

He excavated among the rubble to find smashed, fire-blackened bones, which he put in a safe place to await the return of the Republic and the Jedi to give them a proper burial. The dented lightsaber he repaired and polished until it was as bright as the blade it used to have and put it in a place of honor on the top floor, holding flowers of remembrance.

He heard that the Empire had eradicated the old religion, and the few Imperial officers who remembered them, used the word "Jedi" derisively. Over the years, there were fewer and fewer of those mentions.

So, Jon built his restaurant to honor the past and service the future. The five levels were each differently lit -- white, purple, light blue, deep green and finally sandy-brown, the color of Shawan's hair. The walls were incised with drawings of stylized lightsabers, the bottoms wound with leaves -- flowers, beans, the native blossoms, -- all etched in impenetrable glass that would withstand an attack if someone dared to attack an Imperial ship building hub. None of his patrons noticed the art.

For the Empire there were no ghosts in the restaurant.

Jon knew better.

* * * * *

Jon finished telling the story with a mixed sense of dread and relief. He had always wanted to tell someone what happened and Rasse had the sense to listen quietly, his hands motionless on the lightsaber.

"Each level is for a Jedi then," Rasse finally said getting up. "The colors, the lights, the etching. And no one knows."

"Only you and I," Jon replied. "So many of the Imperial command has been here, but they don't recognize the walls. I don't think even the Rebellion would know what it means. No one remembers."

"We call it 'The Alliance'," Rasse said softly in a hesitant whisper. "'The Alliance to Restore the Republic.' They intend to overthrow the Emperor."

Jon's mouth gaped open. What did the boy know about the rebellion? "What?"

The gangly youth lifted his chin, suddenly looking more assured than Jon had ever seen. "Even I know about the Alliance. Alderaan always supported the Republic. I wanted to join the rebels, but I was caught by the Empire. I'm no one in particular but even I know of the Alliance."

"Can you reach them? Now? The officers tell their plans over my dinners--"

"No, Master. I never knew how to do that. But . . .," Rasse looked around as if he expected to see a Stormtrooper loom up unexpectedly, then added in a whisper, "I've heard that there is a Jedi them."

"A Jedi?" Jon's shocked voice awoke echoes in the room.

"Yes, Master. But it's just a rumor," Rasse said hastily, putting the lightsaber back into the bracket holder. "What did you do with the Jedis' bodies, Master?"

"I hide them. They're safe."

"Are they still here? Do they haunt here?" Rasse whispered looking around. The lights of the Imperial buildings flickered across the marble floor.

"Does it matter?"

"No, of course not, no. Then I may stay, Master?" Rasse asked, his tone desperately hopeful.

They both knew that one mention to any of the Imperial officers and Rasse would be gone into the darkness. Even if he told of this conversation, they wouldn't believe him opposite Jon's word.

The man eyed him for a second, then inclined his head. "You may stay, Rasse."

Rasse's intense relief showed in his face. "I will do what ever you want, Master!"

"Good. In the meantime, these storms will bring the flowers and we will harvest them together."

Rasse's face flushed with hope. "You will show me how to brew the wine? And to cook as you do?"

"You like to cook?"

"Yes, Master! I love to cook!"

"Then I will teach you," Jon said expansively, throwing wide his arms. "And we will cook a feast for your Jedi when he arrives." He picked up one of the flowers that lay on the table. "In the meantime, let's solder the lightsaber back into place tonight, and put these flowers in a new vase. Alderaani blossoms are rarer than they used to be, and we can't let them wilt."

"With a touch of wine in the water?"

"Yes. Always add a touch of wine for the past."

The End

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