Hook, Line and Sinker

by 4persephone

Summary

Revamped/Expanded with the help of a wonderful beta. This fic is a 4th Season SWR AU where Ezra's attempt to save an alien species endangered child leaves him (and the rest of the Ghost's shell shocked crew) trying to adapt to the unexpected set of consequences.

And somewhere along the way, Rex and Kanan and Ezra make a (little, supposedly harmless) fishing bet.

Notes

Be warned... deaged Ezra Bridger to follow. This piece is nothing like some of the more typical 'what if they found him earlier' situations we already love so much in the SWR fandom though....Ezra's not age regressed in terms of his mind in this story, just in terms of physical/biochemical status, which is the plot driver/humor creator throughout most of this story for me.

This piece will contain: angst, humor, lots of bad jokes about fishing., as well as tiny Padawans, bewildered Jedi Masters and Ex Clone Troopers who deserve a lifetime's worth of free drinks for putting up with innumerable moments of emotionally constipated bullshit.

(Please take the threat of semi horrified Rex and Kanan bonding very very seriously.)
"Tion te haran!?” The swear's mostly instinctive - automatic. Rex's well aware even before the words leave his mouth that his tone is bemused - even if the situation itself isn't all that funny. The reaction is largely involuntary - old age's long ingrained habit by now, Rex supposes, of using humor as a way to cope with sudden stress.

'Because what the hell' indeed. He'd heard the talk around the base that Ezra Bridger had experienced some kind of unusual incident while Rex was out on his last assignment. Still, when he'd met up with Kanan earlier this morning in the mess hall and then followed him back to The Ghost on the promise of more information...Well, Rex certainly hadn't foreseen anything quite like *this.* Round 107 apparently, of the Bridger Effect.

In front of him across the room, the now significantly shorter than normal Jedi Padawan doesn't even bother to turn around at the sound of Rex's voice, just tenses up a little where he stands, hunching his narrower than normal shoulders and dropping down his head toward his chest before replying. “Oh. Hey Rex. Good morning, I guess.” Ezra's voice is currently at least an octave higher than it was the last time Rex encountered him and those three words, the Padawan is apparently done with any other formal re-introductions. Instead he just settles for pulling out one of the galley’s lower storage drawers in order to use it as a step stool as he clamors up and onto the counter top so he can reach the storage cabinets where Specter Crew usually keep their serving dishes.

"What on Yavin...?” The question when asked is mostly rhetorical rather than speculative. Still Rex clears his throat one more time before ultimately making himself rephrase the question. "Uhm not to be rude or anything Vodika but what in karking hell happened?"

"Weird force-related banthashit, Rex..."

"You can thank a species known as the the Ash'taan'aleki." Sabine and Kanan both answer Rex's question simultaneously without even once looking in eachother's direction.

"The what again?” Rex repeats, raising a hand to scratch an itchy spot just below his chin as he repeats the unfamiliar syllables carefully.

"The previously unknown alien residents of Davrosh System 4 's moon numer twenty three, Rex." Ezra's voice is carefully monotone when he answers the unspoken question again. "They're apparently a highly reclusive, highly force sensitive species who live below the surface of the moon in a bunch of dug out cities who like kriffing with their unexpected visitors apparently. They're technically the reason right now that I look ...well, mini me."

Rex nods at that brief explanation- studying the younger Jedi as best as he can from behind for a couple of seconds, noting both the obvious differences and apparent current similarities. Younger Ezra's hair had been the same color but distinctly more curly. The kid is currently dressed, as best as Rex can see anyway, in a pair of plain, gray child sized sweatpants and an orange pullover shirt that seems to have a stylized cartoon velociraptor wearing an odd looking hat on its back. Ezra for his own part keeps on speaking , just a little bit defensively under the continued observation. "Look Rex - no offense but can we just put the 'how this happened part of this conversation off until another day? You won't be missing much...it's just a long stupid pointless story, believe me. Best titled as 'why you can't seem to have...muchless keep... nice-ish things.'
Zeb huffs at that hard from his spot at the table, while Sabine just continues to glower. Kanan on the other hand, shifts back and forth where he is standing, his mouth opening and closing several times in conjunction before he finally just sets his jaw and opts to also let the comment pass silently. Well then now, the whole kriffing group of them seem to have a metaphorical grump stew simmering on the metaphorical cook top at present.

"No point in making it any spicier then, old man, at least not if you can maybe tone it down." "Later then," Rex allows, stamping down hard on his lingering curiousity. "Just thought I'd come say hi. Kanan said you might like a little change in scenery."

"It's appreciated." Ezra nods his small head in thanks and then apparently considering the conversation closed, goes back to focusing on finding himself whatever he was trying to find before the older man entered the room.

Rex for his own part just stands there watches the boy as Ezra does so – and he uses the term 'boy' here because the kid can scarcely be called anything more than that at the moment, honestly- he's guessing that the Padawan has lost at least a decade of growth since he last saw him. Ezra meanwhile, either unaware of the continued scrutiny or deliberately choosing to ignore it, successfully digs out a plastic bowl, a spoon and a cardboard box full of fruit and grain cereal from the nearest of the cabinets while still kneeling and then he stands and stretches upwards on his tip tip toes for one of plastic cups on the very top shelves immediately to his right. The effort makes his whole body wobble for just a moment or two alarmingly precariously.

"Ezra, please get down."

"Karabast kid! Ask for karking help already..."

"Bridger, Hera's told you not to go above kneeling that way. *Repeatedly*..." All three other adults speak up simultaneously from behind where Rex is currently standing in what is clearly not the group's first incarnation of this particular conversation. Though only Kanan, Rex notes, does anything more than just speak: the older Jedi risimh and stepping forward to gently but firmly lift his still standing Padawan up and off his feet.

Ezra meanwhile just groans in clear exasperation. "REALLY you guys... You need to chill out a little. I'm pretty sure at this point I can at least manage to get my own breakfast without tripping over my own undersized feet." He peers down at the floor. "And even if I were to fall... so kriffing what?! It's what? A meter from the counter top to the floor at absolute maximum? No big deal. Seriously...I've fallen nearly five times that far back when i was even smaller than this and all that I ended up with at the time was a couple bumps and bruises and a goose egg on the back of my head. You all need to stow the ongoing paranoia. Please. I'm like ninty percent bouncable rubber and cartilage.

"Kid, as amazing as this sounds, you're not actually doing that much for your argument right now." Kanan's tone is very wry as he first floats Ezra's selected dishware and food over to the open galley table seating, and then shifts his Padawan from his right hip to his left in a fluid thoughtless movement, opening the door to the fridge as he does so with his still open hand so that the boy can retrieve various items from the top shelf of the unit without Ezra having to try and climb on anything else in order to finish his breakfast preparations. Sabine speaks up from her plate of foot. "Not to even mention when you climb up there in your sweaty socks all the the food cooked there ends up smelling and tasting like a gym that desperately needs to be cleaned. Have pity on the rest of our tastebuds at least. Ezra grimaces in response to that observation, and Kanan frowns a little as well. Though the Jedi knight looks less concerned with Sabine's complaints right now then he is with his Padawan's current state of mind. Or at least that's what Rex is currently guessing. The older Jedi is
the closest Rex's ever seen him before today to outright hovering. And the former soldier also hadn't missed the fact that, perhaps because Kanan's made no attempt to be condescending, just calmly authoritative as he moves about offering Ezra continual assistance his deaged padawan has made no real attempt to complain about his Master's grip or otherwise wiggle free- instead simply accepting the silently offer assistance from his master with what Rex could as easily call genuine gratitude as grudging compliance, even if neither Jedi acknowledge what's happening more verbally.

instead Kanan, once Ezra's found everything that he's apparently looking for, simply carries Ezra all the way back over to the table before setting him gently down on the bench seat and pouring some cereal into another bowl for himself before returning to the counter to pour himself a hot cup of caff with a cream packet as well. "Hera's ship, Hera's rules, Kid, and you already know it." The older Jedi tells the younger very calmly.

"Yes your coordination is definitely improving but that doesn't mean that your balance at this point is as good as it used to be. Not to mention that the floor you're standing on durasteel. Stop writing checks that you're really not going to want to pay that one time you do fall accidentally." ...

"What he said times a million." Sabine's interjects. with just the slightest edge of subtle derision. "Your little stunt the other day has already inconvenienced enough people around here as it is, Ezra. You do realize that with you grounded this way because of what you did that now ghe rest of Phoenix Squadron have had to take on extra shifts trying to fill the void you inevitably left. Your choices right now have communal as well as private consequences. " Ezra doesn't outwardly react to those worlds...well outside of a tiny microflinch that the kid can't keep of his face and the way in which he hunches further into himself as if to guard up his wall against some vast army of oncoming shame, but still Rex can tell just by look in Ezra's eyes that that last statement in particular had hit its target with almost perfect aim.

"Fine, I'll try and be more careful, all right? I'll find a stool or ladder or something. But I also meant it too Sabine...when I said that the rest of you need BACK OFF with the constant lecturing and judgement. Before you all drive me literally batty. " Ezra takes a deep breath. "Because bottom line here ...big body or little I am still ultimately me. My size may be different right now but the rest of me isn't. And I am sick to death of all the sarcasm and near constant hovering."

Bright blue eyes glare out at the rest of them, from what can only be described as an pixie-esque face. And yes, Rex has always been aware that Ezra's a little small for his age, but today it's different somehow. Today buried at the core of of Ezra's fragile human wrap he can all but see the bottled lightening. Power somehow both beautiful and strange simultaneously.

Ezra seems to slump a little, once that eerie warning is done. His eyes are resting on each of the others in the room in turn - trying desperately to make sure then his words have been heard and heeded, after which he turns specifically toward Rex. leaning forward as if imparting a particularly important secret. "Look, Rex, thank you for coming - I appreciate the concern, but the truth of the matter is? I'm not really up for anyone's company at the moment. Because I need to finish my food and then go do some work in the vents in my room and down in engineering."

Ezra pivots toward the table then, soundlessly opening up the box he'd brought with him from the cupboard and pouring some of it's contents and some of the blue milk in his bowl. The only sign of strain he's showing at all anymore is in the way his hands shake slightly under the weight of the ceramic pitcher from which he's pouring. Inevitably because of this as he does so a small trail of milk and cereal both decorates the tabletop in his wake as Ezra first pockets a spoon off of the table then nods his head in goodbye again, and then with great dignity turns to walk away.

Which is when Zeb more out of long ingrained habit then anything else, calls out to his roommate just as he heads through the door just a little bit teasingly "What...so you're not even going to clean up
your mess before you go? Karabast, Kits these days are all so karking messy." Ezra doesn't stop, muchless turn around, but as he leaves the room he does float his bowl long enough to reply to Zeb with both of his middle fingers accompanied by a long string of frankly filthy mandalorian.

"Language, Bridger!" Sabine who is still eating her own food at the table yells back...also clearly automatically.

"Oh for Force's Sake... just back off of him already, Sabine!" Kanan, whom Rex might've regularly expected would usually be the one employing that particular reminder to his Padawan on any other day of the week, snaps out the words as he to deflates just a little... leaning his head back against the galley's cooler pursing his lips before deeply sighing. "He's right about you guys' constant grousing. And all three of us know it. These past few weeks...especially after everything else that's currently happening...all of it is hard enough for him to process right now as it is, Sabine, without you in particular deliberately taking constant potshots at him." The older Jedi's head head pivots in Rex's direction then, sightlessly. His face is flushed..deeply apologetic. "I'm sorry about you having witness that, Rex. I didn't mean to further stir the proverbial pot...thought you showing up might help honestly. It's just... well frankly I thought that Ezra would welcome seeing another friendly face at this point. He's normally such a genuinely social person...and it's just been the six of us the past few weeks essentially...." Kanan gestures to the door helplessly without any further real comment. "I never thought when he saw you that he'd actually...

"What? Magically pull himself out of the ongoing freak out he's been in ever since we first got back to Yavin?" Sabine harshly interjects. "Newsflash, Kanan - he's been getting worse and worse with every day that passes since things finally got back to normal. Or rather as close to normal as we can get living like a karking sitcom at present. We've all gone back to work... Well except for you two of course... for obvious reasons... And adapted pretty well I think. EXCEPT for Ezra of course. Who is basically playing out a kriffing speeder wreck in occuring in real time slow motion. He doesn't talk to anyone willingly any more... Except for maybe you and Chopper. He doesn't sleep with any kind of regularity ..I mean I've seen him up and wandering around at all hours...night time is the only time he'll go off ship. Otherwise he's basically self exiling him onboard the Ghost- wont come out to get supplies or even have a meal with Zeb or me in the market He's cranky and he's foul mouthed and more and more he 'hears' people but flat out refuses to actually listen. He's freaking the kriff out and quite frankly Kanan, I'm starting to suspect at this point that he's actually *gunning* for spanking for some kriffed up reason..."

Zeb lets out a sympathetic if slightly incredulous huff at that comment as he looks over at the girl. "Don't you think that you're, I don't know, being a little bit hard on the Kit under the circumstances, Sabine? He's just being human. You think you'd have done any better coping with the change after living through that kind of shock situation?"

Sabine just snorts then shrugs and scraps more eggs onto her fork before ultimately replying. "I think that big shock or no he's been getting away with murder - or something very close to it essentially since we all first got back to Yavin. And I think that Kanan's instinct right from the first has just been to basically coddle him. Which clearly isn't working. Things aren't ever really going to settle back to any kind of stable normal if something isn't done to reign him back in. If I'd started pulling this kind of Banthashit back home at the same age as ezra is right now then you better kriffing believe that my mother would have had me on some kind of rigid daily schedule with clearly written expectations for behavior faster then you could blink and if I'd broken either then my mother would have put me over her knee and tanned my hide long and hard enough i wouldn't have been able to sit for a week...!

Sabine cuts off her own rant then abruptly, with a sudden pause and a quick glance toward Rex. Who mercifully doesn't even seem to be aware of her actual pause- he's too busy studying Kanan's body language at the moment- which is getting stiffer and stiffer with every word, almost as if he's
instinctively readying himself for oncoming combat.

Zeb contrasting, just raises a brow at the end of Sabine’s diatribe, and starts ticking off several points on each of his fingers as he rebuts each comment. The Lasat and Sabine clearly don’t see eye to eye on this topic. "One, Sabine - "if we want things to get back to normal..." The Lasat snorts aloud as he puts the word in quotes. Then drops both of his hands. "What the kriff do any of us know about karking normal, huh Firecracker? You think any of us had normal childhoods from the view of the culture that actually birthed him? Or'd be better served copying them exactly with Ezra even if we did?" The Lasat crosses his arms and leans back in his chair. " This isn't Mandalore, Sabine, and even if it were, this isn't a typical little's temper tantrum. The heart of the problem with the Kit right now isn't about him being stubborn or rude or even rebellious...he's been all of those before and didn't act this way when it happened. No what's driving the kid right now is psychological shock, body dyphoria and poor sleep I'm guessing. Not to even mention a whole lotta fear and mostly unresolved frustration." Sighing, Zeb unfolds his arms and spreads them wide. "Think about it Sabine, Ezra's just physically lost a *decade's* worth of growth from his life. And even more than that...he's also been told that he's going to have to live with that switch up for an unspecified amount of time ...possibly even indefinitely. Is it really so surprising that he's freaked out right now and acting a little unruly? You claiming you would have miraculously done better than him if your places were switched? Cause frankly thats a a bill of goods I'm not buying." Zeb sticks up another finger to join the first, "Number two…Kanan mentioned something to us last week or the week before that that's still probably relevant. And that's Ezra's whole physical vs his mental age thing." 

Kanan nods in reply to that, walking over to the table himself as well and sinking down onto the bench before reiterating what he had learned concerning the topic...presumably from the beings who had first found Ezra then saved him. "Like Zeb just said... it's true that Ezra's memories and general knowledge skill sets are all still the same as they were before he died.." Kanan pauses, clears his throat of that word... "As they were before he fell, rather, I meant to say, but his body is like one of its typical age. What that means, at least right now is that Ezra really hasn't lost any of his cognitive or technical knowledge -though yes right now he definitely doesn't have the same dexterity, physical strength or endurance as he once had to use them, but he's still biochemically the age he currently looks to be. And he's subject to his current the resultant physical and biochemical limitations."

"Great. So then what you're saying is he's an adolescent boy who's got even more karked up hormones than ever." Sabine takes two more vicious bites from her buttered toast with an equally vicious shake of her head, "I still think either way that he is practically flailing around searching for any kind of disciple right now. He at least needs to be grounded to his room for a couple of days for all the back talk and swearing and refusing to listen."

Zeb snorts at that again, still unimpressed by Sabine's suggestions. "And how is that going to be any different then it already is Sabine? Like you said yourself earlier these past few weeks Ezra hardly ever voluntarily leaves either his room or the vent systems. Which i think is more than half of the problem frankly... Cause he ends up alone for hours a day at a time with who knows what swimming around like a shark in his thoughts basically.

Sabine snorts...then mutters more than a little rebelliously, "Maybe so. All I know right now is that it never would have gotten this bad with Ezra if Hera were the one dealing with him around here."

Kanan's head snaps toward her at those words, his scowl fierce and just a little bit bitter. His voice is clipped when he speaks. "Yes, well we'd all like to be seeing her more but Hera isn't currently available right now, is she? She's been very conveniently busy lately with a literal cornucopia of administrative paperwork and meetings ever since we got back. In the meantime please forgive those of us who are actually *with Ezra* every day and who also karking telepaths capable of sensing his motives for attempting to practice something as horrible as a few post trauma doctor recomended
parenting techniques...!

There's a long startled moment of silence after that and Karabast, but Rex can't help but think that there was probably a great deal more frustration in that set of sentences than Kanan had probably meant to make public, considering the way that the Jedi Knight then twists up his face, forcibly making himself breathe in, breathe out, and then begin to speak anew again.

"Look Sabine." Kanan's voice is soft when he finally continues and as gentle and patient as Rex imagines the other man can make it in this particular situation, but his words themselves are both direct and very, very frank. "I get that you're frustrated and worried right now, I really, truly do. I know that what happened with Ezra two weeks ago was scary and hard and frankly pushed a bunch of all our buttons. I definitely know that Hera's been gone more than usual, as well, and that all of us are currently feeling her absence...." He pauses then to take another deep breath "I also know you think I'm handling things wrong with Ezra right now. That I'm regularly letting him get away with murder or carry on unhealthy habits without intervention or other consequences...though whether you are right or wrong in assumption is another entire conversation better saved for another time than this..." Kanan picks up his mug of caff then and drains it, setting it down on the table with a clunk, then folds his hands in front of him and continues in a tone that is inexplicably both gentle and also viciously brutal. "But all that acknowledged, let's at least both actually acknowledge the truth, okay, Sabine. Even if I were to go out there right now and spank him like you claim I should - force him to conform, to hide not actually work through his current feelings, that still wouldn't actually make a damn thing better would it? Not for Ezra. Not for you. Because most of this attitude of yours the past few weeks... all the venom you've been flinging at me and Ezra isn't even about what's happening now but about what happened before- what Ezra was willing to sacrifice for you and that child whether you wanted him to actually do it at the time or not Sabine."

The Mandalorian girl flinches at that, as if she'd been literally struck. Kanan just sighs yet again, then reaches put a careful hand to squeeze the girl's forearm lightly, offering what Rex guesses is meant to be a gesture of both regret and comfort. Whether or not she seems to welcome either at the moment. "So, for the record officially: none of what's been happening has been your fault, Sabine. Ezra wasn't forced into making the choice he did... There was no doubt, no fear or coercion in his mind when he made his move. Not even a hint of hesitation. He chose to die to save your lives... just like you had been willing when that bridge started crumbling to do exactly the same. Ezra just... well... He just expected there'd be a different set of final consequences then the ones that he actually got when he actually made that decision, and so now he's got fair bit of physical and emotional whiplash to work through as he tries to learn to live with the actual consequences of his particular decision.

Sabine's face goes from frustrated and scowling to carefully, painfully neutral within the space of a heartbeat… "I already know that, Kanan." She grits out through her teeth very into the tension filled silence.

"Do you, really, Sabine?" Kanan pulls his hand away from her now, crossing his arms across his chest and leaning back in his seat again. "If that's really the truth Sabine, if you've come to terms with that, then for Force sake, please just take a step back for awhile and give it a rest. Detach completely if you need to do so for a couple days. Blow kark up. Work on a couple of your paintings. Take a couple extra shifts of piloting practice and blow space rocks to high heaven. Just, please in the meantime back off on the constant sniping and give Ezra in particular a couple days rest. If it makes you feel any better, I promise you that in return I'll pin him down after breakfast this morning and have a talk with him about his..." He waves his hands, "Attitude and continuing recklessness. He'll start getting better eventually with time. I promise he will. But only if you can step back for now and just let it go while he processes. Only if you can stop railing at him over and over and over again for the way that Ezra loved you and that child both enough in that moment that he was willing to die for you both without any hesitation."
"No!" Sabine slams a hand down on the table, "That's a lie... And both of us know it...Ezra's like he is right now because he's a reckless idiot with a kriffing death wish, Kanan. I could have...would have gotten her to safety on my own ...it would have been close yeah but he didn't have to....he didn't have to do it! So don't you dare romanticize what happened in order to make it easier for the rest of us to swallow. He didn't have to do that..do you hear me, Kanan... He. Didn't. Karking. Have. To." Rex doesn't miss the fact, that, though the Mandalorian's hands are clenched into fists when she continues, they are also currently shaking with the strength of her own repressed emotion. He looks to Kanan then to Zeb raising a silent brow in question.

He hadn't been there after all. Though honestly he tends to think he'd rather trust the word of the Jedi Knight at the moment. "Do you really still believe that, Sabine." Zeb's voice is gruff. Affectionate. Knowing. "Or has it just been easier to deal with if you keep on telling yourself that? Sometimes being pissed at a lie hurts less then facing the actual truth." "Kriff you Zeb, I'm done." Sabine snaps back after another moment into the silence, dropping her fork onto her plate, and rising rush out through the main galley door. "Believe whatever you want. It doesn't matter to me I know karking better. If Hera shows up later and asks for me tell her I'll be in bay seven- doing the new parts inventory like she asked me. Comm if something comes up later or if there's another crisis and you end up needing me." Amd then Sabine is out the door and down the hall almost faster than Rex can actually blink.

The Lasat watches her exit from the room with a clear but unsurprised grimace. "Well that went about as well as i suppose we coulda expected. That wound's been left to fester for way, way too long. Now that it's lanced you want me to go and…?" He makes a gesture toward the door with a jerk of his head. "Keep an eye one her for a while at a distance just in case she, well, you know..."

Kanan nods his head a little in the affirmative, "Yeah ...if you have the time and really don't mind handling the mop up at the moment that would be good Zeb. I'd be really grateful. I know I need to check on her again soon or later have Hera do so for me, but right now, I just need to actually *stop* and pause for a bit honestly."

"Not a problem, Kanan. I'll even do a two for one if you likr. Since it sounds like Ezra took my joke as a real jab when he storm'd outta the kitchen. We should probably clear the air in the wake of that I think. Real question is do you want me to start with Shortstuff first or should I go chase down Firecracker instead?"

The Jedi raises a hand to rub at the back of his neck, considering the question seriously, "It'd probably be better to leave Ezra to me Zeb, at least for now and go check on Sabine. I'll deal with tracking down little Mr Stormcloud and either talk or spar.some sense into his thick skull *after* he and I both get the chance to both meditate and properly eat." The older Jedi scoffs, softly, gesturing to the breakfast items still on the table. "Ezra doesn't even like this kind of cereal Zeb, or any other kind of cereal for that matter. Especially not after eating almost nothing but that on his over the past couple of days because that's about he can get to on his own right now the way things are set up in the kitchen. He hates being forced to ask for assistance every time he gets hungry because he can no longer reach ...it makes him feel stupid, small and pretty much all around useless."

"Understood. Sounds like we need to do some cupboard rearranging. I'll try and keep the access issue in mind when I'm the one cooking stuff in th3 kitchen. It's easy enough if we both wander in around the same times looking for lunch or or.for supper for me to just make an extra serving that he can have if he likes without him constantly asking. Last question before I go- is there anything else i need to know or you want to talk about before I head out to check in on Sabine??"

Kanan considers the question for a long moment or two then finally nods his head and sets his jaw, apparently deciding, "Yes, Zeb. Can you please let Hera know for me the next time that you see her, that Ezra and I are going to be headed off base for at least a couple days - Force, possibly for a couple of weeks, and we may even end up off planet. However long it's going to take for me to
actually help Ezra reestablish his emotional control after everything that's happened and, hopefully establish his balance. "Zeb raises an eloquent eyebrow. "You don't want to tell her all that, yourself? Have time for a proper goodbye? Both for you and shortstuff?"" "With her schedule like it is now?" Kanan just shakes his head. "Right now I don't think Ezra and I can handle that kind of waiting anymore to be frank. Our priorities don't mesh at the moment in terms of what's currently important." Rex winces silently. Because kriff but there's a world of pained acceptance in that one statement. "So then you want me to tell her that you just went off with Ezra alone... away from all the chaos on base in the hope you'd have a better time of working it through out of the hub bub and out in the wild?"
"Yes- though honestly if that doesn't work then the next step is to try some place off of the planet... We'll pick up a couple of milk runs of basic supplies in one of the neighboring systems or something like that. At this point, honestly I'll take almost anywhere at all just to get us out of this fish bowl ezra feels like he's trapped in at present. Stir crazy and too damn isolated are both more than half of Ezra's problem right now: you're absolutely right about that much, Zeb, but the bigger issue right now as far as I can tell anyway is that Ezra's absolutely right about what happens whenever he goes out on base in public. Every time we've tried to go anywhere...Force even out into the Jungle for an afternoon's meditation, a bunch of people end up gaping at him like he's some kind of freak show... Or worse yet they want to put him on the head or something. And he can actively sense it. I'm not surprised at all at this point that he's made himself a literal shut in. I mean at least here on the Ghost it's pretty normal most of the time for the most part. We all know how old he is mentally...he can pretend some of the time that nothing has changed. Out the on hase though it keeps being driven home that everything is..."

"...Different?" Zeb completes the sentence for him, the Lasat's voice full of a now much clearer understanding. Rex watches the Jedi Knight nod his head up and down more than a little bit tiredly, his face tight with exhaustion and worry and too few hours sleep. "And I bet that it also isn't helpin'," Zeb continues on after another couple of long considering seconds, "That the kit isn't sleeping worth krif cause he's so karking freaked out. Practically every night since we got back on Yavin, he's woken both of us at least one or twice with his ongoing nightmares. And I also think he's been having some kind of gut trouble practically every time he tries to eat." "He is...for some reason this all also amped the kark out of his usual food sensitivities." Kanan sighs along with the observation, spreading his hands and shrugging, still feeling more than a little bit helpless quite clearly. "I'm hoping that...oh I don't know. Maybe if I can get him alone for awhile, away from all of Sabine's acid guilt and Hera's total lack of current attention... then maybe he and I can actually start to deal with some of the shock and fear he's working so hard right now at simply repressing. He's terrified out of his mind right now Zeb...and I don't think even knows quite why himself, honestly."

Zeb snorts, "He'll figure it. Just give it a little more time. Kriff once he does and actually says it out loud then the rest of it afterwards is practically easy. I'm guessing you've already been looking into gettin' the papers or whatever else the change in age is gonna mean you might need? Assuming this ends up being even a longer case of temporary?" Kanan nods in affirmation. Zeb reaches out a hand to slap his arm. "All right then. Congratulations. Sounds like you're working on a good plan to me. Now go out and get the needed seen to then. I'll fill Hera in whenever I see her next, no problem worries. Now, is there anything else that I need to keep an eye on in the meantime while you and Ezra are gone? Well other than the obvious eye that I've got to keep on Little Miss 'Just ignore me I'll over here brewing up a big bomb' I mean?"

The sarcastic twist of a nickname actually makes Kanan grin openly at his old friend this time. He chuckles softly as well, "No. Not really. Though thank you for actually asking. From what she told me last night Hera will probably be in meetings at Central Command till suppertime or later. After that she'll be home...hopefully. She definitely needs a night off the way that she's been driving herself lately into the ground. Hopefully my getting Ezra off the ship for a few days at least should diffuse a
lot of the lingering tension around here in the meantime. Once Sabine has cooled down maybe she and Hera will have another movie marathon like they used or something. We may all benefit from a little gender selective group bonding."

"Kanan ...not to be a downer or anything but are you really sure that you wanna take the kid somewhere here on planet into the wild all on your lonesome? I mean don't get me wrong it's peaceful sure...but it's also new bush baby season... The new mamas are going to be iffy just generally on unexpected company. And Sabine was right earlier about the way that Ezra's been skidding off the rails when it comes to things like actually listening."

Zeb's question draws Kanan up short - whether in surprise or in genuine consternation. Zeb lets out a low grunt of sympathy and reaches over to pat the other man's back briefly before ultimately continuing. "Look I'm not even saying it's entirely Ezra's fault that he's been backslidding more and more as of late. I can't really blame him under the circumstances for getting sucked down right now into the kriffing quagmire the way he is emotionally. It's just...well the Kid's been semi regularly bolting like a rumpled loth-cat every single time that he hits his limit break it seems to me. And if that were to happens as well when you two are out there alone, in a generally unfamiliar location...well things could turn ugly fast, depending on what he ran into if you take my meaning."

The rest of the statement goes mercifully unspoken. But all three men get it. If something like that were to happen then Kanan'll be in one hell of a mess... alone in a completely unfamiliar territory with a smaller, less predictable Ezra who will be far, far easier to lose - and predators already inclined thanks to the season to eat them. "I...I don't really know anymore, Zeb." The Jedi Knight eventually admits. Kanan slumps forward into the table, then reaches up to take off his eye shield so he can rub at the bridge of his nose a bit more aggressively. "I just know that I have to get him away from all the other noise - psychic and otherwise- if i want to be sure that he'll actually hear me. Ezra's always liked our trips into the jungle...but maybe you're right and we should just go back to Lothol for awhile or something..."

Kanan looks so weary in that moment - sitting slumped over trying to review all his less then stellar options - that he reminds Rex almost painfully for a moment or two of Obi Wan Kenobi. Especially in the later days of the Clone Wars. The thought makes Rex's lips quirk up a little, distinctly bittersweetly. Because everything changes in the worle but also stays the same, he can't help but think. Stupid Jedi. Stubborn Jedi. Always trying to carry around the weight of the entire karking galaxy on their too-noble shoulders as if they're the only ones in the universe with a share of that responsibility.

His next words, unrehearsed and unplanned are completely impulsive. "The two of you could always come along with me on my next mission if you like. I'm headed up north to check out one of the new possible proving ground and training site areas they've asked me to survey and add on the maps we've been compiling on the planet's surface... It'd give you both Emergency backup and a fair amount of privacy."

Jedi and Lasat turn their heads toward him as one at that announcement, and Rex is fairly amused to realize that judging by their by their current expressions both men had apparently forgotten he was even there to begin with. Still, Zeb tilts his head after a moment, before finally voicing his question. "Your mission, you say?" His expression has gone from stunned to merely curious. "And what if i might ask is that this time exactlh?"

"Recognizance. Survey and new site scouting. Back before I actually left on my last assignment, Ezra, I and some of my other Vod'ae down in the Chow Hall were talking about a large spot that I noted a couple hundred klicks north of here in some of our aerial surveys. Photos indicated it's in one of the larger continental savannahs and I thought that might be a good place for possible munitions or
fire arms training. Plus there are a plenty of large lakes and rivers in the area in question, so I figured it was a good spot to plop down and do some fishing...see what's available that might also be good to eat." After all, Yavin's 4's rich biomes have in many ways been a literal boon to the Rebellion's bland, inexpensive nutritional options after all. Fresh protein sources, like fresh produce, are treasures not to be overlooked. Rex will frankly be thrilled while he's up there if he manages a few days of profitable fishing.

"So anyway - we would definitely be roughing it, at least accommodations wise, but if you and the kid want to get out from under the radar for awhile then why don't you and the little Nadala Kovid come along with me up north for a couple weeks company? You won't be completely 'without gawkers' maybe, but I can slip back into the woodwork easy enough as there's need. And kriff if you want then the two of you could probably even spend some of the time just helping out with the fishing. Since I got the distinct impression during our earlier conversations that Ezra's actually pretty fond of that sort of thing." Zeb snorts. "Sure fishing's fun. So long as you're not the bait for the 'fish' in question." He looks at the Jedi, then, "That's actually a great idea if you can hold your nose over the actual event, Kanan - the kid *loves* fishing and it'll get you both out into the open air an sunshine. Just call it a little belated Father-Son type of bonding."

That statement prompts a sharp look in the Lasat's direction from Kanan, whose forehead wrinkles in the sort of way that makes Rex wonder if he hasn't stumbled into another, no less important conversation between them. "You...you're sure that you don't have any other pressing commitments?" Rex wonders if the younger man even realizes how conflicted he's looking at the moment. He wants to go, that's clear he just doubts their genuine welcome for some reason.

"There's nothing that can't wait. (Or can't be rescheduled in sometime next week. Never underestimate the value of maintaining good Jedi Maintenance. It's one of the first rules Rex learned to embrace in the field, and all that usually entails is coming back to him now surprisingly easily.) We can even take my ship when we go if you like ...though I'll warn you now it's nothing fancy - but it'll hold all the equipment we need for the next couple of days with spare room besides for storage and talking. It's also got two rooms with bunks if you don't want to sleep outside overnight and get eaten alive."

"We've all had a lot worse," Zeb observes with a small snort, and the look on Kanan's face confirms he clearly agrees.

"All right then, that's one item on my checklist checked off. Are you going to bring the droid along with you as well, do you think?"

"Chopper?" Kanan frowns, seemingly surprised by the question, "I hadn't planned to, no...Do...do you think that we'd need him along to for some reason?"

"Need, no. Though I'd be happy to have him. My charger on ship is just broken at the moment - so he'd need to bring along a portable one if he actually comes." Rex snorts softly to himself before continuing, "Not to mention that I've always gotten the impression that Chopper and Ezra have a certain kind of Sympatico, if you know what I mean... You know how it is with a droid and his boy."

That earns him another of Kanan's genuine chuckles. Rex grins back, easily - because yes, Chopper may be a literal murder-bot even on his best days, but the droid is also clearly fond of the Ghost crew - Hera and Ezra Bridger both most especially, and Rex remembers far too much about R2-D2 and Anakin Skywalker's unique, and long-lasting friendship during the time of the Clone Wars to disregard the value such a 4th member might represent in the right situation. "Of course," Rex
spreads his hands wide, "All of this is even assuming that you actually *want* to take the boy and come out on mission for a week or so with me…"

"...I think, that I actually do." Kanan’s voice is more than a little horrified, much to Rex's completed amusement. Though to be fair he doesn't honestly know right now, if the Jedi Knight's apparent mild horror is at the thought of being forced into prolonged periods of time with him as the only other available adult company, or if Kanan Jarrus just truly doesn't like fishing.

"Ni kar'taylir darasuum gar. Don’t worry about it so much, Commander. Give me a few hours to resupply, all right? Then comm me for a point of departure location. " Rex can't resist teasing him just a little, lips quirking as he goes on. "If it makes you feel any better, Kanan I'll even promise you outright that this time around the only prey that we're after will at least be smaller than the crew is. Now if you excuse me you two, I'll be getting on my way."

Zeb’s snort of laughter rings through the ship as Rex rises from his chair before Kanan can come up with a retort of his own, heading out toward the bases' center and the necessary pre-mission rounds of supply gathering. It has been, he decides, smiling and shaking his head as he goes, too long since he's looked quite this forward to a chance to stop and go fishing.
When Kanan leaves the kitchen in order to track down Ezra approximately fifteen minutes later, it’s with a tray of hot waffles, fresh fruit and two bowls of scrambled eggs all in one of his hands. It takes him no effort at all to find the boy - sitting, kicking his legs back and forth in the quiet as he dangles them off the edge of his upper bunk bed.

He finds his Padawan doing exactly what he'd been expecting him to do – namely ignoring his breakfast. Ezra is listlessly pushing his now soggy cereal around in a bowl of luke-warm blue milk with a less than eager expression despite the continued insistent rumbling of his stomach.

And honestly, later today Kanan's just dumping the rest of that box of cereal in the trash where it clearly belongs.

“Ezra bring over ones of the tray tables, would you please? My hunger sense likely outperformed my stomach and there’s likely more than enough for two here if you want to come and share a portion.” A small body drops out of the upper bunk almost immediately in response to the comment, Ezra bringing over the requested item with a decided eagerness in his step.

Kanan smiles in response both to the rumbling of Ezra's stomach and to the easy almost thoughtless obedience. He divides up the portions without another word, and they both begin to eat in silence, Ezra practically inhaling each bite as it reaches his lips.

“…I owe Zeb an apology, don’t I?” Ezra mutters sheepishly after a couple of minutes, once his fruit is all gone and he's demolished most of his waffles. Well, at least the kid's self-aware enough now that he's actually eating that Kanan doesn’t even have to work him around to that particular conclusion. Now if he can just figure out how to help Ezra stabilize enough emotionally that those kinds of outbursts aren't happening what feels like every ten to fifteen minutes.

“Yes, Ezra - you do. And you also owe him some help with his chores later on in penance - I'm sure that there are at least a couple that he can think of that you can help him finish up even in the state that you're currently in, and if there's not when you ask him then I'll have a talk Hera later about coming up with some other scut work that seems suitable instead. In the meantime though - eat the rest of your food while it's actually hot. You've got to be better about fueling up regularly, Kid. Your mind and body are both under a huge amount of stress at the moment and in case you missed the memo actual protein is your kriffing best friend.”

Ezra complies with his order willingly enough, dropping down on the floor in front of where Kanan sits on the Edge of Zeb's bunk while they both finish their breakfast. “Thanks for this by the way, it's really good.” He comments with a mouth thats still more than half full of eggs.

Kanan responds initially by reaching out silently to tousle the hair on his Padawan's head. "It's no big deal, Kid." He adds after he's finished chewing his own mouthful of food, "I'm just glad to see that you're finally doing better nausea wise...especially first thing in the mornings." Whether it had been hormones or just nerves at first, the changes to his Padawan's body had wrecked terrible havoc initially on Ezra's digestive system. Which had left the boy miserable because frankly the younger Jedi's world has been challenging enough already all on its own without fate also inviting hypoglycemia along to the rave currently playing out within him.

Ezra sighs at the comment, setting his fork down with a soft clatter. “Food's just... frustrating for me right now, Kanan. Nothing tastes like I remember it should anymore, and on top of that it's like I can't even enter the kitchen these days without somebody showing up to stalk me. I know that I'm
smaller sized yeah but I still *know* how to the cook for myself, I really do Kanan, and the constant hovering whenever I try is just…”

'Its humiliating.' Ezra may not say that last bit, but it doesn't mean Kanan can't fill in the blanks. He reaches out again to squeeze the boy's shoulder sympathetically. Wishing he had better ideas on how to give Ezra back his old sense of dignity. as it is he's trying to balance prudence and empathy both at the moment.

“I know you can cook Ezra - kriff you helped me with prep for that curry just the other evening. But you can't light the stove alone right now without also having to practically climb atop it, and you can't reach the cooktop at at without having to find something unsteady on which to currently balance. Now, I've already talked to Hera about how we need to outfit a few more rooms on the ship with stools or benches or such so you can access things more safely, and once that happens, things will change for the better I promise, but in the meantime Kid….”

Ezra nods, huffing at this information quietly, "I know. In the meantime I'm basically kriff'd."

No... not kriff'd, Kanan thinks sadly: just unavoidably dependent. Which for Ezra, Kanan acknowledges, probably equates to much the same feeling. Sabine may not understand that right now, but Kanan does, in a way that makes his chest literally ache. Ezra's living his life right now in a constant low grade mixture of both frustration and its twin: humiliation.

No spanking in the world Kanan could give the younger man at present could possibly hurt his Padawan right now more than his near constant self perception that's he's some how been made helpless by everything that's happened, been reduced into something weaker and useless and *less.*

"Ezra..." He draws in a deep breath, trying to find the right words to address exactly that problem, but his Padawan cuts him off, whether deliberately to avoid the topic further or because he hadn’t noticed Kanan's actual attempted opening. “So, I didn't see Hera last night - she must have gotten back pretty late from Central Command again. Is she stuck for most of today as well like she was yesterday in meetings?"

Ezra's voice sounds distinctly wistful as he asks - like he's missing the company of the Ghost's Twi'lek pilot. Kanan more than sympathizes with the feeling, but there's also a strange layer of guilt in the question when Ezra asks, as if he blames himself somehow for Hera's frequent absences...

Which is silly since Ezra has no control whatsoever over Hera's current schedule at the moment.

“She'll be gone for most of the morning, yes - but she’s supposed to be back by mid-afternoon, or at least that's what she indicated. In the meantime, Kid, you and I have just been recruited into helping Rex over the next couple of days with completing his latest field mission. So pack up your gear, Ezra, because later on this afternoon once he finishes supplying his ship for a trip north of here, all three are going to be officially blowing this caf stand.”

Ezra startles a little at that announcement, “Really?!" His Padawan's voice is clearly surprised at the news - not to mention more than a little elated. Probably because the poor kid's been going slowly out of his mind ever since they brought him back to Yavin, his only real distractions having been books and whatever cleaning and maintenance he can perform in the Ghost's already well maintained vent systems.

His Padawan can, Kanan knows, face and conquer many, many kinds of challenges, but what Ezra seems to have no ability to conquer whatsoever is slow death by prolonged idleness, which the boy's been faced with practically nothing but since...well ever since the 'incident' when he'd fallen on planet.
Kanan for all he tries, can’t bring himself to consciously refer to what occurred on that planet as Ezra’s death unless he literally forces out the words. Oh, he rationally knows that that’s exactly what had actually happened, yes: at least for a couple of heart shattering minutes. Force, he had literally felt the link snap between them when Ezra passed, had nearly vomited and struggled for several long minutes after just to stay upright and maintain the will to keep breathing. Then just as suddenly as it had first been taken what had been ripped from its psychic mores had just been back, leaving Kanan reeling with shock and almost breathless elation. As a light he’d simply thought was lost forever flared back to life in one corner of his mind again.

Kanan’s not even ashamed to admit that at that point he literally cried for a good fifteen minutes like a baby, while the other Specters hovered close, convinced that he’d had some kind of psychological break from what all of them had just witnessed... until he’d finally managed to calm himself down enough to explain what had actually just happened from his own particular perspective. After that there’d been nothing any of them could do but wait for their hosts to finish the healing they'd apparently begun without either their earlier notice or permission.

It had taken several hours after that before Ezra had finally been physically returned to them as well, his tiny, warm, body deposited in Kanan's trembling arms wrapped up in a thick, scratchy blanket, as the creature bearing him back apologized profusely for his Padawan’s lack of appropriately sized clothing. As if that had mattered to any of them even a wit at that moment.

Kanan hadn't been able to bring himself to put Ezra down for literal hours after that, afraid of letting his out of his arms reach after so momentous an experience. Even now days afterward, there are times he seriously wants to cling to him at odd moments - to pick him up and hug him fiercely. To wrap him up and stuff him in some kind of impenetrable closet where the kid can't ever be hurt in the same way again. There are moments when, despite his best attempts to move on from what happened, he wants to shudder at his Padawan's sheer smallness of size and newfound fragility. Only Ezra hasn't actually changed that much at all, just shifted in some miniscule aspects.

’Which is probably half of the problem,’ Kanan wryly admits. After all he's not the only one stuck with dealing with the embarrassing tendency toward clinginess right now - or at least that's what Kanan suspects - given the way right now Ezra's both hungry for physical reassurance and oddly shy about actually admitting to it, not to mention the way he's also comsntly reflecting back the emotional reactions of almost everyone around him.

And yes, that kind of psychic mirroring's something Ezra has always done to a degree off of the people who surround him– though Kanan really doubts that he realizes it's happening consciously. It’s just never been a problem before precisely – instead of something Kanan tries to remain consistently aware of in high stress situations, especially when exhaustion or higher than normal levels of emotion are also affecting his padawan's normally well shored up shielding.

Ezra has been...markedly leakier in both directions, empathetically speaking though, since they first returned home from planet. His personal mental defenses seem to be thinner right now than Kanan has seen them, well, ever, outside a few times Ezra’d been either injured and unconscious really. Kanan'd thought at first that that was just the natural effect of the shock of their current situation and that a few rounds of meditation would be enough to help his Padawan re-establish his balance. Now though...may it's time to actually step up and intercede more actively. After they’re done with their food, Kanan really needs to get the kid to sit down with him in a mutual meditation session long enough for Kanan to examine and if necessary, help him prop back up his increasingly battered personal shielding.

Not to mention that he also needs to check the kid for signs of psychic bruising, frankly speaking.
‘Why in kriff didn’t I think to check for that earlier then this?’ Meaning before Ezra had progressed to outright swearing at Zeb this morning like he had in the kitchen, because yes Sabine has been grinding on Ezra’s nerves lately but usually his Padawan uses sarcasm to deflect - not flight or that kind of vociferous swearing he’d thrown Zeb’s way earlier this morning.

If the Kid is good at anything at all in this stage of his life, then it’s his normal ability to deflect the truth about what he's actually feeling away from the notice of other people - especially when he's feeling vulnerable or otherwose hurting. The fact he's failing at it so hard right now certainly merits that Kanan start asking some more probing questions.

'Starting with...have I been overlooking the obvious.' He'd thought at the beginning of all of this that most of what Ezra was suffering from emotionally was the natural outcome of shock. Now, though, he has to wonder if the root of the problem isn't actually something more basic - something rooted in a biochemical reality. He’d just assumed after Ezra's restoration by the Ash’tan’aleki that his Padawan had retained all the psychic resources he needed to maintain his typical mental defenses, but now he's beginning to have serious doubts about his Padawan's capacity for fully unguided self-shielding.

'Which would probably explain why,' Kanan realizes after a moment more, though Kanan can literally feel how hard his Padawan trying to remain calm and centered and and in control the last few days, 'Ezra is clinging to his composure like a height phobic climber clings to a crumbling cliff ledge at the moment.' The kid wants to act more maturely than he's urrently managing - Kanan has actually heard Ezra castigate himself over the subject of his own emotional volatility, but Ezra literally *can’t* seem to find and maintain any real sense of balance at present. Instead, he's just getting tossed around like a piece of battered drift wood in a hurricane. Which is humiliating to Ezra as well as exhausting for both of them to deal with quite frankly..

“Ezra...” He finally asks, his voice as calm and non-judgemental as he can possibly make it, "I'm not trying to judge here, but I need you to honestly answer a couple of questions for me if you can, to see if I can help you a bit with the way that you're coping. Since you first woke up that day on Davosh 23- have you noted any differences in how 'sharp' how the world seems to feel around you...especially when you're under stress or opener than normal for your daily meditations?"

The dark haired boy blinks at the question, pausing his fork between his mouth and the plate. “Well, everything seems... louder generally, I guess? And it's hard for me to be still now for more than a couple of minutes at a time, both mentally and physically.” He shrugs noncommittally, "But I guess that I just figured that's essentially the norm for being between six and ten physically. I never liked slowing down back when I was a kid. Kriff I *still* don't like keeping still, I've just learned to better ignore the unavoidable twitchiness over the intervening years.”

Kanan makes a mental note to himself how very deliberately non-specific that stated range of age is. He has a feeling that the subject is going to merit further discussion later...since up until now, Ezra has insisted vociferously thst he's between eight and ten years old, at least according to his memories regarding this particular version his body. “Have you had any more headaches, nightmares, visions etc than usual – since we got back to Yavin System?”

Ezra snorts. “Well, I guess I've had a couple more migraines than usual, maybe? But I'm really not complaining. Frankly, Master I’m just karking relieved to not to be dealing with some of the other physical stuff that originally constantly dogged me.”

“….Excuse me? What?” Kanan nearly drops the last bite of his waffle right along with his fork.

Ezra just shrugs - apparently unaware of Kanan's building consternation, “It’d just be a pain in the ass to have to deal with stuff like hives or frequent nose bleeds while I'm up in the vents, that's all. Granted the food available here on Yavin 4’s totally different than what was available back home
after my parents were taken... I'm not stuck with what I can find in the trash like I was the first time around for one thing. Plus I know noe how to skin test for allergies now when I encounter new foods- which I didn't at the first time I was this age quite honestly."

Kanan holds up his hand in order to cut him off. "Wait...wait another karking minute. Did you just say that you used to get hives last time at this age Ezra?"

"Yeah..." His padawan shrugs, "But not like, well, *often* or for too long or anything. Once I finally figured out how to identify the bad stuff allergy wise and stay the kriff away from it, I was just fine, Kanan. It just took me longer than it probably should have to actually figure out why my Mom and Dad never let me try some samples they handed out in the markets."

"Define 'bad stuff'" Kanan growls back using his fingers to frame the words with no small amount of creeping sarcasm. Because frankly he's a little irritated right now. Ezra's been aboard the Ghost for ober three years, and *now* is when they're finally getting around to this particular enlightening conversation? Sabine and Hera also have allergies as well and preferably he likes the Ghost's crew still breathing. But he can't avoid buying trigger foods he doesn't know exist when he goes shopping for supplies in the market.

"Just this one really specific Lotholian grain that I've never seen grown or sold anywhere else but near Capital City? Otherwise there's just a couple of different fruits: two common and one really not grown on all kinds of rim planets."

"And you've never thought to, I don't know, *mention* these allergies to either Hera or I so we didn't accidentally bring any of said food home with us when we're out resupplying?!"

The child in front of him shrugs, "...I see em now, Kanan...I don't eat em. It's not like you guys do a lot of complicated baking where I can't tell what I'm actually eating. I guess I just didn't see any reason that you needed to know when I had it so well covered?" Ezra’s voice is getting slightly defensive.

"Have you ever had an anaphylactic reaction bad enough from said allergies that your parents needed to start carrying around an emergency epi-pen?"


Kanan raises a hand to rub the suddenly throbbing vein on the left side of his head. "You know what Ezra, never mind. I'm just going to assume that yes you may need one and talk to the doctors in medlab the next time we actually see one. So, well we're on the topic of possible medical crisis you haven't bothered to mention is there anything else interesting that I should know concerning the subject of your health before it gives me an unprovoked heart attack eventually?"

"Uhm...I had a few months of pretty intense ear and nose bleeds that started the same year that my folks were taken away? So I suppose there's at least a chance that those might happen on occasion."

'Just lovely, of course he had.' "Do you happen to know what triggered either type of event currently?"

"No - just that they basically quit on their own not long after I moved out into to my tower on the south edge of town instead of staying like I did initially in Central." Ezra frowns a little, obviously thinking further back. "Come to think of it, that was also just about the time when things started getting easier in terms of my controlling my empathy. I think my instinctive skill for shielding may finally have gotten better or something." Ezra taps his small forehead lightly. "Before that period it was like things just got quiet, then loud, then quiet again over and over in my head on this weird kind
of funky rotation, until it all just faded to a kind of background static essentially. Well until we met anyway and things inside my head got weirdly tickly."

“When we first met it *tickled?*” Kanan raises an eyebrow at that admission. This is the first time that Ezra's ever willingly spoken in any kind of detail about his own experiences when they first made initial contact. His Padawan is, as a general rule, reluctant to describe the processes inside that lock box that he calls his head when they're actually occurring.

“Sort of. Sort of it was more like, oh I don’t know…” Ezra pauses a moment to consider the issue then eventually brightens, straightening up. "Uhm...have you ever had a really bad itch that you can feel way back by your ears but you just can't seem to reach it to stop it no matter what you're currently doing? It was kind of like that really, ever present and really, really annoying....”

'Yeah kid, I hear you.' Sometimes the pull of the Force can be irritatingly insistent. “And I assume that the same thing is happening to you again at the moment?”

Ezra tilts his head, then shakes it. “Oh no. That was just what it felt like when we first met. It was more of a throwaway comparison. Since I woke up on Davosh 23…well it's not like it was the first time around but it's also not all that different. It’s louder now and the static's back again yeah, but it's not affected by location in the same way it was before. Now it's more like its affected by the number of *people* who are actually around me.” He pauses chewing on his lip thoughtfully, then frowns deeply, “Though now that I really think about it, maybe it was *always* that way before too and I was just too young then to process it consciously. Now Kanan, *you're*…” He pauses, then claps his mouth shut deliberately.

“And now I'm?” Kanan’s a little afraid to ask Ezra to complete that particular sentence.

“Now, well going back to the previous analogy, Kanan, it's like you're itch that I can scratch whenever I happen to feel it, without too much difficulty...by simply answering your ping.” He makes a huffing sound, then he blushes a little. "Sorry, I probably should have described that just a little bit more tactfully."

Kanan, far from offended by the analogy, finds he simply wants to laugh at the boy's currently sheepish expression. If only because now every time one of them pings the other through their bond he’s going to be stuck with the mental picture of an Ezra-colored loth-cat, foot to his ear scratching furiously. The image is comical as kriff yes, but also strangely fitting.

“But anywsy,” Ezra’s finished his own breakfast, judging by the way he sets his plate aside. Kanan wonders if the boy is aware of the fact that at this point he’s so hyped up after having eaten real food that he’s practically vibrating as he leans forward. “You mentioned that Rex needed our help on a mission? How? And where are we going to be going?”

“That site north of the base that you were talking to Rex about a couple of weeks ago. The job is basically scouting, site prep and if any of the lakes look like they can safely support the effort, local protein capture for nutritional analysis.”

Ezra draws up short and shakes his head several times like he's trying to clear it before speaking. “Wait...hold on for just a minute...did you just imply that we're actually going fishing? With Rex?!” The dark haired boy's tone at the query is outright incredulous.

Kanan snorts softly, unable to help the reaction. “Yes, we are, Ezra. Unless you have some kind of objection to us doing so that I need to be made aware of?”

“Not really. Though I do have one question, Kanan...what are we going to be using as bait, while
we're up there exactly? Cause I'm a whole lot smaller than Zeb is, and I'm inherently suspicious about such things..."

Kanan can hear the smirk in Ezra's tone as he climbs off the floor and doesn't even consciously think about his next reaction - just delivers a sharp, quick swat to the seat of his Padawan's pants in retaliation for the comment, in much the same way he's seen other parents teasingly respond to their mouthy small children in city markets all across this part of the galaxy. As well as more than one of the Clan masters back in the Creche quite truthfully. Then he freezes, wincing in preparation for the oncoming explosion of Ezra's almost inevitable reaction once he registers the gesture properly.

Ezra doesn't even seem to *notice* at least for the moment however - anymore than he would have shrugged off a more typical light smack to the back of the head. Instead, Ezra remains completely fixated on the novelty of idea being dangled in front of him apparently. “But...but, well Kanan, whenever Zeb and I have asked you along to go fishing before you've just waved us off repeatedlu. No offense or anything Master, but I always thought that you genuinely hated fishing. That being the case why in kark are we currently...?"

'Because my need to see you smile right now, Ezra, out weighs what amounts to a very minor case of specific task loathing.' Kanan thinks in reply before answering aloud, “I like ‘fishing’ just fine Kid. In my experience though, that's not what Zeb actually does when he goes down by the river. He chases around his prey with sharp sticks, yells way too much and usually ends up soaking anyone with him nearly to the skin. His idea of a fun day fishing does not happen to mesh well as a result of that with me. ”

“Hey! Lasat spear fishing is *cultural,* Kanan!” Ezra shoots back just a little indignantly. “And it also works better when you're working in shallow waters then a pole usually does. They actually do something a lot like it in some areas of Lothol too, where regular fishing lines would only get caught up or broken ....”

“I'm just saying I have no objection to fishing at all, Ezra, so long as the people engaged in it with me when I do so are also relatively *quiet.*”

"Understood." Ezra responds with what Kanan can clearly hear is a broad grin.

And Force but right now the Kid's force signature is literally radiating excitement. Zeb hadn't been understating the situation. His Padawan really does love fishing apparently. Though how he picked up the skill is a question that leaves Kanan more than a little bit curious, as Ezra's tower had been too far for a single days walk to and from the coast as far as Kanan remembers.

Ezra meanwhile, has finally continued speaking “So like then does Rex have poles that we're going to be able to use? Or are we going to need to make some while we're out there with some found sticks and fishing twine? Because my dad…” He pauses, nearly tripping over the words, “Back when I was little, Kanan, my dad spent nearly a whole summer of Saturday mornings teaching me everything he knew about fishing. If we need poles then I know exactly how to make them - as well as how to bait for almost anything with gills you can think of. My mom used to jokingly call all of it our regular 'weekly male bonding' session.”

'Oh. Ohhhh.' Well, that explains any number of things, really. Including Zeb's repeated attempts over the past year or so in particular to encourage Kanan to come down to the river with them 'just one Karabast time you stubborn bantha's ass- even if just to sit around with us for awhile and enjoy the karking 'meditative ambiance'.

The Lasat had already *known* that Kanan's Padawan used to go fishing semi-regularly with his Dad. Probably because Ezra had told him about it at some point during one of their own earlier
fishinh trips, and Zeb's been trying to clue Kanan in on the opportunity to bond with the kid while helping him preserve his memories of his own father literally ever since.

Kanan had honestly wondered why the Lasat, who was usually pretty good at shrugging off Kanan's disinterest at offered leisure activities most of the time, had suddenly kept pushing the idea over and over again. Until he'd stop completely at the end of a seriously strange conversation.

'Look...I know that you ain't lookin’ try and replace his father, Kanan. Which is good.” The older male had said to him once, “Because truthfully you couldn’t do that even if you wanted to. But life’s a lot like a broken transport sometimes, for lack of a better analogy, Kanan. Especially when it comes to dealing with orphaned or otherwise abandoned kids. Sure, everybody might have had a ship that they liked just fine when they bought new, yeah. Still, when an axle snaps during an accident or auto grav generator suddenly fails on a scarcely scraped up model, well then *someone* better man up and weld on a karking replacement, and fast, shouldn't they? Or otherwise completely repairable, *beautiful* ship is gonna wind up on the top of the scrap heap - and Karabast but that's a waste at least in my personal opinion.”

It's such a simple truth really. Such an obvious analogy once the point behind it fully clicks. Kanan kind of wants to beat his own head against the wall of the bunk directly behind him over how long it's taken him so long to fully grasp what the Lasat had actually been trying to get at when he brought the subject up that long ago evening. Why is Kanan always so fast to get caught up in the petty details of his own life and yet so slow to notice the supernovas of truth literally flaring to life at his feet?

'Can't change the past, Jarrus, you can only change what you do from this moment forward.' Which is why he reaches out to take Ezra's shoulder and squeeze it in a firm grip, smiling genuinely, making sure to meet his Padawan's enthusiasm with an equal measure of both teasing and encouragement both. “I don’t what Rex's going to be packing for the trip, Ezra, you'll have to ask him about that when we meet up. Though I imagine that he'll likely have a variety of options considering the nature of the job, but even if I'm wrong and we end up having to rig a couple of different poles or other traps up, well that's more than okay right with me. I mean I've always enjoyed the chance to build things with my hands and see how they work, and I would love to see what your Dad showed you regarding the subject of fishing as opposed to what I learned from my own Grandmaster the few times went went ourselves. In fact, I'll even make you a bet for fun if you like, Ezra. Just to keep things interesting. We'll compare what we've learned about fishing, over the duration of our time up north, and at the end of the excursion the one of us with the biggest catch gets to pick the next set of katas that we work on, agreed? ” Kanan pauses, a little expectant, "So then? What do you think?"

Ezra literally beams at that. Both in his force aura and in the real world, presumably. "I think it's a great idea, Kanan. Though just for the record, you, Master are about to be absolutely slaughtered. Like a crying little baby."

Kanan snorts "Well I can tell someone's already clearly getting cocky."

Ezra raspberries. Literally, actually raspberries. "No just preparing you for the reality of your situation, Master. Because there is no way in Sith hells that you are going to ever out fish me."

Probably not, but at this point Kanan's pretty sure that he doesn't much mind the sacrifice much really. "We shall see, Junior. We shall ultimately see. In the meantime, though - do you mind taking the dishes back to the kitchen for me, Ezra? After which we should probably both get packed up after some shared time meditating."

"Not at all." Ezra reaches out to start stacking them.
"Then do so, Mr Overconfident and when you get back we'll sort through what we need before the agreed check in call to Rex."

"Sir, yes sir!" Ezra replies saluting, and heads out toward the galley cheerfully.

Kanan can literally sense him whistling all the way back to the kitchen.

xxxxxx
This is what little of 'his fall' that Ezra actually remembers:

One moment he was dead, and the second he just...wasn’t. The world was bright when he awoke, and light sliced across painfully overstimulated senses. It bound up the breath in his chest and set all of his nerves - which felt made new - to absolutely agonized howling.

His mind had been too big in that instant – somehow changed, somehow made entirely different - and his body had felt shrunken and too tight around him. As if he had somehow been compressed down into the wrong size of skin. Indeed, the only thing at all that hadn’t felt out of place in that moment had been the sound of his own breathing and heartbeat, and then a moment or so after that bright strand of light pulsing painfully in one of the corners of his mind. That light which Ezra just knew instinctively. That light which was his master. That light which was *Kanan.*

He'd known, without really even knowing why, that the other man was in terrible agony as he automatically stretched out toward him.

Reaching out for what he'd later come to realize had to have been the still fraying ends of their newly severed training bond, and pouring all he was into connection in order to try and ease the pain, hadn’t been instinct on Ezra's part exactly so much as raw desperation. But the effect had still been immediate and more than a little bit electrifying. First there had been shock from Kanan in response, and then confusion followed by joy – boundless as the vastness of space itself - rising and sweeping like a tsunami of healing back toward him through the link. The other man's sheer ecstatic relief cementing bits and pieces of each of them that had shattered back in their proper place almost effortlessly. Ezra is pretty sure that by that point that he'd been physically crying.

And Kanan Jarrus - Jedi Knight, protector, beloved master, dearest of friends – had clung to Ezra all the while through their link, alternating between swearing, laughing and crying even as he did so. Until their hosts had finally necessarily willed an exhausted Ezra to 'Sleep' with the promise that when he woke again both he and his Master would see each other again.

That is the only part of his time after his fall that Ezra really remembers clearly. Until many, many hours later when he'd first woken small, sore and wrapped in a scratchy woolen blanket. Hera had been gently stroking his hair, and he’d been cradled like a baby in Kanan’s arms. It had taken more than a day after that before either of the two of them had been able to stop circling back around to periodically visually or physically check in on Ezra just to make sure he was still all right. They've both slowly gotten better about not being so clingy since. Hera in fact hasn't been around to more than to chat occasionally and pat his shoulder late at night or early in the morning before leaving for work. Ezra understands that she's busy right now, that the fleet is consumed with maneuvers at the moment but something about Hera's increasingly frequent absences and the slightly off key smile that she plasters across her face whenever he sees her now makes something tug in his gut just a little bit queasily. After all of his years on the street, he knows the feeling of an adult who's anxious to have him out of their presence. Hera's gone from shell shocked to just short of outright avoiding him in less than two weeks and Ezra has no idea how to properly respond to any of it.

Kanan on the other hand, is always nearby since they first got back to Yavin, always quietly monitoring. Not really hovering or crowding Ezra with his presence mind you, just there somehow in a way that is both odd and fundamentally completely reassuring.

Ezra has to remind himself, over and over again as the days drag slowly out in to weeks, that he's too damn old this size or not, to want to go climb back into his Master's lap again.
This is what Ezra knows: one moment he’s in the kitchen, sliding across the floor in his sock covered feet, intent on delivering the dishes from their breakfast into the sink so that he can return to his room and help Kanan begin the process of packing for their journey north with Rex. He feels almost giddy at the moment with his mind full of fishing and his stomach finally full of something approaching a decent morning breakfast...

Which is precisely when he skids, unseeing, right into a shallow standing pool water in the galley. Then Ezra's airborne, for several heart stopping seconds, and then he's landing, after striking the back of his head against something hard just off to the side of him.

The next thing that Ezra Bridger is aware of after that, he’s lying on his side on the floor, his face wet and his eyes staring blankly up at cupboard directly in front of him. His head is throbbing mercilessly, and his whole mind feels both clouded and somehow oddly sticky. Off somewhere immediately to the right, Sabine is hollering at the top of her lungs for someone's assistance, though Ezra's brain can’t quite work well enough to make sense of her words as meaning as well as in greater context. He winces at the sound: because Karabast but Sabine is *loud* when she screams. Could she maybe, he wonders, like, turn the volume down at least a little bit? His eyelids slide slowly shut against the brightness in the kitchen even as he simultaneously flops over and fully onto his back.

“Kanan! Zeb! Someone! I need help in here. Kanan!!! Ezra! Come on and open up your eyes, Bridger! Ezra can you hear me?! Kanan, get in here now! Ezra! Zeb, someone! Please kriiffing hurry! Ezra, can you hear me? Open your eyes, please sweetheart and just kriiffing look at me...”

Ezra’s distant aware of the smell of blood, and that now the back of his pants are shirt are both soaking wet as well as his stocking feet. Kark: with what speeder exactly did he decide to play chicken? And how in kriiff did it get in the kitchen to begin with? He hears a sniffle off immediately to the right of him. Blinks again. Then he licks his lips, forcing a single word out of a mouth that feels a million miles away in distance as he fully forces his eyelids open. “Sabine.” He forces a weak smile. "I'mmmma all right, don't worry so much about it.

"Ezra. Thank the little Gods! You're doing great! Come on now, keep your eyes okay, and see if you can look at me. That's right, Bridger. You're doing great."

On the bright side, at least Sabine is no longer so lost to sheer panic that she’s actively bellowing. On the other hand though...Force she looks scared to death at the moment. Ezra wiggles his fingers cautiously where he lays, then his toes, trying to physically assess his condition. His head throbs – probably from a concussion in progress, but nothing else that he can feel seems particularly broken. Ohhhhhhhboy is he going to be sore in a few hours though - he can already feel the warmth of where new bruises are forming. When he finally shifts his eyes to look more directly at Sabine though, the light just behind her bent head makes him want to literally puke in protest.

“Are… Are Hera's dishes okay, Sabine?” He licks his lips, trying for another sentence. He really hopes they aren't too badly broken. They'd been a present for her birthday from both him and Zeb and he knows that the ceramics are actually Hera's favorite set.

Sabine’s hand wraps around his own smaller palm now, and she’s squeezing it tightly, halfway between laughing and crying. “Ezra no one in the whole karking world gives a kriiff right now whether you broke Hera's dishes or not. Just stay with me, okay, and do not go to sleep?!”

Then Zeb and Kanan both come skidding into the kitchen before he can form a more coherent reply. Kanan is pale and breathing hard even as the older Jedi drops down to his knees right in the middle
of the small pool water Ezra's currently lying in. And kark - why's the stuff all of a sudden gone from clear to a fairly bright pink?

Karabast! What in karking hell happened?!” Zeb’s question comes out as a literal bellow from where he stands in the doorway, and Ezra groans at the too sharp sound yet again. Seriously, does *no one* in this room but him grasp the concept of 'silence?" "Hey Big guy, could you please keep it *down?!*" He thinks he says, though he can't tell whether or not Zeb actually heard him.

Then he licks his lips and reaches out to try and pat Kanan's arm consolingly. “I’m fine, Master, really, I promise. I’m ... I just hit some water when I was loaded down with our dishes and after that well I guess I just slipped.”

“You fish tailed right through standing water and went ass over elbows, you mean!” And Force dammit Sabine, Ezra thinks crossly, but that tone is really not helping the current situation...the goal is to descalate not fuel all the fear filling up the room at present.

Kanan meanwhile is still trying to check his basic vitals. Seeking out his pulse at his carotid, placing a hand on his sternum to assess his overall breathing. The older Jedi's face is calm. But his mind... Kriff the hurricane he's locking away in his head at the moment. Just the feeling of the older man's current emotional turmoil slams Ezra's eyes shut in instinctive self defense. “Ezra.” Kanan’s voice is measured when he speaks, “Ezra I need you to open your eyes if they're not that way already, okay. And then I need you to look at Sabine so she can check your pupils for me all right. Ezra - Kid I also need for you to verbally confirm that you can hear me right now and know what I've actually been saying.”

Of course Ezra understands, he’s been an active part of the kriffing conversation ever since Kanan first arrived hasn’t he? He thought that he's been speaking aloud, even if his throat feels dry as dust right now.

“Should I run and get one of the medics from over at the complex?” Now it's Zeb’s turn to speak. His tone is anxious.

“It certainly wouldn’t hurt. Head wounds tend bleed a lot no matter their actual severity but I'm actually more worried about possible concussion at least at the moment. This floor is almost as hard as ceramacrete as ai previously said. Please go alert a medic and then go get Hera back here as fast as you possibly can. Let her know what's happened, even if that means that you have to pull her out her meeting. Because odds are very good Ezra's going to need stitches minimally by the end of this.”

"Kriff," Ezra mutters in response to that request. "She's gonna be pissed...getting pulled outta her meetings." Stupid water. Stupid slippery floor. Stupid him in the galley with only socks on his feet.

"She's going to be worried when she finds out what happened Ezra, not mad. Zeb go ahead and get moving."

"On it Boss." Then there are footfalls falling away. Most likely Zeb doing exactly as Kanan had suggested. “We need you to open your eyes, again Ezra. I know that it's tough but we need you as awake as possible at least for the moment “ Kanan prompts him gently again. And kriff but Ezra's dizzy right now, and growing increasingly nauseous. “I'm working on it,” He finally manages to get out. "Brain's just having... a little bit of trouble ... delivering messages quickly at the moment."

“Well make it work harder already!” Sabine’s voice snaps out – her voice simultaneously wobbly and angry in her brusqueness, "Honestly, Ezra, I've seen people show more grit after losing one of their limbs! Stop whing that its hard and just karking do it!”
Ezra opens his mouth then to retort, something clever or flippant or snarky of the sort he'd normally use in these moments in order to diffuse her lingering tension, but then Kanan cuts him off with a thunderous bellow instead. “Oh for Force God Damned Sake! Do not start that kriff with him again right now, Sabine!” And woah golly does *that* do the trick in terms getting his eyes open. Hello there world and my old friend adrenaline. He hadn’t realized Kanan could literally feel like striking lightning - his Master's protective rage at the words literally sheering into Ezra's own mind through their link. At least his eye are open now, though - which hopefully has got count for something.

Kanan is kneeling on the floor next to him on the right, while Sabine crouches down on his left, her eyes wide with shock at Kanan's unexpected reaction. She's literally gaping at the older Jedi at the moment. Ezra's hand stretches out then, wraps around Kanan's forearm, trying to yank Kanan's focus away from her and center it back on the hopefully less dangerous him for the time being. Makes his own eventual words as soothing as he possibly can. “I'm fine Kanan. Really. It's going to be fine. Sabine's...just venting a little steam at the moment. Like we all do sometimes when we're stressed. Granted I'd generally prefer that she didn't do it in a way that makes me feel quite so much like Banthashit pooodoo. But whatever works under these circumstances. I mean it's not like I'm not currently conveniently pint sized and basically perfect for kicking.”

Kanan draws in a deep shaky breath at that while Sabine just stares at him, absolutely stricken. Ezra laughs then, shakily, for both of their sakes. "It was a *joke* guys, okay. Just go with it for the moment? What's the status do you think on my actual head?"

Then his master's mind is calm and still again and Ezra’s hand is being gripped tightly between both of Kanan's own. “We're all right, Kid. And you're going to be just fine, I promise. Sabine assuming his eyes are open again I need you to check his pupils – are they fixed, uneven, dilated? How’s his coloring looking? Can you estimate his possible amount of blood loss and any time he was unconscious for me?"

She leans forward immediately in order to check his eyes. “He's got normal pupil responses right now. He's definitely pale but not outright ashen.” She breathes out, raggedly surveying the area all around them. “There's a fair amount of blood on the floor from when he first hit his head, Kanan, but with all the water on the floor too right...it's hard to tell how much he's lost so far exactly. My guess is it looks like so kuch because its pretty dilluted."

"Ezra you said that hit you head on the way down when you first fell?"

He nods a little, than regrets it as the room spins even faster. "Yeah, I did on the back left side, I think."

“Did you twist funny when you went down, Ezra? Did you have to roll to get onto you back or did you land there naturally? Do you have full sensation at least as far as you can tell in your fingers and toes? I'm a little worried about moving you honestly, Kiddo, but at the same time I really want to get you upright enough so I can check on the status of your head as soon as possible. But before that I'd like you to do a self check I think.”

Ezra licks his dry lips, “Everything feels fine, Kanan,” He murmurs, wiggling his fingers and toes again, then rotating his neck from one side to the other before pushing himself up gradually into a half reclined sitting position. “I'm pretty sure I just smacked myself really good upside the head, Kanan. Nothing new about that. And it's not like I can't spare the brain cells to or anything.”

Sabine makes another harsh sound at that comment, this one somewhere between a whimper and a laugh. "Kriff Ezra, enough already with the dark jokes and the sarcasm."

But then I wouldn't be *me* now would I?" Ezra closes his eyes and breathes deeply for another
moment or two. Then he pushes himself upright still further, swaying as a wave of vertigo tries to swamp him. “Can I get a towel, or something to help clean up the back of my head please, guys? Feels really gross back there right now.” Judging by the increasing stickiness running down the back of his neck now that he’s mostly sitting upright, he’s guessing that he’s probably still bleeding pretty steadily from where he bashed himself in the skull. Not to mention that the edges of his vision have also started blurring. After a moment or two, he shifts his gaze anxiously toward his master, whose arm’s supporting his lower back at the moment. “I...I’m pretty dizzy right now. Don’t know how much longer I’m going to be able stay upright like this without more help, Kanan...”

“I’ve got you. Sabine, can you brace him for just a moment please?”

The Mandalorian nods wordlessly. Then there’s some shifting around, and a couple of low sounds from both Ezra and Kanan, as Sabine eases him first slightly forward then backwards again, until Kanan’s sitting behind him instead of beside, and yeah, Ezra notes, that’s definitely better for the time being. Kanan’s kind of huge and feels way too tall these days to be a really comfortable chair back for someone of Ezra's current size, but at least now he's no longer worried about listing one way or another should he suffer another round of vertigo.

"Are you still dizzy or nauseous, Ezra?"

"Mmmhmmm. That would be a definite yes, Kanan."

Gentle fingers are prodding along the back of his scalp now - carefully but steadily assessing as they go– at least until Kanan locates Ezra’s head wound. The pressure of the other man's touch is intentionally light as Kanan can make it but Ezra can’t stop himself from flinching in pain at the contact of fingers to torn skin. Kanan’s voice is very sober as he systematically maps out both the size and the depth of the gash. “Yup, Kiddo I’m sorry but you’re definitely going to need both bacta and stitches.”

"Well kriff." Ezra grumbles. This day officially bites it. This better not mean that they don't get to still go fishing.

“Karabast. Hera’s going to kill me.” Sabine mutters, hand flapping a little for a moment in sheer agitation. Behind Ezra, where he's still providing support for the moment, Kanan’s whole body stiffens at the comment.

Ezra’s brow wrinkles a little in confusion, “Wasn’t your fault, Sabine... Like I said earlier, I just slipped. I should have been wearing shoes. As it was I was in a hurry to get back to my room and I wasn't paying enough attention to the state of the floor of the kitchen.”

But Sabine shakes her head, eyes wide with regret and clear agitation both. “No. I’m sorry Ezra, I spilled some water while...while I was cleaning off some of my brushes about half an hour ago in the middle of working on a painting. I swear was going to come back and clean the mess up just as soon as I dropped the supplies back off in my room but then I got distracted by a call from Hobbie and I just...”

Behind Ezra, Kanan growls, actually literally growls “How many times are you, me and Hera going to have to talk about this, Sabine?!”

Ezra coughs then, more than a little alarmed by the way things are suddenly escalating again. “Kanan, she... it was an accident okay? I should have been paying better attention...”

“No, it *wasn’t* an accident.” Kanan snaps back automatically. “Not when this is the third time something like this has happened since she first came aboard The Ghost.” He scowls at the
Mandalorian fiercely over Ezra's shoulder, “It wasn't an accident Sabine. You were being careless. And now he's gotten hurt because of it- even after all the kriff you've been given him lately about his being reckless and selfish.”

“I’m sorry.” Sabine all but cries out then, completely horrified by the whole situation. “It's been literal *years* since I forgot to clean up last time, Kanan! I didn’t know that he’d be coming back into the kitchen so soon! You... you’d promised me that you’d be tracking him down this morning and talking to him immediately after you two finished breakfast.”

“Which is beside the point completely! Do not try and divert the blame here, Sabine! You are not a child, and this wasn't another minor faux paus like it's been every time before...this isn't Hera's slightly turned ankle or my couple of mild bruises anymore. Ezra's going to need multiple stiches. He probably has a concussion!”

"Guys - it's fine...! Really it's just..."

"I...” With each sentence out of their mouths Kanan’s form is getting tauter with anger, Sabine is getting paler and paler and Ezra can literally feel the anger and guilt rising up like twin tsunami waves about to sweep over and devastate all three of them. ”"i’m all right. It'll heal you guys, I promise. Just stop fighting! *Please!* I'll take any blame for this..."

"Enough!” The sharp word from the galley doorway cuts off his panicked babble midsentence.

And then suddenly a new voice rising up to fill the space as indignation and shock ad well as a sharp wave of pure *disgust* is added to all room's current emotional roiling. And Ezra's pounding head, and rolling stomach has simply had enough. So Ezra turns to his left side then and vomits. Despite his best efforts to prevent it, some small amount of his previously well enjoyrd breakfast hits both he and Kanan's pants legs in the process. Karabast. "I’m sorry.” He babbles, "Kriff Master, I’m so karking sorry, for all of it.”

And just like that, the whole room falls absolutely silent.

Until half a second later when there's a low, furious snarl of epithet in Ryllian, and before Ezra can say anything further, Hera’s striding forward from the doorway, radiating disgust and anger both even as she reaches down to scoop him out of Kanan's grip. “Go and cool off, guys. BOTH of you. Before you make this situation any worse than it already is. I've got him for now.”

“No!” Ezra cries out, backing into Kanan almost instinctively, irrationally panicked. Because this?

This was not what he asked for. He wants Kanan to stop yelling at Sabine, yes. But that doesn't mean that he wants to be up and abandoned into the keeping of someone who's literally radiating disgust just from having to look down at him. He wants Kanan to stay. Force, if Kanan doesn't stay at least for now Ezra may, in fact, completely flip his lid. "Kanan stays, Hera. I don't want him leaving!”

“...Ezra.” Hera’s voice is odd now, different - lower and much softer than it was just a minute or so before. She’s practically frozen in place where she stands, half crouched down directly in front of him. His hands clench instinctively into the fabric of the pants of the man still behind him.

And just like that Hera's hands fall away as she steps first back and then still farther away. "Kanan - what the Kriff?” There’s a queer combination of shock, hurt and regret in her eyes before her eyes shift to look over his nearest shoulder, to where Kanan has also finally softly started speaking.

“Ezra? It’s okay, kiddo. You’re fine…Hera just wants to help…I promise you..."
“No!” And Force but right now he sounds desperate. Like he's forgotten how to breathe right or something. It this what it sounds like, Ezra wonders, when someone is close to hyperventilating?

Arms tighten around him gently from behind, “I'm not going anywhere, okay. Ezra, you need too calm down. You're safe. You're fine ...do you here me? I'm here and it's going to be all right. I promise I'm not going anywhere. Just take slow deep breaths kid everything's going to be all right...”

It’s at that precise moment, shaking with adrenaline and pain both that Ezra finally consciously realizes there’s something very, very wrong with his usual shielding. It’s less than it should be right now, not enough for all that he's desperately trying to keep it stable, and Force but he hurts right noe. It's as if he's picking up on *everything* at the moment whether he wants to or not: everyone's anger, their guilt, their fear. And it's just too much on top of his own hurricane spin of emotion.

“What…?” He gasps out then, his eyes slamming shut, hands coming up to press on the sides of his head almost desperately keening, “Karabast what the kark is happening to me?!” A trickle of moisture runs down and over his lip, then before increasing into to a steady small stream. Hera curses softly in shock at that, reaching out to gently touch his face. When her hand pulls back seconds later it's literally coated in bright red … and it takes Ezra a dizzy, detached sort of moment to realize once he opens his eyes again that he must be having some kind of major nose bleed.

“Hera?” Kanan’s voice is tight with worry when he speaks from behind him. He’s clearly asking for more information.

“He…Kanan, I don't understand. His nose just literally started gushing blood like a faucet.”

There’s a pause of about half a second after that, before his master starts cursing softly under his breath. Then careful hands shift Ezra's body ninety degrees, moving him down to rest with his head in the crook of Kanan's left elbow - his body in a basically cradled position much like an oversized infant - as Kanan's own fingers go directly to his forehead, the older Jedi's mind reaching directly for his own. "Sith spit." Kanan curses the first moment he makes actual contact, "The concussion's just effectively crashed the last his mental shielding.”

Ezra whimpers at the feel of the other man's frustration tangled up in his words, then jerks at Hera's corresponding flash of sharp panic, and Kanan grimaces, his lips thinning. "I'm so sorry Ezra. Look I've got it covered okay - just hold on for another minute..." Then there’s another sensation - this one subtler and far more soothing - a lot like a warm wind of calm and reassurance sweeping through his mind even as something snaps up bulwark strong around the both of them, and just like that all the overflows of everyone else's emotion that he'd felt before are finally gone, the flood of them shut off like the handle of a streaming water faucet.

"Oh thank kriff!” Ezra's whipcord tight body shudders once hard then drops back almost bonelessly, limp into Kanan's lap.

“Kanan!” Hera’s voice is even more alarmed in reaction to that. She’s got a soft cloth pressed fully against his nose by now, and is trying to mop up the mess on the lower half of his chin with another damp washcloth that Sabine had probably supplied her from the sink “Is he…”

“He’s fine, Hera. He just managed to bust, well, an empathic fuse, basically. I’m pretty sure that he has a concussion right now as I just said, and on top of that he's also been having some ongoing issues the last few weeks with his personal mental shielding.”

“He's been having what?!” Sabine squeaks out the question breathlessly when she she hears those words. "You could have warned us about that, Kanan!"
“Why? Because it's required for you to know that he's even more vulnerable than you already thought he was earlier before you're willing to uncap your actual pool of empathy, Sabine? I wasn't hiding anything, okay? It’s something I only just figured out myself earlier this morning when the two of us were talking.”

Ezra's eyes pop open again then, and this time his glare is accompanied by a fierce scowl. "Oh come on you guys. Can you just *not* for awhile until you've like, you know, actually treated or drugged me? Can the ongoing smack-down please wait until after I'm finally asleep?"

Hera stares at Kanan then – for a long and probably hypercritical moment, before she looks over her own shoulder at Sabine and jerks her head toward the exit door. “Why don’t you give us some space for awhile, okay? I'll come find you once Ezra’s been treated and update you on the current situation. ”

The Mandalorian simply nods, avoiding Kanan's gaze all the while as she simply turns and flees.

Then Hera’s eyes are back on him again, and Ezra tries to force a genuine smile for her in response. Because she doesn't look all that much better than Sabine had earlier really. She's clearly pale and confused and more than a little alarmed. But hey at least the world's not so painful anymore - which should count for something in terms of providing reassurance.

Hera hardly seems to notice that she even has his gaze though. Instead her voice is very low, as she speaks directly and calmly to Kanan, “We still need to get him to med bay to deal with his scalp wound. And I want to send for one of the medics, just as a precaution. Are you okay to lift him on your own? Or do you want me to take him so that you can go and get into something dry and clean before we treat him?”

Ezra’s body stiffens involuntarily at the words again for reason's he can't exactly make sense of himself, but Kanan only shakes his head without even glancing downward. “No. We’re fine for the moment, Hera. Let’s just get him over to Medbay, okay. I already sent Zeb to get help when we found him a couple of minutes ago. I take it then that he didn’t find you before that to pull you out of your meeting?”

Hera shakes her head in the negative. “I specifically asked them to move a few things around this morning so I could make it back for lunch. I wanted some one on one time with with Sabine this afternoon. She's having some issues at the moment. I thought she could use a friendly ear.”

Kanan nods. “She'd probably have really liked that. So Medbay then. Do we have all the gear right now that's needed for his stitches?”

“Assuming they use the same needle and thread sizes for children, yeah, we should, Kanan. All right. Just be careful when you do get up, Kanan– blood and water are both all over the floor right now, Love, and it's slippery as kriff as a result.”

“I know.” Kanan informs her softly “I could smell the blood in here from practically the first moment that I came in…not to mention that Sabine was screaming bloody murder when she first found him. The Kid scared the Sith Hells out of me.”

Ezra wets his lips at that, "Sorry, Master."

" It's not your fault, Kiddo."

"...Also isn't Sabine's."

"We're going to have to agree to disagree on that one Ezra, but don't worry about it for the moment,
okay?” A broad hand strokes the hair on his forehead once, lightly, reassuringly, and then his master is shifting his grip again, reaching an arm under Ezra's small shoulders and another under his knees before exhaling slowly and then rising up to his feet. Ezra looks out at the world from this new perspective for a moment, then closes his eyes against the vertigo the change in positioning almost inevitably brings.

"Force but you're tall." He complains grumpily, "It's like being carried around by a kriffing tree."

Hera chuckles softly, but Kanan’s voice is both warm and stern as he answers. “Oh no, you don’t, Kid. Eyes open for now- you are not allowed to sleep yet. No flirting with the sandman, Ezra until after we get your head all stitched up and the doctor checks you over.”

“Kay.” Ezra, answers, more than a little muzzily. It takes a few moments effort on his part, but he does get his eye open again, then he winces, ashamed as the smell of blood and human sick, “Sorry about the blood and the vomit that's now all over your pants, Kanan…”

His master just shrugs, causing Ezra to raise and then fall slightly with the flow of the motion. “It happens, Kid. I can just wash them all out later. Don’t worry about it anymore for the time being. Besides it's not like I'm the only one who's going to have to clean up, anyway. You're just as much of a mess right now, Ezra as I am..”

“Good. I karking hate this shirt. Velociraptors should not be wearing cowboy boots and bandannas. It’s stupid. For that matter most kids clothes these days are dumb.” And Force but his eyes feel so heavy right now.

“If you hate it that much then why are you wearing it at all, Ezra?” Hera asks him then, more than a little bit curiously, having fallen into step beside him and Kanan as they walk, her boots matching Kanan's own trod on the floor almost perfectly as they move in unison.

Ezra shrugs, “Well I can't exactly run around naked, now can I? All two other shirts that I have that don't drown me at the moment were still in the fresher when I woke up earlier this morning. They’re all stupid yes, but I don’t exactly have the leeway to be choosy about those sort of things..”

Hera reaches out and squeezes Ezra nearer forearm briefly. “I'm sorry, Ezra...you kind of have been left with the short end of the stick last last week or so haven't you? With everything's that's happened. I really meant to plan a market run as soon as we reported back in on the situation here on Yavin, but then officers from around the base offered me a few bags of their kid's old hand me downs and I didn’t even stop and think how you might feel about having to just live with other people's random cast offs or whether or not they'd even fit you well. I promise you that we’ll try and find some stuff more to your taste, on our next supply run, I promise. No more living with cowboy dinosaur t-shirts as your only real option.”

Ezra smiles a little at that, “And plain shoes too, please - not ones with holovid characters on them. Especially not ones from bad cartoons either. I mean do I honestly LOOK like the kind of kid who would voluntarily watch something called Red, Rose and Rover? Just no…” He wrinkles his nose as both adults chuckle and Ezra pokes Kanan in the chest in retaliation. "Yeah laugh it up you overly height gifted asshole, but I'm telling you from my perspective, Master that it isn't even remotely funny at all anymore after the ninth day in a row of actually having to deal with it.”.

There's a moment of silence, then Kanan's arms tighten around him just slightly, as Hera speaks up again. “We hear you, Ezra. And we'll take care of it, I promise. In the meantime we’re almost there... You're doing just great, just a little bit longer okay.” Then a moment after that, "Also, Ezra...watch your kriffing language. Especially when you're this small it just makes you sound ridiculous."
Ezra's head lulls to the side at that, a little smile tilting his lips as he finally acknowledges at least a little bit of the humor of his present situation. “Oh well, at least my underwear right now is all black and not covered in like... speeders or something, because there’d definitely be a joke to be made if they were. But not one that wouldn’t get me grounded indefinitely, I'm guessing.”

Kanan snorts, while Hera keys open the door to the medlab, “Take him over to the table, Kanan,— get him out of those wet, bloody clothes and then swaddle him up in a blanket or something. I’ll get some warm soap and water into a basin so we can wash the blood out of his hair, and then while you get to work on that I'll get you both some clothes that you can change into once you're actually done.”

“Or I can just clean up myself alone in the med shower.” Ezra suggests, “It’d be faster and probably way less messy to clean up then trying to wipe up via towels or a sponge bath or something.”

Kanan snorts behind him softly, even as he sets Ezra down with his legs dangling over the edge of treatment table “Sure it would be, Kid, in other circumstances, anyway Like if you were currently capable of, oh I don't know, actually standing unassisted.”

“Hey - I can stand up just fine on my own, thank you very much.” Ezra grumbles back, and tries to demonstrate in order to prove it, only to discover that the moment that his weight lands on both of small his feet, he wobbles precariously as his knees start to buckle. Only Kanan's quick hands keep him from toppling over and probably netting himself yet another concussion.

“Just be still, Ezra, I’ve got things covered for now, okay. We’re good.” Kanan informs him softly, once again depositing him up on the exam bed. Then gentle but efficient hands begin to methodically strip Ezra out of his blood and water soaked clothing, lifting his shirt carefully over his scalp wound and then waiting as Ezra wiggles out of his pants and underwear quickly, before enfolding the younger Jedi's entire body inside a warm checkered blanket. "Now let's see about cleaning up the blood on your hair as best as we can, okay."

It only takes another minute or so after that for Hera to return again, the Twilek pilot wheeling in a basin of faintly steaming water on a cart as well as clothing changes for both himself and for Kanan . Ezra smiles at her warmly in response as she comes through the door. "Thank you, Hera, for literally helping cover my ass at the moment. " He smirks at his own joke even as Hera rolls her eyes in response. Then he turns toward Kanan glaring, poking a finger into his Master's chest. “Hera can help with that for now. Go - get cleaned up yourself Kanan, and then come back here and stitch up my head once she's done. Because don’t think for a moment Master, that this gets you out of our bet. Because it does not. A tiny little head wound is not going to stop me from kicking your ass when the three of us go fishing..."

“Ezra..” Kanan hesitates, clearly concerned at the suggestion that this fall should somehow not change any of their plans, only to have his nose nearly poked by the tiny pointer finger of an emphatically waving Padawan hand.

“Fish. Ing. Kanan. We are going fishing. Like you promised that we would. Even if in the worst case scenario, I do have a *minor* concussion, well then we're using poles, not spears or nets, aren't we? So it won't be a problem. I'll just ...whatever...nap on the shore on a blanket whenever I'm not actively demonstrating my superior skills in terms of piscine dominance. This,” He points at his head and scowls, "Isn't bad enough Master, that you need to cancel our trip."

“Kanan, what on earth is he talking about!!” Hera’s voice chimes in then, from the side her voice is somewhere between confused and increasingly indignant.

Ezra turns to face her, voice and face alight with his sheer glee. "Kanan and I have a rebellion related
assignment all of our own, right now Hera. We're going to be capturing and assessing local water-based protein sources up north at the proving grounds for the next week or so. With Rex. 

"Oh are you *really?*" She says as crosses her arms, looking over at Kanan, very *very* deliberately.

Which is the exact same minute that the on call Medic from the base's larger medical facility comes tearing through the door with a fast-moving Zeb at her heels. Much to Kanan Jarrus' both sincere and *immediate* relief.
Rex is just finishing up picking up the last of the weekend's requisitions and grabbing a quick snack for himself at the Rebel Encampments central marketplace, when he hears the words from two tables over, via the base's seeming endless scuttlebut generator. "So, it looks like Bridger's just landed himself in some kind of trouble yet again."

His head cocks to the side at that, attention sharpening even though he determinedly does not look in the direction of other table's occupants. Rex after all, has no intention of encouraging the gossip that's spreading around base regarding the Ghost Crew's current situation if he can possibly prevent it. Kanan and the rest of Specter Crew all have more than enough stress to deal with already after all, without this kind of Bantha poodoo adding constantly into it. Still, it's not like at this point Rex can actively stop hearing the gossip either, can he? Plus it might be wise for him to have some clue what other people on Yavin 4 are actually saying right now, and through whom exactly the news is routinely spreading, if only so Rex knows which asses exactly might need to have a potential little chats with his boots at some point down the road.

"What happened this time?" The Gold Squadron pilot asks, snorting as she takes a long sip of her milkshake.

"Not a clue, Jaime…I wasn't actually in Medlab myself at the time." Her dark-haired colleague replies, clearly bemused. "But my friend Cadgeson was there picking something up for his allergies at the time and he swears on his Nonna's secret fudge recipe that Garazeb Orrelios himself came barreling into the place this morning looking for one of the emergency medics to bring them back to The Ghost to help with an emergency situation. Because it looks like Bridger took a nasty fall somehow and hit his head. The Lasat was apparently 'pretty frantic.'

Rex doesn't bother to wait to hear any further details after that. He's already up and out of his seat by the end of the sentence, his bag slung up and over his right shoulder, his mind already mentally mapping out the most efficient path through the Yavin 4 Complex as he shifts around his current itinerary. He'll need to stop at his own ship at first just to quickly stow away his newest supplies. Then he'll head over to the set of 'boardrooms' where the rest of the command staff usually holds their daily meetings. If Hera's still present there then that'll serve as a pretty good indication that any fall Ezra actually suffered was minor enough that Kanan didn't even bother to inform the Twi'lek pilot and Rex'll know that the rumors he's hearing were probably greatly exaggerated. If Hera's been pulled out her meeting though... Well that's another matter entirely.

There's no point in getting all riled up either way, Rex reminds himself until he has more reliable information. Still even so as he walks toward his ship his mind's eye automatically goes back to the image of the porcelain fragile-looking child he'd seen that morning while visiting The Ghost. Recalling the way that Ezra's balance had wobbled precariously on the galley's counter-top as the stubborn Padawan had gone looking for his breakfast.

Just like his master, Ezra Bridger can be incredibly stubborn sometimes. Not to even mention that the Padawan's always been, in Rex's experience at least, almost fanatically independent about taking care of himself. If Hera's not in her meeting when Rex goes to check for her there, well then in light of what he's just heard, it certainly can't hurt for Rex to just pop over to the Ghost himself for a little while in order to check up on things, can it? He can always pass the visit off as just his checking back to provide more trip information if Ezra just turns out to have a goose egg.

A few minutes later Rex's abandoning his glance through the windows into the largest of C&C briefing rooms (No Hera present) in favor of heading directly for The Ghost's assigned Yavin 4
parking berth. He doesn't intend to butt in when he actually gets there if he can possibly help it. If only because he knows better than to needlessly inflame any high-stress situation that way. That doesn't mean though, he can't at least check in and offer his services if they are needed. After all right now Hera and Kanan might be glad to have someone on hand who's willing to act as a - Rex doesn't exactly know what to call it - a public gatekeeper of sorts when it comes to providing additional information? Because if the rumors about Ezra's fall keep spreading around the base like they are at present – which Rex doesn't doubt for a second they will- then he's likely not the only person on planet who'll hear about the rumor and be concerned enough to come looking. Ezra and the Ghost crew after all, tend to be pretty well liked by just about everyone they meet, and so a bulwark on the boarding ramp may be of tremendous help in the short term in terms of handling the dispersal of updates and information while Kanu and Hera focus on actually caring for Kanan's Padawan instead.

'And if that's not really necessary either,' Rex acknowledges to himself with a little shrug, 'Then at least I'll get to find out straight away what has actually happened instead of just being stuck with the scuttlebutt.' Which Rex much prefers at this point to the endless web of maybe's that are currently weaving their way through his head.

When Rex gets to the Ghost's docking slip roughly seven minutes later it's to see that the vessel's disembarkation ramp is still open, despite the mild drizzle of rain that's started in the last half an hour or so. Rain on Yavin 4 tends to be relatively frequent, but also incredibly brief, and this particular burst of precipitation has had very little effect on the day's overall visibility at least as far as he can tell anyway, which is why in very short order Rex's eyes locate Sabine.

The twenty year old Mandalorian is currently sitting in the cargo main hold, on one of the room's larger boxes. She's gazing down the ramp and out into the continuous drizzle with an anxious little frown on her face, all the while playing with the cuticles of first one and then the other of her nervous, restless hands.

"Hey, Sabine!" The Mandalorian raises her hand in a half wave of sorts when she sees him, then she jumps down off her box and heads down the slope of the ramp to meet him as he continues striding toward her. "Hey, Rex. How's it going?"

"There's a rumor going around the market, Sabine that…" He starts only to be cut off almost immediately.

Sabine sighs, "It's true, Rex. Ezra fell while he was in the galley about an two hours ago and busted his head wide open. Hera, Kanan and one of the doctors are all upstairs with him right now doing a careful check over as well as closing up the gash on the back of his head."

Rex winces at that, "Let me guess? The kid was climbing up somewhere where he shouldn't be again?"

"No!" Sabine's emphatic reply surprises Rex just a little. Her voice has gone from glum to irritated and defensive as well as maybe just a little bit angry. Which is surprising truthfully given her earlier comments about Ezra's behavior. "He…There was a water spill on the galley floor that he didn't notice when he carried in the tray of he and Kanan's dishes from breakfast. Ezra's view was badly blocked and well…he just slipped apparently, and couldn't recover his balance fast enough to restablilze when he flailed. He smacked his head hard on the way down. By the time that we heard the crash of Hera's china breaking and all made it into the galley to find out what had happened there was blood all over both him and the floor, Rex. Like in a horror film, really. His eyes were closed Rex, and…well…he scared the kark out of all of us basically."

Rex winces a little at that particular string of mental image. "Yeah, scalp wounds do tend to bleed
like the Sith's Own Hells when they happen. It usually looks way worse than it actually is though. So, you said he needs stitches then? Does he also have a concussion?"

Sabine shrugs, "Well, Kanan sure seems to think that he probably does, at least. Either way, they decided to get him checked over right away by a medic just to be safe. Normally a head wound of this type wouldn't be such a big deal, Rex. I mean we've all had to be monitored for concussion once or twice after a mission went south in our lives, that's just the nature of the work, really. Ezra's just so kriiffing small right now though, and kids' skulls are so much softer then adult ones are apparently...I think they're worried that..." She lets the words cut off then, looking down at her hands again, which Rex notices have clenched into tight fists. "They're worried that he might have... Karabast, the past few days especially: I've been so kriiffing petty and stupid. The constant amount of kark that I've given Ezra over what amounts to essentially nothing... and then this had to go happen to him. And he's lying there on the floor bleeding and pale and making awful jokes like it's his job to try and comfort Kanan and me in that situation."

Rex smiles sympathetically at that continuing stream of words, then makes a point to turn Sabine, and nudge her back up the boarding ramp and into the ship for the rest of this obviously needed conversation. "I take it then that you're feeling pretty bad about how you guys have been getting into it over the past few days, Sabine?"

The girl nods, almost convulsively in response to the question. "Yes. He could have...he could have ended with a skull fracture, Rex and it was...it is my fault, I'm the reason he's even injured first place. Kriff, I try. I really, truly do. Sometimes though I'm just so karking stupid." She mutters the last bit again.

Rex pokes her shoulder with one finger, gently. "Now enough of that, do you hear me? It isn't going to help anyone right now, least of all Ezra for you to fall into this particular mindset. Why do you even figure you're responsible for his injury at all?

Once they're inside the bay again he settles down on one of the room's various piles of cargo crates, patting the space right beside him and making sure this time not to choose something directly within sight of the ship's slopping entrance."

"No. I...I'm the one that got distracted while I was painting a few hours ago and then left water pooling on the floor in the galley after cleaning my paint brushes, Rex. I should know better than to do that. Karabast, I *do* know better than to do that, I just... I let myself get distracted, which is not a good enough excuse. Kanan's right, Rex it was selfish and childish and stupid of me. I mean I've been giving Ezra ten levels of kriiff the last few days about all the reckless and stupid choices he's been making regarding his current safety and then the minute he's out of sight and out of mind *I* just go and..." She shakes her head in self disgust then beats her fists once against her own knee once. "Somebody ought to beat on *my* ass right now Rex, honestly."

"Why bother, though, Sabine, when you're so clearly handling that job all on your own?" Rex replies a little bit dryly.

Sabine's head flies up then – and she glares at him unhappily, but Rex still opts not to back down in the slightest. After all if he's learned anything at all in his long years of living it's that there's almost nothing in life as useless as a mire of guilt or self-pity that doesn't almost immediately lead to a significant move toward action in order to make amends. If accountability is necessary for personal growth in a person's life, then penance, in Rex's own opinion at least, is downright holy.

"I mean yes, Sabine it definitely sounds on the outside like you screwed up big time, and someone else got hurt as a result. It happens to the best of us, unfortunately. But did you deliberately mean for it to happen?"
"Of course I didn't, Rex!" And there. That's better – now the girl's gone straight from self-loathing to righteously indignant if guilty. It's a much shorter trip from there Rex knows, to the actual choice between restitution of wrongs or the continuation of more pointless brooding.

He shifts his body enough to face hers almost head-on. "Then the way I see it, Sabine Wren, right now you've got two options on how you're going to proceed forward from here on out. One – you can drown yourself in the shame of what just happened and the part you played in it. Or two, you can commit yourself to actually learning something from the experience so that it never happens again. And well no, Sabine, I'm no Ezra Bridger, I still I can still guess which one he'd be telling you to pick if he were the one talking to you right now. Both because he hates when the people he cares about are hurting and because, well bluntly stated in this case, restitution's far, far more functional and healthy than shame on any kriffing day of a week."

Sabine sighs at that, but then she nods a bit grudgingly. "Yeah, you're probably right about that. And about what Ezra would say at this point."

"Well I do know the kid fairly well these days now that I've officially buried the hatchet with Kanan. Not to mention that Hera likes to occasionally sneak a quiet date night from time to time and when she does Ezra usually ends up going out to supper with me," Rex's lips quirk a little, "Look at it this way, Sabine: if Ezra really just cracked his skull open then that probably mean's that he is going to be stuck in bed for a few days and I'm betting that he'd encourage you to pick penance over self-loathing just because he'll love to have a 'slave' for the duration of that time just for general distraction purposes and to help him fetch and carry. That particular kind of penance if you're looking for it certainly makes a whole lot of sense."

Sabine lets out a wet little giggle. "Actually, Rex from the last I heard from Hera, Ezra's still swearing up and down and left to right – to Kanan, to the doctor, kriff to everyone he comes in contact with that a 'tiny little gaping head wound' should not be enough to deny him the opportunity to go fishing."

Rex raises his eyebrow at that confession, feel his lips quirking. "Do tell…" Yes, Zeb had mentioned that Ezra likes fishing earlier when Rex had first suggested the trip to Kanan, but it seems that he and Kanan had come up with an effective antidote to the Padawan's earlier malaise indeed, if Ezra is actually now defending their little excursion up north quite that vociferously.

Sabine snorts and shrugs, "Apparently Ezra took to the news of your upcoming trip with about as much excitement as a zealot takes to the idea of an annual pilgrimage." She shrugs her shoulders, "I don't really know why that's the case though. Ezra's weird as kark about some things sometimes, I've never fully understood him."

Rex's smile grows fond, "Well fishing's an honorable sport all on its own, Sabine– he certainly could have done a lot worse I think, in terms of acquiring hobby. Do you happen to know who taught him to fish and when? I mean was as it back on Lothal? Was it one or both of his parents? Or did he pick it up from a friend after they were taken?"

Sabine opens her mouth then closes it, her expression clearly poleaxed by what Rex had assumed was a pretty unremarkable question. "I...I don't really know." She admits after a moment. "We've never really talked about it, or any of his other hobbies really. Just about my art and tech and the mundanities of his rougher days after training with Kanan. Which is odd I suppose, when you consider how long I've actually known him, maybe."

"Well if you want to change that then you ought to ask him about it sometime if it's something he seems to enjoy that much. Because I bet the reason he likes it is tied to a who every bit as much as it is to a why. For most of us, hobbies stick in part because of the positive memories or relationships
that we associate with having them. We stick with what we remember made us feel good the last
time that we did it, essentially."

Sabine nods at that, chewing on her lower lip, her dark eyes going distinctly thoughtful "We don't
really tend to ask Ezra a lot about the time before he joined the crew truthfully, Rex. His background
is…well, it's rough, and sometimes he gets touchy or snappy. Or sad – which is a thousand times
worse, Rex at least in my own opinion, anyway. When someone's past is that painful to talk about
then there's no point in rubbing their history repeatedly into their faces. Or at least that's what I've
always thought, anyway. I mean, why salt a wound if there isn't a need."

Rex snorts, then chuckles softly at the comment, rubbing at one of his eyebrows.

"What is it?" Sabine tilts her head at him just a little curiously.

"Look, don't take this the wrong way okay – but elephants in the room don't ever really leave. They
just create a lot of kark that has to be shoveled up later. Whether you guys are talking to him about it
or not I guarantee that Ezra's past is front and center in his mind at the moment. I mean it kind of has
to be every time he looks in a mirror right now, don't you think Sabine?"

"…I hadn't really considered the subject all that much."

"Well I honestly can't think of anything but that at the moment. Karabast, but the kid's got to be even
mentally tougher than I gave him credit for initially. I mean it can't be easy staying sane Sabine, when
one day you're eighteen and the next you're waking up ten or eight or maybe even as young as six
orseven."

"He actually claims that he's closer to eight or nine…or that he remembers looking like he does at
that same age anyway. Which I personally think is Banthashit, but then again…"

"But then again?"

Sabine's lips tighten. "His early childhood wasn't exactly reliable, Rex in terms of when or how often
Ezra got the chance to eat. If he says he was still this small at age eight or nine, then he may well be
telling the truth, but that doesn't mean that he was that way healthily. Kriff he's just so karking small
right now, Rex." Sabine mutters. "It makes me a little paranoid really, if I let myself dwell on it too
much, that something else bad is almost inevitably going to happen to him again sometime soon.
Because face it, our lives have never exactly been what you'd call quiet."

"Something already has happened. And he's surviving it just fine from what you're telling me so far."
Rex points out with a gentle smile, "Well enough that he's concerned about fishing not healing,
anyway. So no matter what else happens before all of this finally gets sorted out, at least you'll all
know that in this time around can't be any worse than the last one was, anyway."

Sabine choke.s aloud at that comment. Rex frowns and pounds her back, "You okay, Wren?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, it's just, well that's not much of a benchmark, Rex. Age seven for Ezra the last time
around was…pretty much hell on wheels actually. His parents were arrested by the Empire right after
his 7th birthday and he spent the next seven years living alone on the streets until the mission where
we finally crossed paths with him. And I'm pretty sure by that point that he'd grown comfortably
used to occasional runs of intermittent starvation."

Rex winces, then spread his arms a little, gesturing as if she's just made his point, "Well at least this
time around there's no need for him to fear that'll repeat, is there, Sabine. I mean he's got you guys
now, doesn't he?."
The Mandalorian looks at him a long moment, utterly silent then finally shakes her head, as if clearing it of a cloak of clinging cobwebs.

"Yeah. I guess he does have a better support system to help him get through this, now that you put it that way." She pushes herself upright onto her feet, beginning to walk toward the ladders with a motion of her hand for him to follow. "Come on, let's go upstairs and check in on them all right? It should be safe by now I think. Ezra'll probably be happy to see you so he has another chance to plead his case about the fishing, I think."

Rex protests a little, even as he matches his steps to Sabine own. "I don't want to intrude…especially if the kid is still feeling cruddy or is still visiting with the doctor. I just came to check. I try whenever possible to get the facts over accepting the rumors. When I heard the scuttlebutt I just got a little worried – especially the way he was climbing around like a monkey earlier this morning."

"Oh they gave Ezra something for the pain over an hour ago now. I don't think he's feeling anything but loopy at the moment, Rex so you don't need to worry about disturbing him. Which reminds me…” Sabine stops suddenly, turning to face him. "His probable concussion…along with his drop in age, maybe – I don't know which is really more responsible - but either way it's apparently done something to his psychic shielding. Be careful about avoiding extremes of emotion in his presence if at all possible, Rex, just to be safe. Kanan says that he's helping bolster the Ezra's shielding now but that doesn't change the fact that earlier he got so worked up by all our anger and panic after he fell the galley that he literally ended up throwing up all over himself and Kanan when his shields overloaded and crashed."

Rex winces at that announcement, pausing where he is for a moment or two in order to deliberately clear and steady his mind, via the same meditative pattern he'd learned years ago while watching over Obi Wan and Anakin. Obi Wan, in particular, had been more than happy to share his knowledge on the subject with any Vod who wanted to learn it -claiming it made for less cluttered more focused pre-battle planning and first engagements. Rex hadn't needed the skill in years, perhaps, but he also hadn't entirely forgotten it, either.

"Thanks for the advice. Are you going to be doing the same yourself?" Rex asks as Sabine leads him down the corridor to stop and ring the chime in front of the Medbay entrance.

"Oh I'm not going in there right now…” Sabine is quick to inform him very wryly. "Like I said Kanan's with Ezra right now at his request…there seems to be some injury induced separation anxiety at play at the moment – maybe because Kanan's doing most of his shielding right now, maybe just because he's spent the most time since the fall just, well, basically hanging out around him. Either way, I'm the last person on Yavin at present that Kanan needs to be seeing if he's going to help keep Ezra on an even keel. Hopefully, that'll change later. If Kanan ever actually lets me get close enough to apologize again."

Then the Mandalorian painter is turning on her heel, with nothing but a tiny nod of her, leaving Rex to wait for the door in front of him to slide open as he tries to ferret out what precisely that all had meant, and how it might affect the coming weekend.

"Heeeeeeey Rex. Howya Doing?!"

And okay, yeah Rex thinks with a wry little smile, the kid is definitely doped up to gills right now.

"Hello, Ezra." He says with a bemused little smile, stepping into Medbay and letting the door close behind him.

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Ezra Bridger is currently lying in the middle of the med bed. Well okay not so much lying down as half laying down and half sitting up in a bizarrely uncomfortable looking reclined position. He's in one of those poses that adults usually shun and young children always make look easy – cross-legged and partially reclined against the elevated upper half of the bed – his face deeply relaxed and his body all but apparently boneless as he lays there.

Which doesn't change the fact that he's also tremoring noticeably – his entire body twitching with hundreds of little shaking motions that are making his teeth chatter just a little as he lays covered in what looks like at least three separate layers of blankets. "Are you still cold Ezra?" Hera murmurs from her spot on the right side of the bed, frowning as she looks down at the way the blankets only half cover his narrow shoulders, before tugging them up slightly and tucking them in firmly around the edges of his body.

"I wasn't all that cold to begin with, Hera" Ezra tells her with a wry little grin, "Like I told you and Kanan earlier, my reaction to this particular medication can be odd from what I remember. Not that I've taken it all that often. I'm not like allergic to it or anything - but it always makes me shake at first. I'm not sure why exactly it happens."

The doctor at Hera's side chuckles softly, while on the other side of the bed Kanan reaches out a hand to stroke through the hair on his Padawan's forehead with low soothing tone. "It's called an atypical therapeutic response, Ezra, and if it makes you feel any better to hear this Kid, it was actually a fairly common reaction among the other humanoid Jedi at the temple as well when they were dosed it. The same thing happens to me as well when I take it."

"Stoooop it," Ezra whines, in response to his master's touch, even as his eyes slide slow shut. "You keep on doing that and I'm gonna fall asleeeeeeeep, I already told you that, Kanan..."

Rex can't hold back a chuckle as he comes through the door and approaches the foot of the bed, near where Kanan's now standing. "Right now, Ezra, I'm pretty sure that's the point. You look more like bait than you do like predator right now, Vod'ika, at least from where I'm standing. It's probably wise we delay our plans for awhile and let you get some more sleep instead."

The look that that observation earns Rex is both wounded and pitiful: betrayed. "It's just a stupid cut and a couple of stitches, Rex. I've had worse by far believe me." Ezra mutters out rebelliously. "And psychic shock. And an admittedly mild concussion." The doctor dryly interjects, earning herself an equally tragic look from the Padawan. "Though honestly the first issue, at least from what I've read on the subject, wouldn't be hurt that much by a quiet, nature focused mini vacation if you were to take one. At least it'd be a lot quieter up north psychically than in this proverbial fishbowl you're trapped in right now. But of course, that's just my own personal views, as opposed to your Master or your CO's final call on the subject."

"My CO?" Ezra snorts at that. "Do I *look* big enough to be allowed anywhere near a cockpit at the moment, Doctor Agel? To have a A CO requires my having access to an actual squadron... and I am indefinitely grounded at the moment.. Hera's just well, my...Hera, for the moment. " The boys lips quirk up a little, on the left side of his mouth, "The ironic part of that, in this case, being that this time around I didn't even do anything particularly boneheaded to deserve to lose my wings this time. I just tried to help a friend and a stranger both and got handed this body back as a really awkward alien 'thank you for playing the hero' thank you payment. Kinda lik gettinge a coat that's warm but not at all the proper fit. Not that you dare complain to the people who gave it to you in their presence."

Neither Hera or the doctor can completely hide their blink in response to that statement. Kanan frowns as well his own shoulders stiffening. "Ezra…" He shifts his jaw then, clearly looking for the
right words to speak and sooth his charge's frustration.

Which is when Rex surprises them all by simply laughing.

Ezra looks confused, then a little bit indignant. "What's so funny?" He demands. "It's rude to laugh like that, you know."

"Probably yes, it is Ezra," The clone trooper shrugs and rubs the back of his neck, "And I'm sorry – I honestly didn't mean to be a bantha's ass or anything, …it's just, well you're just not the first person I've listened to bitch about the indignities of atypical aging in the past few days. I guess that just found the situation a little funny, because usually, the complaints are coming from the opposite end of the spectrum."

"Huh?" Ezra looks completely baffled by the statement, which is good because it means Rex has managed to boot him out of his ongoing pity party for the time being. The Ghost crew seems to be having a run on those this week he can't help but notice. So Rex puts his hands on his hips and tilts his head, and asks bluntly "Ezra do you have any idea how old I actually am?"

"Sixtyish?" The Padawan guesses. "Maybe a little younger than that. I mean, the white in your hair and beard could be throwing off my estimations..."

Rex snorts aloud "I'm just a little older than your master is, Kid. I just turned 33 years old. Well, if you count my creche hatch date as a birthday, anyway."

Everyone in the room blinks at his dazedly for a moment."Clone Trooper." He says very slowly as if they'd all somehow missed the memo or. Then he shrugs, "People who don't know me well, or who forget how and why my Vod and I were originally made tend to forget as well that thanks to the way we were bred to mature rapidly in order to help get us ready for the realities of combat, me and all my 'freed' brothers still get to experience the wonderful daily reality of constantly progressing rapid aging."

"I …I'm sorry." Ezra mutters shamefaced, after a moment, even as beside him the Kanan has gone very, very still , his forehead creased in deep thought. And well Karbast: Rex really hopes the Jedi Knight hadn't taken that as some kind of personal dig aimed at the Jedi order. They hadn't been the ones who created the Clones after all, well not deliberately, anyway, just accepted the help of the troops that had literally been brought into existence to serve (and kill) them.

"You've got nothing to apologize for Vod'ika… I wasn't trying to belittle your frustration by bringing it up, just the opposite really. It's just, well the whole 'actual vs physical age dichotomy' that you're talking about, I understand it far better than you probably think. I just never thought it I'd hear the same kind of sentiment come out of the mouth of someone so much younger than I am, or that us clones and any of our Brother Jedi would ever walk such a similar spert of path." Rex reaches out and squeezes Ezra's shoulder affectionately then, earning himself a shy little grin in return, "But I guess you could just say that now we really are cut from the same kind of cloth righter now, Ezra. Even if right now you literally got the shorter end of the bolt than me or my Vod did."

Ezra actually giggles a little at that observation, though he looks surprised to be doing so. Then his whole body seems to deflate back into remembered depression. "Bedrest is boooooring." The boy all but whines. "My brain is literally atrophying every time I even think the word, Rex. I mean I've lived through much worse than slipping on a puddle of water…Force, I was literally stabbed once at age ten and I still had to be up the next day to work or I wasn't going to be able to eat the rest of the week! So why in kark is it now so unreasonable for me to want to sit on a blanket for a few days and pull fish out of the water while I work on recouperating? How is healing that way – out in the sunshine and open air without having half the damn base staring every time that I venture out -
anymore inherently damaging or dangerous than my climbing around in the vents of the Ghost for another two weeks just to try and fend off the boredom?"

Hera blinks at that pronouncement, even as Kanan sighs heavily. "Ezra, you may want to look up the definition of 'bedrest,' again." Rex informs him very dryly. "Because if that's your version of it then you're clearly failing at understanding the concept pretty badly." And kriff this kid is so much like Obi Wan in some ways it's flat out ridiculous. Rex just wishes he knew now with planet the older Jedi had originally hailed from, because maybe it's a heritable trait and Obi Wan and Ezra were actually cousins or something.

"I don't do lying around and staring at the walls for any length of time if I have any say about it, Rex." Ezra informs the older man more than a little bit grumpily, "Because sooner or later whenever I do, they only end up staring right back or worse yet – they try to talk back instead."

"Ezra," Hera begins again, her tone frustrated if gentle. "You just sustained a serious concussion. You're nearly to dizzy to stand. Not to ever mention you have more than two dozen new stitches.

Kanan interrupts this attempted denial by laying a gentle hand on her arm before pivoting to face the doctor, "You seriously don't have any concerns about it setting back his physical recovery if he goes out to the woods north of here with Rex and I, Dr Agel?"

The physician shakes her head shrugging a little. "Just so long as there's no major change between when I see him today and when I check in later tomorrow, no. Though you'll have to make sure that he takes it very very easy activity wise for several times and that you keep his wounds clean and covered. You know how to change his bandages and add spray on bacta as needed I presume?"

"If he doesn't, Dr Agel, then I do," Rex interjects genially. "Anyone lieutenant level or above in the GAR got standard combat medic training during the end phase of the War, mostly just as a common sense precaution. The only useless skills being the ones that you didn't have, I think they figured."

Kanan looks at Hera, "Dr Agel is right about one thing at least, Hera: it would definitely help Ezra to be somewhere less crowded for a couple of weeks, especially if we're going to get any real work done in terms of repairing and then bolstering his shielding. Ezra and I's only real viable choices in terms of that are either to go up north for awhile with Rex or get off the planet entirely. If that's your preference than maybe we could visit Lothal's outskirts for a month or so - take the Phantom there or something. But I honestly figured that you'd prefer we stuck closer to home than that."

"...Kanan..." Hera's voice isn't forbidding, but it also clearly isn't happy, in the slightest, with the current conversation. "Couldn't all of this wait for at least a few more days? I mean he can't even stop trembling…I really think that under the current circumstances...."

"That's just the affect of the meds, Hera." Ezra interjects insistently, "And I don't really need to take them anymore. My headache's back to being just the normal kind again now— and it'll pass on its own like they always do just as long as Kanan keeps helping me with my shielding. This thing with Rex is important... I mean, it'll help increase the bases' selection of fresh protein sources, which we all appreciate, and I'll actually get to do something truly useful again."

Hera sighs, "Is it really so unreasonable of me, Ezra, to point out that fishing, no matter how passive, is not the same as sleeping, and that a dirty riverbank is not the same as a real bed? You just suffered significant brain trauma, on top of everything else that's been happening. So right now I'd just feel a whole lot better with you here at home where someone can keep proper watch. The first day or so is when you really need to get the most sleep to heal properly post concussion."

Ezra considers this a moment silently, then finally bursts out, "Fine. Then how's this for a deal for
you guys. I'll go to sleep literally right now, Hera – no fighting and no trying to get up at all except if I need to go to the bathroom." Ezra bargains, "If in exchange for me doing so without complaint until then, Rex, Kanan and I can go out to the lake sometime tomorrow in the late afternoon or the evening instead..."

Hera frowns at this suggestion, but this time it's Kanan who actually speaks up, turning his head so that he can better hear Rex, "Would that still fit your timetable, Rex? If all three of us left tomorrow in the latter half of the evening? You'd still be able to accomplish everything on your itinerary if we did?"

Rex nods, "That'll work easily enough, yes. Kark- we could even leave the following morning in an absolute pinch if that works better...though I admit that I would prefer to fly up there and make camp the night before, sleep in the bunks and then hit the lake just before dawn, since you tend to have the most luck around that time of the day with the fish, at least in my own past experience."

"In that case then let's make our agreement last one complete twenty-four-hour cycle. It's 12 pm or so now, right? Ezra tomorrow at say around 2 pm or later we'll have you checked over by Dr Agel - well assuming she's free - to get an all-clear essentially. And until then you'll be expected to spend the whole time in bunk - no complaints, no monkey business, and absolutely no vent crawling. You stay in your bunk, and you either sleep or you rest quietly if you want us to honor our part of the bargain. Agreed?"

The boy chews his lip. "And if I agree to this Kanan then you absolutely promise that we'll leave for Up North before nightfall tomorrow unless Dr Agel finds something new and forbids it?"

"Yes, Ezra. If you agree and comply to the letter than tomorrow afternoon we'll all proceed up North just as we've planned. Well with a few reasonable restrictions of course, given the change in your current circumstances."

"Those being?" Ezra asks, his eyes 200% locked on nothing and no one but Kanan.

Kanan shrugs, "Well you do have an open head wound, Kid, and until the Bacta finishes its work you're going to need to keep it clean. So swimming or running around in the rain is out...and no spearfishing at all without my okay until the stitches have dissolved and the head wound is completely closed up." The Jedi hedges for a moment and then adds on three more new rules fairly impulsively, Rex thinks. "Also - you can only sleep at night on the ship and not outside while we're up there, and you don't go anywhere while we're out in the bush unsupervised without Rex or Chopper or I unless you've been granted specific permission. Oh and if you're starting to look worn down than I'll expect that you'll go without any kind of protest if I tell you to go hit the bunks for an hour or two before rounds of fishing."

"Done." Ezra rapidly agrees. "Done done and done. Also done one final time, Kanan...well assuming that I counted all of the above correctly. All the above sound more than reasonable to me."

Kanan apparently isn't finished quite yet, though, because he leans in just a little more closely. His expression is stern, serious, clearly laying down the law now and no longer negotiating as he puts a hand on Ezra's shoulder and squeezes just a little bit. "Good. Because understand me clearly, Ezra, and know I'm dead serious when I tell you that we will turn right back around and come home the same exact moment that Rex or I catch you violating any of the above rules, or if you start showing even the slightest hint of real fever, Ezra. Because I'm not playing games with your health. Are we clear?"

"We're clear. I'll be good Kanan. I promise." Then the boy makes a face, "Though knowing my luck lately I'm probably going to follow all that too the letter and still end up having to come home early
anyway because of some kind of stupid infection."

"Uhm…about that. I was going to be giving you a course of oral antibiotics to take over the next ten days regardless, Ezra." The doctor informs them all softly. "That gash was submerged in nonsterile water on the floor of the galley when you fell, after all, and considering the depth of the dent on the back of your skull it just seems like a reasonable precaution for us to take. I'll give you some tablets to take tomorrow when he sees me - 2:45 would be fine with me, by the way for an appointment, and before I go today we can also hang a stronger broadspectrum antibiotic via IV, just to be extra cautious since you've already got a port active from your other meds."

"And then we'll go fishing?" Ezra echoes, confirming all that he apparently cares about in this entire bargain yet again. Rex smirks, because he had forgotten how hyperfocused someone could become in the midst of concussion.

"Yes Ezra," Kanan says with a bemused little huff. He glances over at Hera, who's still frowning, but nods back, nonetheless. Rex is guessing from the look in her eyes that Kanan will be hearing more about this bargain of his and Ezra's once the two of them are in private, but she'd decided to cede to his and Ezra's wishes for the time being. "If you keep up your end of our deal, and if the doctor still gives the green light at your checkup tomorrow, then we'll leave base tomorrow a couple of hours before sunset and the following morning you, Rex and I—will hit the lake or the river and we'll go fishing."

Ezra smiles in response to that promise, weary but also clearly triumphant. "In that case guys, it's both settled and sealed. Though I'm not going to bother kneeling on it this time around, because if I tried to do I'd probably fall on my ass. Still, - I'll see you all later cause I'm now doing exactly as I promised and go the kark to sleep…"

Then finally blue eyes slide shut and literally twenty seconds later, Ezra Bridger is asleep, the blankets covering him falling and rising with every lift of his small chest.

Rex feels himself chuckle again. Dr Agel gawks at the scene before her for moment, that shakes her head and whispers, chuckling. "Did he really just…?"

"Yes. He did, Dr Agel." Kanan answers very dryly. "What can I say. He was finally found sufficient motivation to stop fighting unconsciousness."

"Unbelievable." Hera mutters under her breath, even as the doctor smirks and shakes he head, then moves to drop the head of the exam table down to a more reclined position. "We've only been telling him for the last forty minutes that he should rest now. But no, he holds out for no reason I can think of…other than just to be stubborn, I mean."

"Actually, Hera," Kanan rubs his forehead wearily, "My best guess at this point is that he was hoping he'd manage to stay awake through at least one actual visit from Sabine. He wanted her to know he's all right after how upset she got about everything that happened in the kitchen. I was actually going to suggest you go and find her right before Rex came in."

"Well, either that Kanan or he's the exact kind of stubborn that finally decided that he was going to refuse to yield on the issue until he wore us all down concerning that kriffing fishing trip anyway," Hera murmurs, rolling her eyes heavenward. "Which I note, Love he finally did."

Rex snorts, "Vod'ika appears to drive a hard bargain - even when concussed. I'll definitely give you that."

"Indeed he does. Is he always this…well…doggedly persistent?"
The word you are looking for, Dr Agel, is stubborn." Hera informs her with a small sigh. "And the answer is unfortunately and irracibly yes."

"Actually, he's usually far worse than we just saw, Dr Agel when operating on all gears. He's just generally also learned how to be more subtle about it." The Jedi Knight informs the medic dryly, gently straightening his Padawan's legs out one at a time into a more natural sleeping position in order to assure that he doesn't wake him up before recovering him with the blankets and putting the rail guards up on the bed. "I have learned over the past four years how and when to pick my battles with him regarding our ongoing bargains, so that when I need to win a fight with him most urgently I usually tend to do so relatively quickly."

"An astute battle tactic." Rex intones with a twinkle in his eyes.

Hera snorts, "What Kanan actually means is that he just plain spoils him rotten. Not all that often maybe, but Sabine's right about that. You can be a real pushover Kanan...at least about some things."

The older Jedi merely shrugs, raising an unimpressed eyebrow in the Twi'lek's direction. "If that's the way you want to look at it Hera, then you go right ahead. I just see it a bit differently at present. For me its more like I'm tipping back the scales for him that have recently leaned so far out of balance by everything he's been forced to adjust to that he's practically hanging off of his weigh pan by his fingertips. As was more than adequately demonstrated earlyl by his bout vomiting in the kitchen."

Hera frowns at that, even more, opens her mouth but then closes it again, apparently lacking sufficient rebuttal. Kanan shrugs again, at the gesture, his lips own lips quirking. "And even if I'm wrong right now, Hera, or as you and Sabine insist I'm going too easy on him...by the looks of things I'm going to be the one dealing with the consequences of that decision, since I seem to be Ezra's primary caregiver at present. The rest of you have had other priorities and responsibilities these days that clearly take precedence."

The Doctor shakes her shakes her head then very clealy bemused. "Touche...first point this round to Knight Jarrus. You know, the two of you remind me exactly of my husband and I about fifteen years back. We were always sniping back and forth at the time he was younger about the way his dad handled our youngest son. Tim was a real firecracker. Reminds me a lot of Ezra truthfully...smart as a whip, and a real bargain maker. Could talk his way into our out of almost anything, or so it used to seem. The kid used to drive me absolutely barmy until he hit his late adolescence and I stopped worrying so much about how easily he could get hurt, but that didn't stop him from growing up into a responsible, dedicated man- as well as a talented pilot. He was a member of gold squadron. Their second in command I believe. He...he died during the final escape from Atollon."

Agel's smile is wry, her eyes a little wet, as she looks up at them "He got himself blown to bits along with Sato's people during the course of that evac, but they cleared the way for a bunch of other people to survive thanks to their bravery. Gods were his Dad and I proud when we finally heard about it. Though also, does it pain us some days how much we both miss him."

The older woman wipes at her eyes with the back of her hands then smiles again, this time more genuinely. "Ah well. The price of freedom I guess. Still, I guess that I'm just saying; keep sniping if you have to you guys, but also try and enjoy the wild ride ahead as much as you possibly can, okay because you're going to have an interesting next decade or so ahead, unless your alien friends come up with some miraculous way to fix things. And truthfully, I'll probably envy you both even if that doesn't happen."

That confession seems to refocus both Kanan and Hera, as it was no doubt intended to, Rex suspects. "We're still hoping for a real cure," Hera murmurs then, reaching out to stroke her own hand across Ezra's forehead "For Ezra' sake. He's lost so much already...and it's clear right now that he really isn't enjoying this."
"But even he stays like he is indefinitely, Dr Agel then I'll still take him as he is - be it seventeen or seven." Kanan interjects then his voice oddly tight and choked up, "Ezra just being alive at all is a miracle at this point as far as I'm concerned. I'm not jinxing it by getting greedy and demanding anything else." Kanan reaches out a hand toward the doctor then, offering a her a quick shake. "Thank you for everything you're done for him today, Dr Agel. And thank you for your openness in sharing your own experiences concern your son. I grive with you in your loss, and appreciate both your wisdom and perspective, just like I know they're probably missing your wisdom and experience back at the clinic. I don't want to abuse your kindness if you need to start heading back, now, to the clinic."

"Pah. It's not a problem, Kanan, I assure you. House calls are just part of the service around here some days. We were actually having a slow morning anyway." The dark-haired woman shrugs and looks down at the boy on the bed another moment or so, then turns to her med kit and pulls out a smaller IV infusion bag - likely the aforementioned antibiotics, Rex guesses, and starts connecting it to his IV Tubbing before pulling out a scanner again. "I'm glad that you sent for me as quickly as you did, guys – head injuries in children are never something to be taken lightly because their skulls aren't as solid as adult ones yet, and their brains are growing fast - something I have no doubt is doubly true when you're dealing with telepaths or empaths." His scanner beeps and she looks down at it with a small frown for several moments. Then she sighs and roots around in her bag for a blood collection kit. "Still, to be honest, Kanan, I am probably more concerned about some of the hormone and neurochemical levels his blood tests are indicating right now then I really am about his concussion. Probably because I have so much less personal knowledge or reference materials to help me know how to properly treat psychic shock as opposed to concussion. May I ask you a couple of quick questions, just to make sure that I've properly covered my bases on the subject?"

Kanan shrugs, "Of course you can ask. I can't promise that I'll be all that helpful answering, though. My own education on the subject is unfortunately extremely limited. Advanced biology and Jedi Healing were taught in the temple not out in the field for the most part when I was growing up. I had some basic readings on the subject of course, and some training from our company's medic in the GAR when he had the time, but the reality is that what little I do know about psychic injuries in particular was that they always mandated rest and variety of different types of neuro inhibitors like the one you first gave Ezra when you got here to help lessen his pain. After which it was recommended that the patient was be transferred back to Coruscant as quickly as possible for care there by better qualified mind healers." His face twists up in frustration, "Neither of us have access to the knowledge or healing techniques they did, well other than my ability to enter a basic healing trance. It's something that I intend to teach Ezra as well over the weekend. Well okay not teach so much as review more thoroughly with him."

"As do I, Kanan. But i'm also leaving another single dose of the pain cocktail behind for you to have on hand if he needs it all right? I'll give it to Hera and he can have it starting 4 hours from present."

"Thank you. Now is there anything else you wanted to know before Sabine or Zeb help you walk your equipment back...?"

The doctor frowns looking down at Ezra again, "Just one thing. Jarrus, I really don't mean to be
"I'm the type who wants to understand...."

"Which I value. Just ask your question, Aliyah. I won't be offended, I promise."

"All right, then, I know that you said earlier that Ezra's shields most likely collapsed the way they did because of his concussion. I'll even concede that such occurrences are documented in what few psychically aimed medical references I was lucky enough to find on file, but it still took more than double the normal initial dosing of Nylole for someone in Ezra's weight range in order to bring his neurochemical levels back to their age-appropriate ranges, and I'm trying to understand why they were that out of whack after such a short period and low level of actual trauma. I remember reading awhile back during my years in med school that a psychic's shields are more vulnerable to failure they're already healing from a previous psychic trauma of some sort or another, so I guess that I was just wondering...Has Bridger recently experienced any other significant psychic events that could account for his brain's level of over-reactivity. I mean he clearly has markedly heightened levels of both cortisol and adrenaline but it looks like that may be an ongoing problem not a new one and I'm just trying to make sure that neither of us are missing something more obvious like thyroid or pituitary problems that I should be checking for with more blood tests."

Kanan snorts dryly in response to that. "You mean have Ezra or I experienced anything more mentally or physically stressful over the past month or so than the complete shattering and then the abrupt reformation of our training link the day he died? No, we haven't. But yes, that would more than account for the stress your tests are indicating he...we...have both been under." Kanan sighs as he senses the shock in the older woman's expression. "I'm sorry if that came across as flippant or sarcastic, by the way...I appreciate your thoroughness I really do. It's just...hard, at times, to adequately vocalize some experiences to non Jedi who've never experienced any kind of psychic phenomenon."

"You and Bridger's bond was actually *broken?*"

"For a few minutes yes. It remade itself as soon as he was healed enough to regain any level of consciousness."

"I see..." The doctor's next question is hesitant. "And you and the Ezra are *both* recovering from that in the normal ways I'm hoping?"

"Yes, as much as there is any kind of precedent. It'll take some time, of course, before things settle down completely and we both feel like our old selves again."

And until then?" The older woman crosses her arms awkwardly as she asks the question.

Kanan just shrugs, his voice for the most part dispassionate, or at least as close to it as Rex imagines he can currently manage. "Until then, Dr Agel, there'll be occasional headaches and nightmares for the both of us. As well as the occasional minor emotional meltdowns or panic attacks...which is probably why I'm prone, right now, as Hera just put it, to go a little easy on Ezra and be a more lenient than normal. At least until Ezra’s feeling a little less fragile just in general emotionally speaking."

Hera slowly lowers her coffee cup from her lips then, her gaze on her lover's face suddenly both much more shocked and intense. Rex barely hides a little wince in response to that look because yeah judging by the rapidly shifting emotions on Hera's face right now, Kanan's lover had probably only known at perhaps a third of any of that before actual this moment. Either because of some kind of earlier miscommunication or because as Kanan had hinted at earlier this morning, the Twilek had been working so much lately she hasn't been around enough to notice all the struggles that have
actually been in action.

Still, Rex thinks, looking first at the boy asleep on the table, then at Kanan himself, who’s never been more than just a few yards away from his Padawan if he can possibly help it since both he and Rex returned to the Ghost this morning, that new little tidbit of information actually clarifies a hell of a lot of previously unconnected things that he has noted have changed about Kanan and Ezra but not been able to string together into any kind of coherent conclusion until Kanan acknowledged that there’d recently been a total break of their old training link. That one additional detail Rex acknowledges, places literally everything else in a much clearer context.

Padawan-Master relationships by nature are incredibly close, after all. They involve tremendous amounts of both slowly built trust and mutual sacrifice and suffering. Not to mentions hours and hours of one on one meditation and other similar interactions. And in the presence or wake of illness, danger or threat, any clone trooper worth their salt quickly learned to work around the fact that any two Jedi with a training or pair bond in place had a natural tendency to be both interdependent and deeply, protective of one another. With the majority of a Masters 'crazy side' becoming most evident when their younger charge was or had been injured, harmed or otherwise threatened.

Jedi 'family relationships' on a good day, Rex admits with wry twist of his lips, are complex and exhausting to see, much less to navigate, and Jedi with recently damaged or mending psi bonds on top of that were…

'Well BANTHASHIT' pretty much summed it up that particular situation. 'It explains Kanan's temper...Ezra's acceptance of being carted around earlier...they both probably feel pulled right now toward more contact even if they're not eager to talk about it.' And itm also explained Sabine's comment before she'd left him right outside the door of Medbay about how she seemed to be being viewed as a threat by Kanan for some reason. Most likely right now the older Jedi was simply having a hyper protective reaction to her slightly higher than usual amounts of post trauma snarking.

From what the other Jedi had just shared, Kanan and Ezra's link had been broken and reformed less than two weeks ago now, with no warning and now real treatment for it afterward, and unless Rex doesn't misjudge the situation, the aftermath has left both Kanan and Ezra wobbling dangerously on their feet in the aftermath. Both Master and Padawan are no doubt struggling to find their personal senses of balance again.

This kind of situation, regretfully isn't covered in revision five of the sarcastically nicknamed GAR memo, 'So now you have a kriffing pair : A soldier's guide to guarding the Generals/Commanders in tandem.' Which Rex damn well knows mostly because he and Cody essentially COAUTHORED versions 2-5 of the damn thing. The closest practical comparison he can think of to the current situation had probably been just after Anakin and Asohka had watched Obi Wan 'die' before the older Jedi's secret acceptance of an undercover mission. And kriff but hadn't that just been the ultimate nightmare situation.

What he does know right now is pretty simple really – Ezra has clear psychic damage, has been de-aged against his will and desperately wants to run the kriff away from his current life for awhile to just go fishing rather than deal with any of the above. While Kanan? Is so force damned relieved that the kid is alive at the moment that he is more than willing in the short term at least, to let him.

Because really it's not like the older Jedi is any less in need of the time away from himself right now is he, from what Rex is guessing, whether he's aware of that fact or not consciously. Either way right now both Jedi need rest and sanctuary. This little excursion, for lack of a better way of putting it, is both Kanan getting the hell out of Dodge for awhile and essentially circling up the wagons while he and Ezra both attempt to catch their breaths and process what happenef. While Ezra comes to terms
with his new body and Kanan comes to terms with what happened just generally.

If he can 'come to terms with it on his own' Rex thinks a little grimly.

Because that? Seems like a pretty high order right now. After all, how in kriff does someone adjust to feeling someone you love die literally inside your mind and then just go on afterward without completely losing your composure at least once eventually? Muchless adjust to something like that happening twice – even if the later time the death you share only ended up being thankfully temporary?

Rex doesn't know. Neither does Hera. And neither does Kanan Jarrus, from what Rex can see at the moment. The Jedi Knight is just, per his reputation and norm, punting at the moment basically. Taking one day at a time and making it up as he trudges along. But that tactic isn't going to work this time- at least not indefinitely.

Kanan and Ezra are both going to hit a wall soon, and probably hard. And maybe even explosively. Just like Obi Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker had gone all those years ago from being literally the greatest heroes in the GAR to being two literal human sacrifices who essentially gave and gave and gave over and over and over until they literally bled themselves dry and both fell for lack of knowing when or how to actually stop essentially.

And like kriff is Rex going to sit back over the next few weeks and watch the same thing start happening in miniature to Kanan and Ezra. Not when he has the time, the will and best of all, in this case, previous traumatized Jedi wrangling experience. This fishing trip of theirs, intentionally or not has just become Rex's working vacation. His primary objective has just been switched from site scouting and protein access, to emergency Jedi post-trauma repair, analysis, and all around maintenance. It is time, in short for Rex to buckle the kark back up and start earning his (admittedly utterly fictional now) princely Clone Trooper salary again.

Xxx000xxx000xxx000xxx000xxx000xxx000
few things are heavier than words left unspoken...

“If you have something that you want to say Hera, then why don't you go ahead and just say it, instead of just hovering there in the background like you're a big cat preparing to pounce.” The statement comes out very dry ...though more funny then judgemental when Kanan actually voices it. To be fair he isn't even being entirely metaphorical...because Kanan can literally sense the way that Hera’s eyes are currently drilling little holes holes into the back of his skull as he carefully packs several folded sets of clothing from the drawers underneath his bunk into a now open bag thats up on the mattress.

Hera’s voice is quiet...possibly even a little hesitant. “I'm honestly not sure right now, Kanan, where to even begin at the moment.”

He snorts, very softly “In my own experience Hera, a good place most of the time is usually the beginning.”

“Maybe so, Love. When I even know where that technically is,” The Twi’lek pilot speaks up again, clearly feeling both frustrated and lost, her voice uncharacteristically tentative, “The truth of the matter though, is that I kind of feel like Rip Van Winkle, at the moment.”

That wrings a very soft chuckle out of Kanan– wry, dark, tired, and not particularly amused in this instance. Though also not truly angry either, because the truth of the matter is that Kanan’s too damn weary to manage much more actual conflict at the moment. Not after how Force damned much the past few weeks have seemed to drain out of him. Instead right now he's settling on calm and reassuring for Ezra, grateful for Rex and Zeb and polite but distant for pretty much everyone else. Though there is just enough bite in him apparently to finally parry back Hera's last comment. “We haven’t actually changed all that much while you were gone Hera. At least not since Davrosh anyway when we got back on planet. Ezra's basically just little bit shorter than normal right now, and so is my temper essentially. But both problems should take care of themselves, given a little more time for readjustment basically.”

Hera snorts, the sound soft and wry, though also now unpinned with a thick coat of newly discovered empathy. “Believe me, Kanan, after what happened earlier today both Sabine and I are intimately aware of the fact you're both currently on edge. Far moreso than we realized initially.”

Kanan sighs aloud. “Look, don’t worry about Sabine and I, Hera, okay? I promise you that I'll officially clear the air with her tomorrow right after breakfast– though for the record, some part of me really does think that there ought to be some kind of actual consequences outside of her just feeling guilty when Ezra got hurt considering what her carelessness actually caused today ultimately. She has been giving him hell for days now about his supposed recklessness and immaturity well simultaneously not acting all that much more like a grown up herself with much lesser excuse and, and now Ezra's the one who's paid for it in actual blood in the end. Still Hera, I’m also self aware enough at the moment to grasp that I did cross a line in the kitchen, and I'll tell her as much myself before we leave. If only because Ezra himself is already so stressed out by all lingering, unresolved tension. He needs me to act like an actual grown up not an over reactive guard dog at the moment”
“That’s actually what I want to talk about myself right now, Kanan.” Hera steps closer, a hand reaching out to grasp Kanan’s upper arm and tug him upright from the floor, albeit gently. "The current mess with you and Ezra and your link break as opposed to what happened earlier between you and Sabine..."

“I’m not done packing, Hera.” He protests the action in vain even as he feels her tugging him up and onto his feet.

“Yes. You are, Love. For the moment anyway, at least.” His lover informs him more than a little bit sternly. “Because you and I are both going to go back to my room in order to lie down together for awhile before you do literally anything else – to talk some if you feel up to more of that eventually, but more importantly at this point because I just want to hold you right now for a bit and you obviously need it...”

“Hera,” Kanan protests again, “Like I already told you, I still have stuff that needs to be done tonight before tomorrow so that Ezra and I actually can…”

“Uh uh.” The twi’lek pilot cuts him off again more than a little bit insistantly, "That's nearly a full day away Love. This first, because yes I know that I've been pretty busy, lately – probably more so under our present circumstances than I should have let myself become honestly, but that needs to stop, rather glaringly obviously. The truth of the matter Kanan is that I have been trying to sort through some personal banthashit that has been stinking up the inside of my own head, but quite obviously Kanan, I’m not the only one who’s been struggling with everything that's been going on. If you needed more help or comfort than you were getting from me under the present circumstances then you kriiffing well should have said something to me, Kanan. Especially when you're clearly trying to manage all of the post traumatic pooodoo you just acknowledged in front of Rex and Doctor Agel in sickbay but never bother to as much as hint at even once before this to me.”

“You’ve had other obligations to keep you occupied recently, Hera.” Kanan defends his previous silence simply – well aware of both his own personal limitations when discussing matters psi-related as well as Hera’s own general hierarchy when it came to day to day non-critical priorities. Though of course it doesn't help much that right now the two of them can't even seem to instinctively get on the same page as to what does or doesn't make up an actual mid crisis priority!

'No one is actively dying, so of course we'll all just grin and indefinitely bear it. Unless things are literally life or death or otherwise mission related, Kanan’s the one who always takes point when dealing with issues concerning the kids. Up to and including, Ezra being deaged almost a decade by the current looks of it probably indefinitely. Mind you it’s not that Hera doesn’t care about the rest of them just as much as he does– Kanan knows that bloody karking well. Its just that these days she’s also got far more non-Specter related commitments then he does to juggle, thanks to her role as a rebellion squadron commander. All of which usually means that most of that time what Hera actually ends up knowing about where Sabine or Ezra are personally concerned usually ends up being retrospective not actually active unless they're of course working directly with Phoenix Squadron.

And honestly? For the most part Kanan is usually okay with that particular arrangement. It works for them all most of the time, if yes maybe some days he does find it a little bit frustrating because it almost always leads tone of these inevitable post-crisis, post inevitable wall-hitting conversations.

Because Kanan tries – he really, truly does, to keep Hera up to date concerning the truly important stuff that's going on. He tries to let his lover know as soon as humanly possible if anything has happened that’s particularly likely to require more of her time and attention. But the plain old truth of the matter is that sometimes if Kanan’s completely honest? He figures he must just plain suck at it. Because even when he does try it ends up feeling all too often as if he and Hera are literally speaking
wildly separate, languages. Because almost inevitably it's precisely when Kanan’s at his physically or emotionally weariest, that the two of them prove again and again and again they still maintain very different grasps of the supposedly 'obvious.'

Case in point – Kanan’s currently about to get dragged back to Hera’s room right now, and offered the chance for a prolonged snuggle if he wants it. (Which yes for the record, he generally does - though ironically far less so then normal on this particular day.) Hera's just doing it as much as an apology though, as an actual gesture of comfort. Because after all, judging by his lover’s shocked response to his earlier words when they'd all been in Medlab, Hera'd been truly blindsided a few hours ago by the details of what Kanan and Ezra have been struggling with during the past several weeks even though Kanan had honestly thought that when he and Ezra’s link had broken and then been reforged on the day on Davrosh 4 that he’d been very blunt about explaining what exactly had actually had occurred– and what would also cause his later atypical wilder then normal emotional swings.

Only Hera obviously hadn’t understood him as well as he'd originally thought she had – or maybe she had just assumed at the time that the effect of what he'd described was going to be an issue not of days but of hours or minutes – symptoms they'd both shrugged off in just a couple of days even though anything but that had been what had actually happened.

And now that Hera's finally realized how badly she misjudged the actual situation, his lover has apparently responded by backpeddling about a hundred miles an hour, and deciding that he's now entitled to some extra TLC and hovering. Never mind that he’s had to find a mostly solo way of dealing with the situation on his own in the interim while she was away. A coping mechanism that’s actually harder to just switch off right now then simply continue to lean on in the here and now moment.

And yeah, maybe it’s at least half Kanan’s fault that Hera hasn’t registered before this afternoon how much stress he and Ezra have actually been under – Kanan's pretty much awful about talking all that much about his less pleasant feelings even on his best days and Ezra is certainly no better. And there is little in the Galaxy right now that either of them want to talk about less than what has actually happened back on that planet as it relates to their past histories or their current feelings.

Hera though, isn’t going to be content to just let them continue to stew in their own slowly healing juices. Especially not with Kanan and Ezra also leaving with Rex tomorrow afternoon: the Twi'lek pilot clearly still isn’t happy about their little upcoming vacation – especially not in the wake of what Kanan’s just finally acknowledged, though she also isn’t going to try and fight Kanan any further on the subject under the current circumstances. That all acknowledged, Hera also definitely isn’t going to want to just let him and Ezra hare off up north for an indefinite period of time after everything she’s just found out without also at least trying to actually clear the air. She wants to cuddle him for awhile yes...and then push him into more exhausting sharing.

Which would be fine under normal circumstances. Really it would. Except that right now Kanan has no clue himself how he really feels about almost anything, because the plain cold hard truth of the truth of the matter is, that he’s just been locked in a giant holding pattern for days now: which is largely defined by constant worry for Ezra, lingering soul deep exhaustion, and ongoing brief moments of incredibly painful personal revelation about he and his Padawan's current life path that Kanan just honestly wishes would just Force Damned stop.

He hasn’t been sleeping well for the last couple of weeks. His personal meditation’s also been going poorly. Not because he’s avoiding stuff either, exactly...but because Kanan’s life has just been growing more and more mentally and emotionally taxing, to the degree that it has been all but stripping Kanan down to his last nerve even on the good days. Especially during the clashes
occurring repeatedly between Ezra and Sabine.

Because yes, Kanan understands logically why the Mandalorian has been acting the way that she has over the past two plus weeks. He knows that twenty year old is currently feeling guilty and angry not to mention more than a little bit terrified that alive or not what’s happened to Ezra has in essence permanently cost her the ‘life’ of her former best friend.

But Sabine - a lot like Hera right now, is essentially missing the obvious thanks to her currently stormy emotions. She's blind to the fact that Ezra hasn't actually changed all that much outside the physical body she's currently seeing.

Because after all, the rest of Specter crew aren’t Kanan – they’ve got working eyes yes, but not any of Ezra and Kanan’s deeper psychic connections, which means that they don’t currently perceive how little Ezra has actually been altered despite his obvious chronal deaging. At least not in terms of Ezra’ overall temperament, his soul health or his basic personality

All they can see right now are the obvious changes in Ezra’s physical status, as well as the hopefully more temporary psychological changes that Ezra has been struggling to adapt to over the past couple of weeks thanks to both the changes in his hormones and his current psychic capacities.

They're utterly blind to the deeper reality of their current situation.

Because really? Everyone but Kanan himself - well, and possibly Ezra as well, who seems about as resigned as his master is to the long haul ahead ahead of him for no other reason that Kanan can sense but pure old hard learned cynicism - a re still looking at their current circumstances and labeling Ezra’s status as mainly ‘hugely inconvenient’ but something to just be endured until things all go back to normal again. They assume at this point that any steps the Ash’taan’aleki may have to take to help re-age Ezra back to eighteen will automatically be safe, fast and easy when they finally happen. Which is frankly so ignorant of them at this point Kanan doesn't know yet whether to laugh or simply break down and sob.

'None of them get it yet.' They don’t grasp the sheer level of damage that Ezra’s fall had actually caused to his body. Or the true level of effort that had gone into the Ash-taan-aleki restoring Ezra to them in the way that they had in any kind of reasonably whole and healthy state. They don’t grasp what had been done to the body they’d found crushed to bits at the bottom of that cavern.

“We have repaired what we can of your child, Sir Knight, in thanks for his courage and bravery. But we could not, we confess, heal all his wounds in their entirety. Some brokenness is soul deep...a matter of spirit just as much as of flesh. We could not bring him back to you in the way that he once was...so instead we offer an opportunity for another beginning. For the broken parts of this child of light to grow upright anew.” That was what the lead healer of the group of Aliens - who had eventually appeared before them gently bearing the newly healed Ezra - had projected, quietly, reverantly into the depths of Kanan's head as she carefully laid the blanket wrapped child in his arms after binding back his soul to his body again... 'He is altered, yes Sir Knight, to his form from an earlier time...but fear not Master ..he is also exactly what he always has been. He is not changed at all in belief or in the contents of his mind.'

Hera had finally asked one of their hosts, once she’d actually found her voice out of the quagmire of shock that had initially encapsulated all of them after they initially saw Ezra, if there wasn’t some way for them to re-age the younger Jedi in the same way that she'd assumed that they'd apparently de-aged him...presumably as some part of the greater healing process. She’d been more than a little befuddled when she’d been informed by their hosts that though the Ash'taan'aleki might change their views concerning the subject after a few more months of dedicated study of the matter they simply didn’t consider that an either safe or particularly wise option at present. Especially not, Kanan knew,
when as they’d also vocally put it, the process of rapid aging of the kind she spoke could have
tremendous impact on any young psychics fast growing mind.

They’d seemed a little confused, honestly speaking by Hera's initial request, by her need under the
circumstances to ask the question at all - but then again the non-humanoid beings had all been
strongly telepathic, and Kanan strongly suspects at this point that the group of them hadn’t been
fully able to comprehend why Hera…who didn’t perceive the world in all the same ways that Kanan
and the rest of them did, couldn't perceive for herself how little Ezra had actually been changed. At
least not in any truly meaningful, long term or permanent aspect.

After all, whether he was physically eighteen years old or seven, Ezra is still as strong in the force as
he’d been before, still just as bright of a empathetic beacon, still just as tasty a potential target for
manipulators or people looking to both lovvr or use him. Whether he's a teenager or a child at this
point in his life Ezra is still just as large of a bundle of only partially met needs and unresolved
expectations as ever… Which shouldn't even have been that surprising. After all he’s still just as
desperately in need of guidance, protection and affection as he probably had been when his parents
had been dragged off at seven.

Ezra hasn’t changed all that much since he first fell in the caves. Not fundamentally at least. It’s just
that he now actually looks as physically in need of sheltering as he's probably always been in need of
it emotionally. At literal age seven Ezra finally appears as vulnerable and in need of long term
nurturing as he’s been since the day that all of them had actually met. It’s just that now that reality's
not *hidden* so effortlessly behind an eighteen year old’s body or Ezra's usual shy half smirk or
cloak of largely faked self confidence…

Ezra *hasn't* changed…but Hera doesn’t seem to grasp that reality yet. Instead right now his lover
is currently just fighting to just push through what she sees as another minor inconvenience, to
endure yet another ‘hiccup’ in their lives and outlast the reality of them having not two largely self-
supportive teenagers more than happy to go with them into battle but one nearly ready to leave the
nest adult daughter and one tiny, hurting, desperately needy, wounded *kid.*

A little kid who very likely isn’t going to be going anywhere anytime soon no matter what Hera
thinks about their situation at the moment and who also apparently *knows that* whether or not he's
admitting it to himself consciously. Who understandably also finds the entire situation absolutely
terrifying.

Because Hera Syndulla? Never signed on for raising a seven-year-old. Taking on Ezra if they’d first
encountered him on Lothal back at that age initially would have been an entirely different ballgame
then what had actually occured eight years down the line when they had all first stumble across
eachother instead…

Kanan’s not so naive that he's going to bother with any denial of that fact.

After all a tiny seven-year-old Ezra, he and Hera would have doubtless told themselves, would have
deserved – no, would have *needed* something much closer to a normal sort of life than the
nomadic one that they could have offered a preteen if he’d stayed aboard The Ghost with them. A
life without so much danger and preferably with ongoing therapeutic intervention and maybe even a
legally adoptive set of guardians if the worst had eventually been learned about the fate of Ezra's
own parents.

A fourteen-year-old street rat after all, could have looked at the idea of a life with a bunch of
nomadic rebellion leaned thieves and essentially see it as a massive upswing from his previous life
scrounging by himself on the streets. But including a seven-year-old in the same kind of lifestyle
would definitely not have been the same sort of thing.
Force, isn’t the same thing now either, quite truthfully speaking.

Because after all, Ezra may not be mentally seven – anything but – but whether or not the former teenager has come to grips with it or not yet himself (and probably not – Kanan's guessing given how generally unpanicked and un-angry Ezra has generally been about everything so far) the Kid just plain isn’t in the same position as he had been a month or so before. Ezra's recent physical changes have necessarily booted him out of far more than just a Phoenix Squadron cockpit.

Because yeah, maybe the kid can still learn to fight just as well in a x wing as he’d done before all of this first happened– and maybe he could quickly adapt to defending himself with a lightsaber at the same level of skill as he had before he fell with some additional drilling and kark....after that was all done maybe he could keep right on fighting with the same level of commitment to the the Rebel resistance. But only if Hera and Kanan and Sabine and Zeb– and the rest of the rebellion as a whole for that matter – were actually willing to simply look away from the greater morality of the situation and *let him.*

And the truth of the matter is, a part of Kanan is absolutely terrified right now to discover just how the Rebellion might actually respond to such a desire from his Padawan at this point. Would most of Rebel Command outright refuse on basic principle to just look away if Ezra tries to go on as if nothing has actually changed – or would they basically just convince themselves. ‘Yeah the kid is seven but he’s a JEDI. There’s a war on. We need him and he's willing. Sometimes to win you have to make some ...uneasy exceptions.’

Because Kanan…? Kanan honestly can’t decide how he’d respond to that banthakriff right now if it actually happened.

Other than badly. Epic-ally, world alteringly badly.

Because Kanan’s young, yeah but he's not stupid, nor is he ignorant of history. The Jedi order had been wiped out the first time around in large part because its own members had allowed themselves – as well as their karking barely out of the creche CHILDREN to be essentially turned into weapons by the Republic. What's worse most of them had done it largely without question. .

And Kanan honestly doesn’t know – doesn’t want to know what he’d have to think or to actually become, if he ever had to stare down that kind of undeniable proof that the rebellion as a whole would willingly do the same thing to Ezra as well in the name of their greater convenience. Kanan thinks – he hopes to Force rather, that it would never come down to that. But the problem is that he's realized that he really isn’t *certain.*

Which raises some kriffing uncomfortable questions right noe, if Kanan’s absolutely honest with himself, about the life that he’s consented up until now to him and his Padawan living.

Because like it or not, whether Ezra stays seven years old or not – the past few weeks have changed practically everything in ways that can’t be taken back. Because now Kanan’s seeing things that he has no real method of ever unseeing. Things that are going to to have long term consequences for all of them, whether Kanan wants them to or not. Because really how big of a hypocrite is Kanan prepared to be in the end? Force how badly is he failing his Padawan already?

Because after all everything he’d used to describe Ezra earlier in terms of his basic nature is virtually unchanged despite his relative age or size – if the unfairness of Ezra being made into a literal child of war at age seven is just as much about his emotional state as it id about his current physical limitations…then really what the kark has Kanan been doing for the past three years but seeing the same damn kid used as a tool for years by thr people he'd called friends and allies while simultaneously turning a blind eye to that harsh reality because he didn’t know how to actually face
up to it?

What the Force is Kanan supposed to do now? Because he’s seriously starting to think that he’s either in the middle of a major philosophical crisis or that he’s blowing literally everything in his life out of proportion as a result of everything that’s recently happened. And he honestly doesn’t know if he’s finally come to his damn senses or just hit the height of his own irrationality.

Which leaves him in this place where he doesn’t know how to actually be. In this moment and this time. Standing outside the door to Hera’s room. Then putting his boots by the entryway and at last laying his body beside hers on the bed. Frozen in a way that almost defies real explanation basically.

Historically– when Kanan hits this particular kind of wall of doubt in his life he copes with it by doing one of three things basically.

He drinks, he talks to Hera or he meditates. Force sometimes he ends up doing at three.

But Hera – at least indirectly is part of the problem this time around. Because her allegiances…her end goals, her commitments to a life lived with and for the rebellion have never been a secret to Kanan. They have never even for a second been in any kind of question. And up until recently? Kanan’s always basically been okay with that arrangement. only now he's starting to think that now he can’t be.

Because yeah they’ve always had their issues…somewhat conflicting wants and priorities, but there’s always been room for compromise too There’s always been enough space to make room for all of their goods and needs. There may not be anymore, though, if Ezra stays this small – especially if any significant portion of the rebellion shows that it has no qualms at all with still continuing to try and use him as their weapon. Which is something that Kanan can not and *will not* allow to happen.

Kanan’s pretty sure right now if he’s not paranoid and even half justified in his fears that he and Hera are about to hit a serious impass as to their current ideological commitments, and very frankly speaking the idea is kriffing terrifying. Because yes Kanan loves Hera – more than he has words for really – she has been the cornerstone of his life for literal years now. But his commitments to her as a lover and best friend have never really come into this kind of potential conflict before...not with the additional responsibilities that Kanan’s also shouldered as both a Master and a parent. He’s simply never imagined before being caught in this kind of potential catch-22.

Because Ezra? Is seven. And small, and whether he admits it or not literally terrified by his current circumstances. The kid can’t possibly not be - not with his previous history of repeated rejection and abandonment. Not after what had happened to him the last time around that Ezra had woken up seven.

Because no – Kanan hasn’t missed that particular irony – though he’s pretty sure at this point that the rest of the Ghost crew hasn’t really registered the reality. Ezra had basically glossed it over earlier at breakfast but Kanan hadn’t for even a second failed to overlook the truth that the last time he’d been this small, the last time he’d been this karking vulnerable? The Kid's life had literally collapsed when his parents were arrested and he’d been left on his own. Every single bit of security and innocence and safety he’d had up to that point in his life had been violently ripped away from him all but instantly.

And now? Well subconsciously or not, Kanan’s pretty sure at the moment that at least some portion of Ezra is all but subconsciously curled in tightly on himself, waiting for it to happen again. If not today then tomorrow almost for certain.
Not that it’s actually going to happen, mind you, at least if Kanan has any power at all to actually prevent it of course. Because the kid has another think coming if he truly believes that anything short of death is going to ever cut his existent ties with Kanan at this point. Yeah the older Jedi may have taken a while to commit – he’ll be the first to one admit it – still once Kanan’s in, Kanan’s force-damned karking in.

He’s not going kriffing anywhere. Karabast, the kid is going to be 120 with dozens Grandkids on his hands and the reaper on his heels and still probably trying to run away from Force Ghost him.

‘Be careful what you wish for Kid,’ Kanan thinks more than a little bit wryly, his lips twitching up ‘because the universe is an ironic karking bitch sometimes, and just when you least expect to, you might actually get what you need at levels and for durations you hadn’t quite anticipated.’

Kanan has always known – which is is probably a large part of why he waffled as long as he did about taking on Ezra as permanent crew, that once some elements meet and interact, can’t ever entirely be separated again. And Zeb, as much as Kanan still half winces every single kriffing time the Lasat makes a reference to parent-child bonding, had been absolutely right.

Kanan Jarrus has a Padawan, sure. One he’s incredibly proud of. But more importantly than that? He’s essentially also now got a son.

Which yes, as it turns out is an entirely different sort of commitment. Because while Kanan Jarrus the Master can and will eventually let go with pride when Ezra Bridger is ready to be out and truly on his own, Kanan Jarrus the parent watched his kid fall to his death over two weeks ago. And yeah he’s pretty much ready in the aftermath to KRIFF any sort of claims to true non-attachment. Apparently that level of Jedi discipline is simply beyond Kanan at this point in his life, but also ironically he’s pretty sure at this point that he’s more than content to live with the fact. Because if he’s not the typical Jedi…well than he’s never had the typical student either has he? And perfect adherence to all the Jedi tenets doesn’t actually serve either Ezra or him at this point in their lives. Theory tends to buckle under the pressure of reality because it’s meant to, basically. You only know what supports will hold in the end when you actually have to test them out in an actual emergency.

Kanan Jarrus is Jedi, yes, but noe he’s also a parent. And no as it turns out, despite everything he’d ever heard in his childhood in the temple, the two things don’t appear exist completely seperately. It looks like he’ll be making this up as he goes, basically.

Now to just figure out how to help Ezra come to grips with all.of that How to make sure he realizes that no matter what else has changed in his life, some things aren’t going to. Ever. Not anymore. Ezra Bridger isn’t an orphan anymore. He hasn’t been for awhile now speaking truthfully And Force bless the road he never will be again.

That’s the one – the only real promise at this point about their future that Kanan is prepared to actually make. Everything else, well, is pretty much a giant question mark at the end of a whole list of questions that Kanan’s frankly terrified to even think about at the moment. Muchless talk about seriously.

But he’ll try to do so anyway. Not because he wants to– but because he has to at this point. Because his duty and his love both require at least that much actual courage from him at present.

And really? There’s no time like now for starting that particular ball rolling .

So he draws in a deep breath, reaches out to take Hera’s hand, where its resting on top of his chest from how she’s wrapped her arms around him, her quiet body pressed up against his back from
behind, her nose pressed into his neck, the only sound she’s made since they laid down together in
the quiet of the room the slow in and out exhalation of her breathing.

“So…Hera.” He begins, in a voice he tries to pretend isn’t just inches from actually breaking,
“Before Ezra and I head up north with Rex. I know you probably have a couple of questions. But
before we get to that I…” He swallows hard twice around the lump in his throat. “I also need to talk
to you about a couple of thing that are…well pretty important right now frankly speaking.”

She kisses his shoulder softly. “All right Love, I’m here and I'm listening.”

He nods a little at that, and does his best to begin.
“Ezra’s not going anywhere, Hera... for the time being at least.”

His lover snorts at that very softly. “Other than up north with you and Rex to go fishing, you mean?”

Hera doesn’t understand. Kanan sighs very deeply, and then he tries again, searching for the words to make things a little bit clearer.

“That’s not actually what I’m getting at, Hera. I mean don’t expect that he’s going to be able re-age up anytime soon – even when and if we do return to that moon again to see the Ash’taan’aleki. Not via any safe kind of method I’d consent to them actually using on him I mean.” Kanan exhales very raggedly. “Hera, I…Look I’m not even sure he’s still in his original body right now, okay.? I’m actually pretty sure at this point that they just made him the equivalent of a new one. Because I’m almost positive that yes they did have that level of technology. They didn’t de-age Ezra just at random to make it easier to fix him, Hera. They couldn’t fix everything that had been broken when he fell – or ‘some wounds are deeper than mere flesh’ As their healer put it to me.’"

Hera has gone very still. Stiff for a moment with shock. “So you’re saying what then? That they essentially captured the equivalent of his soul when he…when he fell basically?”

“When he died, yes Hera. And then they bound it to a new copy they built out of his old body.”

The Twi’lek behind him shudders hard at those words, but Kanan makes himself say them again. “Because he was dead, at first, Hera. I literally felt it happen down the link. Even if yes his time that way was very very temporary. But his body was…it was basically too wrecked to repair in any meaningful sense of the word, or at least that’s what I assume from what they tried to show me. So instead of even trying to repair it and leaving him permanently and grossly disabled I think that they used what was left to provide his soul a healthier physical alternative.”

“They…you're saying that they cloned him?!” Hera’s voice is somewhere between horrified and sheerly awesomely wondering. “Without either his or our permission first? Without asking if it was actually wanted.”

“I don’t know about the former but yes Hera, I think that they did pretty much just that. Not that we can tell for certain at the moment since I’m assuming Ezra didn’t exactly have many distinguishing scars at seven. Those all came much later on, after his parents disappeared and as he kept on just normallyaging.”

"Though Hera,” Kanan shifts a little on the mattress. “I wouldn’t try and climb onto any kind of high ethical horse about the subject if I were you when we go back to see them: they’re an ancient, advanced and highly, highly telepathic species...and frankly I don’t think they necessarily have the same views on what makes a person ‘themselves’ as either you or me. Life is all about the state of spirit and perhaps the mind in their views...so them giving Ezra new flesh so long as his soul and experiences came along for the ride…” Kanan shrugs his shoulders, “That’s probably not much different then returning him in new clothes basically. I mean he’s still in his own body after all...not stealing it from anyone else. But I’m also guessing that advanced or not there are still functional physical limitations to rapid cloning and aging that can't be messed with too much really. All though again, if I am right... I’m mostly playing on a hunch,” He reaches up to rub his forehead tiredly. “Rex or some of his other Vod would probably know a Force Damned lot more about this subject right now than me.”
“Is…is there anyway at all, you can think of that we could be certain, Kanan? If he’s in a cloned body or not I mean?”

“Uhmmm…maybe? Theoretically at least there’s always the chance we could get some old samples of his DNA and test them against his current for comparison while looking for differences. But frankly Hera,” Kanan shrugs, “I don’t know if it would benefit anyone to actually do so. I mean I can’t say for sure if Ezra knows what I suspect – we haven’t exactly talked about it, in large part because he’s already overwhelmed enough by the situation I mean. Not to even mention cloning’s illegal now – albeit the Ash’taan’aleki aren’t exactly members of the Empire or the Former Republic …But even if it’s true Ezra’s….” He pauses, tries to put his thoughts into coherent sentences.

“Look by every measure that I can possibly use in my own view Ezra’s still entirely himself, right now Hera. He’s smaller yes and still trying to adapt to the limits of his new body – which has different hormones and vulnerabilities thanks to his smaller size and the way that all Force sensitives age, but, his soul, Hera – his basic personality, everything he’s experienced and how it’s made him the person he is, all his needs and wants weaknesses- they’re all still exactly the same. This may sound ridiculous to hear, Hera, but….” Kanan flails around for words, feeling his frustration mount in his tone as he struggles to be understood.

“Wow.” Hera finally speaks up – with only that single word.

Kanan isn’t actually done yet though – because while this conversation is imperfect yes, just finally letting the words spill out into the air – getting them out of his head and into actual shared reality with someone else who at least wants to try and understand, is an unspeakable almost giddy sort of relief.

“I mean kark, Hera…he…he in some ways may be more himself in this new body than he was in his old one…but then again that sounds unfair to say. Look I’m not trying to infantilize him, really I’m not. He’s not a baby – he’s survivor, he always has been because he’s always had to be. It’s just…” The words drop off as Kanan sighs again in frustration, because the analogies required to make what he’s saying coherent have simply disappeared from his mind once again completely.

“Look, just don’t count on him aging up any time soon okay, Hera.” Kanan finally settles on telling her very bluntly, “I know that that’s the last thing on Yavin that you want to hear. I know that it’s strange and inconvenient and Force but everything is now suddenly ten thousand times more complicated as a result but the alternative would still have been Ezra dead and I can’t…I’m just not capable of even letting myself think about that without possibly going crazy right now and….”

“Kanan, Love,” Hera’s arms tighten suddenly around him from behind. “I know that that’s the last thing on Yavin that you want to hear. I know that it’s strange and inconvenient and Force but everything is now suddenly ten thousand times more complicated as a result but the alternative would still have been Ezra dead and I can’t…I’m just not capable of even letting myself think about that without possibly going crazy right now and….”

“Kanan, Love,” Hera’s arms tighten suddenly around him from behind. “Look I need you to stop talking for a minute or so okay? Just slow down for a couple of moments and let us both breathe. So that I can process what you said for a moment, and so you don’t end up full on hyperventilating, all right? I’m not angry or telling you to shut up or anything like that…I’m really not. It’s just…what you just said is a lot to take in so give me a moment to process.”

Kanan giggle-snorts at that but obeys ultimately.

A few minutes later he finally speaks up again. “Believe me, I know this is overwhelming. I’m sorry didn’t mean to overwhelm you. I’m a little…mentally on the fritz at the moment, I think.”

“The words that you’re looking for are in-shock.” Hera eventually shoots back at him then, her own voice finally cracking, at least infinitesimally. “And if you’re actually right, Kanan then you have every krippping right to be.” Hera draws in a ragged sounding breath. “Kanan, Love how long exactly have you known all of this and been hauling it around on your shoulders by yourself basically?”
“I don’t… I don’t know anything for sure, Hera.”

“Banthakriff,” She shoots back softly. “Fine then, how long have you at least strongly ‘suspected.’ Because with that level of previous detail you just hit me with you’ve clearly been obsessively gnawing at the subject for awhile now, at least inside your own head. And then almost inevitably panicking as a result. Which is understandable I suppose but still… clearly far less than healthy.”

Her arms tighten around him hard again. “Like I said Love, I know that by mutual agreement you usually headline with the kids most days and that Phoenix Squadron keeps me busy, but this is Ezra. Not to mention this is you. I guess that I’m struggling to get here why this is the first time you’re actually bringing it up to me.”

“I’ve been processing it all too, Hera.” Kanan manages. “When not having nightmares or dealing with Sabine and Ezra. And Ezra’s not trying to be high maintenance – he’s really not but he’s still karking seven – and he’s falling to pieces – then trying to stick himself back together with crazy glue, and on top of that Sabine won’t stop taking verbal swipes at him… And he’s karking *letting her*, Hera - kark, he’s actively *encouraging* the habit – calling himself ‘pint sized and perfect for kicking’ – and yes, we both known his sense of humor has always been dark like that but he’s such a mess already – hunched in over himself just waiting for the rain of fire to start like it did the last time around and…”

Kanan shudders almost convulsively. “I know that it’s just supposedly a coping method for dealing with all the stress but it’s just not okay with me right… I can’t be rational about it like I know that I should really be and…”

“No, Kanan. You shouldn’t be.” Hera’s voice cuts his own off sharply, suddenly biting. He starts a little at the interruption, and then Hera’s tugging at his arm gently, "Love please roll over okay, please? So you’re facing me?"

Kanan nods, doing so automatically.

A second later they’re face to face, and Kanan’s blinking a little startled at the sudden familiar press of a palm directly over his heart and then two seconds after that her lips are on his and they’re kissing. Albeit not particularly passionately – no this kiss is all about comfort, the most intimate sort of reassurance and nurturing, as Hera’s lips slide across his for a moment or two, her hands rising up and down his spine very very gently about half a dozen times, before finally rising up to tug free the tie from his ponytail and then massage the freed hair of his scalp very gently.

And no, Kanan has never actually outright told Hera that he’s a sucker for head-rubs, that they have from his earliest days of memory been a gesture he finds incredibly soothing for some inexplicable reason, to the degree that his clan leader back in the Creche had occasionally used them to help knock him out when he was trying to get back to sleep after nightmares.

But Hera clearly and obviously knows anyway, because her fingertips are now caressing his scalp methodically, even after she finally breaks off the kiss itself, shifting her head just enough to rest her forehead against his own for several seconds before she finally seems to find the words again to speak.

“Kanan, Love, right now you don’t have to be constantly logical or rational about anything okay? You just went through what is known as ‘major kriffing trauma’ – and Jedi or not, you’re still human, Kanan. Not an automaton. You’re allowed to be freaked out right now, by literally everything that you’re saying. Especially, now that I actually understand the context, about the dynamic you’ve been seeing especially between Ezra and Sabine. Because emotional abuse – even
when it’s unintentional, which yes I’m assuming it is right now because Sabine's mad but not
generally cruel on purpose, is still not and will never be an acceptable coping mechanism. I'm sorry.
I shouldn’t have been riding your ass about it earlier today in the galley – even as frustrated as I
initially was by what I walked into, when I clearly haven’t been around enough as things escalated to
actually grasp what was going on.”

“Sabine’s not doing it on purpose.” Kanan is quick to confirm, “She’s just scared and mad and off
balance…thrown off by the reality of the entire situation. She doesn’t know what to do about it – and
since she doesn’t know how to deal, she’s basically coping via generalized anger misdirection.
Which would even be fine Hera, in the short term, if she hadn’t picked kriffing Ezra as her target.
Because right now he…."

Kanan chokes out a bitter laugh. “I’ve got enough unresolved angst and guilt to deal with where he’s
concerned as it is already at the moment. This entire force damned situation’s been enlighting as kark
in some ways personally, in terms of the lives we’ve been leading. As well as Ezra and I’s whole
dynamic I with the entire rebellion.”

Kanan actually chokes on a laugh. “Do you know what one of the newest wagers in the betting pool
on base is right now, Hera?”

There’s a moment of silence. When Hera finally speaks her voice is clearly confused by the abrupt
change of topic, “Concerning Ezra you mean?”

“Concerning all of us really. Or at least all of Phoenix Squadron anyway.” Kanan lets out a ragged
snort, “They’re actually taking bets on when Ezra will manage to talk his way back into a cockpit
again, Hera…how long it’ll take before our sheer reduction in numbers in the squad will mean we’ll
have to start using him as a resource again – at least in support type positions. If only so that means
he won’t leave me stuck home as a ‘babysitter’ instead of available to actually help you on missions.”

Hera gapes at him a moment. “They’re what?” She splutters. “Kanan…Ezra’s not…just no, Kanan!
He’s between seven and nine biologically, no matter what he says about his previous growth track! I
asked Dr Agel specifically when I helped her carry her things back to the med center. He’d need a
karking booster seat right now to even sit in the cockpit. He’s barely 3 foot 5 at the moment. That’s
way too small, he’s way too kriffing fragile for me to even think about letting him…”

“Yoda was really no bigger.” Kanan points out to her softly.

“Yoda was a Force Damned kriffing adult, Kanan!”

“So is Ezra - from a certain perspective at least. He was nearly eighteen before this happened. And
even if he is physically young, after all, he’s a Jedi. Sometimes you have to make ‘uncomfortable
exceptions’ for the sake of the mission, Hera.”

There’s a long pause of maybe a couple of seconds. Then Hera Syndulla explodes – this time in
furious Ryl. “For Kriff’s sake, Kanan, I don’t care if he’s the strongest force user in the galaxy. I
don’t care if he could personally kill the Emperor himself. That doesn’t change a thing! Since when
is it okay to weaponize children?!”

“And when does childhood start or end, Hera? Does it when you’re eight leading Clone Trooper
soldiers around through a captured Seperatist city like some of your own people did during the clone
wars? When you’re a thirteen year old and you’re a Padawan being sent with your master onto a
battlefield to watch the eventual death in campaign of the closest people you currently have to normal
actual friends? When you’re fifteen and go from stealing to feed yourself to stealing information to
provide the rebellion with needed intelligence? Or how about when you’re seventeen and you’re
dying – or willing to at least – and not just because Ezra loved Sabine and cared about that child – though yes I'll admit he absolutely did in both cases. But mostly Hera, when it comes right down to it I’m pretty karking sure at that point the idea of being left behind again – to grieve still more, to lose still more - was a lot less attractive to Ezra at that moment than nobly dead.” Kanan sighs, very very deeply, feeling the woman in his arms go absolutely still at that particular confession.

“Where’s the line between child and adult, Hera? Between acceptable and immoral? Between abusive and just uncomfortable or ‘severely uneasy’ – as I once overheard my Master describe it Grey – her own GAR Senior officer when the two of them discussed the subject late one night after a particularly brutal battle. Because I have to tell you, Hera,” Kanan sighs rubbing his forehead, “I’m apparently blind in a lot more ways to this stuff then I realized initially. And frankly if there’s a clear line where all of this is concerned, then I’m having serious trouble right now actually finding it.”

Silence follows that statement. Complete and utter silence. Hera’s all but ceased to breathe, at least from Kanan’s perspective. She’s gone completely still and quiet where she lays in the bed beside him.

“Hera.” Kanan says after a long moment. “Look, none of this is meant as a personal attack. But I know where your heart is, okay? I know where it’s always been. And I’m not stupid. Part of my loving you, at least from my perspective has always meant accepting that reality and finding ways to compromise- to seek mutual ground upon which we could all still comfortably stand. But now – in terms of Ezra’s new situation?”

Kanan grimaces, “What was just uneasy when Ezra was fourteen and sixteen and almost eighteen, Hera? Is completely intolerable at seven. I will take Ezra and I will leave Yavin, I swear to Force that I will, Hera before I’ll see him turned into politely rationalized tool.” Kanan snorts bitterly, “Hell I’ll probably do so before I’ll even sit down at the same table for any real length of time with anyone who’d try and seriously justify that sort of thing and then expect to have regular access to either him or me skill wise As much as it kills me to even think this out loud, HeRa I’ve made commitments not just to you but to Ezra as well. The Jedi Order fell, in part because it utterly failed to protect its most vulnerable - its children. And I can’t afford to not learn from history – not with Ezra already this vulnerable. I will cut ties with the Rebellion completely before I’ll sit back and watch anyone weaponize him. The way it happened before.”

Which Kanan is well aware, if it comes down to that, is going to have all but inevitable personal repercussions. For the Specter Crew, for Phoenix Squadron, and for Hera and him specifically. Because Hera’s baby is the Phoenix Squadron – there’s never been any doubt of that. But Kanan Jarrus doesn’t have a metaphorical ‘child’. He’s got a real one, who’s blue eyed, petite, and force sensitive. And he’s first priority. As of the end of this conversation.

It’s a massive change of status for them, Kanan knows, at least theoretically. His lips quirk up a little wryly, as the thought enters his head. After all, right from the beginning it was Hera who had all but demanded the addition of the last of their number. Kanan just has his serious doubts that she'd ever imagined when she did so that it would ever lead them here to this.

“Kanan I…” eventually, Hera seems to find her words again. Though they’re broken – still more than a little bit shell shocked. As if Hera’s been thrown directly into the shark infested deep end of the pool. Where Kanan’s been treading water by himself with a seven year old for the last several weeks now, frankly speaking.

“KARK, Love.” She finally manages after another minute or so. “How am I? What in kriff under the circumstances do you expect me to say to any of this?”

The smile Kanan gives her in reply is wry upturn of his lips. “Right now, Hera? Nothing at all. I
expect that you’re going to need some time like I’ve needed some time to process everything that
I’ve just told you. I didn’t bring it up because I’m looking for any sort of a fix – or even just a
temporary patch job. The truth of the matter is Ezra and I...we’re...well we’re mostly fine at the
moment. For the most part. We’ve been gradually getting better at coping the last couple of weeks.
And honestly, I think it’ll probably do us all some good for Ezra and I to just get out of this fish bowl
awhile – to be alone for the most part – well excluding Chopper and Rex anyway. Which reminds
me: I let Chopper know that he’s been invited by Rex to join us unless he has other specific
commitments right now or unless you have urgent need of him for Phoenix Squadron. In the
meanwhile, Hera, I just figure it’ll do us all to have some mental cook-time to let all of this simmer
for awhile. Because face it, everything above – well except for my comments about Ezra staying
young for the time being anyway, is just a hypothetical threat at the moment.”

Hera snorts at that particular assessment softly. “Like Kriff it is, Kanan. Not from your perspective at
least. You’re essentially about as comfortable right now by the sound of it, staying with Ezra here on
base, as a mother would be with her baby actively crawling around in a snake pit, and you’re finding
it hard to relax because of it at least subconsciously.”

He snorts at that particular analogy. “Maybe so...but to be fair Ezra’s not actually baby at the moment
he’s seven, and capable of at least basic self-defense so long as he isn't actively trying to comfort or
pacify the people trying to hurt him instead. And I’m well aware that I’m unreasonably paranoid
about the current threat level, at least from the outsider’s perspective. I point out that we are still here
Hera, no matter how I currently feel about any of it. I may feel a bit ill at ease but it's only shaping
not controlling my current reactions...”

Hera eyes him more than a little bit skeptically, “Yeah, well Love if Ezra hadn’t fallen this morning
Kanan, and if I hadn’t moved my meetings around this morning in order to get off of work earlier
today would that actually still be true? Because I have to tell you Kanan, that the way Ezra was
carrying on about it earlier in Medlab it sounds a lot to me like the two of you did have plans to take
off this afternoon before I even got home – without even discussing it with me first or telling me
anything that you've finally gotten around to bringing up. Or are you claiming you weren't just
basically flying the coop without even a “hi and goodbye” in the karking process?”

Kanan sighs heavily, rolling on to his back. “We were just going Up North within a reasonably easy
reach in order to do some fishing and try to decompress, Hera. I wasn’t taking him off the planet or
anything more extreme like that. Zeb promised me that he’d brief you on where we were going when
you got home as well as fill you in on what had been happening between Ezra and Sabine.”

Hera’s resultant scowl is fierce, “That doesn’t change the fact that you were going to essentially flee
the premises for more than a week with our sudden SEVEN YEAR OLD, Kanan without a word to
me first about the kriffing subject! You essentially gave me no say whatsoever concerning anything!”

Kanan crosses his arms across his chest, shrugging a little defensively. “Speaking very honestly,
Hera, I wasn’t all that sure you’d be all that concerned what we did at the moment Hera – I mean it’s
not like you’d even have really have been seeing either of us one way or another while we gone, as
much as you’ve recently been so ‘conveniently absent.’” And yeah, Kanan acknowledges to himself,
there’s definitely some unacknowledged bitterness in that phrase. Some lingering resentment to
Hera's previous actions he probably needs to deal with the next time he meditates.

Silence falls at that admission for a moment or two...weighted and heavy, and then Hera softly
swears in Ryl and sits up, pivoting directly to face him. “Little Gods, are we actually at the point that
I have to say this, Kanan? Yes I’ll admit I’ve been gone a lot recently. I’ve been karking freaked out,
all just like you are by what happened back in the cave and I’ve been trying to sort through it mostly
alone...which was clearly a massive mistake! That still doesn’t mean that I don’t care what’s
happening right now or that I still don’t want or deserve a damn say in what’s going on with Ezra.”

“So then you want to supervise and criticize, Hera, but not have to be around to actually help clean up any of the mess?” Kanan snaps back, “Because sorry but right now I can’t say that I’m all that enamored with that arrangement. Especially when in the last week you’ve only spent maybe two hours with Ezra total and probably even less than that if we’re honest about it! You don’t just get to leave me to deal with the bear in the house all alone and then afterwards critique the way that I actually end up dealing with it!”

Kanan can hear the defensive tension in Hera’s tone at that particular analogy...which is definitely pertinent to the current situation, if only because it’s hard even on the best of days to make someone see what they’ve been semi deliberately avoiding.

The Twi’lek pilot finally responds, “That doesn’t mean that when I’m not around I don’t miss you or Ezra, Kanan - or that I don’t want to keep him iclose right now, especially given everything that’s happened! That scout site’s two hours away even before he was concussed and frankly stated I get pretty damn twitchy at the thought of him that far out of my current grasp.”

“So then you *are* worried about how he’s coping with things as well?”

“Yes! Of course I kriiffing am!”

“Yeah well Hera, you might want to get around eventually, to making that clear to Ezra as well as me, given how much you’ve been avoiding him Because yes, I’ll admit that I didn’t fully grasp myself how big of a problem it’s actually became until the poor kid had a full on miniature panic attack when you tried to separate us in the galley after he fell, but the cold hard truth of the matter right now is that Ezra...subconsciously at least, anyway is basically already more than half way packed for when you essentially dump him of Phoenix squadron and possibly even off of the Ghost if they can’t ‘fix him’ the next time that we go and see the Ash’taan’aleki.”

“He’s expecting that I’m going to what!?” The words come out of Hera’s mouth as more than just a slightly indignant squawk. “That’s absolutely ridiculous! I wouldn’t do that ever Kanan!”

Kanan snorts, a little harshly, “Yeah well that may be true, Hera...but then it’s all still mostly instinct on Ezra’s part and he’s under massive emotional strain right now – Hera this is Ezra we’re talking about, remember? ‘Mr Lack of Discernment’ yes, but also ‘Mr Oceans of Uncontrollable Empathy.’ He’s always been hyper-charged when it comes to picking up on other people’s emotions, yes, but that doesn’t mean he completely understands what he’s sensing or that he can’t mistake what drives people’s feelings or actions just like the rest of us do. And he can karking well tell when people are avoiding him.” Kanan spreads wide his hands, helpless, “And it’s not as if he currently feels right now at the size that he is that he’s exactly ‘useful’ to anyone at the moment.”

And boom! The next words nearly explode out of Hera’s mouth so great is her fury in reaction. “What the Karabast is that supposed to have to do with ANYTHING, right now Kanan Jarrus?!” She strikes the mattress with the fist of one of her hands. “He’s karking Ezra! You know that. He doesn’t have to be useful to anyone for me to be worried about him under the current circumstances!”

“Yes. I know that, Hera.” Kanan’s voice is just short of painfully patient, “But the better question at present, Hera is probably ‘does Ezra know that?’ And the answer, at least subconsciously appears to be ‘no.’ Because he’s been badly misreading most of your current reactions.”

“He can’t possibly seriously think that I’d just up and …it’s been over four karking years, Kanan! You’re saying he still doubts me that much after all this time?! Because if so, then what the kark do
you suggest that I do if I haven’t managed to earn even that amount of trust?!”

Kanan sighs, tries to make his tone consoling, “Subconscious and conscious reactions aren’t the same thing Hera - and just for the record, we have a kriffing psi-link, and right now he’s still half watching *me* when he’s particularly anxious...he was literally clinging to my kriffing clothes in the galley, though yes Hera, his concussion and shielding issues were most of the reason he was so obvious about it...why he essentially publicly panicked instead of just doing so all by himself in private, but it’s been happening there too.”

Kanan sighs deeply, because just the act of admitting that much out loud leaves him incredibly saddened and weary. Both for himself and for Ezra especially, who really has the short end of the stick in all of this.

“He doesn’t expect either of us to actually *outright* abandon him at the moment consciously, Hera. Especially me, thank the Force. My sticking close has managed to head that worry off at the pass. But in case you forget about this, he’s not just traumatized, Hera. He’s been karking deaged to age seven. The year that he lost his first family, and right now you better believe that subconsciously that fact is absolutely lurking in the back of his mind every time he looks in the mirror. It can’t not be. Which is why I’ve been literally hovering over the kid until he has more of a chance to settle down and settle in. Because whether he’ll admit it or not right now Ezra needs the extra reassurance he’s got at least one of us constantly close to him.”

Hera’s blinks at that. “And you didn’t think to share that information with me as well, Love?”

“I didn’t think it wasn’t obvious...pointing it out seemed just a little bit insulting frankly speaking.”

Hera blinks at him, “So what? You thought that I was actively hurting him the way that I have been on purpose instead?! I’m not as naturally good at seeing this kind of stuff as you are, Love - you ought to know that by now Kanan. If I was emotionally battering our damn kid...unintentionally or not, then why in the Kark didn’t you pull me aside like normal and say something?!”

“Because I’m kriffing tired, Hera!? As I’ve already said repeatedly. I’m just trying to keep Ezra and my own head above the kriffing water and the moment. In the middle of a Force Damned hurricane! And this may shock you but there are times that I can’t be the emotional enlightener of the whole karking universe and these last few weeks have been one of them!”

And yeah...that statement had started out fairly calm and rational on his part. Because he’s really trying his best despite it all to be understanding, to be empathetic and compassionate...to remember the current situation has been hard on all of them. But like he’d thought about earlier, sometimes he and Hera have very, very different grasps of the obvious. And truthfully sometimes Kanan just gets seriously pissed as hell about the reality of that.

Because after all...Hera has all the same puzzle pieces that he does...well about Ezra’s personally history at least. She knows how and when the kid’s parents were originally taken, just like Kanan does. She has to be able to make the connection if she really *wants to that this entire situation could be massively triggering Ezra’s historical fears of abandonment. She has to. The woman commands kriffing a fighter squadron. She certainly isn’t stupid. She never has been. And it isn’t fair under the current circumstances that she keeps leaving Kanan to do all the damn heavy emotional lifting.

Kanan clears his throat, then bites out the next set of words almost compulsively, if as vocally neutrally as he can possibly manage it. “Hera, why is it my job right now to que your practice of emotional intelligence? Especially if I’m the one who, as you just put it yourself, is dealing with serious trauma and am therefore allowed to be irrational and seriously freaked out by everything that been going on? Because one minute you’re telling me I’m allowed to be human but then you act just
the opposite and when I am having trouble with things, you start making accusations and mad at me about the consequences. And frankly I’m both confused and frustrated as kriff by all the karking mixed messages. They’re only making things ten times worse. And frankly I’m Force damned exhausted. To exhaasted to deal with it at the moment.”

Silence falls.

And yeah that's basically what Kanan had thought. He sighs very deeply in response to hera's complete lack of answer, then sits upright after a moment or two and begins to climb out of the bed.

“Kanan,” Hera’s voice is soft when she finally speaks reaching for his arm...a mixture of regret, anger and a little bewilderment when she finally finds her words again. He very gently peels her hand off.

“I’m sorry Hera, but look we need to pause this discussion for now, because it’s clearly going nowhere productive while I’m this frustrated. I…I’m going to go finish packing and then check on Ezra, okay? Who may need a trip to the bathroom or a snack or something. We...we’ll both take a few days to calm down and to process some of this through and then we can pick this conversation back up if you really want to after Ezra and I get back from our fishing trip.”

Hera’s silent again for a long moment after that, clearly wordlessly debating with herself. She definitely isn't happy with what Kanan’s just said, but she also consents even so after a moment or two - probably because she knows after all of these years together how unproductive it actually end ups being most of the time when she tries to force Kanan to talk when he’s in certain moods.

“Fine.” She finally states, climbing out of the bed herself, and padding on small bare feet to come and stand directly in front of him. “But so you know, Love, before you go I also get to make two conditions to this trip. Since I had no chance to do so earlier in Medlab.”

Kanan sighs but nods, “Agreed…within the scope of reason anyway. Those conditions actually being?”

“Oh they’re both completely reasonable believe me. One…Chopper is definitely going to be going along with you when you depart and I’m going to be calling in *at least* once a day to check in and talk awhile with Ezra, because if he’s doubting me as badly as you’re implying he is right now then I clearly have some serious ground to recapture where he’s concerned, even if it’s just via some casual ‘how was your day/who’s winning you fishing bet so far chats’ with him. Any problem there?”

Kanan shakes his head. “No that’s fine.”

“All right then. You can expect those calls to come either right after lunch or right after supper depending on my meeting schedule for the day. I may also try sometimes to talk to him right before bedtime or in the early morning. You can let me know, when I call if he’s still asleep or on his way to his rack. Two,” she pokes him in the chest, hard enough this time to practically leave a bruise.

“You, Rex and Ezra can *expect* that Sabine, Zeb and I will show up and spend at least one whole day of every weekend that the three of you are gone making up for lost time – with my guarantee that while we’re there, Sabine will restrain from any kind of Ezra baiting or she'll suffer my extreme and immediate displeasure.”

Hera takes a deep breath and then lets it out. “Because you better damn well believe Kanan JArrus that if you’re actually shop-lifting *our* seven-year-old out from under my nose like this, without warning *after* telling me outright that right now he thinks that I want to ditch him that I am damn well at least getting some occasional visitation!”
Kanan sighs but nods, “Agreed again with one caveat, Hera - after which we can even talk about what we talked about today, assuming we’re both willing and actually in the head-space for it.”

“That caveat being?”

“Before you come out to visit us the first time for the weekend you need to at least find some decent clothes for Ezra first at an off planet market. As well as some step stools and other stuff that you and I talked about for the Ghost to ease Ezra’s access and movement while he's on the ship. If you really want him to think you’re really in it for the long haul no matter how big or small he is at the moment than that’s a damn easy way to prove it.”

“Done. And your second condition?”

“Second you find out who I need to talk to on base to pro-cure top tier falsified papers of adoption. Don’t worry about the specifics of time or cost or the names that I want on them right now I’ll handle that myself when it's appropriate– just try and get me a name.”

Hera blinks at that, clearly caught off guard by the request, even though not exactly in a bad way – she’s simply genuinely startled that he’s looking for this information, though really she shouldn’t be, Kanan figures, considering everything thing else that he’s just had to say. Ezra after all, is only karking seven years old. Before when they’d found him, the kid had only had four years before his majority and his parents had only been missing. Now though, there’s something closer to eleven years before Ezra twill turn eighteen again, and his parents very frankly stated are dead.

And no, Kanan’s not demanding that Ezra change his name, or even Kanan’s title for that matter: he’s just looking to aggressively change the kid’s perspective about his future prospects no matter what his current physical situation, by the end of this trip, along with any other number of other things. Because frankly speaking Hera isn’t the only one where Ezra is concerned who needs to start blatantly putting their money where their mouth is.

So he just shrugs, and rotates his head on the base of his neck, “Sometimes, Hera, I'm learning that it actually helps to stop being quite so subtle about certain things. There are any number of topics that Ezra and I are going to cover by the end of this trip – that being one of the basic ones one my list. Because as I already said earlier, right now as far as all of this is concerned with me and Ezra, the kid needs some things made blatantly clear. Which is why while we’re out there I fully intend in this case to fish and not cut bait.”

A/N: For the worried. No this is not and will NEVER be a break up fic. I adore Hera/Kanan. But sometimes you have to climb some steep slopes for the awesome view at the top of the mountain. Everybody in the fic is just learning a little rock climbing at present. Also, lose not your heart at bitter/grumpyass Kanan. Help is coming the next couple parts via totally deserves a kriffing medal Rex. Who serious kicks ass at basic Jedi maintence!

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