strange days (no colors or shapes)
by technorat

Summary

(Major TROS spoilers in chapter 1)

Hux chose to leave with Finn and Poe, deserting to the enemy, with the knowledge that he would never have to see Kylo Ren again.

He was wrong.

Notes

As this is a fix-it (of sorts), there will be major spoilers for the plot of The Rise of Skywalker in chapter 1.

There are some differing elements, like Hux and Kylo both survive.

warnings for this chapter: canon typical injuries

Minor edit 1/18: changed "garage" to "hanger" because that makes more sense. oops!
“Shoot me in the arm or else they’ll know it’s me.”

FN-2187 raises his blaster and then hesitates. Lowers it. “Seriously,” he says, finally. “Do you really think your men are that stupid?”

Hux scowls. He can feel his face heat. “I can buy you time.”

“They will kill you,” FN-2187 says with a dawning sense of horror. “Why would you help us if they’ll kill you?”

“He’s gone mad,” Hux says, huffing. “Flames of rebellion burn across the galaxy and Ren chases a ghost. You need to shoot me. Quickly. We are running out of time.”

FN-2187 blinks again, his face pinched.

Dameron returns to them, placing a hand upon Hux’s elbow and dragging him along. “Come on, Hugs, you’re holding us up!”

He wants to protest more. That he is a part of the First Order, an integral part. That he designed so many of the fierce machines in this war. That he had overseen the Stormtrooper program for years. That he could not be tossed aside so easily.

But this was not the Finalizer and Pryde now had Ren’s ear.

For once in his life, he stops fighting.

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It is beyond strange to be within the Millennium Falcon. No one quite talks to him which, by all means, is fine. The scavenger keeps on looking back at him oddly. If she should kill him, perhaps it would be mercifully brief.

Well.

Hux walks the length of the ship and is more and more disturbed at its condition. If he inspected a ship like this within the First Order, he would not allow it to leave its dock.

And yet, he is within the ship. Hurtling towards kriff knows where.

Wonderful.

Hux peels off his greatcoat. He will never bear it and what it means properly again. He folds it, neatly, and sets it down beside the holo-chess board. Then he rolls up his sleeves.

The Wookie roars something. He doesn’t understand it and thus does not let it impede his actions.

He rummages about and eventually finds a tool set. As everything else, it appears that nothing goes together. It is less of a set and more of an accumulation of mismatched tools. He has made due with worse.

“What are you doing?” the scavenger says, approaching. She’s got a hand on her staff.
Hux brushes hair away from his face. “It appears as though your ship is in desperate need of repairs,” he says. “The compressors are—”

“—damaged, yes,” the scavenger says. She shakes her head. “And why are you here again?”

Hux raises his brows. “Because it seems that Dameron and FN-21—”

“His name is Finn,” the scavenger says. Her knuckles are white with the force of her grip. At least she holds the staff and not the lightsaber. Small mercies.

Hux presses his lips in a fine line. “Finn,” he repeats. “And what surname has he chosen? I wouldn’t want to sound too familiar.”

The scavenger is unimpressed. She frowns. “Don’t do anything to endanger us. I’ll be able to sense your ill intentions.” And then she walks off, leaving him to his own devices.

He shakes his head. As if he would sabotage the ship he was on. He had a sense of self-preservation, thank you very much. And so he loses himself in work. At some point, the orange and white BB unit and a smaller, strange droid comes to investigate too. The BB brandishes its taser.

“Hush, you,” Hux tells it. “This is a piece of work. It’s a real mess of parts. And you agreed to fly in this?”

The BB unit beeps at him in increasingly alarmed tones. Charming.

The other droid rolls back and forth. “Mechanic,” it says.

Hux scrunches his nose in distaste. But then again, he is no longer a general. “What is your designation?”

“D-O.”

“Mm.” Hux reaches forwards, to adjust its antenna, but it rolls out of the way.

“No— No thank you,” D-O says.

“Apologies,” he says, dropping the matter.

The BB unit has no such aversion to touch. It rams into his leg and beeps out, _More polite to droids than humans._

He sneers at the thing.

The ride is jerky and bumpy and uncomfortable. When the ship finally breaks from hyperspace, it ought to have been a celebratory event. But the landing leaves something to be desired. They crash heavily.

The scavenger is the first one out of the ship and she is squabbling with Dameron. Finn runs after them, acting as a mediator. It’s laughable.

“Children,” Hux tells the BB unit. “You work with children.”

The BB unit beeps at him. This time it brandishes a lighter.

The Wookie growls something at him and places one hairy paw upon Hux’s neck. He is
unceremoniously dragged out of the ship, BB-8 and D-O chattering the whole time.

Already it seems as though the Resistance members have met with the locals, all of whom sat upon massive beasts. Their leader takes notice of him and points her bow at him. “Why is he here?” she asks.

He shuts his eyes and lets out a breath. “I don’t suppose this day will get better?”

The Wookie lets out a whine and shrugs.

“He’s with us,” says Dameron. “It’s a long story.”

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“Rey’s gone.”

“I thought she said we’d wait till tomorrow!”

Again. Squabbling. And then Finn and Jannah run off to Rey’s rescue. The scavenger was from a desert planet. Could she even swim? The waves are rough, rougher even than the waves of Arkanis. And, amongst them, lies the wreckage of the second Death Star.

It should make him feel something.

But the Emperor leaves a sour film across his mouth. He cannot forget his legacy. How even the Empire was flawed. How Rae Sloane would have led them to glory. But he’s abandoned her legacy too.

“Well,” Hux says to Dameron. “What ever shall we do now?”

Dameron runs his hands through his hair. “How fast can we repair the Falcon between the two of us?”

*

He would know the scream of that X-wing anywhere.

He would recognize it across time, across space, across lifetimes.

“We need to go,” he tells Dameron. “Ren—”

“Don’t finish that sentence,” Dameron says. His eyes are glossy with tears. He cares so very much about those others, even those he had just met. Rey, Jannah, Finn.

*

The Resistance base is on a jungle world. The moment he steps from the (almost, if he shut his eyes and pretended) sterile environment of the Millennium Falcon to the jungle planet his boots will be ruined. Dameron drags him out anyway, without letting him think about it.

Perhaps it is of little surprise that the Starkiller possesses a recognizable face. A dozen blasters point at him.

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” Dameron says, an arm slung casually over Hux’s shoulder. How he loathes the contact. “He’s with us now. He’s our spy. I need to talk to Leia.”
The world stops.

“Poe…” says a woman, her eyes red and irritated. “Leia’s gone.”

“What?” Poe deflates. He pulls away from Hux and goes to the woman. “Rose, no…” BB-8 lets out a low trill.

The Wookie falls to the ground and sobs. When Finn approaches, he is pushed away.

Hux remains rooted to the ground, his mouth dry.

If Leia Organa was dead, what hope did the Galaxy have?

“She left you in charge,” Rose tells Poe. “What are we going to do, General?”

But Poe shakes his head. He cannot stop tears from rolling down his cheeks. “We… we need to fix C3PO,” he says, voice hoarse. “We need to call everybody we have. We need to bring the fight to them.”

* 

While everyone is focused on C3PO, Hux retrieves several of his data sticks from his sleeve. They are thin silver things, so easily passed for rank bands. He delivers them to Finn wordlessly.

Finn looks at him, brows furrowed. “What is this?” he says.

“Information banks on the Stormtroopers and their origins,” Hux says. “Do with it as you will. I have no need of it any longer.”

“Man, I always thought you were a bastard,” Finn says and the choice of word has him stiffen. “I really don’t understand you, Hux. This doesn’t make up for everything you’ve done.”

Hux snorts and rolls his eyes. “I don’t expect to redeem myself in your eyes. That was never my goal,” he says. “Simply… Ren wants power. Ren is chasing power in the form of ghosts. The Final Order, all of those old Imperials. They want the Empire back, they don’t want a better Galaxy, one that is ordered and peaceful. The Final Order’s ships… I’ve looked at their blueprints. They are equipped with planet destroying technology. Each and every one of them.”

“You realize this is rich coming from you,” Finn says.

“Starkiller was necessary,” Hux says. “The loss of the Hosnian system was necessary. What the Final Order will do is rid this Galaxy of planets. Until we are all marooned on ships, until we have no more supplies. And then what?”

“You’re really fucked up, huh.” But Finn says it sadly. “You know… there are people that can help you here. They can help you break free of the reconditioning.”

Hux rears back. “I don’t need your pity,” he snarls.

Finn does not react. Which is worse than if he had. Hux feels like a child again. Like he is Kylo Ren.

“Guys,” Poe calls. “Meeting.”

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“Rey is showing us the way,” Poe says.

To Exegol. A hidden planet for Sith. How wonderful. He almost wished that she wouldn’t.

“The planet’s atmosphere…” Rose says. “It’ll make it difficult for the Final Order ships to break atmosphere. There are towers.” She points them out. “Target these and the ships will go crashing back to the planet’s surface.”

“If I may interject,” Hux says.

Rose is unimpressed. She lifts her chin. There is a taser on her hip. He is certain she would not hesitate to use it.

He removes the final data stick from his sleeve, the one he had kept and studied during so many Delta cycles when he should have been sleeping. “This is the Steadfast, the acting flagship of the First Order. It is headed by Allegiant General Pryde. It can act as a tower, if the engineers aren’t complete buffoons now that I am gone.”

This draws some nervous, uncomfortable laughter.

“I… would like to infiltrate the Steadfast. My codes will still work,” Hux says, with all of the confidence that he does not have.

“And why exactly do you want to infiltrate it?” says Rose. She shakes her head. “No, that doesn’t make sense.”

But it is something personal.

Pryde must die. At his hands.

And there remains the fact that he needs access to First Order sanctioned communications to send a message to those that were still loyal to the First Order and the First Order’s goals.

But, the Resistance did not need to know that.

Only if it worked would it matter.

“The Steadfast needs to go down,” Finn says, so very serious. “And I have an idea.”

* 

Finn leads Jannah and other fellow Stormtroopers on the Steadfast. Earlier, the data files on the millions of Stormtroopers—their origins, their histories, all carefully logged—had been released. In the halls, Stormtroopers remove their helmets and throw them aside.

A Stormtrooper Revolution.

How Brendol would roll in his grave, if he had been given one.

The Officers are overwhelmed by the sheer numbers.

Hux breaks away from the group and sprints onto the emergency bridge, deep within the bowels of the Steadfast. There is no one there, save for droids, and droids are more trustworthy than people.

He makes it to a console and types in one of his overrides. It works after a second try, his hands shaking with nerves.
“Hux here,” he says, once the transmission begins to broadcast. “Those of you who still are loyal to the First Order and the values that Admiral Sloane held dear, turn your back on the Final Order. Emperor Palpatine ruled a flawed Empire. He allowed for slavery and abuses to crop up across the Galaxy. Even now, he cares only for his own power. He doesn’t care about anyone save for himself. You cannot allow this to happen. You cannot allow yourselves to be used for an agenda so far from what you were trained for. Officers, Stormtroopers, all those who would call yourselves as part of the fierce machine that is the Order, cease your fire against the Resistance and instead fire upon the Last Order. This I beseech you—”

“Hux!” yells a voice he is not at all pleased to hear.

“Hux out,” he says, ending the transmission. He spins on his heels and is greeted with the scowling visage of Pryde.

“You bastard!” Pryde shoots him.

For a second he is unsure of what happened. Then he is on the floor, his chest on fire.

*Lie still, lie still and he will go away.* But that is an echo from another time. Hux breathes shallowly and goes still. He slips the vibroblade from its sheath into the palm of his hand and waits.

Pryde approaches him, footsteps heavy and quick, and when he kneels, Hux springs to action. He stabs Pryde, again and again, until Pryde goes still. His body is mangled, more blood than sense. And Hux has been shot again, this time in the thigh.

He breathes heavily, the breath rattling within his chest.

He is absolutely covered in blood. Where Pryde’s blood ends and his blood begins is a mystery. And he laughs, something brittle.

Hux lies there for a good long while, a hand upon his chest. He’s really done it now. What would Phasma think?

He has destroyed his life’s work. A tear trickles out of the corner of his eye and runs down the side of his face.

*  

It is Finn that finds him.

“Kriff. What did you do?”

“Just leave me here,” Hux says sourly.

But Finn doesn’t listen. He helps him up. “I don’t understand you,” Finn says. “At all.”

And this time Hux laughs.

*  

They celebrate.

There are those that embrace, that kiss. There are tears. Music. Dancing. Joy.
Hux feels none of this. He sits beside D-O and scowls at anyone who gets too close. Every part of him aches, but he refuses to bring attention to his own weakness.

Rey approaches the base, her face bloody and dirty. She embraces Finn and Poe for a good long while. And then she pulls away. “There is someone joining us. Promise not to react too badly.”

Hux looks up just in time to see Kylo fucking Ren.

Kylo Ren scowls. He grips a lightsaber, one that certainly wasn’t the exposed-wire mess he had all those years. “What are you doing here?” he barks.

“Leaving,” Hux says. He grits his teeth and rises, walking away. There is only so much bullshit he can put up with.

Why, oh why, does it seem that Kylo fucking Ren is inescapable?

D-O goes with him. “Scary,” it says.

“Yes,” Hux huffs. “Don’t go near him. He has no care for droids. He’s destroyed so much.”

Walls. Consoles. Droids. Officer’s throats. All of Hux’s ambitions.

“Got it.”

He finds himself an empty hangar, meant for an X-wing or two but noticeably lacking. He sits, sinking into the comfort of a chair, and does not think of how the day had gone.

“I need a drink,” Hux says, words hollow.

“Water?”

Hux does not deign that with a reply. He sits and sits, so very still, until the lights overhead turn themselves off.

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Chapter Notes

warnings applicable to this chapter: violence, canon typical violence

Kylo Ren will be more central to future chapters! Slowly getting there, haha.

The little hangar more or less is claimed by Hux. Whoever had used it last either did not survive the confrontation with the Final Order (likely) or did not want to hazard being within the proximity of Hux himself (even more likely). D-O stays at his side and brings him small things: water, at first, and rolls of bandages, small tubes of burn cream, a blister packet similar to that he had taken while on the Finalizer.

Hux fixes himself and then fixes what D-O requests, explaining what he does as he does it. D-O does not thrill as other droids would, but it does say, “Thank you.”

A well mannered droid, more mannered than certain people.

Making use of the mismatched and, quite frankly, antique tools left behind, Hux sets about improving the garage. There is a small fresher, barely suitable for a human being. He upgrades it and even installs himself a sonic, built of the random, scattered parts both within the garage and brought in by D-O. He washes and dresses in grey clothes, loose on his long limbs, what Dameron had found for him.

“It’s almost like a regular living quarters now,” Dameron says when he came to visit, bringing the cot that Hux had requisitioned.

“Such high compliments,” Hux says dryly. He remains seated on a high backed chair, gloved hands fiddling with the remnants of some poor mouse droid. If he could find enough similar parts, the droid surely could be salvaged. Hux’s leg, however, makes itself a bother. The sooner Dameron left, the sooner Hux could see to pain management.

“You know,” says Dameron, not taking the hint that his presence is no longer necessary. “You could come on out of your bubble. You can walk around base. I promise you’re not under arrest.”

Hux puts down his power calibrator. “No?” he says softly. “Perhaps someone should remind the Resistance that I am the Starkiller.”

Dameron touches the back of his neck and lets out a long sigh. “Look, yeah, you’ve done terrible things—”

“Atrocities,” Hux corrects.

Dameron frowns and then nods. “Atrocities,” he echoes. “But your buddy Ben Solo is here too now, so I don’t think it would really be fair if—”

“Let me clear up a misunderstanding.” Hux stands, his heart pounding. “Kylo Ren, Ben Solo, whatever he chooses to call himself next, is no friend of mine. I want to have nothing to do with him.”
“Hugs—”

But he cannot listen to this anymore. His stomach twists. Hux walks quickly to the fresher and locks the door behind him. He falls to his knees and presses his forehead against the cool rim of his toilet.

He spits up little more than stomach acid, bitter against his tongue.

He does not know how long he sits there, just that D-O evidently loses patience with him. D-O rams against the door, once, twice and then says, “Open.”

Hux does as the droid asks and opens the refresher door. He goes boneless against the ground. “I will get up soon,” he tells the droid.

D-O tilts its visual receptor but says nothing. If it could express any emotion, it would let Hux know its doubts.

Hux rises when he feels ready and rinses out his mouth with water from the sink three times, for good measure. He can still taste the sick at the back of his throat. Lovely.

“Water?” D-O says.

Hux blinks and gazes into the mirror, into the eyes of his unfortunate reflection. “No water is necessary,” he tells the droid. “Has Dameron left?”

“Affirmative.”

Hux lets out a soft sound and runs his hands through his hair. It does little to calm the disorder. It seemed that hair wax was forbidden in this lawless land. He sees to his injuries, removing the old bandages and sneering at the reddened skin around both wounds. He uses a topical ointment, smearing it over his skin. D-O provides clean bandages and helps to wrap the wound on his chest.

He redresses himself and goes to the poor mangled mouse droid.

Seemingly sensing another chance to irritate him, Dameron returns, baring a tray laden with food. Two steaming bowls with a bright, red stew. A small loaf of bread. Two cups of tea. And an assortment of strange fruits. Dameron places the tray on Hux’s desk.

“Time to eat, Hugs,” Dameron says.

Hux looks over the assortment. Nothing appears palatable. Nothing is wrapped. But it would be far too sudden and strange for Dameron to poison him. He looks from the food to Dameron. “I assure you that this is far more than I could eat.”

Dameron laughs. It is a quick thing, something that could be mistaken for an exhale. He picks up one of the bowls and a spoon. “I came here to eat with you, since you’re so weird about company.” He seats himself on a crate of droid parts and eats.

It is all too casual.

Hux does not examine the stew. It smells so strongly that his eyes water. “Are you tooling with me, Dameron?”

“And why would I do that?” Dameron asks, his mouth still partially full of food.

Hux rolls his eyes. “Why bring me this… assortment? A ration bar would more than suffice.”
The answer is obvious. Something must be poisoned. As to what, he does not know.

Dameron purses his lips together. There is an odd expression on his face. “You know, when Finn first joined the Resistance, he talked about the nutrition slop served to Stormtroopers. Didn’t really think the officers would have to eat that garbage too.”

Hux wrinkles his nose distastefully. “Nutrition bars and slop are efficient and adequate sources of calories,” he says.

Dameron’s disbelieving look is what prevents him from reciting the rest of their benefits. “Tasteless, textureless, and grey. Yum. Can’t believe you call it slop.” He gestures with a spoon. “At least eat your stew while it’s still hot.”

He looks to D-O. He had not installed any programing in the droid to analyze for poison. He had not convinced the droid of the necessity of that application. How he regrets it now.

D-O whirs and rolls back and forth, demonstrating before Dameron. “No squeaking,” it says.

“That’s great, buddy,” Dameron says, genuinely enthused. “I’m sure BB-8 will want to race you later.”

Hux rolls his eyes again. Because that is what D-O needs. Already, he can feel a headache coming on.

But Dameron takes this a different way. He smiles unabashedly. “You like droids,” he says.

“I do not,” Hux scoffs.

“You do,” Dameron says.

D-O swivels about and rolls itself into Hux’s high-backed chair. He glares down at the droid, but it does not see this as a deterrent in the very slightest. “Nice,” D-O says.

He sneers. “I’m not nice at all,” he tells it. He’s destroyed planets. The Resistance would do well to not forget this, even if they seemed alright with the former Supreme Leader running amok.

Dameron shakes his head. “Okay. Now that you’ve cleared that up, I wanted to talk about your future here.”

Hux does not bother to hide the grimace that crosses his face.

“Come on,” Dameron says, slapping Hux’s arm. He likely means this in a good natured way. He has seen Resistance pilots perform this gesture to one another. Nevertheless it makes his skin crawl. “I could’ve been giving this talk to Ben.”

Hux draws away from Dameron’s touch. “What is it that you expect me to do?” he says.

So long as he does not have to see Kylo fucking Ren again. So long as he does not have to mingle amongst the Resistance scum. So long as he is not expected to leave the safety of his hangar.

“You gave Finn those data sticks.” And again Dameron smiles, so damn cheerful. He does not clap Hux’s arm, thank the stars. “Rose was able to flood HoloNet with Stormtrooper data. So many Stormtroopers took off their helmets and joined us. It really helped them, you know? To learn the history that has been stolen from them. To see what could be their future. Finn inspired them—continues to inspire them.”
There, Dameron gets a little teary with passion. If he burst into tears, Hux is not sure what he would do but watch on, uncomfortably. If only Phasma were still here.

“But the conditioning protocols are still effecting a lot of folks,” Dameron says. “Your father designed the program, didn’t he?”

A chill creeps up his spine.

Everything came back to his bastard of a father.

“Yes,” he says, word coming out thickly. And when his father died, Hux inherited it. Edited it. Lived it. “You do know, what conditioning still effects them was my doing.”

Dameron waits for a moment. “And?”

“And you are trusting me to reverse what I’ve done,” Hux says slowly, like he is speaking to a fool. “Isn’t this a tremendously risky idea?”

“Listen, Hugs—”

“Hux—”

“You might not care but Rey and I’ve got a bet going on.”

Hux raises a brow. “Oh? And what if I intentionally sabotage it now?”

Dameron presses a hand to his chest, offended. “Believe me, you wouldn’t do that,” Dameron says. He gesticulates with that same spoon. “Rey thinks that Ben will be more willing to cooperate despite, you know, him being the former Supreme Leader.”

“And why would you think I would help you again? Willingly.”

“Because,” Dameron says, his smile unbearable. “I think you’d hate to lose to Ben.”

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Dameron leaves shortly after his rather impassioned statement, leaving behind the mostly untouched platter of food. Hux stares suspiciously at everything on it.

If Dameron wants his cooperation, he wouldn’t kill him now.

“Hungry?” D-O says.

Hux shakes his head. He forces himself to try the stew and quite nearly spits it right back out. It’s hot and burning his kripping mouth! He drops the spoon and downs a lukewarm cup of tea. His mouth still burns. “Water!” he says.

D-O wheels about and returns with a small canteen of water.

He drinks it quickly and coughs, quite nearly drowning. Only then does the burning subside. So Dameron had been tooling with him!

“Stabilized?” D-O asks.

Hux nods, not trusting his words. He examines the fruits carefully. Would any of them invoke that same reaction? He sets aside the whole platter and returns to his work with the mouse droid.
Dameron can go to hell.

D-O wheels itself about and rolls into Hux’s chair one last time.

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At some point, he must have fallen asleep. He wakes up to a massive pain in his neck. Hux lets out a groan and begins the slow process of getting up. He limps across the room and settles on the cot. It is about as broad as he is, though it is meant for someone shorter than him. He is too tired to care.

“Re-recharged?” D-O asks. “Recharged?”

His heart beats rapidly in his chest. It is so difficult to find sleep without the aid of one of the First Order sanctioned stims.

“What shift is it?” Hux asks.

D-O pauses and tilts. “It— it is 9:43pm.”

“What… shift would it be on a ship?” Hux rephrases. He is used to the cycle aboard a Star Destroyer. Alpha shift, Beta shift, Delta shift, Gamma shift. Being planet-bound violates everything he has ever known.

D-O wheels around. “Sleeping. Recharge.”

Hux snorts. Helpful. He had been sleeping. And now sleep will elude him.

“D-O, would you bring me a ration bar?” he says.

The droid lets out an excited beep. “Affirmative,” it says before wheeling away at top speed.

Hux presses the heels of his hands against his eyes, until stars blossom across his sphere of vision. A headache is building. He rises unsteadily on his feet and teeters back to the refresher, where he keeps all of his medical supplies. He takes a blister packet of pain medication and takes three tablets. They taste like nothing when he crushes them between his teeth. He drinks more water anyway.

Who would have thought the great General Hux would stoop so low as to drink from a fresher faucet and think it to be wonderfully refreshing?

D-O returns triumphantly, a ration bar tucked carefully on its person. “Ration bar,” it tells Hux.

“Thank you,” Hux says, and frees the bar from where D-O had trapped it. He moves to the small cot and sits atop it.

The ration bar tastes of nothing, as the best ration bars do. He breaks off small pieces and chews thoughtfully.

“First thing during Alpha shift…” he says, trailing off. “In the morning, I must requisition a datapad and read what reports the Resistance have made.”

Of course, there’s always the fact that the Resistance have no reason to trust him like that.

Hux tucks away the remainder of the ration bar, folding the wrapper and setting it aside. He wanders about the hangar and scrounges through the drawers finding sheets of paper and several
pens.

Warily, he looks at the food that Dameron had brought.

Surely, it wasn’t poisoned.

Surely, Dameron would be angry that he had wasted food.

“We need a conserver,” Hux tells D-O.

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When dawn breaks, the Resistance encampment springs to life. Hux becomes more active too. He has fixed the mouse droid and now the droid, serial number MSE-6-22, zips about the hangar with D-O. They converse in a mixture of simple Basic words and binary.

Hux passes time, taking stock of what materials are left within the hangar. He notes everything down dutifully in a flimsipad. His handwriting is a scrawl, letters slanted and leaning into one another.

Finn is the one to interrupt his work, knocking three times on the hangar’s door before letting himself in. “Hux,” he says. And then stops. Looks at him. “You look like shit.”

Hux bares his teeth in what should have been a smile. He hasn’t slept. Not since he woke. And Finn can tell.

Finn shakes his head. He examines what’s changed, his eyes settling on the platter of untouched fruits. “You know,” Finn says slowly, “you aren’t going to be killed here.”

“Can you really put forth such a guarantee of safety?” Hux muses aloud.

Finn blanches, lips pulled down in a frown. “You won’t be poisoned. The fruits are nutritious. Sweet. Probably better than anything you’ve ever eaten.”

Hux doubts that.

Privately, he thinks of his mother. He could scarcely remember her, save her rough, calloused hands. The way she hummed when she cooked. Her fish stew, the finest meal in the Galaxy.

“What is it that you want?” Hux asks.

Finn massages his temples. “You’re needed,” he says. “We’re having a meeting to cover expectations. We’ll be talking about reconditioning protocols. You’ll have a lot to say on that, huh?”

Hux does not break away from Finn’s unwavering gaze.

By all means, Finn had been an exemplary soldier. Brave. Talented. An excellent leader. His scores were ideal. If only he weren’t so ready to question orders.

Well, that had worked well for the Resistance too, when Finn broke free from conditioning and ran to them.

(And, worse, Hux is amongst them now as well, having run from everything he has ever known, having engineered the deaths to so many loyal soldiers, but unable to run from Kylo fucking Ren.)
Hux stands. For a moment his vision swims, but he steadies himself. His chest aches. His leg is not much better. Hux straightens himself. It would not go to be without dignity so soon.

Finn raises his hands, brows furrowed low. “Are... you okay?” he asks carefully.

“Yes,” says Hux sharply. His head is light. His vision spins. “Of course.”

“You should eat something,” Finn says carefully.

“I should eat something,” Hux repeats.

Finn blinks and looks away. “Here,” he says, picking up the platter of fruits and holding it out to Hux.

There are too many fruits to choose from. They come in many bright and colorful shades. He hesitates before grabbing a bowl of small, red berries. They are sweet against his tongue. Strange, that. The berries do not hurt him.

Before he even knows it, the bowl has been emptied of berries and a sweet film coats his tongue.

He blinks again.

How strange for him to follow orders.

Hux narrows his eyes at Finn, who avoids his gaze. “What are we waiting for?” Hux says lowly, before rising to his feet.

Around the Resistance base, many people stare. His is not unaware of how well known his face is—he had been in so very many propaganda holos, given so many speeches. If anything, his own exhaustion and dishevelment might have served as a disguise, if it weren’t for the uncommon hue of his hair.

Finn leads him to a war room. A wide conference table takes up much of the space. Around it are chairs and, predictably, it seems that none of the chairs match. They’ve been repaired and mended, showing their age. There are crates stacked behind chairs as well, serving as makeshift seating for the room’s occupants. It is already crowded with a variety of people, both human and xeno. Amongst them is Kylo Ren, slumped in his chair, a fearsome scowl across his face.

Hux pauses at the doorway, even when Finn continues on. Finn hugs Rey, then Dameron and sits between them.

It is so damn quiet.

More slowly, Hux makes his way over to one of the crates, seating himself on the edge—as far from Kylo Ren as he could and, by extension, far from Finn, Rey, and Dameron. His leg protests but he says nothing.

“Alright,” Dameron says, clapping his hands together. “Thank you, everyone, for making it here on such short notice.”

“Too damn early, Poe!” one of the pilots heckles.

The room devolves into laughter—all save for Hux and Kylo Ren.

Dameron waves off the laughter. The smile on his face comes so easily. “Yeah, yeah,” he says. “Not my fault you stayed up half the night reading holobooks. Anyway…”
BB-8 warbles and lets out its projector. Some of the databanks he had given to Finn are shown to everyone gathered. BB-8 scrolls through the databanks—each and every Stormtrooper’s eyes bores into Hux.

“We have some information on the Stormtrooper conditioning protocols,” Dameron says. “But we have a lot of former Stormtroopers and they’re going to need our help.”

A medic speaks, rattling off facts that Hux already knows. Her hands are interlocked together, her knuckles white. “It may be more than what we can deal with effectively.”

Dameron nods and then runs his hand through his hair.

“But we’ve got to try,” Finn says. “We owe it to them.”

**How many Stormtroopers have died in this war?**

“There are… there are creches,” Finn continues. BB-8 shifts the projections to display a generation of would-be Stormtroopers. They are young, just children, their eyes shining brightly. “On every First Order Star Destroyer. They need people to look after them and help to break the conditioning.”

Kylo Ren scoffs.

Beside him, Rey shoots him a withering glare.

“**Ben,**” Rey says.

“What do you have to say?” Finn asks. He crosses his arms over his chest and leans back in his chair. Beside him, Dameron places an arm around Finn’s shoulders. He, too, never looks away from Kylo Ren.

Kylo Ren is arrogant, chin tilted high. And he moves his eerie gaze to settle on Hux.

Hux fights against the chill that creeps up his spine.

“You took them away from their families,” Kylo Ren says, staring right through Hux. “You and your father. You programmed them like you would a droid. Trying to deprogram them now is useless. They don’t know anything but the Order. They will never know who they are.”

Hux rises to his feet.

Around him, people shift away.

“That’s a riot, coming from you,” Hux says bitterly. “You were Supreme Leader. If you didn’t agree with the program, you could have ordered something else to be done. Like that clone army you so desperately wanted.”

Kylo Ren bares his teeth in a snarl. His fingers twitch at his sides. He brings ruination to *everything*, and yet he wants to stand here and act as though he’s been absolved of his actions?

“And you were a General,” Kylo Ren says. He too stands, despite Rey latching onto his wrist and pulling him down. “Instead of acting foolishly as a spy—”

“Woah, woah, woah,” Dameron interjects.

But Kylo Ren does not care.
Kylo Ren pulls away from Rey. He walks towards Hux and it takes all of Hux’s self control to remain standing straight, unmoving, tall. “—you could have freed all those children you choose now to pity. Tell me, Hux, what changed?”

There is far too much cutting silence. BB-8 breaks it with a distressed warble. The projection flickers and then goes dark.

Hux blinks, slowly. All that time he had served under Supreme Leader Kylo Ren. The time spent serving Snoke. And the time before that, when he had his father and all of his father’s men. He had never let them see him afraid.

He cannot be so weak now. His nails cut into the palms of his hands.

“You did,” Hux says, voice hoarse. He does not look away, cannot look away. “You killed Snoke, you took his power, and then you threw me against the ship’s wall. How easily you took over the First Order. How easily you welcomed those who worshipped Palpatine.”

Kylo Ren is mere inches away, body radiating his rage.

At least he has no lightsaber, though his glower is fearsome enough.

“You’re one of the children of the Empire,” Kylo Ren says. “And yet you’re no better than your little lost Stormtroopers.”

“I am aware,” Hux grinds out painfully, “of exactly who I am. Unlike you. What are you calling yourself now? Kylo Ren, Ben Solo. You talk about those former Stormtroopers who don’t know themselves, but you should look to yourself first. You have never once in your life known who you are, not without somebody else telling you first.”

In an instant, Hux goes flying.

He hits a wall hard. He cannot breathe.

Kylo Ren stands amongst rubble. The large table had broken, right down the middle. Chairs and crates are destroyed. The members of the Resistance hold up firearms.

But Kylo Ren does not care.

Hux struggles, fingernails scraping against the skin of his throat. He cannot breathe, he cannot—

His vision tunnels, going black at the edges.

Warmth bleeds out of his wounds. He can feel his wounds reopen.

“Ben!”

“Stop this—”

“This isn’t right!”

“—right now!”

“You—”

He wakes up again on the floor, a pool of blood beneath him. He blinks and blinks, but his vision remains fuzzy. A pair of black boots are before him.
“Hux?”

Lie still. It will all go away if you lie still.

“A hand grasps the back of his shirt. He is boneless as he is maneuvered. Still. Silent.

If you are quiet, they will go away.

But that was long ago. And nothing has ever changed.

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“Damaged.”

“Yes…” A sigh. “I wish I could have done something sooner..”

“Sc-scary.” A whistle. “Do-do-don’t go near him.”

A pat, skin against metal. “Sorry, I might have to ignore your advice, Dio…”

Hux blinks. He is lying in a bed. He looks at his arm, pale and bared to the world, a mess of wires feeding into him. His vision swims, dark at the edges.

“You’re awake.”

Hux blinks again, fighting his own grogginess. It would be so much easier to stop fighting, to slip back into sleep.

Rey is sitting at his bedside, a somber expression across her face. D-O is at her side. Seeing him awake, D-O gives a happy whistle and rolls itself in a circle.

“Reboot complete?” D-O asks hopefully.

Hux tries to sit up, but pain twinges across his chest. He winces and slumps back down.

Rey watches him. He cannot read the expression on her face. “When Finn… found you on the Steadfast, he thought all of that blood was Allegiant General Pryde’s.”

Hux does not reply. He looks instead to the drips that are connected to him. Pale fluids. The words blur together.

“Why didn’t you tell us that you were injured?” Rey asks.

“I helped,” D-O says.

“I know,” says Rey gently. Again, she pats D-O. The droid does not run from her touch. There is something to be said about that. “There was… a discrepancy in our supplies.”

Hux shuts his eyes. He should have anticipated that. He should have questioned just where D-O was locating the materials.

Rey reaches out, placing her hand on his shoulder. Her hand is a rough thing, calloused and used to hard work. “Don’t go to sleep so soon,” she says. “I wanted to talk.”

Rey presses her lips into a fine line. “You can trust us,” she says. “The Resistance is not like the First Order.”

He lets out a huff of air. “Obviously,” he mutters. There’s not a lick of order to anything. They let him run free. They let Kylo Ren run free. It was as if nothing they have ever done mattered. As if they weren’t the faces of the organization that the Resistance fought against for years.

“But I think… it’s not just the Resistance you’ve troubles with. You feel angry with yourself,” Rey says.

Hux lets his eyes fall shut. He rolls over. He does not want to hear any more of this bantha shit. He’s already agreed to help. How many more speeches must he listen to?

“Because you are you,” Rey continues. “And you outlived the life you had imagined for yourself. Because everything you had imagined slipped away from you, like grains of sand between your fingers.”

Rey rises to her feet, the chair scraping against the floor. “But you don’t know the size of your own hands.”

D-O whirls about. “Definition?”

“I lived for many years alone on Jakku,” Rey says, voice hoarse. “I didn’t know where my family had gone. I imagined them as kind, loving people, who had left me, only for a moment. I imagined that they would come back. That they would hold me in their arms and apologize for abandoning me.”

Hux is quiet. He does not know why she is telling him any of this. They aren’t friends. They aren’t even close.

“That was the hope that kept me going, some days… But they never came back.” Rey’s voice grows thick with unshed tears. “My father was the son of Palpatine and I never found out who my mother was. But both are dead now. The future I had imaged was not there for me and I rejected the future Palpatine had planned for me. But I’m not alone. I have family now, all around me. The Resistance is my family. I have a life here and so will you.”

“I don’t think for a second that I will find family here,” Hux says. He cannot hear her nearly weep about the great tragedy of being related to someone she didn’t particularly like. He was related to Brendol after all. He sits up so quickly that he pulls on all of those IV lines. “I will offer up all that I know but don’t think for a second that I will become one of you.”

Rey shakes her head. She has turned to stone, smooth, still, unfeeling. Righteous. One of the Jedi of old. “You won’t die. Not for a long time. Not until the conditioning breaks in you, in the former ‘troopers, in each and every officer that defected and you all understand the gravity of your actions.”


“Ben Solo,” Rey corrects.

Hux waves a hand. “Did he call himself that?” he asks.

Her brows pinch. “You of all people should know what great shadow the name Kylo Ren casts.”

D-O rolls back and forth, prodding the bed with its body. “Stay away.”
Hux looks to D-O for a good long time. “I don’t know what you think will happen,” he says, finally. Rey’s words catch up to him. “…there are officers here?”

Rey’s face softens, but only for a moment. “Yes,” she says. “There were young officers that took up your call. You should have seen it. First Order Stardestroyers turned against the Final Order. They’re still here. After… you are released from medical, there is something I want you to join in.”

He waits, unsure of what she will say next.

If he were back on the Finalizer, back on the Steadfast, upon clearance from Medbay he’d still have the usual tasks to care for. The overseeing of their army. The development of weapons. The growth of the Stormtrooper program.

None of that seems possible here.

“They’re calling themselves a mutual self-help group,” Rey explains slowly. “The group consists of several former officers and former Stormtroopers that meet and talk. I think you would benefit from this. And they would benefit from seeing you. Here. With us.”

Hux wrinkles his nose in distaste, but does not say no.

“Well then,” Rey says. She nods. “I’ll leave you to rest but I’ll visit you again. D-O, make sure he doesn’t do anything reckless.”

“Affirmative,” the droid chirps and rams itself against the bed one last time, for good measure.

* *

He sleeps and wakes with no discernible pattern. When he wakes, he sees slivers of things between blinks. D-O, charging. Several medics, in and out. Grey robes, black boots. More droids. He feels as though he will never rest enough. He feels as though he will never be stronger than the weight of exhaustion upon his brow.

When he wakes again, and believes that he will stay awake, there is a curious plant on his bedside table.

The tarine plant is native to his home planet of Arkanis, a delicate white petaled thing. It is a million light years away from its home, placed in a bright orange plasteel urn. He raises a hand and touches one fat leaf gently.

D-O awakens at this movement and hurriedly comes to Hux’s bedside. “Reboot complete?” it asks.

Hux lets out little more than a broken, half choked sound. “Reboot complete,” he confirms, his voice rough. He scarcely recognizes the sound.

D-O chimes warmly and wheels away.

It returns in a few moments with a Resistance medic. She is older, with her dark hair speckled with grey. “It’s good to see you’ve woken up, Armitage Hux,” she says. “My name is Dr. Kalonia.”

He winces at the sound of his full name. Why invoke it now?

“You’ve been in and out of consciousness for four days now,” the doctor says. “You had quite a few wounds left untreated when you were brought to me. They’ve been seen to now.”
Hux sits up carefully and pushes back the sheets from his body. He wears a pale gown and underthings. Where those pale garments don’t grant him modesty, pale bandages do instead.

“In the future, you mustn’t hide your injuries like that,” Kalonia continues. She speaks calmly and clearly. “You will only do more damage to yourself.”

Hux does not say anything as she speaks.

“In addition… there is a discrepancy I would like to follow up on,” Kalonia says.

“Which would be?”

“Your weight on official First Order documents is listed as 75 kilograms.” Kalonia’s dark eyes flicker across his forms. “However, you are 55 kilograms.”

Hux does not say anything.

_Thin as a slip of paper and just as useless._ It seems that he could never escape his father’s words.

Kalonia merely lowers her head. “We will have to plan a diet for you to help you gain weight,” she says slowly. “And I believe that Rey has brought up the First Order support group… I think that would truly be helpful to you.”

As if he needed _more_ people knowing of his vulnerabilities.

“Am I to be cleared of medical?” he asks.

Kalonia frowns at him. “You’ll be cleared from medical. Provisionally. You should rest and not do anything that would strain you. Do try to keep off your feet. I’ll be asking people to check in on you during meal times.”

Hux scowls. “That is not necessary—”

“I’m the doctor,” Kalonia says, not unkindly. “I decide what is necessary or not. And there is only so much Dio can do for you.”

D-O wheels backwards, seemingly taken aback.

She smiles, laughing beneath her breath. “You’ve done a good job, Dio, but something tells me that your human needs a little more help than he’s willing to ask for.”

Hux grinds his teeth together. She discusses his weakness so easily.

He hates it.

Kalonia checks her com and smiles down on it. “Oh, someone is coming to escort you back to your hangar right now.”

That someone is the Wookie.

The Wookie lets out a low growl but waits patiently as Hux finds his legs. They make an odd party, traveling through the Resistance encampment: a Wookie, a droid, and a fallen First Order General. A furry paw remains securely on his neck. The other paw holds the tarine plant close to his chest.

As though he will run.
As though he has anywhere to run. Or the energy.

When Hux enters the hangar, MSE-6-22 greets them with a set of urgent beeps.

“It’s alright,” Hux says. He manages to stumble over to his cot before entirely collapsing. He feels heavy, as though his limbs are weighed down with durasteel.

“Reboot complete,” D-O tells MSE-6-22 reassuringly.

The mouse droid lets out a relieved chime.

The Wookie lets out another growl before placing the tarine plant on a table, where a patch of sunshine falls on it. When the petals grow brown and wrinkled, Hux has every intention of collecting them to make his favorite tea. But for now the flower is blossoming, at the height of its life cycle.

“Pretty,” D-O says.

The Wookie, pleased by this, nods enthusiastically. When he leaves the hangar, Hux deflates.

MSE-6-22 warbles and D-O joins it.

Soon, he would get up.

Soon, he would find out what work is necessary.

He falls asleep again, despite everything. His legs hang halfway off the cot.

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The sun is at its highest point in the sky when he receives visitors. No one knocks or requests entry, like they would have done on any First Order vessel. Simply, they let themselves in.

Rey is laughing, talking with the other woman, but her face sobered when she sees Hux. Her eyes flicker to the tarine plant, but she does not comment on it.

“Lunch is served,” Rey says. She walks to him and hands him a ration bar directly. “Poe said you weren’t used to normal food, so here’s a ration bar.”

The other woman makes a face, scrunching up her nose in distaste.

Hux peels away the foil and eats the ration bar, one piece at a time. Rey makes herself comfortable, sitting down on a crate and making an observation of the poor mouse droid.

The other woman remains standing, a fierce scowl on her face.

It seems like she is the only one with sense. The only one who had remembered what occurred during this war.

“You know,” the woman says. “You should thank me.”

And then he knows that he has seen her before, on the Supremacy. She wears her hair differently and she does not wear a stolen First Order uniform.

“And why would I do that, Tico?” he asks.
She blinks, brows furrowed low. “You remembered me?” she asks.

Hux snorts. “Not many people bite me, I’ll have you know,” he says. “Now tell me, why would I thank you?”

Tico lifts her chin a little. “Because I shot Kylo Ren.”

“With a blaster?”

“With a repurposed slug thrower.”

Hux lets out a thoughtful hum. “You are right,” he says quietly. But he does not thank her. He cannot force those words past his teeth.

Tico rolls her eyes. “Well then,” she says instead, adjusting her utility belt. “What have you started here?”

“You’ve got so many spare parts laying around,” Rey says thoughtfully. “If we put our heads together, we could make some really useful things for the camp. We could use updates just about everywhere. No one is too shy to say that.”

“We can get started,” Tico says. “Let people Hugs needs things to repair.”

Rey smiles at the use of Dameron’s blasted nickname and doesn’t even attempt to hide her amusement. “That sounds like a plan.”

He hates it.

* * *

Together, they intend to work on a speeder that was brought to them along with several mangled droids. The speeder needs simple fixes and, given how old everything was, needs some upgrades. Desperately. Hux lies on the floor beneath the poor thing and slowly rewires the underside.

Some of the wiring definitely preceded the Empire. Some of the wiring had been wrapped with electric tape many cycles ago and even that was peeling.

He shudders to think about how long the shoddy repairs would have stayed if he hadn’t been told to be useful.

The wide door to the hangar remains open to bring in fresh air, according to Rey. All it does is bring in the scent of the outdoors: burning ozone, wet earth, and countless unwashed individuals.

If he had his way, he would shut off the hangar from the rest of the camp and install proper air filtration systems, something they so desperately lacked.

What he misses most about the Finalizer is the sounds the ship made. The hissing of air filtration system. The orderly march of boots. The electric lighting’s buzz. The movement of droids.

So wrapped in his thoughts, Hux does not notice heavy footsteps.

“Rey?” a dreadful voice says.

“Oh, good, you’ve brought snacks,” Rey says, delighted. Her footsteps are light. He sees a sliver of her brown boots, her white leggings. “Thank you. You can set the tray down wherever you find room.”
Kylo Ren seems to hesitate, boots turned inwards.

Hux does not move out from beneath the speeder, but merely watches, his heart beating quickly. Beneath his soft grey clothing, he is still covered in bandages, like a second skin.

He does not need Kylo Ren to see him so weak.

Finally, Kylo Ren moves. He puts something down on the table. Pauses. “Is there anything I should do?” he asks, voice low. He sounds strangely subdued. Quiet.

Perhaps the slugthrower’s shot did some proper damage to him.

Hux lips twist into a vicious smile, far too pleased with the thought. With slow fingers, he continues the task at hand and continues replacing the wiring. If he did so slowly enough, perhaps Kylo Ren would leave.

“We could move things around,” Rey says. “Make this a proper living quarters.”

Wonderful, Hux thinks sourly.

“Or Hux could move into quarters that were already prepared,” Rose mutters.

Even better.

Wonderful ideas, the two of them had.

But he remains silent.

D-O rolls slowly until he stands before the speeder. It angles itself awkwardly, its optic receptors facing Hux. It says nothing and then turns, facing Kylo Ren.


Hux grits his teeth. “I don’t have a problem with the hangar’s layout,” he says. He quite nearly tacks on a Supreme Leader at the end of his sentence, but just barely bites it back.

Kylo Ren goes silent again. And then he takes steps forwards, closer and closer to the speeder.

D-O wheels closer to him and says, “Do-don’t go near him.”

Hux frowns and frets that Kylo Ren will take out his anger on the droid. Quickly, he crawls out from under the speeder, dreadfully aware of how he looks: paler than a sheet of paper, bandages peaking out from his shirt, hair plastered to his scalp with sweat.

But Kylo Ren makes no such move.

He stays where he is standing, scant inches from D-O. He wears heavy grey robes. Wherever did he find such things? He too is pale, with a bandage placed haphazardly upon his cheek. His eyes are dark, unreadable.

Hux does not know what to say. The silence is unbearable.

“There are a few things we can bring here, to make it a little more livable,” Rose finally says, drawing out her words. Her hand is kept on her hip, fingers tracing the hilt of a slugthrower. “If you want to stay here.”
Hux frowns, eyes flickering to what Kylo Ren had brought.

A tray of fruits placed carefully next to the tarine plant. Amongst them, a bowl of red berries.

“We could bring in more furniture,” Rey says. She tilts her head. “You could help with that, Ben.”

Kylo Ren nods. He looks at Hux, gaze heavy, then watches D-O. “Got it,” Kylo Ren says and turns around.

When he leaves the hangar, Hux lets out a breath.

“You didn’t say what kind of furniture,” Rose says.

Rey shrugs. “Whatever he finds would be better than this.” She gestures broadly at their surroundings. And it is true, in a way.

The hangar was meant to store X-wings, not people, and had a lot of empty space.

There were only two high backed chairs and a small table when Hux had first wandered in. And now the only real difference is the fact that Hux had requisitioned a small cot.

What would Kylo Ren think as necessary? The man bore him no good will, surely, and, besides, Kylo Ren’s quarters had always been spartan, with only the bare minimum.

Rose sighs. “At least there’s a fresher,” she says miserably. “Let’s get ourselves cleaned up before he comes back.”

They clean themselves of grease and abandon their tasks. Instead, Rose and Rey set about eating some of the fruit that Kylo Ren had inexplicably brought. Hux takes the bowl of red fruits and retreats onto his cot. D-O wheels itself to his side and lets out a low hum.

Not too long after Hux finishes, Kylo Ren returns. He has a hand held aloft. An assortment of furniture floats lazily behind him.

He does not ask questions, but instead places the furniture about seemingly at random. A work desk. A wardrobe. Several lamps. A small conserver and other kitchen gadgetry. A bright blue couch, not at all like the one Hux had on the Finalizer.

Where his ice blue couch had been sleek and stylish, this blue couch is garish with both its coloring and design, tacky tufts and patrician scrolling.

Hux lets out a huff of air.

Kylo Ren looks at him with a fierce scowl, as if daring him to say something.

But he does not.

The mouse droid comes out of hiding and investigates the new things within its realm. It skitters in a circle around Kylo Ren, but does not manage to entirely avoid him. MSE-6-22 rams into Kylo Ren’s foot and then wheels away at top speed, screaming until it gets to Hux’s side.

He places a hand atop the droid, but never does he look away from Kylo Ren’s gaze.

Finally, Kylo Ren is the one who breaks the impromptu staring contest. He looks down and rubs the back of his neck with a hand. He leaves, without even saying a goodbye.
And, after a moment, D-O rolls forwards and right out of the hangar door.

“D-O,” Hux hisses and rises to his feet. His leg pains him. It would pain him more if the droid was damaged unnecessarily.

Rey and Rose exchange a look, but neither one of them attempts to stop him.

Hux follows the droid but halts at the hangar’s door.

“—that’s not it,” Kylo Ren says, pacing. “He’s been… there. Always. He’s the only constant. He was the… only one who wasn’t afraid of me in the First Order. The only one outside of Snoke. And he’s here now. I don’t know when it started but he is… afraid of me now.”

D-O is behind him, completely still.

“I want to do something for him,” Kylo Ren says, staring at some point on the horizon. “I almost killed him.”

“Damaged,” D-O says sadly.

Hux furrows his brows, taking offense at that. He is merely injured. Injuries have never kept him down for long. He had experience.

“I didn’t think that I could kill him,” Kylo Ren says, more slowly. “I didn’t think at all.”

D-O rolls itself closer.

“If Hux died, there would be no one in the Galaxy who knows me. Not really. I would be alone again.”

Hux grits his teeth and looks away, suddenly uncomfortable.

It is always, always about him, huh?

But he could not shake the uncertain feeling that echoes within him.

Of being alone in a crowd of unfamiliar and strange people, all save for the former Supreme Leader.

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Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Sorry for not updating last week! I had meant this chapter to be a sort of birthday present from me, but whoo-boy did that weekend get busy. I want to thank everyone for reading this fic. The feedback has been incredible for me. Seeing your comments made me so happy! I hope this chapter will make you all as happy as I felt writing it.

Which is a funny note to end it on, given the next line, but oh well.

warnings applicable for this chapter: canon-typical Force usage against a person, panic attack

 Mostly, Hux is allowed to stay within his hangar. Projects are brought to him. Small things at first, like droids and speeders. X-wings and smaller fighter ships come after.

 More and more, he is brought domestic items.

 Comforts.

 Datapads, credit changers, data analyzers, a large and unwieldy desalination tank.

 He does the work given to him and does not ask questions. He must do the work, must earn his position.

 Sometimes, Rey and Tico join him. Both are proficient at repairs. They fill the hangar’s air with news from around the base and idle chatter as they work. And they talk to D-O and MSE-6-22 as well, including them in the conversation.

 Just as well. MSE-6-22 is turning into a relentless gossip.

 (No sense in stopping it. MSE-6-22 gathers intel from around the base and chirps it out in beeps and whirs later.)

 Sometimes, Dameron joins him. He does not help, but instead sprawls out on the blue couch and regales Hux with tales of the Resistance’s brand of bureaucracy.

 (He would state for the record that calling their burgeoning government the new New Republic lacked any hint of creativity or thought.)

 Sometimes, Finn joins him—with or without Dameron. He is more silent, a curious look to his eyes. He does not help either. Which is just as well. Dameron is more interested in D-O, charmed by how polite the droid is, likely.

 And D-O is a polite droid.

 When the Resistance scum come and go, they bring him his meals, as decided by the MedBay. Ration bars at first. And then simple broths. Platters of fruits. Things that even those with delicate palates can manage.
He would not admit it to anyone but himself, but his stomach did not disagree with their offerings.

This cycle, Hux works alone. The astromech droid had not survived a tumble. He has the BB unit’s part laid out on the floor. Many parts are broken in a way that he cannot replace. Other still are missing.

But it had been a task in it of itself to drag all of the parts to the hangar and to organize them.

“Water?” D-O asks.

“No thank you.” Hux wipes his brow of sweat. His limbs feel heavy. If he let himself slow down, he will fall asleep.

But there is work ahead of him, a list of tasks as long as the hours in a day.

And the day is not nearly done yet.

The hangar door opens slowly, metal creaking loudly in the silence. And then one set of footsteps, heavy as ever.

He does not have to turn around to know who it is.

He knows it, within himself, within his very bones. “Ren,” he says in greeting.

The footsteps draw short of him. “Hux.”

Slowly, Hux rises to his feet. He would never let see Kylo Ren see him on the ground. He clenches his fists, nails digging into the palms of his hands. “What brings you here?” he says. His throat aches.

Kylo Ren holds a mangled instrument in his hands. “Could you fix it?” he asks. “I’ll pay you.”

Hux snorts. Why would he want to be paid? What would he do with currency here? “Let me see it,” he says, and approaches to snatch the device out of Kylo Ren’s hands. D-O stays close to him, optical receptor locked onto Kylo Ren.

The device had been a crystal growth tray.

Hux had used them in his time preparing plans for Starkiller Base. Hux had even dared to offer one to Kylo Ren, before Crait, before Snoke’s death, before Starkiller fell. He had told Kylo Ren to fix the broken kyber crystal within his lightsaber.

Kylo Ren had scoffed at him, rejected him. Nothing out of the ordinary then.

This, this now, is different and strange.

Hux watches Kylo Ren carefully now. He did not think that Kylo Ren still possessed his lightsaber. He didn’t think the Resistance would be that lenient.

To think, his duties may soon include mucking up after Kylo Ren’s mess.

“What did you get this?” Hux asks.

Kylo Ren clenches his jaw. “I… borrowed this. From Rey.”

And Kylo Ren had broken it too. Why was he not surprised?
Hux snorts. He walks slowly to the table and lays the parts out beside the tarine plant. It looks as though the most important parts are still there and salvageable.

“Can you.” Kylo Ren shifts. He looks away from Hux. “Can you fix it?”

“Thank your lucky stars,” Hux drawls out. “It seems the scavenger will never know of this.”

Kylo Ren’s brows twitch. He purses his lips together. His face gives off a wealth of emotion. Hux refuses to read it.

“Will that be all?” Hux asks coolly.

Kylo Ren nods, a mere dip of his head, turns around, and walks away.

Only when he is gone does Hux let out a breath, his heart hammering furiously in his chest.

“Water?” D-O asks again.

But this time, Hux nods and says, “Water would be appreciated. Thank you.”

D-O returns swiftly with a little mug filled with cold water. Hux drinks it all in one gulp before setting himself to work.

The crystal growth tray had not been difficult to fix.

It took less than a standard hour to piece together.

That said, how strange for Kylo Ren to come to him. How strange indeed.

* 

Of course, there is a problem.

One that Hux had not thought about until it was too late.

He picks up the crystal growth tray and then sets it down.

Kylo Ren had not remained while Hux had fixed the device. Hux had rejoiced at that then, to have his sanctuary to himself and his droids alone. He had assumed Kylo Ren would return at some point. But he had not.

And, now when the device is complete, Kylo Ren had not returned.

Hux frowns to himself.

There are options, of course.

1. He could wait for Kylo Ren to return again.

But that would be a surprise. And he hates surprises.

(How could he sleep if he did not know if Kylo Ren would appear or not?)

2. He could send D-O off with the damned thing.

But that would leave D-O terribly vulnerable, should Kylo Ren have a complaint with the repair job.
3. A suboptimal plan… He could go across the base himself.

But he did not know where Kylo Ren lurked. Or how Kylo Ren would react.

Hux lets out a long exhale. He picks up the crystal growth tray again and turns it over. He could keep it, of course, but Rey would not appreciate that. And he does not need another Force user out for his blood.

“D-O, shall you accompany me?” he asks, finally rising to his feet.

“Yes,” D-O says and rolls onwards, ever forwards.

He would have expected more strange looks, but mostly it seems that those on base don’t quite care. He doesn’t paint a frightening picture anymore.

Before, people were afraid of the Starkiller, of him.

But these people had seen him lain low. Bloodied and bruised. How much fear can he inspire when he wears soft grey sweatpants that are several sizes too large for him? How could he aspire fear when everyone knew just how weak he was?

“What? where to?” D-O asks.

“Where to indeed?” Hux mutters beneath his breath.

But he has known Kylo Ren for six years. He has studied his habits and placed multiple trackers on him over the years. A pity he did not do that here, but it seems like Kylo Ren no longer cares for belts.

He begins to walk ever closer to the jungles of Ajan Koss.

The sounds of the Resistance Base have all but died by the time that Hux runs across Kylo Ren.

Kylo Ren sits on the jungle floor, cross legged, his eyes shut. Hux studies him for a long minute, eyes tracing the bandage the Resistance had applied. What had happened to the old scar upon his face? The one the scavenger had dealt him?

*Had all of his scars disappeared?*

*Had he been wiped clean of the last eleven years of his life so easily?*

"Hux," Kylo Ren says without opening his eyes.

"I've brought you your crystal growth tray," Hux says. He does not move. He merely stands there, amongst the undergrowth, the device held in hand.

Kylo Ren opens his eyes. "So you have."

"Are you going to take it?" Hux asks, grinding out each word.

Slowly, Kylo Ren rises from the ground. He approaches even more slowly and takes the crystal growth tray from Hux's hand. He does not back away, staying persistently in Hux's space. Kylo Ren smells of ozone, of charcoal, and, most distinctly, of sweat.

Hux makes a face and back away. "Well then," he says stiffly. "If that will be all."
“Wait.”

Hux stills. He does not turn back around. “What is it?”

“Thanks.”

Hux huffs. He walks away. Never does he look behind him.

He does not know what he would have seen if he did.

*

Finn brings him broth along with a ration bar. He brings food for himself too, a thick, spicy stew. They eat together in uncomfortable silence. Hux is distinctly reminded of the shared mess halls of the Finalizer.

But they had both left those behind long ago.

Finn finishes his meal first, but does not scurry away as Hux would have expected. He waits, until Hux is done with his own meal, and then says, “There’s a First Order support group meeting later this cycle.”

Hux purses his lips.

It seems that everyone wants him to go. But how strange would it be to see such familiar faces after his betrayal of the Order?

His wounds are still healing, but Pryde’s blaster shot will leave a scar.

Will it hurt, then, when he sees those people he had condemned to death live amongst the Resistance, meek and mild? Like a nexu with its teeth removed?

“I think you could seriously benefit from talking to someone,” Finn says. “A trained professional,” he mutters beneath his breath. “How long do you think you can hide in the hangar, Hux?”

Hux does him a favor by pretending not to hear the latter half. “Do you know the names of those attending?”

Finn runs a hand over his face. He looks as though this very conversation has aged him. “Today’s group is mostly former Stormtroopers.”

“Names, designations.” Hux waves a hand. It didn’t matter. There is scarcely a distinction. For years, his father simply referred to him as boy.

“The former Stormtroopers have chosen names already. I’m not going to give you their designations.” He is firm, unmoving.

“I did not ask for just them,” Hux snarls back. “The officers then. Do you know their names?”

“The Stormtroopers are people too,” Finn says seriously. He won’t let it go. Won’t move past it. “You know that, right?”

Hux steeples his hands together to prevent himself from resting his face in his hands. He is so very tired.

“You know that?”
“What do you want to hear?” Hux grinds out. If he says yes, then Finn will rebuke him about the Stormtrooper program existing at all. If he says no, then Finn will not believe him anyway.

“I want to hear that you know that you were part of a system that stole children away from their families and forced them to be your soldiers,” Finn says. “That you forced those children to grow up and be murderers.”

Hux opens his mouth to rebuke the claim—

Finn holds up a hand and his words die in his throat. “You’ve been here for long enough and I still don’t know if you left the Order because you realized it was wrong or you just left to get away from Kylo Ren. And I don’t even know if you’ll ever realize that your life’s work was evil, that everything you have every done was to hurt others. But you’re... you’re you. You hide your injuries and hide from everybody else and only get along with droids.”

Hux blinks and blinks again. He cannot move.

He has felt this before, this feeling.

The Force surrounds him, holds him still and silent, binds him. His heart races, faster and faster, as though his heart is attempting to force its way out of his chest.

“And worst of all, I feel sorry for you.” Finn spreads out his fingers. His face is so open, honest. It’s disgusting.

Finn does not even realize what he is doing. When he lowers his hand, he lowers his tenuous grip on Hux.

“That’s your problem. I don’t care about your sentimentalities,” Hux says, sneering. But he cannot breathe. The hangar is far too small and too hot. He is trembling.

“I don’t miss being a Stormtrooper,” Finn says carefully. “I don’t miss having my identity taken away from me as a child. I don’t miss being molded into someone’s idea of a perfect soldier.”

Finn looks up. “Why did you do this to us?” he asks, gaze piercing.

A headache builds. It feels as though his head is caught by a vice. Nausea swims in the pit of his stomach. D-O rolls towards Hux and settles at his side, warbling some nonsense. Hux gasps and flinches back.

His father glanced from his report to his son. “I’ll make a proper soldier out of you yet, even if I have to beat your mother’s weakness out of you.”

The Stormtrooper program at the Academy. Conditioning and reconditioning. Again and again until there were no colors, no shapes.

Finn’s face falls. His eyes are dark, glossy. “You’re like me,” he says, words falling emptily. The headache that had so quickly built dissipates.

Hux rises from his seat so quickly that he knocks it over. “I am nothing like you,” he snarls. “But you are no better that Kylo fucking Ren!”

He doesn’t think. He just moves, all but running to the fresher. He slams the door shut and locks it.
His heart is racing, like it is trying to burst out of his chest.

“Hux?” Finn calls. “We need to talk. I-I didn’t… I didn’t think…”

But he does not want to hear any of it. None of the lies that spill from his mouth. He kneels before the toilet and presses his forehead against cool porcelain.

He throws up what little he had eaten.

“How are you?"

He does not answer. How could he?

What if Finn chose to Force choke him? Throw him into walls?

Kylo Ren did that before and here he was, accepted amongst the Resistance. Rey could use the Force that way too.

Were there more Force users hiding amongst the Resistance? All in hiding, taking amongst each other on how but to torture him for his faults.

“I’m sorry,” Finn says, ragged. He stands just on the other side of the fresher door. “I didn’t mean to use the Force against you. I-it just happened. That doesn’t excuse my actions. That doesn’t excuse your actions either.”

Silence.

“Are you okay?” Finn asks, so painfully genuine.

It would have been easier if Finn had just left and pretended that whatever happened between them never happened.

“I didn’t want to be trapped in a room with Kylo Ren. And now, here you are. A kripping Force sensitive,” Hux spits out. But his words sound weak, even to him.

Finn’s breath hitches in his throat.

“I never want another fucking Force user to do this to me,” Hux says, but his voice breaks. He sounds weak, useless, not at all respectable.

“Hux… come on out,” Finn says.

But Hux is silent.

If Finn wanted to, he could bring down the door. He could enter his mind again.

All Force users were the same. The Jedi. The Sith. They all thought they were special, all because they lucked out in some bizarre twist of fate, and had wizardry at their disposal. And they always, always used their power on others.

Like the older, bigger cadets who had killed the weak ones at the Academy.


He is lying. He must be lying.
“Water?” D-O asks quietly through the door.

Hux presses his palms against his eyes until he sees stars. “I would like to be alone now,” he says.

Finn hesitates but, after a while, he does leave.

*

He does not know how much time has passed when he hears the door to his hangar open.

One set of footsteps, heavy.

He already knows who it is.

D-O beeps warily and rolls back and forth, sliding against the ground noisily. “St-stay away,” the droid warns.

Hux rises to his feet quickly and opens the refresher door. D-O rolls into the fresher and halts at Hux’s side. Hux says nothing, but glares at Kylo fucking Ren.

Kylo Ren stares right back, his face painfully unexpressive.

“What are you here for?” Hux grinds out. D-O rolls backwards and forwards before it bumps against Hux’s knee.


*  

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*
Hey there! sorry about the late update again. due to my schedule, i will very likely be aiming to update every other week. fingers crossed for the best!
otherwise, you can find me here on tumblr and you can find me here on twitter.

"And what do you presume to gain from that?" Hux says, his lips pulling into an ever familiar sneer. Old habits die hard. He can feel his heart race, beating against his chest as though it wants to escape.

“You fixed the crystal growth tray,” Kylo Ren says, snarling right back at him. “I’ll teach you how —”

Hux holds up his hands. “That’s hardly the same,” he says. A simple repair was so far removed from lessons in the karking Force. D-O wheels back and forth rigorously, as though he is trying to wear a hole into the floor. “What do you want from me, Ren?”

Kylo Ren’s eyes shine with something strange. “I want you to not be afraid of me.”

“Hah?” Hux shakes his head. That is not something that Kylo Ren could decide. That is not even in the realm of possibility that Hux would be willing to entertain!

Of all the things Kylo Ren could have said, he chose the absolute most ridiculous option! It is horrible, like— like—

Like Kylo Ren is having a great big laugh at Hux’s expense.

And that would not do.

Hux pushes past Kylo Ren and urges D-O to follow him. MSE-6-22 blips its curiosity, but Hux does not answer any of its many questions. He’s got too many of his own.

Would Kylo Ren kill him now? Take him on as some sort of bizarre apprentice?

Burst into tears?

Destroy the interior of the hangar?

For now, he does nothing, as still as could be, right where Hux had left him.

Ridiculous. Kylo fucking Ren was always ridiculous and difficult to predict and it seems like he will never fucking change.

Kylo Ren reaches out and takes a hold of Hux’s wrist. He loosens his grip and lets it fall, so that only his pinkie wraps around Hux’s, as if they were mere children, making some sort of a promise to one another. “I could feel your fear,” Kylo Ren says slowly, as if Hux’s thought had spurred the wretched conversation on, as if any of this was normal.
“Really?” Hux says dryly. “Never would have guessed.”

Hux’s fear had never stopped Kylo Ren before. Not when Kylo Ren choked him. Not when he threw him. Not when he replaced him with karking Allegiant General Pryde.

Why would it matter? Why would anything change?

Why would Kylo Ren want him to live, now of all times?

(They never, ever cared for one another back when the First Order still stood strong. Why should they start now?)

Hux pulls away from Kylo Ren’s loose grip and, strangely, Kylo Ren lets him.

Hux walks away—right out of the hanger door. D-O and MSE-6-22 are quick to follow him.

He does not know where to go, but his feet bring him to the wilds of Ajan Koss. Amongst the trees, the din of the Resistance encampment fades until he wears nothing but whistle of wind, the chirping of strange birds, the calls of some far off primate.

But for how long must he wait for Kylo Ren to vacate the premises?

He didn’t think. He didn’t think at all.

Hux lets out a series of expletives before kicking a stone. It skitters off, viciously, and bounces against the ground several times.

“O-okay?” D-O asks and MSE-6-22 is quick to join it in questioning.

Hux runs his hands through his hair, likely messing it up in the process. What he would do for a tin of hair wax. “Yes,” he says, voice thick. “Of course.”

“Affirmative?”

“Yes,” Hux repeats but does not move.

He does not want to return to the Resistance base. He does not want to return to the hanger.

He does not know how long he is standing around when he receives a visitor.

“What is it?” Hux says sharply, turning to see a different Force user than expected.

Rey stands before him, looking only slightly harried. Some of her dark hair had fallen out of her usual style and surround her face in a layer of frizz. “I—” Rey shakes her head. “Ben said that you left your hanger,” she says, speaking so very gently, as though she were speaking to a frightened child.

He sneers at her. He doesn’t need her pity, nor the pity of anyone else. He could stand on his own two feet and not rely on anyone else in this Galaxy. “Oh? What else did he tell you, then?”

Rey frowns, but steels herself. “He said that he offered to teach you,” she says. “How to block out the Force.” She presses her lips into a fine line and crosses her arms over her chest.

“You don’t approve,” Hux says slowly.

Rey is quiet for too long. “No,” she says, finally. “I don’t… disapprove. It’s just strange to me.”
“And why is that?”

Her eyes slide away from him. She is a curious figure, the last of the Jedi supposedly, wrapped in those white robes of old. But she is so young, younger even than him. “He… once offered to train me,” Rey says. “In the ways of the Force.”

“More than once, surely,” Hux says dryly. “And you rejected him.”

He had overheard some of the discussion between Kylo Ren and Snoke.

“I rejected him,” Rey confirms. “Again and again. But… he wanted to teach me the Dark side. He tried to bring me to his side, your side. And I had a vision.”

Hux knows makes a strange face, because Rey shakes her head at him.

“I know what I saw,” Rey says, this time with more conviction. “I saw a dark throne. He and I were both upon it.”

Hux listens, but he cannot put much fate in her words. But really? The idea of them sharing a throne was more humorous than not. Kylo Ren would occupy most of it and leave only an uncomfortable sliver for Rey.

“And what about this vision is relevant?” Hux drawls out.

“I also saw the shape of his future.”

“Was the throne not to be in his future then?”

Rey scowls at him, something fierce. “This was an earlier vision,” Rey states. “But the future is constantly changing. Nothing is guaranteed.” She pauses. “This vision had no dark throne.”

“Tantalizing.”

“Shut up,” Rey says, but there is little fire to her words. “When I had seen the shape of his future, I saw him here. In the Light. With you.”

Hux recoils as though he has been hit.

A vision. Pah!

Now she is playing tricks on him.

“Scavenger—”

“My name is Rey. Rey Skywalker. You’ll use it or there will be no discussion.”

Hux sneers, baring all of his teeth. “Well then, careful Skywalker,” he says. “Because it seems that you are attempting too much with your words.”

Rey takes a deep breath and shuts her eyes. “I’ve told him about this vision,” she says, speaking so quickly that her words fall into one another. “A long time ago. I thought he changed, I really did, but then he— he lost his temper and attacked you. And now, not long after, he is offering to teach you powerful methods to block a Force user.”

Rey pauses.
“And I don’t know why.”

Rey wrings her hands together, blunt nails pressing into her palms, just the way he does when he tries to suppress his nerves. She ceases when she notices him staring.

“I don’t know why he’s doing this now and I’m afraid he will manipulate us both somehow.”

Hux shuts his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose. He knows how she feels and that is a terrible thing. “It’s fine,” Hux says wearily. Should he have a problem with Kylo Ren, the two of them could deal with it and not involve the Resistance. “He’s not going to betray you.”

He has nowhere else in the Galaxy to go.

And Kylo Ren was not that stupid.

Rey looks at him, doubtful.

Hux sighs. “I know him well enough that he won’t try something on you,” he says. If anything, he was in more danger.

“Will you take him up on his offer?” Rey asks quietly.

Hux shrugs one shoulder. He doesn’t quite know. He hasn’t even thought of it yet. “I would rather not be alone with him just yet,” he admits, and hates himself for how pitiful he sounds.

Rey nods. “Would… would you want me to walk you back to your hanger?” she asks.

He does not say yes.

(But he does not say no either.)

*

The hanger is empty when Hux is led there and, as soon as he is settled, Rey takes her leave.

MSE-6-22 busies itself by cleaning the floor. He does not want to think about how filthy Kylo Ren’s boots are or just what the other man had stepped in.

(If he shut his eyes and took a breath, he could smell the scent of ozone that so often lingered on Kylo Ren’s dark robes.)

D-O has taken it as its duty to harass Hux. First, chasing Hux until he would sit. Then bringing him two canteens of water.

Hux takes a drink from one grudgingly. He had been outside for a while and Ajan Koss’s weather did not quite agree with him. He takes a quick shower in the refresher with real water and changes into fresh, clean clothing.

The shirt is loose and a light, washed-out green, a lighter color than any of the other clothing that had been given to him. He finds dark brown trousers to go along with it.

When he sees his own reflection, he is struck by just how silly he looks.

Like he is pretending to be a smuggler.

Hux shakes his head and walks out of the fresher. He halts before he walks into Dameron, nearly
Dameron smiles as if he does not see Hux’s scowl. “There you are,” he says, so light and casual. “I was looking for you.”

“Surely Skywalker must have told you that she saw me returned to this hanger,” Hux says.

BB-8 has accompanied him this time and wheels itself around MSE-6-22. The two droids gossip in binary, with D-O adding in its own thoughts here and there. Utterly incorrigible.

“You’re especially prickly today, okay?” Dameron holds up his hands in surrender. “I can work with prickly.”

Hux raises a brow.

Dameron’s hands fall. “I brought you something.” He pulls a slim datapad from his jacket and boots it up. “There’s no connection to the holonet for some understandable reasons, but I’ve loaded it up with some books and holodramas you might want to check out. Oh, and one of the files contains the First Order support groups’ info. Might want to check it out.”

Hux takes the datapad. “Why are you giving me this?” he demands.

Dameron is quiet for a beat too long. “Because,” he says and looks away. “Because you need something else to do except repair stuff. Soon, we won’t have anything else to repair and we don’t want you to get bored. Who knows what super weapon you’d come up with then…”

He speaks so quickly that his words blur together.

Hux shakes his head. He settles the datapad down on the table, his fingers feeling as though they were burnt. “Is that so?” he says dryly.

“Yup,” says Dameron. “BB-8, time to go.”

BB-8 whirs its goodbyes before charging out of the hanger door.

Dameron lingers a second too long. “Promise me you’ll take a look at the support groups?”

Hux rolls his eyes and turns away.

“I’ll consider that a promise, Hugs!”

*

Hux does look into the datapad’s offerings eventually.

He is not sure just what about him or his reputation led to Dameron making often confusing choices in content. The books ranged from manuals that Hux could have written and edited himself (useless) to fluffy romances (slightly more useless) to historical fiction (…grudgingly more up his alley, though he would never admit this to Dameron).

The holodrama choices are equally puzzling but it is laughably easy to put one show on as mere background noise and have the whole damn thing play through.

At least it serves as something interesting for D-O and MSE-6-22, who are sure to inform him of every change as he repairs another speeder.
It is very unlike him to be attached to these fleeting images and romances. Of great tragedies that did not break the heroes. Of lovers spurned and the sweet, ineffable reunions.

(He wipes his face of grease, not tears, and refuses to acknowledge MSE-6-22 cooing, sympathetic warble.)

One such stupid holodrama ends when there is a knock on the hanger’s door.

Hux scowls and shuts the holopad off. He rises to his feet and marches to the door because it seems this visitor has decided to have manner’s.

His face falls when he sees just who it is.

Kylo fucking Ren stands outside the hanger door, BB-8 at his side, beeping in annoyance. There is a tray in Kylo Ren’s hands, a pile of sealed ration bars upon it.

“What do you want?” Hux asks.

Kylo Ren does not respond in words. He shoves the tray into Hux’s chest.

Hux snorts. He backs away from the door without shutting it and places the tray down onto the table. Really? How much did they think he could eat.

“Why are you here?” Hux asks, sighing.

“I offered to teach you,” Kylo Ren says. “I want to hear if you’d let me.”

What a joke.

“Do you really think you’d find a Padawan in me?” Hux says tiredly.

Kylo Ren tilts his head, as though he is considering it for a moment.

Ha! As if Hux would wear such a foolish costume, not to mention the even more foolish braid.

“You don’t need to be a Padawan to learn,” Kylo Ren says, so strangely diplomatic. “And I’m no Jedi.”

BB-8 warbles angrily at that and brandishes its little taser, as though that is much of a threat to the man. D-O rolls out to greet BB-8 and they exchange a flurry of noises.

Hux raises a single brow. He does not acknowledge the droids beside them, though, in a way, they are a strange comfort. “Does Skywalker know that you do not consider yourself a Jedi?”

Kylo Ren snarls at him. “Skywalker?” he says. “You call her Skywalker?”

Hux sniffs. Ridiculous. That is what he chooses to focus on? “Yes,” he says lightly. “That is her name, isn’t it.”

Kylo Ren leans forwards and then stops. He looks to the side, at empty air itself, and then shakes his head.

Ah. He’s still mad.

*What ghost does he chase now?*
“I said I don’t want you to be afraid of me,” Kylo Ren grinds out, like it pains him to admit it over and over again. “I want to have one person as my ally on this base. I want to have you as my confidant.”

“Tell me, Ren,” Hux draws out, a hand upon the hanger’s door. “Just why would you ever want that?”

“Because you’re you.”

Hux sighs. “That cannot be what you’ve come up with,” Hux says unkindly. He jabs Kylo Ren’s chest sharply and is satisfied when Kylo Ren takes a step back. “We were never acquaintances. We couldn’t stand to be in the same room together without clashing. We couldn’t get along on a ship that was three thousand meters long. You really think whatever this is will work out?”

If Hux were a rabid cur, then Kylo Ren was an attack dog, beaten and then praised for its anger. And they were always, always set against each other in those five years they’d been co-commanders, with the space in between ever being enough.

There was no love lost between them.

“Because you are you,” Kylo Ren repeats, with frightening intensity. “And you never change.”

Hux wavers.

After everything, Kylo Ren says he has not changed?

Did he not give up everything he had worked for his whole life? Did he not prepare himself for death? Even now, his chest aches from the wound Allegiant General Pryde left. Even now, it is unexpected that he is still alive.

Perhaps Kylo Ren can sense his whirlwind of emotions.

Or perhaps not.

(What did Kylo Ren know about how others functioned?)

(Why would Kylo Ren care about how he felt?)

(Could he not return to the past? To the damned day that Kylo Ren struck Snoke dead and Hux missed his chance to take the First Order into his hands and bring about Rae Sloane’s vision.)

Kylo Ren takes a measured step forwards. BB-8 lets out a long string of blips and beeps, but Hux is unable to decipher its message.

Not with Kylo Ren standing so close to him.

“You are the same as always,” Kylo Ren says slowly. “Your mind is a sharp point, with everything having its place. Your presence in the Force does not fluctuate, doesn’t waver. You are so entrenched in your sense of self, in your convictions, that I think you’re incapable of changing. You’re an anchor to me.”

Hux would much rather be a ballast to him, he thinks. So that he could drag Kylo Ren down, down, down with him as he fell. So that Kylo Ren would drown.

There is a ghost of a smile on Kylo Ren’s face, one that does not reach his eyes.
“Eat,” Kylo Ren tells him. “I will teach you if you are willing.”

Hux scowls at him. He has never liked Kylo Ren telling him what to do. Just what about him makes Kylo Ren think he will be an apt student?

“Are you going to stay here?” Hux says, dripping venom. “To watch me eat.”

“Should I?” Kylo Ren asks, his voice low.

Hux shakes his head.

Kylo Ren snorts, a soft exhale. “I will meditate. Outside.” He walks right out of the hanger, but pauses for a moment. “Join me. When you are ready.”

The hanger door slides shut then.

Hux scoffs. “Pompous ass.”

BB-8 warbles out agreement.

Hux sneers. “You came with him willingly. You don’t get to complain.” He picks up one of the sealed ration bars and opens it. He tears off small pieces with his hands and eats slowly.

Perhaps, if he took long enough, Kylo Ren will become frustrated and storm off.

D-O wheels over to him and bumps him gently. “Water,” it says, and does not quite give him a choice.

“Thank you.” Hux takes the cup of offered water and drinks deeply. He blinks and sets the cup down.

When had ration bars become so dry?

He cannot finish the ration bar he had started and so he sets it back onto the platter. He waits, staring into the air, and does nothing.

This time, BB-8 prods him none too gently.

Hux scowls at the droid. “Really?” he says. “You are so eager to return to him? My, I was not aware that Dameron chose a self-destructive programing for you.”

Again, BB-8 prods him sharply.

“B-Be nice,” D-O reprimands.

BB-8 lets out a long sigh and puts away its tool.

Hux stands up all at once. In a way, BB-8 is right, though he would not admit it aloud. The sooner he went along with the farce, the sooner Kylo Ren would be on his way, to ruin someone else’s day.

Outside, Kylo Ren sits on the grass. His hands rest upon his knees. His eyes are shut.

If Hux had access to his blaster, Kylo Ren would make for an excellent target right about now.

“You know,” Kylo Ren says. He opens a single eye and dares to look amused. “You think very loudly.”
“You don’t see me as a threat?” Hux says, not kindly.

“Nope.” Kylo Ren lifts his chin in challenge. “How could you ever be a threat?”

Before Hux could wring him out verbally, Kylo Ren gestures at the grass beside him.

“Sit,” Kylo Ren says.

Out of sheer distaste, Hux remains standing, a sneer upon his face. “Explain first then,” Hux says, quickly, “just what you think you are doing?”


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Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Edit 3/15: Corrected "hanger" to "hangar" oops! I think I might have used the word 'hangry' too many times and it got stuck in my head.

Meditation involves paying attention to one’s breathing and not letting one’s mind wander. An absolute riot, given just who was his instructor.

It seems to not be a useful technique. Hux had certainly witnessed how poorly Kylo Ren’s meditation worked out through those six damned years within the First Order. How many consoles and training droids had been victim to one of Kylo Ren’s rampages.

But the breathing techniques, Hux could regretfully admit, are of some use.

In, rest. Out, rest.

Hux fills out forms about the reconditioning program, all that he could remember. His father’s program, his own suggestions. The recommended method of deprogramming. Everything that he would consider part of his legacy, he helps to undo.

In, rest. Out, rest.

To tear down the very foundations the First Order built its strength on. Again and again.

In, rest. Out, rest.

And so meditation ‘lessons’ took place every morning, while the Resistance base was still sleepy and still, with BB-8 watching the unimpressive results.

“You need to stop thinking,” Kylo Ren tells him.

Ah, no wonder Kylo Ren thought meditation was easy. The man never thought.

“You need to anchor yourself to what is going on right now,” Kylo Ren continues. “You need to remain in the moment.”

Hux’s breath stutters at that. He raises a single brow. “An anchor,” he says, stretching the word out. “Should I find myself an enemy then and make strange, uncalled for proclamations?”

Beside him, Kylo Ren sits on the grass. He is dressed in grey robes that don’t fit him properly, his hair tied back into a simple bun. His clothing is the most Jedi-like thing about him. Otherwise, he scowls fiercely, so fiercely that perhaps he would put fear into any other average observer. “We are not enemies,” he says, still scowling.

Hux mutters unkind things beneath his breath. “If you had a mirror…”

Kylo Ren raises a hand and touches his ear gingerly. But the scowl remains steady.

It has been four days of meditating regularly and yet never once has Kylo Ren approves of his
Too stiff. Too agitated. Too everything.

(It isn’t like he wants praise from Kylo Ren, just a break in the flow of criticisms.)

“That’s enough for today,” Kylo Ren finally says, just when Skywalker arrives with a tray in hand.

“Ben,” she says in greeting.

Kylo Ren gives her a wary look before rising to his feet and walking away. BB-8 trails after him, letting a long, shrill call.

“That went well,” Skywalker says weakly. She shakes her head.

Hux rises and brushes grass and debris from his clothing. “Just as well that it is over,” Hux says dryly. He has not learned a thing, not really, save for how to breathe— and saying that aloud would be akin to humiliation.

(The Starkiller General Hux had to learn to breathe properly! Ahahaha! What a laughing stock he would be.)

Inside the hangar, Hux clears the table of blueprints and frees Skywalker of the tray she holds. There is a bowl of steaming broth, several fruits, and a ration bar. Lovely.

“He doesn’t like that you’ve taken on the Skywalker name,” Hux says aloud, not looking at her.

Skywalker snorts. “As if anyone else is using it,” she muses darkly.

A scavenger to the end. Suits her just as well.

(She looks more like a Skywalker than Kylo Ren. He just looks like a discount Sith lord who didn’t properly laundry his clothing.)

“I’ll leave you to it,” Skywalker says, punctuating this with a nod.

And so she does.

He cannot help but watch as Skywalker balls her fists at her sides, her nails digging into her skin. He knows, very well, of the crescent-shaped marks that her nails will leave behind.

* 

Days pass in this new strange way.

Hux wakes up and soon after Kylo Ren comes to his door. Outside, while the base wakes, he and Kylo Ren meditate. Slowly, Kylo Ren’s corrections grow less frequent. Slowly, Kylo Ren nods more than he corrects.

Hux had thought he would never live to see that day.

Slowly, the lessons expand—creation of mental walls, organization of thoughts, growing awareness of where one begins and ends. Kylo Ren is very direct when it comes to teaching him this, explaining each element fully. He is, however strangely, patient when it comes to these matters.
But Hux is not Force sensitive. He will never be Force sensitive. He has put that far behind him.

“I want to test you,” Kylo Ren says. He has not moved, not even a little bit. “Want to test what you’ve learned.”

But Hux shudders.

He is not ready for that, not ready for Kylo fucking Ren to use the Force against him.

(Perhaps, he thinks darkly, he will never be ready for such a thing.)

Kylo Ren waits for an answer.

“No,” Hux says. “I don’t want you to do that.”

He could picture Kylo Ren in the interrogation chambers on the Finalizer. How many times had Hux waited outside of those doors as people cried out in fear, in pain? How many times had Kylo Ren broken people, as a child breaks a toy?

(How many times had he stood there and listened, greeting Kylo Ren with a smile when he emerged from the interrogation chamber, smelling of ozone and power? How many times had he not intervened?)

No, he would not be willing to put himself in Kylo Ren’s hands this way.

Kylo Ren bows his head. He takes a large breath and holds it before letting it out slowly. “If you would not have me test your barriers,” he says, “would you allow Rey?”

Hux blinks.

He had not thought Kylo Ren capable of such compromise.

“Perhaps,” Hux says slowly. Perhaps. “I would have to think about it first.”

Kylo Ren does not react as intensely as Hux might expect when confronted with rejection. “Mn.”

Both hesitate then, as if unsure of what to do next.

There is a quiet, fragile moment where neither man stirs.

Kylo Ren breaks it, as he has broken so many things before, and rises to his feet. “That will be all today,” he says and leaves before Hux has the opportunity to say anything more.

Hux watches Kylo Ren go, eyes trailing on his tall, broad figure until he disappears amongst the growing buzz of the base.

*

Hux takes on more of his original projects rather than repairs from then on. The Resistance Base had swelled in size, with First Order defectors and former Stormtroopers, with folk who had joined for the very last battle, and now with people who came to see the Resistance as the birthplace of a new form of government.

(Hux refused to think too much on this topic. Hux refused to leave his hangar and devoutly refused to think about the government, if only because of the sheer ridiculous of its name.)
(He also stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that there’s any future for him outside of a cell, should the New New Republic become an actual government worthy of respect.)

The biodome seemed promising, now more than ever, when there are so many mouths to feed.

The blueprints had been easy to draw up, pulling from some of the work he’d done for Starkiller. The framework is ready. Now it just needs to be tested.

Dirt is easily acquired. MSE-6-22 cheers him on unnecessarily as Hux shovels dirt into the biodome.

If anyone wanted complain about the mess outside his hangar, he doesn’t think they’d work up the courage to do so, seeing it is the Starkiller himself.

General Hux, gardening. Would anyone believe it?

Inside, Hux rescues seeds from various fruits he’d been given. He plants them one by one, ensuring there is proper distance between them.

“Water?” D-O offers.

“Yes, thank you.” Hux takes the canteen and overturns it, watering his first set of test subjects. Hux dusts off his hands, leaning back to look at what he’s done.

“Fruit?” D-O asks, wheeling back and forth. “Growing fruit s-soon?”

“Well, it depends how effective my prototype is,” Hux says, more to himself than anyone else.

As of now, the biodome just looks like spare parts hobbled together and filled with dirt. Which is to say, the biodome looks just as well as one could have expected.

All that is left is the wait.

* 

If Kylo Ren notices the biodome, then he does not bring any attention to it. Meditation proceeds as usual. Silent, but for the sound of their own breaths and the far-off noise of the Resistance, and then followed by lessons.

(If, for a brief and strange moment, he feels the little strings of life cautiously extend from the biodome, he says nothing.)

“You’re doing… well,” Kylo Ren says.

Hux opens one eye. He had not noticed time pass by, but already the sun has creeped higher into the sky. Perhaps he had fallen asleep for a little while.

Kylo Ren tilts his head and rises to his feet. He offers his hand and Hux lets himself be helped up. He feels as though his head is floating amongst the clouds.

Kylo Ren grants him the ghost of a smile. “May the Force be with you,” he says.

Hux blinks. How does one generally respond to such a thing? “And also with you,” he says.

Kylo Ren furrows his brows. “Right.” And then he leaves.
Was may the Force be with you a Jedi farewell?

Hux huffs and returns to the hangar.

*

He reviews the various First Order Support Groups. Not because he wants to go, but because he needs the information. Information is power, has always been power. And he has put off this particular inquiry for far too long.

Now, more than ever, does he need to know who still lives.

He quite nearly drops the datapad he’d been given.

“No, not quite,” Hux says, hating how reedy his voice becomes.

The names haunt him, for he knows each member of this day’s support group.

*Mitaka, Dopheld.*

*Unamo, Nastia.*

*Opan, Tritt.*

*Bell, Katie (Formerly Designated KT-1138).*

“What’s wr-wrong?” D-O asks and cocks its head.

“Perhaps you were right,” Hux says slowly, setting aside the datapad. “Perhaps I am malfunctioning.”

D-O lets out a long sigh before rolling back and forth. MSE-6-22 joins them, swiftly pushing forth a box of mangled droids.

“Right,” Hux says, taking the box before MSE-6-22 managed to damage itself. “I will focus on more productive tasks.”

He finds most of a First Order astromech and sighs when he reads its designation. “Oh, BB-9E, what has happened to you?”

MSE-6-22 lets out a little sigh before telling D-O of the long, sordid history of Kylo Ren and his long suffering droid. D-O replies at the appropriate moments and is appropriately scandalized to hear of the destruction Kylo Ren wrought.

While the two droids gossip, Hux repairs BB-9E slowly, until all that is left of the poor droid’s misadventure are a few scrapes.

“Rebooting…” Hux says just under his breath.

BB-9E wakes up and lets out a long string of binary that amounts to little more than furious cursing. Then BB-9E notices just who is repairing it and apologizes even more furiously.

“BB-9E, I am no longer a General,” Hux explains very slowly.
BB-9E takes notice of MSE-6-22 and demands the droid tell it what has happened. BB-9E has always been a bossy little creature. This task, however, MSE-6-22 takes to with relish, divulging all the dirty details of the First Order’s fall.

“It’s fine,” Hux says, pinching his nose. “You are safe here, BB-9E. If anything the Resistance treasures their astromechs…”

BB-9E lets out a long, shrill whistle and then rolls furiously to investigate for itself.

“No, wait,” Hux calls out, before cursing. BB-9E took after its master as always. He very much does not run after the droid, but he does break out into a brisk walk.

It is just his luck that a furious BB-9E rolls right into BB-8, Dameron at its side.

“Woah there!” Dameron says, holding a tray up higher. “Almost made me drop lunch, my buddies.”

BB-9E and BB-8 do not head his complaint and instead begin to bicker, whirling about each other and Dameron.

“I see you’ve gotten yourself a BB unit. Couldn’t resist, huh?” Dameron says. He steps very carefully over a disgruntled BB-9E and past Hux, into the hangar. The two droids brandish small weapons at one another. This does not seem to trouble Dameron whatsoever.

“It was Ren’s,” Hux cannot help but say.

Dameron stills. “Ren?”

Hux refuses to budge or to clarify. He had been so used to calling Kylo Ren by his chosen last name back then, and by his full chosen name now. Would Dameron find it strange?

“You do like calling people by their last names,” Dameron remarks finally. “How do you manage with Finn?”

Hux rolls his eyes. “I wish he would choose a surname already. It would make my job much easier.”

Dameron raises a brow. He sighs. “He could take mine.”

Now it is Hux’s turn to raise a brow. “Is there not a rule against fraternization in the Resistance?” Hux drawls.

Slowly, Dameron touches his temples. “There’s a lot to unpack there,” he says slowly. “How about you eat your lunch and I rescue BB-8 from your vicious droid? What’s his name anyway? BB-H8?”

Hux scrunches his nose. “It’s designation is BB-9E.”

“Riiiiight, riiiiight,” Dameron says. He leaves with a half-smile still on his face.

Too late Hux realizes that he had not disowned BB-9E as his droid.

Hux shakes his head again. “Dameron.”

“Don’t want to see me go just yet?”
Hux almost tells him to go hark himself, just because. But he swallows down his annoyance.
“Would you,” he says, wetting his lips. “Would you ask Skywalker to come here? I need to talk to
her.”

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