Lodestar
by ballvvasher

Summary

Lodestar: a star that leads or guides; Polaris; one that serves as an inspiration, model, or guide; a guiding tenet or principle.

Sequel to Firelight and the third and final installment to the Son of Mine ‘verse. The dark side encroaches as Kylo Ren carries the weight of the consequences of his confrontation with his master. Hux’s faith and allegiance with the First Order is tested when an unexpected tragedy nearly pushes him over the edge. Across the galaxy, their son faces many obstructions in his Jedi training, discovering exactly what it means to be the son of Kylo Ren and General Hux. Alliances shift, enemies are formed, but love remains to be the most indestructible force in the universe.

Content warning for brief mpreg, suicidal ideations, attempted suicide, body horror, medical gore, brief eating disorder, child abuse (emotional/mental), mentions of Hux’s sexual assault that occurred in Sunstroke (Part One of this whole series). I highly recommend reading this series from the beginning before starting this one.
And here we are! The third and final part to this verse. I will give you all a warning for drama and violence and terrible things happening to our beloved Kylux ‘ohana. But while there is tragedy, please remember there is always hope because that’s what #StarWars is #about. That being said, please read all warnings.

I only ask one thing and I hope this doesn't sound too silly: If you can, please refrain from harsh comments about what I’ve done to the characters/how evil I am and that I better make everything okay/that I should stop being so redundantly unnecessarily evil to the characters because as you can see I’ve finally added the shiny golden “Angst with a Happy Ending” tag! My favorite tag in AO3 existence :D :D :D I debated not having it up there for spoiling sake but I think there are quite a lot of tragic things that happen that might make people upset if I didn’t have that up there.

I’ve been told after acknowledging critique to “write what I want and screw what people say” but while I see the merit in that, I do believe readers are entitled to NOT get their hearts broken. (and while I do have thick skin I do get upset if someone isn't enjoying reading something but they make themselves read it anyway??) Again, thank you all for reading and I hope you enjoy the rest of the ride!
“Hux, if you’re receiving this, I want you to know that I’m alive, and I made it off Snoke’s moon. Gods, I pray you’re alright…Something’s happened to me. Something that I cannot fully understand just yet, but when I do…I’ll be able to fix it. And I’ll return to you as soon as I’m able. Please know that I’m distancing myself from you in order to protect you, and when I do what I need to do I’ll come for you. And Marin. We’ll find him, and we’ll pick up where we left off, all three of us—”

“General Hux,” interrupts Colonel Mitaka through the refresher door, gloved fist rapping on the durasteel in a rude awakening.

Hux scrambles to pocket the cherished holorecording in his hand, Ren’s remorseful holographic face blipping away. He swabs at his mouth, boring into the withered reflection staring back at him.

“Enemy insurgents have breached our security. I don’t know how it happened, Sir, but the biometrics have been tampered with as well as any surveillances and security measures. They must have had help from someone we believed to be a loyalist,” Mitaka says.

The rest of Mitaka’s urgent message falls to deaf ears. Gagging the rest of his stomach contents into the refresher’s toilet bowl, Hux divulges a pained whimper. He palms his heaving pregnant belly—comically large under his greatcoat. It’s almost time.

Sobering, he clears his throat. “Is it the Resistance?” Hopefulness bubbles up from his heart. An involuntary, heartsick hope to be reunited with the son he’d left behind. It’s been over eight months since he’d last seen his son.

Not for the lack of trying. After the first week of life returning to the First Order, Hux was livid to find that the Resistance had moved from their base on D’Qar. And along with them, Marin. His only hope to being reunited with him is Ren, who has a far greater knowledge of the Jedi and the Resistance than he ever let on.

“Negative. Likely it’s more rebels, but we can’t be sure. No one’s done this much damage before,” Mitaka says. Of course, there was Starkiller, but now’s not the time to send the general into one of his hysterical depressions.

Hux glowers into the toilet’s swirling water. Blast it. Factions of the First Order who have proven themselves disloyal to Phasma have attempted to steal weapons and intelligence before, but never so much as an outright invasion. No one would be so bold. No one except Ren—but this star destroyer’s scanners and his meager Force senses tell him Ren is far, far away. All he has of Ren is the transmission he intercepted months ago. It’s been radio silence ever since.

He lurches around a spasm of his abdomen, groaning in discomfort. “Damn you, Ren,” he curses, hopeless.

“Sir, we need you back on the bridge. We’re not in a state of emergency just yet but we should get this under control before the High Enforcer finds out.” Phasma, the First Order’s present leader, instructs all her men and women to refer to her not at Supreme Leader, not a military rank like her
previous title of captain, but as the High Enforcer of all Stormtrooper garrisons and battleship fleets.

Hux cradles the restless lifeforms swimming around his gut in effort to soothe them. None of his attempts do a thing if not anger them more. Groaning, Hux splashes fresh water from the spout on his face. He straightens. One more victory against the rebels and then he’ll take his leave.

He tugs his coat over his belly, buttoning it at the waist, and slides open the refresher door.

“Everything alright?” Mitaka raises his brows.

Hux curls his lip. “You need not concern yourself.”

“Perhaps it was something you ate,” remarks Mitaka, eyes dropping to Hux’s conspicuous weight gain.

His subordinates never quite held him in as high esteem as they once had since his return to the Finalizer. “I trust you can hold your tongue while we finish obliterating those traitors,” Hux spits. His stomach spazzes again, violent. Victory against the insurgents might not be forthcoming after all.

His pregnancy with Marin had lasted a fraction of the time as this one. It’s been over half a year that he’d carried the twins. The pain is bearable this round, almost nonexistent until recent days. After the third month of gradual growth and mild discomfort, he’d assumed he’d have all nine to go, as human females do. But the twins want to come right now as if triggered by this out of the blue siege to their ship.

No one on this ship—no one in the whole galaxy—knows he’s bearing children. Nevertheless, he has a plan for their birth. He’s to leave and deliver them at a safe house in an undisclosed location.

“What—” he winces, choking on a gag. “What do you know about the insurgents?”

“Unfortunately not much. We’ve sealed off the east wing with as many troops we can spare but it’s like they’re invisible to our measures.” The east wing is where the central computers feed into, controlling all star destroyers in their fleet, computers harboring sensitive First Order data only privy to the highest ranking officers. Base access codes, weapons development reports, schedules—priceless information, and in the wrong hands can be used against them.

Mitaka worries his brow, because General Hux doesn’t appear to be too concerned about that. Only the upset state of his growing gut and the ever present obsession with the disappearance of Kylo Ren.

“I trust you’ll be able to handle—” Hux breaks into a shout, shrill and piercing in the hall of the
bridge. Several sweating officers raise their brows.

“Sir, do you need to be taken to medical?” Mitaka asks, skeptical.

“Go back to your station. You're acting commander,” he pants, groaning around a fresh swell of ache.

“Where are you going?”

“I'll contact you in a few hours!”

Mitaka swallows his protest. Ever since Hux had returned from exile, he's been irritatingly more irate and prone to lapses in judgement. Much like his old commander, Kylo Ren. But dodging crises—on the Finalizer, no less? Unthinkable. He'll regret to inform the High Enforcer about this. After he's taken care of the insurgents.

Hux trudges to the closest hangar, fisting his blaster. Clamoring aboard the nearest command shuttle, he programs the navi-computer for his prepared safe house—a small space station and fortified bunker filled with an array of medical droids and supplies to ensure the twins can be brought into the galaxy without any risk of danger.

A cloaked figure loads up a gun, launching a homing device on the underside of the wing to Hux’s retreating command shuttle. Blinking an ominous, threatening red.

The figure melts back into the shadows, boots stomping a threatening mantra towards its own hidden ship.

Aboard the shuttle, Hux chokes around spasmodic pants, cradling his heaving belly. Tackiness of sweat coats every stretch of skin. There are only a few more minutes between him and his destination before his shuttle can dock safely. He uses this time to whimper like a feeble waif.

The twins are too early.

Marin isn’t here. Ren isn't here.

He doesn't know what he's supposed to do with two newborn babies. He doesn't have a single clue what to do past surgically removing them. And he never operates without a plan. ‘To be without a plan is to have already failed,’ his father used to say. What would his father think of him now, running from a battle, teary-eyed and struggling to right himself against his litter of bastard children?

Maybe there's a world he can monitor them on. Not a wasteland, but a civilized, structured system where they can grow without lacking any of the basic necessities. Maybe back on his homeworld of Arkanis. Maybe he can take a longer leave from the First Order, just until he finds Ren again.

He can have the twins and have the power. They can carry on his legacy. He won’t leave them behind. He can do this. He can—

The twins squirm around within their tight confines, and he lurches, groaning in agony. “Soon, I promise.” Tears well in his eyes, lamenting for the son he'd left behind. Soon he'll go back for him, once things are settled with the twins. When Ren returns, when he stands a chance against the Resistance’s Jedi. When he figures out wherever the hell they are!

“I'm not letting you go,” he vows to their unborn ears.
Hux gasps in relief when the shuttle seals against the station, preparing for safe passage in a matter of seconds.

Clamoring off the ship, he beelines for the panel on opposite side of the airlock and thumbs open the lock that yields to the coding of his genetic material. Hux activates the stationed medical droids. “I need you to tell me if they’re supposed to come out,” he whimpers to the droid parked by the airlock.

From the perch of the surgical table, Hux grates his fingernails along his palms while the droid makes its readings. “Please remain calm. The infants are ready to be removed immediately. Preparing anesthesia,” vocalizes the droid.

“No! No anesthetic. I need to be awake.” He loathes being unconscious. Anything can happen when he’s unconscious.

“Anesthesia highly recommended. Of you are aware there is a chance your body might react and hurt itself or the infants. Preparing anesthesia.”

“Fucking droids,” he hisses. Droids were the only solution. Droids can be programmed. He couldn't trust any human surgeons to deliver the babies safely. Blinking in panic around the room —accounting for the basins and incubators for the infants upon delivery, blankets and bottles of formula, medicine and clothing.

These materials he’s hoarded over the past months have done little else but goad fear. Fear of his future with the First Order, the fear of what the fate lies ahead of his and Ren’s new creations, bleeding through every nerve.

He doesn’t know what is gonna happen once he wakes up with two whole human beings in his care. He’s had months to plan, strategize, organize. But after everything, only managed to get lost along the strange, precarious path he’s treading. It would be easiest if I never wake up, he thinks, a devilish taunt.

The droid administers the anesthesia. Hux fights against it but eventually submits to the drugs, red-rimmed eyes fluttering closed.

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The boy crushes a fistful of leaves in his palm. Crunch. He scoops up another. Crunch.

Marin senses a great disturbance in the Force. Unfortunately his Force skills are far too inept to be of any use. He crushes more leaves in contempt, swallowing the plaguing weariness.

Rey positions two wooden training staffs in each of her fists. “Marin,” she calls from across the grassy training field, sunlight lining her done-up hair. “Where were you?”

Marin looks up at her from his crouch. “I’ve been here most of the afternoon.” He likes to sit alone and think.

“You were reaching again. With your mind. That can be very dangerous if your mind doesn’t have a destination.” While his telekinetic skills are completely nonexistent, Marin’s other mental abilities like telepathy are of no match, other than that of their Jedi master, Luke.
“Something terrible is about to happen. Somewhere far away. I can’t explain it.” Marin peers up into the bright blue sky.

Rey kneels in front of him. She extends her own senses but connects with the universe as she normally would. “What is it?”

“I don’t know.” Frustrated, he scatters his destroyed leaves in the gentle wind, smacking his hands clean.

“Marin, I promise you things are going to be alright. You have to trust your senses. Whatever it is, you’ll see it.”

He nods, scrutinizing the ground. Rey is very wise. He prefers to listen to her advice over Master Luke’s.

“Are you ready to practice your form?”

“Why does it matter? I can’t use the Force as you do.” No matter how hard he’s tried, physically manipulating objects is impossible, as it always has been.

“I’ve told you before that it’ll take time. Come on. Just show me your form once more. Then we’ll join Grandmother for dinner,” she proposes, in an attempt to keep him occupied with something other than sulking.

“Will you do it with me?”

Rey smiles. “Of course.”

In tandem they perform the simple training form. Both right hands fist the ends of the staffs, flourishing the porous wood that which mimics the weightlessness of a plasma lightsaber blade. Soundlessly, the training staffs whip right, left, jab, right, left, parry. Parry, parry, jab, and a few combinations more.

Rey’s brow purses. The boy’s lips are twisted, tightened with woe. She pauses, staff hovering in the air. “I know it’s hard to speak up about your feelings, but tucking them away will only make them hurt more.”

“I’m not thinking about anything,” he grumbles, completing the form without her. Slashing at the air as if dismembering an imaginary foe.

“Marin, I’ve been in your shoes. Standing right where you are.”

“It’s not the same. What happened to you is not the same.”

Rey wilts. “I understand. You know I do.”

“No, you don’t!” Marin hurls the staff as far as he can. “Master Luke hid you from danger because he didn’t have a choice. And because he loved you and thought what he was doing was helping you.” There are no tears, only gravelly, seething anger. “My parents left me because they had something better to do. They’ve never cared about me and they never will!”

It takes her careful Jedi resolve to not be enticed to argue with Marin’s release. It’s rare he talks about the men who left his life in shambles. “They left you because they were afraid of what would have happened if they stayed.”
“They left me because they didn’t want me. They never had. I’m tired of everyone feeling sorry for me. They don’t care about me and I don’t care about them—and that’s that! You’re the ones who won’t accept it. Not me.” Marin glowers bodily, face taut with contempt in a way that Rey swears she could have been speaking to Kylo Ren.

Rey straightens. “Enough training for today. Go on and get your staff. There's no sense in disrespecting something that doesn't belong to you.”

The reprimand appears to get through to the boy. He slumps, stalking in the direction of the discarded staff.

On their hike back to base, Marin snivels a small, trepid breath. “I'm sorry for yelling and throwing your staff.”

Rey nods. “I accept your apology.” A few more steps, and she shifts back to empathy. “You mustn’t lose hope. I sense there are new changes for you.”

Change is his only constant these days. Over eight months ago he was napping in his hovel on his homeworld. And now he's training to be a Jedi, or whatever sorry excuse for one he's set on becoming.

Back then he was dreaming of training with his great warrior father, and now he boils at the thought of Kylo Ren’s indifference and neglect, his selfishness and cruelty. How Hux chose Kylo Ren over him since the day he was born.

“I sense Grandmother got the cheese bread again,” Marin quirks his lip, focusing on the present. It’s the only way he can keep on.

“Oh, the one with the blue swirl in the middle?”

“I hope so.” He and Rey love to talk about food, like cheese breads and sweets, rich foods, salty foods, crunchy foods, spicy foods.

In tandem they walk to meet General Organa and Master Luke for dinner.

General Organa’s homestead is a fortress on the previously uninhabited, forested planet of Ithor. Once a tourist destination in the time before the Clone Wars and the Galactic Civil War, Ithor is now home to the most recent Resistance base of covert operations. General Organa delegated her faction to move from D’Qar to operate on Ithor as a precaution against whatever heinous weapon the First Order is constructing next.

Her Ithorian home is situated between two green hills, lined with a few duraglass windows on its face. Underground, there are broad tunnels connecting it to various areas of the base. It’s a hub, a center where the Jedi commune after training outside, joining the general to her brother and his handful of apprentices.

“Leia,” Luke continues their heated argument in her kitchen, putting away the bag groceries for his work-weary sister. “How the hell did Ben manage to conceal the Falcon from our scanners? Han couldn’t even do that.” They often talk about Han, attempting to keep him alive. He always finds a way into their daily conversations.

“Either he had, or he’s been in hyperspace all this time. Both are likely. Not sure which one I’d prefer,” General Organa laments. Not only have they been scanning the galaxy for him, but they’ve been comming the Falcon’s transceivers nonstop for months. Ben hasn’t sent a ping, or any hint of an indication he cares.
Luke organizes the restock of foods like he used to do for Aunt Beru on Tatooine. “Marin’s holding onto the anger. I don’t know if there’s anything I can do.” Luke’s worst fear is that history will repeat itself. Skywalkers are destined for greatness at the sacrifice of others. And themselves. “Someone has got to get through to him. I sense darkness in his heart.”

General Organa glares at her brother. “You think I don’t know that?”

There isn’t time for their argument to persist when a familiar pair of footsteps skids into ear range. The general welcomes Rey and Marin inside, shaking off the heaviness.

“Is Finn coming?” Marin asks, small. Hopeful. Finn is really busy on base when he's not training with Master Luke. Marin trains under Rey with the physical stuff, like sparring and object manipulation. It would be nice to spend more time with Finn.

“I don't think so. He's meeting off-world with several informants,” Grandmother tells him. She slices a big piece of cheese bread for him. But he isn't as excited now that he knows Finn’s gone.

Marin casts his eyes low, brows pinching. “Why didn't he tell me?”

Sadness passes through Rey’s eyes. “He meant to, but the mission was time sensitive.”

“It would only have taken a second,” he grumbles. Sometimes all it takes is a single second to carry the most weight.

“We can scold him when he comes back,” Luke consoles. Marin’s anger and contempt is a bitter acceptance that no child should have to succumb to.

Marin’s worry melts away a little. Finn really is thoughtful, kind, and considerate. He just forgot this one time.

Still, everyone seems to be moving along just fine. Rey’s getting stronger, Luke’s helping Grandmother with whatever it is they do in the Resistance, Finn’s even more of a hero like Poe Dameron—who still doesn’t like Marin very much, and even Grandmother is smiling more. Everyone is doing better except him. Marin picks at his cheese bread.

“I'm gonna go for a walk,” he mutters with finality, interrupting Rey and Luke’s conversation about lightsaber katas.


“My stomach doesn't feel up to eating right now. Can you please box it up for me?”

“Of course. Don't forget your coat this time, Marin,” she says. She had acquired a new coat for him for Ithor’s winter season, brown leather like Finn’s. He hardly remembers to wear it.

He steps away from the table to snatch the coat from the wall and leaves the three other Skywalkers to their meal.

In the woods of Ithor there are many different species, all shapes and sizes of rodents and birds and insects. He likes to be around them to feel their noise, so he jogs to the closest tree line.

He sees Chewie lugging a crate on a hand truck. He likes Chewie’s noises so he skids over to see if he needs any help.
“Are those going to Grandmother?” he asks, craning his head to Chewie’s height.

Chewie hums and nods his head affirmative. He holds up a hairy hand, and tugs out a little case and hands it over to Marin and points to him. It’s a gift.

Curiously, Marin opens the case. Embedded in the top and bottom halves are rows of identical marble-like trinkets. “What are these?” he grins, bewildered.

Adjusting the stacks of crates so they won’t topple and make a mess, Chewie holds out his hands, grunting along with his movements. He pantomimes launching a stone on a spitter, or a slingshot as Finn called it.

Marin breaks out into a grin. “For me? What do they do?”

Chewie nods his head to the tree line and holds out his own slingshot, also made of wood but his elastic band is much larger to accommodate his sizeable strength. The last time Marin had his slingshot he was on the moon where he lost Hux. He was crying into Finn’s shoulder, letting it slip from his palm as the TIE fighters stormed above.

Shaking off the ever-present depression, Marin scampers after Chewie to compensate for his much larger gate. They weave through the trees until Marin stops him with a small shush. “I sense birds over that way.”

Chewie nods, yielding to Marin’s guide. Settling behind two twin trees, they gear up to hunt some fowl. Chewie hands him his slingshot, nodding in silent encouragement.

He loads up the first marble-like projectile. Aiming for the fowl’s center of mass, Marin launches it through the air. Unfortunately he’s not used to Chewie’s slingshot so he misses by a hair, sending the marble into the tree behind the fowl. The marble explodes on impact, startling the bird away.

“Woah!” Marin exclaims, gaping in awe at the explosion. “That was amazing!”

Chewie hums in agreement. He hands Marin another explosive marble.

Marin aims for a branch a ways away. His marble shoots through the air, demolishing the branch and sending it in a smoke spiral to the ground with a crack.

Laughing freely, Marin shoots some more marbles around the forest.

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Hux wakes up. The overhead lighting units flicker their sickening glow over his pallor. Choking around a groan at his body’s ache, Hux forces himself to sit up on his bottom.

The flatness of his abdomen is the first thing he sees. He’s empty, hollow, void of life. His abdomen is more concave than he remembers from before his pregnancy. Unhealed, unbandaged, barely mended with stitches. The topical anesthetic hasn’t worn off. Hopefully it won’t until he gets those damn droids to properly heal his incision.

Hux’s eyes have trouble focusing from his surgery. “How are they?” he croaks to the droids, eager to meet his daughters. He can't see them. The droids must have tucked the infants away in the
incubators.

Silence screams back at him.

Meagerly, Hux reaches out with his senses. He can’t feel the twins anywhere.

Vision blurring with tears, Hux tips onto his unsteady feet. His aching ankles and barely healed incision throb with the shift of weight.

The droids lie in shorn, melted pieces, their casing cleaved and destroyed. The incubators have their linings disrupted and the crisp blankets Hux meticulously folded inside are missing, ripped away.

Small, agonized whimpering claw out from his throat. But Hux doesn’t register the bloody noises, his heart palpitating and filling his ears with its heady pulse.

The twins are gone.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I cannot stress this enough: Please read the warnings and tags. Please, please god!!!

I got a comment that really hurt my feelings (even after I asked everyone to be chill) but since I love what i do, I'm not gonna let it get to me. Just as another reminder, while I appreciate feedback, no one is paying me to write this or any fic writer for that matter. I don't have an editor or a publisher, all of this is 100% me and my story. Yes, I tweak things to appease demand but never will I change my vision because someone asked me "what is the point" of what I'm doing in the story. I try really hard to make everything fall into place and I feel like I'm on my way to doing that. I hope those of you who aren't enjoying this story eventually find a story that best fits your interests.

That being said, I hope you guys enjoy these TWO new chapters!! Thank you for reading!! (Even the people who hate this fic and are still reading for some reason??????, thank you for reading!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kylo Ren swipes the sweat beading on his forehead. The titian sands of Moraband collect in his hair, agitating the puckered skin of his old scars and new ones. Han Solo’s boots carry him to the beaten paths weaving the abandoned temples of the Sith homeworld.

Moraband grows hot in its cycle around its sun, temperature blistering high above anything resembling comfortable. Ren pushes onward, pulling out his worn mining helmet from his pack and latching it over his head.

He’s so close to finding a cure. He has to be.

What ails him manifests as several ugly physical torments to his body. His hair whips in the winds —head shaved on both sides to reduce chafing from his mining helmet. Blue-grey mottles the column of his throat, as it does just over the skin of his chest. Scarification. Where he’d impaled himself with Vader’s lightsaber on Snoke’s moon, where Snoke had clawed him and tore open his jugular.

But the most notable and most worrisome modification is the hideous, grotesque claw where his left arm used to be. Fingernails whittled into daggers, long gnarled fingers and joints, blue-grey fading into healthy olive skin around the joint of his shoulder. Its weight and size throws him off balance with every step, just enough to give him a beastlike hobble. The form of a monster.

Over eight months prior, he woke mid-hyperspace aboard the Millennium Falcon, twisted limbs curling around the hilt of Vader’s lightsaber. His eyes stung to find himself alone, without his father flying in the Falcon with him. But the tears of sorrow from his vision of what lies across the threshold of life had vaporized when he looked down at his hand, blanching in horror.
It was Snoke’s hand. Thought more monstrous and mutated than he ever remembered, there was no mistaking it. His reflection in the refresher’s mirror gaped in shock at the new patches of skin where the killing blows were inflicted—his neck and chest. Snoke’s skin.

He was back from the dead as a beast, a miscreation of the Force.

How far had the Force gone to repair his dead body? What more of Snoke’s was used in healing his mortal shell?

How much of his skin in his own? How much of him has changed?

Was he ever himself to begin with?

Ren vowed to learn the extent of his ailment and possibly find a cure before ever returning to Hux again. He can’t trust his body. He can’t trust himself around Hux or Marin, or anyone he has to make peace with. Making amends with the Resistance was one of his father’s ultimatums for retribution, as impossible of a feat that will come to be—from both sides.

Ren ushers to the maw of the ruins, down between the crumbling spires.

His excavation is faring well, the bricks encasing sunken Sith relics brittle with their timelessness. He leans over the precipice, adjusting the magnescope on his mining helmet. His readings tell him there is a holocron embedded on the other side of the cliff, an arm’s stretch over a daunting chasm. This must be a hidden tomb, eroded along with whatever else what forgotten.

This is the fourth holocron case he’s found here. But he’s managed to open none of the four, his strength in the Force, both dark and light, diminished even more since his final confrontation with Snoke.

There has to be answers. Snoke was far from a Sith Lord but he had been inspired the Sith’s teachings throughout the course of their apprenticeship. If Snoke had discovered how to prolong his life after death through dark side manifestation—using Ren as a vessel—then it’s logical these ancient teachings were available to the fallen Sith Lords. Like Sidious and Plagueis, and others from the legends who cheated death.

He grips the block with his clawed hand, its strength greater than his human one. Adapting to change, capitalizing on his faults.

His tired lungs tighten. A vision pulls him out of concentration.

_Hux, alone in the vacuum of space, clutching his bleeding abdomen. His face twisted and pale, mouth hanging open in a soundless scream._

Ren’s clawed hand falters, sending the block down inside the depths of the precipice.

“Shit,” he hisses, lamenting at what precious time he will waste scouring the bottom of the trench for the brick, time he could use to find a way to return to Hux—and their son—having only sent a single holorecording to Phasma’s fleet in the span of his isolation after abandoning them.

Back at the Falcon, Ren chews on three servings of ration bars to energize him for his slog down into the ravine. The freighter’s life support system hums dully as ambience. He glares at the table setting—the other three holocrons he has yet to open, not for the lack of trying.

The Falcon’s commlink blinks its steady blink. A waiting call. It’s the same call that’s been waiting since he left with the Falcon, coded with coordinates of its origin. It’s a Resistance code.
It’s where Marin is. Ren fists his claw. He’ll answer it when the time comes.

With mechanical precision he hooks up his spelunking gear. Nylon straps dig into his hips and chest, tight under his pecs like a woman’s brassier, adjusting the straps for comfort for his trek back into the ruins. The chasm isn’t far but this is the closest he could dock the Falcon after his last supply run.

Small noises permeate from the bowels of the ship. They sound like squeals, like from a small animal trapped and dying.

Ren fists Vader’s lightsaber. No intruder could have made it on the Falcon without his knowledge. He’s programmed a biometric seal on the controls having acquired the tools for adding security to his inherited freighter. Though he’s not sure his father would have wanted him to have the Falcon, he’s using it for the indefinite future.

The gnarled hand forms a claw as it often does when he’s not paying any attention to it. He shrugs off the strange cries echoing his mind. His mind is playing tricks on him as it often does, one of the many handicaps he’s forced to conquer.

His father’s boots carry him down the loading ramp and back outside to the desolate sandscape.

*Hux ripping apart shelves, smashing large plastic cases, screaming in anguish. His skin tears from a large wound on his stomach, red dribbling through the thin cloth of his shirt. He fumbles with a blaster, priming the trigger. Bumping the barrel against his head and then whipping it back down. He brushes the tip to his temple again, squeezing his eyes shut.*

Ren doesn’t have much time to reel on the implications of the vision before his chest tightens. This must be it, Hux must have shot himself and the deathswitch connecting their fates is going to beat his heart into stillness.

Death, always the farthest destination on Ren’s path, never comes.

But never was Ren’s chest is tightening with the fear of death. Instead it beats erratic, tormented with terror and grief for the Hux in his vision. Vivid as if the feelings were his own, Ren could feel Hux was weighing the coward’s way out—*suicide*—wallowing in despair that the only thing that’s stopping him was the chance his death would lead to Ren’s through the interstellar expanse that separates them.

Ren breaks into a full sprint, desperate to retrieve the lost holocron and shed the threat of Snoke burdening his body.

Back at the chasm Ren shoots the end of his spelunking chain into the bed of red-orange granite. If he falls he can always use his abilities to spare him any broken bones, but he prefers to use his concentration on the priceless artifact, possibly the last holocron he’ll find in a while. In these temple ruins, anyway.

He secures the chain through the loops of his harness, testing the give of the chain dispenser embedded in the granite. It holds.

Ren puckers his chin, edging backwards down the precipice. Kicking off the wall, Ren eases downwards. He holds onto the rope with his clawed hand and maintains his balance with his human one. He flicks on his mining helmet light, secure around the buzzed sides of his skull. Ren lands on his feet, bracing against the support of his chain and searching the base of the trench like a scavenger.
There are few stones littering the dark flatness of the trench. He locates the offending stone, cleaved open and revealing the embedded holocron. Ren tucks it in his pack.

He’s closer than ever to be reunited with Hux. He feels it so in every fiber of his being, from his heart to the deathly blue skin of his claw.

--

Hux gouges his palms in his eye sockets, bruising the fragile tissue. Doing absolutely nothing to ease the ache in his heart.

He’d lost them. Before he even had them. They’re gone, stolen, to be used for whatever agenda the galaxy sees fit to use them for.

His brain fails to catch up with his heart as it comes to the bizarre, ridiculous notion that this is what it must have been like for the parents of the children programmed to serve the First Order as Stormtroopers. To have his children ripped from him, he can’t breathe. He can’t breathe. His soul aches, the foundations for his very being crumbling like charred betaplast.

Why isn’t Ren here? Why must he face torment alone?

Hux tosses the blaster away from him, its skittering shrill in the confines of the claustrophobic space station. He worries his lip, attempting to clear his head. He’ll go back to the Finalizer. He’ll resume his search for Ren and begin a new search for the twins.

He gets to his feet, spine pinching. Any clues have already been destroyed in his tirade. Destroying the incubators, tearing apart the bags of supplies, thrashing the bottles of formula against the walls. A hapless display of weak-mindedness and useless torrential emotion.

The plan or lack thereof, was irrevocably rash from the beginning to its failed end. How stupid of him to think he could have some kind of secret nursery on some floating box a hairsbreadth away from the airspace of the greatest star destroyer ever made, one constantly caught in every other skirmish. Infants need around-the-clock care. He’s devoted to the Order, culminating the Empire’s lost war against entropy.

There’s no point to this. There’s no purpose for attaching himself to two infants that were never supposed to be in the first place.

Two little babies that he’s never held or fed or seen with his own eyes.

A red, bloody lump sits on a tipped over container. A fleshy mass. Like some kind of organ.

Delirious, Hux picks it up in his hand. It’s cold and clotted with fluid. He turns it over, feral shock strangling him. There’s a gaping incision on the other side, a horizontal line, nearly identical to the incision striping Hux’s abdomen.

It’s his womb. Removed like a tumor, dead and decaying. Whoever took his babies had the presence of mind to program the droids to remove it, ensuring he never carry a child again.

He’s never felt so empty, so hopeless, so paralyzed with sorrow. For the womb, the babies, for Marin, for Ren. Hux’s face twists, drowning in the fresh wave of agony.

Marin is far too impatient and irritable today, but he insisted on practicing his telekinetic Force manipulation with Master Luke. Master Luke hardly gives him the time of day. Marin attributes his disinterest with him because of his lack of telekinetic abilities like Rey and Finn.

As well as the glaring obvious: Master Luke thinks he’s evil.

Master Luke has never said so to Marin’s face, of course. But it’s the truth. Marin’s almost embarrassed on Master Luke’s behalf for his baseless fear.

Finn is most inspiring when it comes to his telekinetic abilities because he started out unable to move anything with his mind but excelled in lightsaber sparring, and developed physical manipulation from his passion for combat. But now Finn can move not only stones but he can lift Rey into the air as if she were made of clouds. He wishes Finn were here.

The stone does nothing. Marin slumps animatedly, sprawling onto the ground like they’re enjoying the winter sun instead of training.

“Marin…”

“Master Luke, you can just tell me I suck.”


“But the Force came to Rey so easily. She told me how all she had to do was will it so, and she could whip your lightsaber into her hand.”

He’s referring to Anakin’s lightsaber, which is in Ben’s hands now. Wherever he is. Luke has his green blade saber, the one he fashioned before he completed his training on Dagobah with Master Yoda.

“Her abilities are much different than yours. She’s like me and your father. We’re physically and mentally capable, inherited from Anakin.”

“So what does that leave me?” If he’s not like Kylo Ren, or Rey, or Master Luke, or like Anakin—the Chosen One—then what does that make him?

“You’re different. With the Force, you can not only see into people’s minds, but you can also heal others. It makes you special. There’s no one like you, Marin.”

Marin rolls over, eying Master Luke’s boots from between the blades of grass. “So I do suck. You can admit it.”

“Your powers are unlike any I’ve ever seen. I just wish Master Yoda could have met you. You’d have loved talking with him, and he would have enjoyed your long and inquisitive conversations.”

Though Master Luke has tossed the name around before, Marin doesn’t know much about Master Yoda. “What was he like?”
Luke kneels in the grass, enjoying the winter sun with the boy. Tatooine’s simmering suns are a
distant memory from another lifetime. “You know BB-8?”

Poe Dameron’s droid who hates him for putting Poe in harm’s way on Supreme Leader Snoke’s
moon? “Yeah, that silly little droid. The one that rolls around like a pinball and hums like R2.”

“Well, Master Yoda was about that size but could lift up my Starfighter from the muck of his
swamp.”

“Oh, stars. How did he manage that?” Marin gasps.

“Patience,” Luke squawks, tightening his throat and croaking in mimicry of Yoda’s distinctive
voice.

Marin raises a brow, confused. Though clearly amused.

“Master Yoda would talk like that. And he had big pointy ears and a cane, and a big green head and
his ears poked out and made his head look even huger, like a watermelon.” Luke cups the air
around his head with his flesh and robotic hands to demonstrate the span.

Marin smirks. “You’re making that up.”

must have.”

“Master Luke!” Marin giggles. “No one in their right mind would have spoken like that!”

“Master Yoda lived over eight hundred years. I figured he’d come from a time where everyone
spoke like that so I never questioned it.” Luke reflects on a similar explanation he gave Ben around
Marin’s age, but Ben never asked as many questions as Marin always does.

Marin snorts. “You’re right. I probably would have liked him. Eight hundred years of life—he
probably had all the answers.”

“No one has all the answers, not even Master Yoda.”

That seems reasonable. Still, he’d like to meet someone who will listen to his thoughts, opinions,
and dreams without judgement and with great insight and wisdom. Master Luke isn’t always so
smiley and jovial. Most of the time, he saves his smiles for Rey, his loyal daughter.

Sometimes, more often than Master Luke would think he does, contemplative scrutiny glints in the
blues of his eyes. Directed at Marin.

It’s not that he thinks Master Luke doesn’t like him. He does. But Master Luke often dissects him,
desperate to find any and all signs of evil in him. Like one day Marin is just gonna snap and try to
kill everyone.

Which is completely unnecessary. Just up and killing everyone wouldn’t make any sense,
whatsoever. They’re his family and friends. They supply him with food and shelter and Jedi
training, and for that he’s grateful. He’s not like Kylo Ren, who is only concerned with himself and
his own power.

Marin flicks his eyes down to the lightsaber clipped in Master Luke’s belt. “When do I get to start
training with a real lightsaber?”
There it is, the scrutiny flashing in Master Luke’s eyes. “It’s best to start off with the training staffs. Until your form is sharper. It’s for safety reasons. Jedi students who are too eager to learn swordsmanship were prone to injure themselves.”

Marin sits up, picking at the grasses embedded in the fabric of his pants. “I’m not Ben,” he says quietly. Marin never uses Kylo Ren’s given name but this time it just came out. He wanted to get Master Luke’s attention, to show him he’s serious.

Luke’s expression softens. If Marin expects to get a rise out of him, it won’t work. His hearing and sight might be deteriorating, his knees might creak when he sits, but he’s no fool. He knows in his heart Ben was a special case—and still is. Manipulated from childhood to adulthood, Snoke twisting his wants and desires until the boy they knew was destroyed.

Luke has carefully monitored Marin’s actions, his wills and motivations. No one is influencing the boy. No Snoke or Palpatine or some other puppet master. No one except himself and his impossibly driven heart. “Of course you’re not,” Luke says, “not any more than I’m Darth Vader.”

Marin eyes Luke, probing stare heedless. “But you were afraid of that, weren’t you? Becoming Darth Vader?” The great Sith apprentice, masked enforcer of the Empire. The greatest Jedi Knight that ever lived, the Chosen One who brought balance to the Force. Allegedly, anyway.

Lip twitching, Luke extends the metal plates of his robotic hand. “Yes, I was.”

Marin turns away, picking at the grass. “You shouldn’t worry about me. I can’t do much damage. I can’t even turn a stone.”

“In time you’ll be able to move a lot more than a stone.”


Master Luke is looking for honesty, so he gives it to him. “I fear being alone. I thought I could do it. I thought I could manage to not care about anyone, but the more I try, the more the fear grows.” Like a wildfire consuming a helpless forest.

Luke nods, understanding. Loneliness is damnation.

“If you don’t fear turning into Darth Vader anymore, what do you fear now?” Marin asks, looking up at his Jedi master.

“I fear that one day there will be no Jedi to stop the dark side from swallowing the universe whole.”


A trail of sparrows speckles the horizon, swooping upwards to settle into the tree canopy of the nearby woods. Luke inhales the crisp winter air. “Do you fear the dark side?” he asks the boy, evenly and without implication.

Marin blinks out at the woods, staring past the line of trees.

“No.”
A couple of things:
> Dirty!Harness!Kylo is my fetish
> Marin wyd...................
> Yes I know Hux is suffering and there is a point to his suffering and a lot of his suffering will cease next chapter :'
> And the next chapter will be posted in one hot second! Hope you guys liked this one.
Chapter 3

The High Enforcer salutes her troops that bow in veneration upon her arrival on the Finalizer. Her officers made her aware of General Hux’s lapse, fleeing the ship just as they were in the heat of an attack. There is no excuse. She’d given him authority, her loyalty. It can just as easily be taken away.

A mere call would not have sufficed. She demands to speak to Hux face to face, regardless of how incredibly hectic it is fighting against the rebels from within the First Order and the persistent pest of the Resistance. Time can be made to deal with her officers. She had always preferred a hands-on approach, like before the destruction of Starkiller when she’d stalk the halls to ensure every trooper was in order, or now, owning the halls she used to sweep.

“Colonel,” Phasma greets Mitaka with a subdued scowl. “Where is he?”

“He came back from wherever he ran off to last night. Hightailed right for his quarters.”

Curling her lip, Phasma pushes past him.

“Wait out here,” she orders her herd of troopers. “General!” she booms through the durasteel door. Unable to muster another fiber of patience for the man, Phasma opens the door with her override.

The room glows blue with the haze of a lit holoprojector, sharpening the edges of the lone bed, the closet door hanging open, highlighting the assortment of firearms littering the floor.

In the center of the room stands her withering general, in full dress uniform as if he’s about to give a riling speech. He’s even got his little hat on. He gapes at the projection, giving no indication he’s aware of the second presence in the room.

Frowning in both curiosity and disgust, she eyes the projection. It’s an archival Imperial datafile of Hux’s since-passed father, Commandant Brendol Hux. Posed with his arm over his heart in salute, holoprojected eyes focused to the infinite horizon.

Hux gapes at the projection of the commandant, the glow catching on the barrel of a blaster in his hand.

“He was very handsome,” she croons, startling Hux out of his daze.

Leather gloves tightening on his blaster, Hux cocks his head to her, acknowledging. “He was a fucking prick.” The insult does not empower him.
“Why the trip down memory lane?” Phasma eyes the mute glint of his blaster. There’s no way she’s his target, given the ample debt he owes her and there’s no way he could have known she would have paid him a visit.

There’s no way that blaster is primed for anyone but himself.

All his life Hux hungered to emulate his father—in rank, reputation, ruthlessness. Before him, in glimmering hologram, projects his ideation of the goal he never could achieve, faded and hiccupping with interference. He wants it to be the last thing he sees before he succumbs to the weak-willed yearnings in his heart.

When Hux doesn’t reply, Phasma shifts. “I know you don’t want to do anything with that blaster. It’s not who you are.”

“I’m not who I am,” he tells her, fraught, hollowed with sorrow.

He can’t be suicidal because of his lapse of judgement yesterday. There’s something deeper, complex, human—feelings she conditioned herself unable to relate to. Still, she attempts to lessen whatever despair that coils around the handle of that blaster. “The insurgents escaped but with nothing. Our officers are quite capable when we need them to be.”

“I had business to attend to,” he divulges as if needing to substantiate his actions even as he’s caught with his head in a noose, tear ducts raw and blistered and unable to wet his cheeks any further. Hot blood dribbles from his incision, protesting under the confinement of his uniform.

“Whatever it is,” she clunks her boots closer. “This isn’t the end.”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about,” he grates, constricting around a sob.

Never in all her years as an officer could she have imagined talking General Hux down from the precipice of self-destruction. “What about Ren?” she tries to appeal.

Ren. Ren would drop dead—wherever he is, if anything were to happen to him because of that damned deathswitch. Hux can’t carry this selfless burden any longer. He longs to be selfish, once more, like his father was during his formative years. He longs to pull the trigger.

A thick stream of blood oozes into his jacket and his vision spots from the loss. “He’s not here.”

“We’re still looking,” she says, sympathetic. “Give me the blaster or I’ll shoot you myself,” she smirks, meeting his eye. There’s a dead sheen in his eyes, crystallized and illuminated by the hologram.

His grip loosens on the handle, wavering at the affliction of blood loss.

Phasma takes advantage at his visible weariness, wrenching the blaster from his gloved hand. Tossing the blaster across the floor, Phasma tugs her lips into a consoling smile. Hux wavers on his feet and falls backwards, passed out.

“Unbelievable,” Phasma scoffs.

Commandant Brendol Hux’s unseeing, holoprojected eyes survey the Stormtroopers lugging his unconscious son from his rooms. Glimmering condescendingly, disapproving in death.

Phasma sighs, following her herd of troopers to the medical bay. Every trooper and officer ogles his disheveled form, face slack and oblivious to the humiliation of the display. She doesn’t bother
reprimanding the rubbernecking bystanders. They know not to fuck with him. The High Enforcer’s orders.

The medical team discovers an unhealed surgical incision. Torn and irritated, blood leaking steadily. Phasma doesn’t know what to make of it, at all.

“My Lord,” one of the officers interrupts her viewing of Hux in the operating theater.

Her impatient stare serves as her response, arms crossed.

“It’s Kylo Ren. He’s landed in the private east docking bay, plainly as day.”

“How,” she deadpans, a mixture of relief and suspicion directed at the dutiful officer. No one gets in or off this star destroyer without direct permission from the bridge.

“No one knows. The freighter just appeared—it didn’t show up on any scanners. It’s emitting some kind of interference that makes it invisible to us.”

After years of playing chess against overzealous men and scourging Force-users, Phasma developed a healthy distrust for their methods. Respect is prevalent in her subordinates and allies and once-partners like Ren and Hux. But trust? Trust is a very precarious, valuable, temporary thing.

“Bring him up here,” she orders.

Ren seals the boarding ramp of the Millennium Falcon from the outside with his biometric locks, impenetrable by anyone except himself.

The Finalizer was not difficult to locate or dock. Strangely easy. As if he’s been here at this exact spot in recent days.

Clawed hand under disguise of his cloak and an ill-fitting glove, Ren hobbles through the bay, Vader’s lightsaber clipped to his hip. A fraught officer leads him to the medical bay. Phasma’s withdrawn countenance greets him.

“Nice haircut,” she nods.

“Where is he?” he growls, ignoring her.

“He tried to kill himself. It was remarkably pathetic.”

Ren wavers, nostrils flaring. “Where—”

“They’re getting him out of surgery now.”

He sinks with leaded guilt. All this time he was away, focused on his own ailment when Hux was the one in danger. “Did something happen?”

“You can ask him when he wakes up in a few minutes.” With that, Phasma leaves Ren to his groveling, having far more important matters to attend to.

Throat aching with the swell of tears, Ren follows the pull of Hux’s presence. A few doors down, secured in a recovery room. Alone.

His unconsciousness is medically induced, suspending him in healing. Not in a bacta tank, but wrapped in a bundle of healing patches, across his abdomen. Ren’s seen a patch like this before
only one other time, aboard a Resistance cruiser nearly a decade ago. After Hux had given birth to Marin.

It can’t be.

It’s not possible.

There must be some other explanation.

Deliberately, Ren seals the door. No one will disturb them here. Ren sits at Hux’s side patiently, carefully. He holds his hand with his human one, bowing his head, sending positive waves of healing energy.

“Ren?” croaks Hux, weak and delirious.

Ren grips his hand. “Yes, it’s me,” he consoles, urgent.

Hux’s golden eyelashes beat like frayed fibers in the dim lighting of the recovery room. His throat cries of parchedness, his lips splitting with his grimace. “Where have you been?” he groans, without heat. Ren bores into him, glassy eyed. Hux can’t speak of what’s happened just yet, what he’s lost, so he ogles Ren in fear that he’ll never see him again. Ren’s dirt smudged, lids sagging and exhausted, facial hair untrimmed. He has so much to say. “What did you do to your hair?” is what his mouth forms.

Cracking a watery smile, Ren leans a little closer, craving proximity. “It’s for functionality.”

“For what?”


Hux attempts to sit up but Ren forces him down with a stern hand. “What happened to you?” Ren asks.

Eyes blurring with fresh tears, Hux sinks deeper into the bed, a weak and wasted shell. “Something terrible. Something terrible has happened.”

“What?” he implores.

“I can’t…” Hux trails off, weakly. He doesn’t recognize this husk he’s become.

“Just tell me, please. I have to know you’re alright.”

“Where were you?” Hux blurts, mournful ire grappling his heart. “Why did you leave? I’ve been searching for you for months. I told you I never wanted you to leave me, not like you left him.” Marin, the son he’d abandoned. Hux was supposed to go back for Marin, but everything changed. He couldn’t find him or Ren and now the twins, he can’t breathe. Everything got out of control. There’s never been any hope, only fear and uncertainty.

“I killed him. Snoke, I killed him for you, for us.” I killed him because I wanted to, because I hated him for what he did to me. “But it wasn’t enough. He still plagues me,” Ren tells him, begs into his withering dolefulness. “I can feel a darkness inside of me. I couldn’t bear the thought of being with you and hurting you before I found a cure.”

Hux doesn’t understand. “A cure?”

Breathing laboriously, Ren releases Hux’s hand. He shucks off his glove, revealing the monstrous
appendage. Hux’s brow pinches, scrutinizing the strange affliction.

“I can’t explain how but I was gone. I was dead. And now I have a second chance to make things right between us. And our son.” He means it. He just needs more time. The claw curls into a fist. “I just have to crack these holocrons…”

Hux’s fingers brushing against the pikes of his claw stun him into silence.

“Yeah, it’s not pretty. I debated getting it sawed off and replaced with a robotic one, but I’d have no way of knowing I solved the true problem,” Ren murmurs, warming at the first gentle touch he’s had in months.

But Hux isn't thinking about warm, gentle touches. His brow puckers, overcome with a distant visage.

He sees himself, face slack and unconscious. His belly is swollen as it was just yesterday. It's his space station, his safe house. The droids are working diligently to remove the twins.

There they are. The two beautiful baby girls, removed with careful precision by his droids. Swirls of dark hair, squealing cries, slippery with fluids, tiny fists trembling with life.

There’s another presence in the room. A gloved hand programs the droids. They're removing his womb, flopping it into a small basin, rendering the organ as useless, rotting garbage. He’s looking through someone else’s eyes as the vision shows him unconscious and vulnerable, abdomen deflated from the birth and organ removal. Hux’s face, even unconscious, is taut with confusion, betrayal for what’s happened to him.

The vision shifts to the babies. They’re prepared by the droids for their new lives, vitals tested, umbilical cords sheared. Mechanically they’re sealed in their incubators, cries muffled, newborn eyes shut and unseeing.

The figure in the room, the one whose eyes he’s seeing through, lurches to the droids. Stripes of electric blue demolish the medical droids, along with it their memory banks. The newborns continue their squealing.

Electric blue fizzles away and the view of the assailant pans to the infants, sealed in their protective cases.

The fragile seals are broken by a grotesque claw, nails like daggers scraping along the incubators.

Blood drains out of his heart, torn open to hemorrhage.

“I was terrified that somehow I would hurt you,” Ren’s voice pulls him out of the nightmarish vision. “Which is why I isolated myself all this time. One day I could come back to you and we could be—”

Eyes rounding, Ren chokes around an unrelenting grip to his throat. Bruising, damming grips, strangling the life out of him.

“What have you done with them?!” Hux cries, thumbs gouging Ren’s windpipe. Unbridled fury consumes him.

Claw scraping at the sheet—restrained by his own volition so as to not injure Hux, even as he’s assaulted by him—Ren sputters, struggling against Hux with his human hand.
“How could you?! How could you?!” Hux pleads, thumbs mangling Ren’s windpipe.

Vision spotting, Ren employs the Force to wrench Hux free—whatever Force-strength he can possibly muster—restraining Hux’s scrabbling, murderous hands. He coughs, finding his breath. Projections of Hux’s seething hatred and betrayal pulse over him, and he buckles with heartbreak and confusion. “I don’t—” his lungs seize, molten with panic.

But Hux isn’t going to help him out of his panic attack. He’s fighting to be free of Ren’s control, demanding to strangle him into death.

“What have you done with them, you animal?! Where are they?!” He can’t see straight, blinded in his rage.

“Hux,” he tries, wavering around his coughing fit. “I don’t know what—” he collapses into violent hacks, weakening under Hux’s hatred.

“You know damn well what I’m talking about.” Hux contorts under the suffocating woe of what Ren’s done. “I don’t know how or why you’ve taken them from me like you took him from me, and why you’ve come here—pretending to care for me like you’ve always pretended,” he sobs. “I don’t care. I want them back!” He’s gonna get all of them back. He doesn’t need Ren and his manipulation, his poisonous heart.

Ren’s face crumples, hot tears leaking from slitted eyes. If he doesn’t know remotely what Hux is talking about—then why does he feel so guilty? The Force has shrouded him from something catastrophic, something fatal and disastrous that he’s done. Desperate to understand, he pierces Hux’s mind, frantic with the fear that he’s done something heinous. Hux growls at the familiarity of Ren prying in his mind, pillaging through the mental barriers he so carefully crafted. But Ren doesn’t care—he’s driven by his fears. He has to know the truth.

He sees Hux, alone on Snoke’s moon, fraught for his fate.

But not solely for his fate, in fact, Hux hardly cares for his fate at all. The fear is for the fates of the two firelight flickers that bud in his being. Born into life through their lovemaking, a miracle of the Force’s doing. Two miniscule, tremendous buds of life, coveted in the safety of Hux’s body. Ren groans in utter awe, disbelief, prying through more of Hux’s thoughts.

It all falls into place—from Hux’s months alone bearing their children, terrified with uncertainty as to what will happen once they’re born. The niggling hope that they can be a family once Ren returns to him, that they can bring Marin with them and live their lives in peace. Throwing away their allegiance with the First Order because it’s incongruent to this ideal: the two of them plus three, sheltered under the wings of love and peace.

New flashes bombard Ren out of the serenity of Hux’s fantasy. Violent, bloody flashes echoing squealing cries and electric blue swipes of Vader’s lightsaber. His abominable claw stealing Hux’s womb and their helpless, squealing babies. Darkness taking over, swallowing them whole.

“I didn’t—I don’t—I could never take them from you,” Ren denies, unable to face the vicious truth. He stifles it, suffocates it to squander it completely. There’s no way he would do this to Hux. It’s unthinkable. Inconceivable, that he would hurt Hux in such an intimate, vile way. He’s not that. He defeated Snoke as well as any vain temptation with getting consumed by the dark side. He’s on the track to master the darkness. Never again will he be a puppet, a plaything.

“I swear,” Ren implores. “I swear I would never do this to you. The dark side is feeding you these lies. It’s trying to keep us apart. It’s tormenting you because you don’t know how to conquer it.
You have to listen to me.” Powerless to stop the tears from slipping, Ren cradles Hux’s grinding jaw with his human hand. “Please, I beg you. Let me find them. I’ll bring them back.”

Human fallacy. Reasoning and logic tossed aside with Ren’s grounding touch. He doesn’t know what to believe. He doesn’t know what to feel. “Then why did I see—”

“It’s all lies! Look in your heart. You know I wouldn’t do this, not after everything I lost.”

Hux thinks back to the vision, the one he endured on Snoke’s moon right after he abandoned Marin, the vision of his future that doomed him to destroy all that he holds dear with another planet killer from above. The twin apprentices, dark and powerful like their master. It was foretold—Ren would train them. He doesn’t know what to believe, if Ren stole them from him because he hates him, because he wants the girls all to himself.

It doesn’t make sense because all Hux senses from Ren are his hurt, adoration, devotion, his love in the purest form.

Why must the damned Force be so deceitful?

Like a rotting petal, Hux wilts into the bed. Utterly drained. “You promise?” Hux finds himself croaking. “You promise you’re telling the truth?”

“I promise. I would never hurt you,” Ren vows. His throat bobs, newly bruised skin protesting. “I love you.” The confession is out in the open. He’s missed him. Oh, how he’s missed him so terribly.

Brows pinching, Hux drags his fingers along Ren’s chest, to the time bomb that connects their fates. Ren’s never told him he’s loved him before. Not in so many words, as explicit as I and love and you. He doesn’t know what to say in return, so he drags his hand up to Ren’s neck, to the bruises from his manic attack and against the scar of greyish blue that mars his golden, even skin.

The warm spring water dribbles of Hux’s fingertips cradle his scalp, his glare softening. Ren offers a small smile, a campaign for comfort, and Hux disrupts his attempt with a tender kiss.

Eyes slipping shut, Ren’s face contorts, agonized. He reciprocates fiercely, tonguing into Hux’s warmth. Ren tastes the salt of tears and the metal of blood, and he whimpers. He never wants to discover that taste in Hux’s mouth. Impassioned, Ren forces them to part. “We’ll find them,” he vows. “And Marin, we’ll all go wherever you want to go.” His lungs have settled, healed with Hux’s loving touch.

Grimacing, Hux searches Ren’s dark pair of eyes. He can almost believe that to be true, that Ren wants that and that he wants that for himself. “He won’t want that,” Hux murmurs, far off. As if he can sense the way Marin feels from the interstellar distance separating them.

“Oh of course he will,” Ren believes.

“He hates us.” His heart misleads him frequently and excruciatingly, but he knows this to be true. Ren flinches, but attempts to smile. “We’re his deadbeat parents. I wouldn’t expect anything less.”

Hux’s grimace never falters, boring into Ren’s openness. “We have to find them. I can’t stand it. I can barely breathe. We have to leave right now.”

Ren wants to object. The patch holding in Hux’s guts spots darkly with red from Hux’s frenzied attack, but he can’t risk leaving Hux alone. And he damn sure can’t wait any longer to find their
two new babies and keep them safe from the monster who stole them. “Alright, be careful. Can you stand?”

Hux is already on his bare feet, marching towards the docking bay. He’s in thin medical scrubs, completely uncaring of the deathly draft biting his bones, and the protest of his surgical wound desperately trying to heal itself.

“I have extra clothes on the freighter,” Ren says, following him closely lest he topple to the floor. Hux gives no indication he heard or cared.

Phasma intercepts them, alarmed at her general’s broken state. “You’ve got to be joking,” she mutters.

“I’ll be indisposed for the indeterminate future, Phasma,” Hux snaps, in no mood to play cat and mouse.

“You have a job to do.”

Hux barrels past her, Ren trailing after with a hard set frown.

“This isn’t a game, Hux!” she calls after them. “It’s all or nothing. I won’t stand for your oversight any longer.”

Hux falters, eyeing Ren. Here it is—caught between Ren, their offspring, the First Order and the rest of the galaxy. Without another word, Hux marches towards Ren’s ship.

The Millennium Falcon’s boarding ramp drops with a surge of energy from Ren. Ducking his head, Hux climbs aboard.

“Where were you when they were taken?” Ren asks, urgently ushering him to the cockpit.

“A space station,” he replies, distant. There’s something about this ship. There’s something about Ren, hovering about him like an errant moon. There’s something that he can’t pinpoint—

“Where?”

Hux freezes, icicle stiff. Watery eyes gape to Ren in disbelief.

“What’s the coordinates?” Ren repeats patiently.

Hux shoves past him to the catacomb of halls leading to the lower levels, the skin of his feet abrading against the flooring. His gut screams to be allowed to heal, falling to deaf ears.

“Hux!” Ren calls, chasing him down with a sturdy hand on his arm. “Please, you’re gonna hurt yourself.” Hux slips out of his grip with a pained whimper, unlike any reaction Ren had ever seen from him.

Throat thickening, Hux scuttles into the bowels of the ship, pulled to it like a metal shaving to ferrous stone. Hux approaches a threshold.

In the corner of the room sits a crate. A familiar blanket pokes out from its lip. Hux lurches closer, in utter distrust of what his eyes behold.

A fraught plea escapes his lips. It’s them.

It’s the twins.
Collapsing, Hux scrabbles for the sheets. Their eyes and fists clench fiercely from their agonized trembling. The skins of their cheeks chafe with the crust of birthing fluid, lips purpling with withered body temperatures. Immediately the infants squeal at his presence, praising their savior for rescuing them from certain death.

There’s nothing stopping the sobs from escaping. Hux scoops one up as carefully as his weakened muscles can muster, cradling the tormented infant to his heart. He’s forced to set the first one down so he can embrace the other, holding it close to feel her cold cheek against his wet one.

They need medical attention. But he doesn’t have any time to risk so there has to be come way he can get them taken care of on the Finalizer before it’s too late—

From the other side of the circuitry bay, Ren sags in obliterating disbelief. There is no way this is happening. It can’t be. His chest constricts, suffocating him.

There are the twins, two miniscule, tremendous buds of life. And they’re here, life-forces dwindling in the icy circuitry bay. He has no memory, no recollection of ever taking them. This wasn’t him. It just can’t be!

The daggers of his claw rake into his scalp, slicing the susceptible skin between the hairs. He couldn’t have done this to Hux, to their children. He’s not a monster.

As if Ren isn’t even there, Hux sets the infant down and secures them as best he can and proceeds to drag the crate out of the door, struggling against its weight and friction.

There’s nothing Ren can say, the evidence glaring him in the eye. Futilely, Ren scrambles. “I swear I had nothing to do with this,” he chokes.

Hux ignores him, drawing up walls. He focuses on getting them to safety.

“Let’s carry them to medical. It’ll be quicker,” he says, tentative. He keeps his distance. No longer trusting a thing he says or feels. “This was Snoke. Somehow he’s done this to us!” Ren pleads, though he knows it to be untrue.

Hux doesn’t bother to concede, dragging the squealing crate past him. Mouth a severe twist, eyes narrowed to a seething glare. His oozing abdominal wound under his gown dribbles thick blood onto the flooring, creating red streaks in wake of the dragging crate.

“You have to believe me,” Ren begs, trailing after him in the hall outside the boarding ramp. “Hux!”

But Hux says nothing. He’s done hearing whatever shit Ren’s saying. He’s done with him.

“This isn’t me. You know this isn’t me,” Ren tries again, lungs struggling to cooperate.

Fumbling to activate the ramp, Hux scrapes his lip with his teeth, coppery blood surging on his tongue. The twins’ cries bounce off every angle of the hall but Hux can’t afford any more time aboard this awful ship, with Ren, his tormenter. He has to get the fuck away from him before he gouges out his eyes.

The ramp gives with a hiss and Hux clamors off, desperate not to jostle the twins too much.

Their twin squeals ring around the active docking bay, passersby ogling the spectacle.

“What the hell is this?” spits Phasma. Ren’s back aboard the Finalizer for not even half an hour
and everything has gone haywire.

Hux gapes at his trembling rescued children. He’ll never be apart from them. “They need immediate medical attention,” he grates.

Phasma bristles with incredulity. There’s a precarious, coveted secret Hux is withholding. She flicks her eyes down to the infants. “Get them to the medical bay,” she calls to a pair of technicians, who obediently move to pick up the ends of the crate. When Hux lunges to grip the side on his own, he’s stopped by one of Phasma’s unyielding palms to his chest.

She searches his red-rimmed, dewy eyes for answers. “They’ve got them,” she assures. “You need to get back to your recovery room.” Somehow there is a solution to this riddle that surrounds Hux and Ren—and these two mysterious infants.

“Hux,” he hears Ren whine. “Will you just listen to me?”

Hux whips his head around, searing Ren with his impassioned heat. What he says next isn’t spoken in anger, or hatred. It’s of nothing but unabashed heartbreak. “I don’t ever want to see you again.”

Rendered speechless, Ren crumples. He bores wet eyes into Hux’s back. Clawing at his scalp, he suffocates under the strangling of his lungs.

Chapter End Notes

#Kylo#did#that and we will find out the #why and #how (and its not because of some OOC reason where kylo turns into a mustache twirling villain !!! ! ! ! )

we’ll find out more next week! thanks so much for reading. and i can definitely say Hux never is apart from his lil babies ever again.
Ren swipes at this errant tears. How could he have missed this?

Scouring over the details of the last few days, Ren comes up with nothing. He has not a single, fucking clue how those babies—his *daughters*—were taken from Hux, abandoned and left for dead in the bone chill of hyperspace.

And Hux. He's hurt Hux in ways he can't describe, betrayed him violently, painfully. Irredeemably.

And the worst part is that he knew, he *knew* this would happen. Everything he fought against, everything he tried to strangle to death, irreparably ripped through the one thing he ever cared about. He destroyed it. He may not remember kidnapping the twins, ripping out the very womb he forced inside Hux in the first place.

But he did it.

Snoke’s influence. It's been there ever since he could remember, from boyhood until the day he claimed Snoke’s life. His ailments as well as the lost time suggest Snoke is tugging his strings from beyond the threshold of death.

Yet his heart tells him Snoke is not to blame. His mind has betrayed him before, obscured his memories and afflicted his heart with false visions. The plague made him weak and volatile, destroying everything that he ever dared hold close to his heart.

Phasma can’t help but gape at Ren’s monstrous appendage. “What the hell happened to your hand?” she hassles. She’s been standing there for a while, not yet able to part from Ren and his peculiarity. At this point, she’s just curious.

“It’s nothing,” he grates. The fiercer he recalls the events of the last few days, the more the black-outs stick out. The puzzle pieces are all shifting together. In a daze, he took the Falcon back to the Finalizer to find Hux, because he sensed Hux was pregnant, he stalked him like a game hunted animal.

The darkness animated his most tormented desires. He stole his babies from him because he wanted to. Because he knew Marin would always hate him. He wanted two apprentices raised from birth. And he missed all this because his mind just couldn’t bear knowing he’d betray Hux in such a vile way. So he suppressed it.

He has to find a cure. Because if he doesn’t, he might just eat his blade.

“It doesn’t look like nothing. It looks like—” She pictures Snoke’s corpse, trundling into the Finalizer’s incinerator. His ashes settling with the rest of the garbage.

“Like who?” Ren glares, needing her to form the words. Because if this is really Snoke, his taint torturing him in death, maybe there’s hope. Maybe he’s not a monster. “You know who.”

“Snoke’s been dead for months. I incinerated his body myself.”

His body? How did she manage to find his body? But the how isn’t relevant. Inconsequential. “All
of it?” he demands. In his mania, he envisions Snoke’s head somewhere preserved in a stasis tube as if this were some science fiction novel.

Phasma makes an uncharacteristically expressive frown. “Yes, all of it. Both his arms. The only thing that was missing was the flesh around the gaping hole in his chest.”

If only Phasma hadn’t, and the science fiction novel explanation were the true answer with a black and white, transparent, easy solution. Ren could slay the final beast, cutting Snoke’s haunting remains with his lightsaber into crispy bits, and then he would be free.

But no such remains exist. Slaying the final beast hadn’t worked. The puppet master is deceased.

Ignoring Phasma’s gripes, Ren lurches toward his old quarters. Hux preserved it in anticipation he would return. Hux had faith in him.

Everything is tucked away as he’d last seen it. He lugs out his crate containing his Jedi trophies, broken parts of their lightsabers. Inside an indestructible case sits his most prized possession, Vader’s helmet.

Opening it carefully, Ren runs his fingers over the fire twisted betaplast.

His journey is not over. His future with Hux is not over. Hux will smile at him again. Hux will let him hold their daughters. And Ren knows exactly how to do it.

Ren calls on the Force to help him lug the crate back to the Falcon but the Force ignores him, flowing through him without action or reaction. Inert.

Eyes watering, Ren tugs the crate along on its wheels. To the Falcon, to finally program the coordinates the Resistance sent him, to take control of the rest of his life.

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Phasma waves away her gang of troopers, ordering them to patrol outside the medical bay. Let Ren be a deformed, wallowing thorn in somebody else’s side.

General Hux, however, remains to be her issue. He’s hiding something. She doesn't like secrets, particularly amongst her people.

In the operating room, the general is regarding the two infants with earnestness, eyes glimmering with a human care that she's never seen in any of her officers, even the flimsiest ones. He never looked this concerned when commanding the star destroyer in the heat of battle, let alone for another lifeform.

“General,” she vocalizes through the comm of the operating theater.

Unrestrained, Hux scowls at the abrupt crackle of the announcement from behind the window. His babies gurgle in contempt in their fitful rest.

Hooked up to tubes and needles like test subjects, his babies lay together. Snug and secure in the same incubator as they had been in his womb. They’re safe now, far away from Ren’s malevolent disarray.
Ren, that monster. Hux aches with betrayal, a blistering heartbreak. Ren wanted the twins for himself, his apprentices just like he had wanted before. He never wanted to be with him, care for him, love him. It was all false. Manipulation. Deceit.

And after everything, Hux hates. He hates and he hates and he hates. He hates that Ren abandoned him while he was hopelessly pregnant, that Ren lied right to his face. That Ren hurt their daughters, leaving them to die.

He hates that when he felt Ren blast away into the endless expanse of space, that he felt the separation deep in his soul. That he cries for Ren to hold him in his arms, monstrous claw and all. He hates that he can't find it in himself to hate Ren. Not even in the least.

“General. A word. If you have a spare second of your precious time,” snaps Phasma over the comm.

With one final look to his tiny, fragile babies, Hux limps out of the infirmary. He offers Phasma a grimace.

“I don't appreciate being lied to,” she says, hands bracketing her hips.

Hux heightens his posture. “I'm taking a sick day or two.”

“A few hours in a tank would fix that nasty wound right up.”

“Never,” he seethes. Never again will he be unconscious. There are infinite methods to keep one's self awake. If it’s up to him, he’ll never sleep again.

Phasma leers. “What is going on with you?”

“I'm handling it.”

“Like hell. No way are you stepping foot on that bridge before getting a rigorous psychological evaluation. As well as a physical.”

At the pride bruising threat, Hux starts. “I'm handling it!”

“Where did those infants come from? And don't give me any shit about recruiting for our program. You've never done any recruiting in your life.” Hux was known to obliterate entire villages instead of taking the time to harvest the infants. For quality control and timetable purposes, were his excuses. Human beings are one of the galaxy’s infinite resources, like weaponry and battleship fuel.

“It's none of your business.”

“I'll give you one more chance to tell me the truth before I slaughter them in front of you.” An empty threat. She'd never waste two potential Stormtroopers, future servants and allies.

The quivering general lunges but Phasma’s quicker. She twists his arm around and grapples him into a choke hold.

She's seen the look he’s got seething in his eye before. When she used to do recruitment detail, raiding shelters and overpopulated city residences. It's the raw anger, bloodied wrath and fear in a parent's eyes when they know the First Order has come for their child.

“They're yours, aren't they?” she scoffs, disbelieving.
“Don't you dare touch them!” he spits through gnashing teeth.

“You carried them. That's why you have that wound.” She doesn't understand why, how he was able to bear children. Nothing in his medical file had indicated he wasn't born genetically male and human. But files can be doctored, eyes can be deceived.

Hux thrashes out of Phasma’s grip. Face twisting, anguished. “Don't touch them,” he hisses, pathetic and bruised.

“Are they his?” It's clear she means Ren.

“They're mine. They're nobody's but my own.”

Unnecessary drama, plaguing her officers and troops. “You're unfit for duty. Allowing you back here was a mistake.”

Phasma grimaces when Hux laughs a broken, defeated wheeze that contorts his features. He can’t counter her, because she speaks the truth. He pictures his father's blue, unblinking gaze, his holographic projection beating him into submission.

“You deserve to be executed. You and your bastard children.”

Hux says nothing. He wants to be back inside the recovery room, tracing the silhouette of his babies with a lone fingernail.

“But if it weren't for you, I would not have the power I have today.” She rolls her knuckles, itching to hit something. It pains her to be honorable. Honor is something she’s vowed never to lose after her defeat at Starkiller. “I told Ren I’d keep you safe. And I never go back on my word.” Even if they’ve both malfunctioned. They’ve only proven to be a liability to each other.

A fresh stream of blood dribbles from Hux’s abdomen, striping down his thigh, aching all over like the throb of a sharp menstrual cramp.

“So here's my proposal. You'll take a leave of absence on the closest land base, gather your wits, find a suitable droid or two to care for your infants, get evaluated. *Rigorously.* And come back to the Finalizer.”

Military base? Nanny droids? Unsafe. Unpredictable. No one is coming close to his babies. Not if it's up to him. And it damn sure will be.

“What base?” he asks instead of spitting the criticism. He should count himself lucky Phasma’s not throwing him out on his ass. Without the Order, and now without Ren, he’d probably die a lonely, decrepit waif.

“Mardromitan. It’s equipped with a large Stormtrooper facility with supplies for infant care at your disposal. A navigational chart should be preprogramed in the officer’s ship. I’ll have them prepare you a room.”

Exhaling, Hux longs to be at the infants’ side. Of course he knows about Mardromitan’s facility. He’s the one who built it.

“Leave within the hour,” Phasma dismisses him as if he were scum on her boot.

Scum that she doesn’t want to see eating his own blaster bolt. Ren really made a mess of this once-capable general.
Hux quivers before the viewport, now alone with the twins. Mercy as well as aid from Phasma was a surprise, a blessing. He has to heal, collect his dwindling strength and wits so he can infiltrate the Resistance dogs and bring Marin back to the Order.

Then they’ll all be together, him and the children he carried. They’ll be together and grow strong within the First Order, without Ren’s poisonous influence.

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Finn zips up his pack, eager to return to General Organa’s bunker. Hopefully Marin will be there to greet him upon his arrival. He has a present for him that will probably piss off Rey from his impulsiveness but he just couldn’t help it! The gift is perfect for Marin, a welcoming distraction for this troublesome time in his life.

“Finn!” shouts Marin from the doorway. Marin sprints into his arms, landing with a resounding ‘oomph.’

“Hey, buddy. It’s good to see you,” Finn smiles.

From the threshold Master Luke watches on, careful and steady as he’d been watching Marin since yesterday. With practiced expertise, Luke dispels his fears for Marin’s alignment with the dark side. The boy has a good heart. He means well, feels and cares so vividly. Much like Master Obi-Wan had described Anakin at this age. He furrows his brow, tending to his tea on the stovetop like the old fart that he is.

“I missed you, Finn. You didn’t tell me you were gone,” Marin frowns, hurt sinking his features. Dammit, now he feels like shit. Finn attempts a consoling smile. “I’m sorry I didn’t say goodbye. You know I’ll always come back, right?”

Marin nods, confident, trusting. Finn is his best friend. Chewie is his friend but they have that language barrier and he’s like two hundred years old. Rey’s his cousin-aunt type friend but she’s more like his big sister as well as his main trainer and Jedi master. Master Luke is his friend-uncle-grandpa-master but no matter how hard Marin sees him try, Master Luke doesn’t trust him. And Grandmother is Grandmother, but she’s Kylo Ren’s mother first and foremost.

Kylo Ren is not his friend. Kylo Ren is not his family. He is a selfish liar who never wanted him and never will. Hux hurt him too, but he told him that he’d come back for him. Marin just wishes Hux loved him as much as he loves Kylo Ren.

“How was your trip?” Marin changes the subject, veering from the contempt he carries for his fathers.

“It was okay. Poe says ‘hi.’”

At the mention of Poe Dameron, Marin sulks. Visibly so, casting his eyes to the grassy ground. After Kylo Ren abandoned him and Marin took control of Poe’s brain, Poe told him he forgave him. Marin wasn’t convinced.

“And he wanted me to give you this. Well, it’s from the both of us,” Finn confesses, reaching inside his pack.
“Oh,” is all Marin can say. He feels so guilty for how he used Poe Dameron like some kind of evil wizard. Surely after such a heinous betrayal, Poe doesn’t like him or trust him in the slightest.

“Meet your new friend,” Finn grins, carefully taking out Marin’s gift.

It’s a dog. A little puppy.

Marin slaps his hands over his mouth. A dog?! An adorable little dog?! Her fur is white like the bright of snow and her dark, dewy eyes bore wide into his heart. Her long snout makes her look a bit doopey but oh-so cute.

“Really, Finn?” he gasps, elated.

“Yes. She’s all yours. You have to think of a name for her, though. She was rummaging around the trash for scraps when we found her. Didn’t have a tag or tracker or anything. Jumped right into my arms.” He rescued her back on Ator, but it was Poe’s idea to give it to Marin.

“Can I pet her?”

Finn sets the puppy down and she staggers to maintain balance after her long journey. Sniffing at the grass she squats to relieve herself, and Marin snorts. “Priorities,” he giggles, and Finn laughs along with him.

When she finishes, Marin gets on his hands and knees. “Hello there,” he smiles, ogling her wide, curious eyes. “I’m Marin. How are you? Did you have a fun trip?”

The puppy responds with several tentative licks to his nose and he laughs in delight. “You’re mighty sweet,” Marin nuzzles her back. Shyly, Marin pats his hand on her tiny skull. When she encourages the touch he’s unable to restrain the hug around her slight body, scratching at her white, stringy fur.

This is the sweetest creature he’s ever met. Most creatures he meets he plans on killing them for food, but he would never, ever consider eating this puppy. “What am I gonna call you?”

Finn smiles on, grateful Marin is taking a liking to his gift. A familiar presence makes him turn his head, smirking.

“What’s all this?” Rey greets with a bright smile.

“Look what Finn and Poe rescued! And he said I could keep her and take care of her. Isn’t she sweet?” Marin embraces the docile puppy, who gives him licks and kisses in return.

Clearly delighted, Rey throws her arm around her partner. “So while I lecture and drone on about the Force and the Jedi and lightsaber katas like old Master Luke, all you have to do is show up with a stray dog to make it all better,” she teases. A stray filling the hole in another stray’s heart.

Finn snorts, satisfied he could do something helpful for Marin for once. “You know how it is, Rey. I gotta win him over somehow.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she rubs his back through his coat. “Thank you,” she beams. “Becoming a Jedi shouldn’t mean he has to be kept from being a kid.”

Marin spends the day outside playing with his new friend, tossing sticks and jumping in bushes. Weaving in grasses, tumbling down hills, laughing and frolicking until their bellies call for food. After several long, frisky hours, the boy and his puppy go inside and eat whatever Grandmother
has in storage.

“YOU’RE really going to love it here,” Marin tells his puppy later that night while she graciously laps up some water. “There’s so much to see in the forest. It’s a lot more plentiful than my home planet. And with so many more people. They’re all Resistance fighters. You’re so cute that maybe if they see you with me, they’ll finally smile back to me.”

It feels really good to talk about his thoughts like he used to do with Hux when he was held prisoner. Shaking off the residual despair, Marin lies on his side, listening to his puppy’s eating noises. He found meat and vegetables for her to enjoy. She especially loves the root vegetables, just like he does. “It’s hard not being like them. I’m from the First Order, you know. They do things a bit differently there.”

He never really was a part of the First Order, no more than he’s a part of the Resistance now. But the description sits well with him. “They mostly live on ships. My father lives on one. At least, he used to. He was a general. He commanded thousands of officers and Stormtroopers. I don’t know where he is, now.” Marin cuts himself off with a yawn. “He told me he’s gonna come back for me but I don’t know when that will be. I don’t know if he even knows where to look. He said he wants to come back for me when he has Kylo Ren with him. But Kylo Ren doesn’t care about him or me or anyone but himself.”

The anger twitches his scarred fingers, nails scraping against the flooring. “Grandmother still cares about Kylo Ren. Even Rey and Master Luke, though they won’t admit it. They don’t understand how evil he is. They think Hux is the evil one. But they’re wrong.”

His puppy slumps on the ground next to him, entirely focused on her caretaker.

“Hux isn’t evil. He’s different. He sees things differently than they do. I know that he’s killed people but he only kills the people who deserve it, because he wants the galaxy to be unified. He’s brave, and a true leader. He carried me inside him and made sure I was able to be born. Not like Kylo Ren, who is heartless and manipulative and kills people for fun. People that he was supposed to care about, like his own father.” He believes this, and was never able to speak the words before he found his new friend.

Marin pets her belly, finding the spot he discovered that makes her eyes slip closed. “Sometimes I’m really, really mad at Hux for leaving me, but most of the time I just miss him. I miss him so much,” he sniffs. Tears leak from his eyes and his puppy licks them clean with her healing tongue.

“Abie. Can I call you Abie?” The name comes to him from his heart. Abie will be her name, like the letters A and B. He likes the way it sounds and feels. Her eyes blink devotedly and Marin smiles. “Abie it is. You’re with me now.”

Boots come into his line of vision, shaking him out of his peaceful kitchen floor nap. Marin sits up, careful not to disturb Abie.

It’s Master Luke. He’s wearing a fake smile.

Ever since their conversation in the field the other day, Master Luke has looked at him more and more in that certain skeptical way. Marin’s not stupid. He knows Master Luke thinks he’s some servant of the dark side like Kylo Ren. He knows what Kylo Ren did to all of Master Luke’s Jedi and is sorrowful for their loss and pities the toll it took on him.

But Marin hates that Master Luke watches him like he’s a bomb waiting to explode.
“I didn’t feel you enter the kitchen,” Marin accuses, void of emotion.

Luke had attempted to mask his presence to allow him alone time with his new dog. Naturally, it backfired. “I didn’t want to interrupt you.”

“Did you hear everything I told Abie?” he pets his puppy, lips a flattened into a line.

The boy is very talented at getting information out of people with just his words. “I’m sorry, but I did.”

“I know what you’re thinking,” Marin sulks. “You think Hux is evil. He’s not evil.”


“Then what?”

“I was thinking how lucky she is to have you. Abie, is it?”

Marin pets a protective hand over her head and nods.

“Marin,” Luke begins, palming one knee. “No one is forcing you to stay here. You have the right to make your own decisions. I left home for the first time when I was nearly twice your age. I couldn’t imagine what it would be like leaving home as a child.”

“There isn’t anywhere else to go,” Marin frowns.

“That’s not a reason to stay here.”

Stiffening, Marin narrows his eyes up at his master. “Don’t push me away. Not like him.”

“Please, let me finish. There will be a time when Hux or Kylo Ren or the both of them reenter your life, and no matter what Grandmother, Rey, or Finn say, you have to make the decision for yourself for where you want to go and what you want to do.”

Master Luke is behaving characteristically open and empathetic, and his words are genuine. The words fill Marin with a burst of gratitude.

It’s too foreign of an emotion, so he pushes the warmth away. “How did you do it? How did you abandon Rey?” Marin shifts gears, desperate to set the tone in the way he knows best.

Flinching, Master Luke turns towards the nighttime space-sky illuminating the viewports. “I always wanted what was best for her. Great things were in her future and I knew from the day she was born that her destiny was to help others. It was much different when I held Ben as a baby. He was all over the place, even back then. But after everything, after Ben turned—I couldn’t bear the thought of him finding her and—” He closes his eyes briefly. “Leaving me alone in this galaxy.”

Marin stares at the floor. “She was alone.” Abie licks his palm consolingly.

“I know. But back then, all that mattered to me was that she was safe. And far, far away from me or Grandmother meant she was safe.” How different his life would have been if Ben never turned. Mara, his wife, would still be alive fighting alongside him. Rey would be a master swordsman, never having carried the burden of her purgatory on Jakku. Han would still be alive to drive his sister crazy.

Ben would have never met the tyrannical Hux, and Marin wouldn’t exist.
“I think it would have been better if you stayed with her. Kylo Ren never found you or her. Nothing changed. You made a mistake in abandoning her.”

Luke peers beyond the gaps between the stars like he used to do as a boy, dreaming of visiting each system that his human eyes can’t see. “That may be so. But we have to accept the mistakes we’ve made and do our damnedest to prevent them from consuming us and prevent yourself from ever hurting anyone you love ever again.”

“I don’t care about forgiveness or acceptance! Darth Vader still cut your arm off. He still caused the death of your aunt and uncle on Tatooine. And he destroyed Grandmother’s homeworld, along with every place and everybody she ever cared about.” Marin remembers all the terrible truths Rey told him about Darth Vader. What Marin never understood is how they all can just move on after all of that.

Forgiveness and acceptance are constantly being shoved in his face. “Kylo Ren still gave me up,” Marin continues. “He still killed all the Jedi, Rey’s mother. And Han Solo. These things don’t just go away. Rey’s mother—your wife!—is never coming back. Han Solo is never coming back. How do you make amends for a life that you take, knowing full well they can never come back?” He swipes at a tear and Abie licks it off his hand, whimpering in sympathy.

Luke is determined to not break under the boy’s powerful projections of anger and sorrow, festering as he mourns for others even when everyone else doesn’t. Han, his oldest friend. Mara Jade, his wife and soulmate. “Don’t let this pain consume you, Marin. Talk to Abie. She’ll listen.”

Nodding, Marin cards his fingers in her white fur. That’s one thing Master Luke is right about. “She is a good listener.”

“You’re the only one who can keep yourself from the breaking point. And the more your powers develop, the more difficult it will be.”

Marin twists his lips, glowering up to Luke. There’s a darkness festering in his belly like an untapped oil well. “I know what you’ve been doing all this time,” he says, confronting Master Luke for the very first time.

Luke furrows his brow, but says nothing.

“You’re finding reasons to keep me from becoming a Jedi. That’s why you make Rey train me.”

“Rey is closer to you than I am, it’s no secret. She has the most to offer you,” Luke tries. Marin’s anger is peaking, unignorably ominous.

Abie whines when Marin stands to his feet, nearly eye to eye with Master Luke from his seat at the table. “You don’t want to train me. Not because you think it’s a waste of time because I’m not as strong as Rey or Finn or Ben. But you think that if you do, you’ll drive me to the dark like you think you drove Kylo Ren.”

Luke gets to his feet. His plan to console Marin after sensing his distress clearly rebounded. He needs to get Leia from her post so she can aid Marin where he failed.

Utterly insulted Master Luke is trying to walk away, Marin coils his hands into fists. “But that’s where you’re wrong. Kylo Ren was already in the dark. Some people are just bad. Some people are hopeless.”

Forcing himself to remain calm, Luke stands unwavering before the volatile boy. “Marin. Don’t let yourself be consumed with your anger. Your father was twisted by Snoke since he was born,” he
says. The blaze in Marin’s eyes falters, but simmers lowly like an active mine.

“He can be helped. He needs your help,” Luke tells him. He’s had this argument in another lifetime, with another little boy whose parents sent him to train in the ways of the Jedi.

Just like that, his rage blisters at Master Luke’s excuses, at the mere suggestion that Marin should help Kylo Ren. That he owes him anything. “All my life I was told how great of a man Kylo Ren was. And when he had the chance to prove it, he tossed me away! Like I was nothing!” The darkness’s hand beckons, goading Marin to the edge. “You’re just trying to substantiate your mistakes. Rey might have forgiven you, but I won’t. I never will!” Marin’s darkness grapples his master’s mind, unyielding and penetrating.


Gaping in terror at what he unleashed, Marin sprints out the front door and Abie scampers after him into the whir of the nighttime forest.

Luke collapses to his knees, unable to comprehend what force, what influence just took over his mind. Helpless, he groans in agony, staring at his lightsaber and the scorched stump of his arm. He cradles it to his abdomen, doubling over, letting his lightsaber clatter to the ground.

History repeating itself, endlessly barraging with the torments of the past.


Rey and Finn jog through the tunnel, ready to jump at their master’s aid.


“I couldn’t change it,” he cries. When Marin seized control of him it was like the thoughts, the actions were organically his own.

Perhaps they were. Perhaps he’s punishing himself, cycling through his worst memories and repeating them. Perhaps he is to blame for Ben’s descent as he is to blame for Marin’s. He is to blame for his family’s suffering. He is destined to suffer.

Chapter End Notes

A few things:
> hello puppy
> goodbye arm
> expect a new chapter right after this in case u all are mad about luke's other arm
>yes, it is still not explicit if snoke is #back or if kylo is #nuts or if its something else entirely! kylo does get to the bottom of it rather soon, so please stay tuned!
>
>this is how i imagined Abie, Marin's new puppy :D she is a borzoi because to me i always thought borzois look like cute alien dogs and star wars needs dogs so i thought... space dog

thank you all so much for reading!!
Monster. He’s a monster. Just like Kylo Ren.

Marin chokes around a fresh surge of tears, dodging fallen tree branches in the midnight woods. The tilt of the galaxy above is his only light source, hanging high and observant over its miserable inhabitants. In his weeping sorrow Marin navigates far, far from Master Luke. Far from everyone who will now look at him as the monster he truly is.

Abie squeals in concern when Marin trips on a stump, sending him flat on his face. The decay of the forest floor scrapes along the wetness of his cheeks. He doesn’t bother to get up, slumping over on his side. The icy winter winds eat into his bones through the thin lining of his sweater. He should have been wearing the jacket Grandmother bought for him. She always tells him to bring it along. He should have listened.

“Abie. You should go back to Finn. I’m not worth your time,” he laments. “It’s too cold for you out here.”

Vehemently disagreeing, Abie nuzzles his cheek. She’s not going anywhere. Her friend will keep her warm.

Grateful for the contact, Marin burrows his face into her soft, white fur. “Nobody wanted me before. I know for sure they won’t want me now.” He hurt Master Luke in his rage, behaved erratically and carelessly. He cut off his arm! And he only had one left!

Marin groans. He’s just like Kylo Ren. He’ll end up exactly like him, evil and hopeless and alone.

Not alone, Abie reminds him with a little snort. He’s never going to be alone as long as she’s around.

“All the things I said about Darth Vader and Kylo Ren and look what I go and do? I’m insane. I’m a crazy person. There’s no other explanation.” He never meant to hurt Master Luke. He just lost control.

Maybe, just maybe, he can muster some iota of sympathy for Kylo Ren. Sometimes things get out of control, people get hurt.

No. Never. Kylo Ren deliberately, premeditatedly hurts people. Killing Han Solo wasn’t an accident. And Kylo Ren wanted to leave Marin behind so badly that he’d done it every single chance he got.

Marin’s different than that. He’s better than that.

He gazes up to the stars. What would Hux say about what he did to Master Luke? He probably wouldn’t care because he doesn’t like the Resistance or the Jedi anyway. Or worse, Hux would care because then he’d see Kylo Ren when he looks at him because Hux cares way more about
Kylo Ren than his own son. Marin’s mouth twists, scrutinizing the galaxy from between the mute sway of silhouetted trees. He misses Hux more every day. Hux probably doesn’t miss him at all.

Marin stands on his scraped knees and changes direction towards wherever his feet take him. Loyal and able, Abie follows suit.

There’s a light between the trees. Not the light from a fire or that of a signal. Investigative, Marin jogs toward its beacon, dodging the litter of forest debris.

This can’t be.

It’s impossible.

But there it sits, plainly as anything. The Millennium Falcon. Nestled in an alcove in the trees and shrubbery, the dim light from the cockpit the only indication it isn’t abandoned.

“I have a bad feeling about this, Abie,” Marin murmurs, and Abie sighs in agreement.

If Kylo Ren really is on this ship, Marin should run back to Grandmother and surrender his location. Helpless to overcome his curiosity, Marin marches on toward the parked freighter.

There’s no sign of any footprints or divots in the ground where the boarding ramp descended, so whoever landed this ship must still be aboard.

“You have to promise me, Kylo Ren,” Marin grips Darth Vader’s lightsaber, fidgeting his thumb against it. “You have to take me with you.”

Kylo Ren’s wriggles in his bonds, itching to be freed from captivity. “Alright.”

“That’s not enough. You have to promise,” he pleads.

“I promise,” Kylo Ren lies.

Anger lusting into vengeance, Marin fumbles with the strange locking mechanism where the ramp used to have a simple open and close switch. There’s a palm sized panel similar to the ones securing the private rooms on base, and Marin flattens his scarred hand to it, hoping his genetic relation to Kylo Ren will not be a burden for once in his life.

The panel gives and the boarding ramp hisses open.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” Kylo Ren grates.

Marin frowns, squinting in thought and scouring his memory.

“The ramp,” his father clarifies, voice hoarse.

Bypassing argument for time’s sake, Marin sprints to the boarding ramp to activate the closing mechanism.

A surge of invisible energy propels Marin into the air, down the ramp and face first into the rough duracrete of the hangar. He tumbles away like he’s falling down a hill, unable to stop until he smashes into the closest wall. Wrought with confusion, panic, Marin gets to his knees, trembling with effort.

The boarding ramp seals definitively. Gaping, Marin limps toward the departing freighter. The Millennium Falcon’s engines glow and Marin is thrusted backwards, skull splitting against the
durasteel. The Falcon dissolves into hyperspace, leaving Marin with nothing but abraded skin and a shattered heart.

A tense fury bridles his senses. Kylo Ren used and manipulated him, turned Hux against him, abandoned him even since his birth. And Marin blames him for causing his anger, how he infected him with his taint and got him to hurt Master Luke and quite possibly casted him away from the Jedi.

He hopes Kylo Ren is aboard. He can finally confront him. He can finally show him exactly what he deserves.

“Wait here, Abie,” he instructs. When Abie pleads to remain at his side, a surge of his darkness changes her mind for her and plants her on her bottom and at the base of the ramp.

Abie’s dutiful posture makes something in Marin’s heart burst. Controlling other lifeforms is wrong. Forcing them to do something they wouldn’t normally do is wrong. But right now, it’s necessary. He doesn’t want her to get hurt. “I’m sorry, Abie. It’s for your own safety.”

Marin climbs aboard, the familiar scent bringing him back to a time where Finn and Rey rescued him from his home planet. He takes in the bowed hall, the quiet stillness. There’s no one here.

Hardly anything’s changed at all, except for the red dirt dusting the floor. He follows one of the paths toward the main living area.

On the table Marin discovers equipment—hooks and ropes and other devices he’s never seen before. They are well used. Marin’s hand reaches for the strange objects littering the table. Three identical, metallic cased pyramids with no clear function and another identical object embedded in a large red brick, sprouting like a fang from a wolf’s gums.

Marin moves into the cockpit finding it largely unchanged except for the scrapes along the controls like someone scratched at them with the tip of a knife. Puzzled, Marin moves to the other halls. He wishes Abie was walking with him into the unknown.

The bisecting hall leads him deeper into the catacomb. Marin approaches a small, dimly lit room. Stricken, he halts in his tracks.

Kylo Ren lies in a heap atop a bunk, uneven dark hair strewn over his sleeping eyes. His arms are coiled protectively over his abdomen, legs drawn in submissively in slumber.

Vader’s lightsaber sits clipped on his hip.

Without thinking, Marin snatches the lightsaber from his hip. It doesn’t belong to him.

Ren’s eyes fly open and his hand slaps to his belt, locking onto the terrified face of his son.

It’s possible Ren could still be dreaming. But in his dream Hux was with him in this bunk, cuddled into his side. And they were holding their daughters, shielding them from the universe.

“What are you doing here?” Marin spits when Ren says nothing, does nothing but stare in his direction.

Swallowing reflexively, Ren sits up, ogling the lightsaber fisted in the boy’s hand. Ren keeps his monstrous appendage hidden. “I’m here to bring you home.” He can’t act impulsively. He’s done allowing his fears to detract from his objectives. Yes, he is here to bring him to Hux and to the twins. He’s going to make them a family—a real family. Marin will forgive him and Hux will
forgive him and they’ll all be happier. He needs them to be safe. He needs Hux to love him.

Recoiling, Marin frowns. He doesn’t believe a word Kylo Ren is saying. He scrutinizes the angry purple bruises blotting his father’s neck like ink, the distinct ovals of fingerprints in the skin of his bobbing throat. “What did you do?”

Ren’s eyes narrow, as if Marin can see through him like glass.

“Someone tried to strangle you. What did you do?” Marin frowns.

Blanching, Ren forces his face to remain even. “Some bounty hunter,” he lies, shuddering recalling Hux’s murderous rage. “Thought he could run away with my ship, too, but I programmed it to my biometrics. No one gets unlocks this ship without my say-so. Unless they, you know, are related to me. Which I didn’t mean to have happen with the lock but it’s a good thing it did. Now that you’re here.”

The boy’s stare hardens. “Lucky me. Where’s Hux?”

Ren rakes his human hand in his hair, monstrous claw tucked in his sleeve and cloak. Hux is back on the Finalizer with the babies Ren kidnapped and neglected and almost killed in a blackout. Hux never wants to see him again. Hux hates him. “He’s with our people,” Ren says instead. “He misses you.”

Marin narrows his eyes. He wants to tell him to shut up but that will solve nothing. “There’s a reason why he’s not with you now. Tell me.”

Unable to admit the truth, Ren summons the most believable distortion of it. “He hasn’t forgiven me for leaving you behind. I want to make it right.”

Typical Kylo Ren. Always thinking about himself. “So your idea of ‘making it right’ is to kidnap me?”

Ren flinches, claw curling into a fist. “No.” He would never. Not again. “I’m not going to force you to go anywhere you don’t want to go.”

“Good. I don’t want to go anywhere with you,” Marin spits, glowering menacingly.

“Fair enough,” Ren mumbles in resignation.

“So you want me now?” Marin’s careful resolve cracks. “Why didn’t you want me then?” he accuses.

“I…I had a lot to deal with. At the time.” Ren’s excuse sounds weak to his own ears.

“You shouldn’t go around making children just to throw them away. You shouldn’t create something just to hurt it.” Calling to the Force, Marin pleads for the wounds of his heart to heal.

His son’s words sting but he’d rather feel his hatred than nothing at all. “I’m gonna do better this time. I promise you.” He means it.

Unconvinced, Marin leans backwards onto the adjacent wall. He crosses his arms defiantly, battling the age-old hurt. “What if I don’t want to go? What if I want to stay here?” he asks, adversarial. He probably doesn’t have much of a choice now that Master Luke will see to his imprisonment, banishment, or worse. But he’s done pandering to Kylo Ren’s whims. He won’t repeat his mistakes like Kylo Ren does over and over again with his so-called mistakes.
“We’ll figure something out.” Ren sits up fully, careful not to reveal the extent of his injury.

“What happened to your neck?” He eyes the discoloration marring the skin around the bruises. “Not the bruises, but the skin. It’s grey.” It wasn’t there before, just like the weird haircut Kylo Ren sports now. He looks like one of those fighter pilots who have facial piercings and tattoos, whose friends all dress the same as them.

“After I—left you behind,” Ren begins, brow pinching, “I had to overcome a trial to attest for my wrongdoings. I killed Snoke and walked away from the incident with several deformations.”

“Several?” he scrutinizes.

There’s no way around this. Ren brandishes his malformed arm, extending the claw as if to shake his hand.

The boy’s eyes widen. “Gross,” he says after a moment. Though he doesn’t cower away or divulge any true disgust.

Nodding, Ren rolls his knuckles. “Yeah.”

“Now you really look like a monster,” sneers the boy pettily.

Resigned hurt sinks Ren’s heart. But he’s forced to agree. “What have you been doing these past several months?”

“I’ve been training,” he discloses evenly.

“With who?”


His attempt is squandered when Kylo Ren’s lips tug into a sad smile. “You two are so much alike,” he murmurs. “It’s kind of creepy.”

When Marin projects puzzlement, Ren clarifies. “You and Hux.”

Marin doesn’t know what to say to that. His heart aches to be with Hux again, but he dare not admit it to Kylo Ren.

“How did you find me?” Ren continues, taking in the boy’s ensemble. Though he’s grown a few inches, his cheekbones poke a bit sharper, and his mouth twists a bit meaner—his hair is the same swoosh of dirty blond, his eyes the same bright blue-green. He’s wearing cleaner clothing than the last time he saw him—a dark blue sweater with a white undershirt poking out from the collar, black cargo pants, and a small tool belt. He’s not wearing a jacket which in this climate is extremely dangerous.

Determined not to tell Kylo Ren about the incident with Master Luke, Marin looks down at the lightsaber hilt. “I was going for a walk. I like to walk with my puppy, Abie, and I saw the Millennium Falcon,” he blurts. Why did he tell him about Abie?

Ren nods. He’s docked the Falcon hours away on foot from any known Resistance base. Purposefully so. He had a lot of thinking to do. Coming to terms with the fact that if he was ever going to gain Hux’s trust again, he’d have to find a way to bring Marin back to him. “Where is Abie?”
“I’m not lying,” Marin says accusingly. “Abie’s outside. I told her to wait out there because I knew it would be dangerous in here.”

Abie’s distant barking resonates in the ship. Stars! Abie better not try and investigate. He doesn’t want to have to force her mind into staying put again.

On cue, Abie’s paws thump towards him. “Abie!” Marin shouts indignantly. Excited to see her friend again, Abie scurries up to him, nuzzling his leg. “Abie, you were supposed to wait outside,” he sighs. She really must have been determined to break out of the spell he cast on her.

“Cute dog,” Ren interrupts. Delighted at the compliment, Abie scampers over to Ren’s shins, standing up on her hind legs.

Scowling, Marin makes sure Kylo Ren doesn’t try and do something to Abie, especially now that he’s got that nasty claw. But all he does is smile and pet her with his normal hand just how she likes to be petted.

He’s seen enough. “Come here,” Marin orders, using his manipulation powers against her to rob Kylo Ren of the pleasure of petting Abie. Obediently, she pries herself away and sits at Marin’s side, panting with her tongue hanging out. That’s better.

Ren frowns. He knows exactly what Marin just did because he’s done the same thing to his subordinates. He doesn’t voice his concern. Reprisal is the last thing he needs to incite. “Why don’t you go and get her some water. There are a few bowls in the living area,” he tries.

Looking down into Abie’s comforting eyes, Marin decides to follow through with Kylo Ren’s suggestion. She looks thirsty. Wordlessly he and his puppy escort themselves to the living area where the bowls are. He fills one up at the sink in the refresher and sets it down outside by the dirty table where there’s plenty of room for the both of them to lie on the floor like they like to do together.

Marin ignores him when Ren lurches into the living area, haunting the ship’s halls like a shadow. “Isn’t it a little late in the day for you to be out walking?” Ren asks. It’s well past sundown.

“Grandmother lets me do whatever I want,” Marin lies, focusing on Abie’s diligent drinking.

That makes Ren laugh. “Yeah, right. Maybe in your wildest dreams.”

Marin flinches at Kylo Ren’s amusement. A part of him believes Kylo Ren doesn’t deserve to reminisce on his mother after all the pain and sorrow he’s inflicted on her. Another part of him tells him that she’s his mother, and they care about each other no matter what.

Against his will, Marin yawns, the physical and emotional exhaustion sinking him into the floor. Abie yawns too. After running for so long, Marin can’t fathom running all the way back home. Or anywhere else, since home is no longer an option.

“You don’t have to tell me why you ran away, but you can’t walk back to the base this late. Neither can Abie,” Ren tries. “It’s freezing out there.”

Marin glares up at him. “I didn’t run away.”

“You don’t have to tell me why. But I know you did, because I did the same thing before when I was a kid.” He can see the look in his eye, the one that says he’s convinced he doesn’t belong anywhere. Ren remembers the same look in Ben’s—the very first person he killed. “Just stay here tonight.”
Affronted, Marin puts a protective arm around Abie, who just wants to sleep but her friend keeps forcing her eyes open. “Not gonna happen.” He’s not staying here with Kylo Ren and all his weapons. He’d rather freeze in the forest.

“Think about your dog,” Ren tells him. He leaves and returns with a large pillow and bedroll. “You can sleep in the cockpit to make sure I don’t kidnap you,” Ren says playfully, softening the heaviness of the situation with a small smirk.

He can feel Abie’s exhaustion and Marin sinks with guilt. Standing up, he takes the pillow and bedroll from Ren. Loyal beyond compare, Abie follows him in the direction of the cockpit, powering through her fatigue.

Marin seals off the cockpit, locking him and his puppy from Kylo Ren’s malevolence. Surrendering to the day’s great toll, Marin unrolls the bedroll and snuggles up with Abie, staring up at the array of lights and controls dotting the walls. Through his half-closed eyes they resemble fuzzy red stars until he slips into a soulful slumber.

Ren exhales, massaging his temples with his human fingers. He’s grateful Marin stole back Vader’s saber, no longer trusting his own body.

Marin intercepting him on his own accord is the galaxy telling him he’s meant to bring Marin back to Hux. Ren knew he needed to, but now he knows he’s supposed to. But most imperatively, he’s going to do it the right way. Settling at the table, Ren begins to excavate the fourth holocron from its brick. The living space fills with the steady rhythm of scraping.

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Commandant Phasma approaches one of her officers. Thankfully Hux has already blasted away to his spider hole. With any luck, he’ll make a speedy recovery. The Finalizer deserves his stern hand. “What of the beacon we planted on Kylo Ren’s ship?” Her troopers secured it between its dilapidated panels while he was off crying in his rooms. Ren’s not her problem now but that doesn’t mean he won’t eventually be.

“He dropped out of hyperspace several hours ago and landed on Ithor. It’s uninhabited but using a probe we can see if it’s a Resistance fortress,” the officer says.

The datapad in her hand crackles under her forceful grip. “How long until we know?”

“Should be a matter of days. Should we send a squadron as well?”

“No, no. Our suspicions are probably correct, and we can’t risk tipping them off. The new weapon will have to be tested before then. No misfires. Not this time,” she vows. The new weapon—a silent, coiled predator. Soon, she’ll have a location of their first target, and nothing will stand in her way.
A few things:
>And the award for the most awkward father/son bonding goes TO...
>idk why but "He cut off his arm! And he only had one left!" is my fav marin moment
tbh lmao .. HE ONLY HAD ONE. LEFT.
>phamsa you need to relax
>More bbs+Hux next week! i thought i had at least one scene of them in this chapter,
but as i reread the draft its the one right after, so please stay tuned!

thank you all for reading!!!! :)
Chapter 6

Abie licks her friend’s cheek to help bring him out of his fitful rest. He doesn’t seem to want to budge so she licks all around his face until it responds with a satisfying crunch.

“Abie,” Marin scoffs. “I suppose you’re not the worst alarm clock,” he mumbles. One look in her earnest eyes and his annoyance dissipates. He hugs his friend good-morning.

Blinking around, the memory of what happened last night wipes his pleasant smile off his face. He glares to the Millennium Falcon’s pilot and passengers’ chairs, and then outside the large viewport that shows the familiar landscape of Ithor’s forest in the daylight.

“Come on,” he stands. “Time to go pee.”

Obediently Abie follows him to the exit. Marin frowns at the table where Kylo Ren chose to fall asleep. Head hanging backwards sloppily, monster claw curled around one of the weird metal objects Marin saw yesterday.

His stomach rumbles but Abie should be allowed to pee before he takes care of his hunger. She wags her little tail, watching the boarding ramp descend. “Go ahead, Abie. I’m going to see if there’s anything for us to eat. Don’t wander off too far,” he chides.

Ren wakes to the clatter of cabinets and containers, narrowing his eyes at the disturbance. Marin’s digging around in the storage, his little dog sniffing around his feet.

Drat, Kylo Ren is awake. Marin doesn’t want to ask him for food. Normally he isn’t hungry this early but he didn’t have time to grab dinner last night because, you know, he cut Master Luke’s arm off. He doesn’t want to ask Kylo Ren for anything because he doesn’t need his help, and never will.

Abie sighs and rolls on her belly, waiting for her friends to feed her.

“Abie’s hungry,” Marin says, breaking the silence.

Ren squints around. “Check the top drawer. There should be a few portion packs in there.”

Surely enough, there are three. Marin pulls out two and prepares the ingredients, adding water from the refresher to the sticks of meat to inflate them to an edible texture while Abie toes around him earnestly. He chews on his piece while breaking off smaller pieces for Abie with his fingers, like he used to toss to the little birds in Grandmother’s yard.

Ren gorges on a green-grey energy supplement—his first meal in days—while studying Marin’s contemplative investigation.

“What are those?” Marin points to the four pyramids littering the table, no longer able to stifle his curiosity after witnessing Kylo Ren sleep with his nasty claw around one.
“Holocrons.”

That answers nothing. Purposefully so, as if Kylo Ren wants him to drive the conversation. “What do they do?”

Ren picks one up with his human hand and offers it to Marin. Hesitating, Marin takes it, investigating its cold, diamond-hard casing.

“They store information for Force-users. I found them hidden in the temple ruins of Moraband.”

Marin runs his scarred fingers along the corners of the holocron. “That’s the Sith homeworld,” he accuses.

Ren raises his brows. “Yes, it was. That was the only place I could think of that would have these holocrons. I’m hoping that I can open them and find a way to…” Ren’s eyes lose focuses, the weight of his trials bearing onto him. “A way to get my soul back.”

“And fix your arm?” Marin asks, admittedly intrigued.

“Hopefully. But most of all I don’t want to be a danger to anyone anymore.”

“You might be looking in the wrong place. Master Luke says the Sith were evil.” Figures Kylo Ren would look for answers in somewhere evil, with whatever ‘good’ intentions he may have.

“Evil is what did this to me,” he defends. “The answers are in these,” he palms another holocron. Ultimately, the Force did this to him, but Ren refuses to believe the Force would be the manipulator of such a cruel punishment. There has to be a puppet master on the other side of the curtain. There has to be.

“You did that to yourself,” Marin corrects him. He tosses Abie another piece of the meat stick and she catches it between her teeth.

His son’s words cut deeply, but he dares not argue. He must master his flaring pride if he’s ever to make amends with his son. “Is that what you believe?”

“Yes. You should have come to Master Luke after you killed Supreme Leader Snoke. He might have been able to help you but instead you ran off looking for your own answers.” He’s careful not to divulge his shame at what he did to Master Luke, focusing on wounding Kylo Ren with his words. “And now all you have are these—lumps.”

Ren recoils, stricken. “These lumps are gonna get me back the life I threw away,” he scolds, the anger buried and sealed for himself, and only himself, peeking through.

Resolute, Marin sets the holocron down on the dirt-dusted table. “Why don’t you open them?”

“They have to be opened with the Force by a trained user.” Ren glares at the stubborn cluster of holocrons. “I can’t open them. I’m disconnected.” What power he had before he ran had dwindled to nothing. The Force has left him, and shows no signs of returning.

Marin crosses his arms. “Sucks for you.”

Ignoring his contempt, Ren clears his throat. “Maybe you could try.”

The nerve Kylo Ren has, asking him for help. What has he ever done for him? “Not likely. I have no powers,” he says instead.
“I seriously doubt that,” Ren tells him. He’s seen how the boy manipulated the cruiser of Jedi and Resistance fighters, barely eight years old and he was even able to render the scavenger and Luke Skywalker unconscious. He’s experienced the boy’s miraculous healing capabilities firsthand.

Could Kylo Ren possibly know what he did to Master Luke last night? “I can’t even lift a stone.”

“You won’t know until you try.” He passes Marin a holocron, the one that was cemented in brick and now free from its dusty case.

Sighing, Marin takes the offered lump and squats onto the floor. Abie cuddles up to his side, soothing his stress with her presence.

Concentrate. Feel the Force flow. He rolls the words over in his head—Master Luke’s instructive chant. Closing his eyes, he focuses on the space around the holocron between his bumpy palms. Like he’s tried a million times before, he extends his firelight into the object. Normally he tries this with stones, sticks, toys, and even Rey herself, but no physical response has ever come. He spins and spins his energy around it as the holocron’s dark energy dances inside the eye of the storm.

The holocron pops open like a blossoming flower, petals a mandala of knives. He flings his eyes open, gaping at the opened holocron in his hands.

“You did it,” Ren gasps, kneeling in front of him. He bores into the opened holocron, to the activation pad that will project the coveted Sith secrets into the air. “You did it,” he repeats, elated. “Thank you.”

“I…” Marin is at a loss for words. “I don’t understand. It just opened.”

Kylo Ren beams at him, joy shining in his red-rimmed eyes. “Do you think you can try the others?” Ren all but begs, bumbling around the cabinets for a pad of paper and a pencil or ink pen to transcribe the holocron in case it needs to be translated from a cipher.

Adrenalized from his first breakthrough in Force-wielding, Marin nods and sets the opened holocron on the table for Kylo Ren to read. Using the same method for the others, Marin opens them all consecutively, each one easier than the last.

Observing his handiwork, he smiles, his heart a fluttering bird. He finally did something that made him worthy of his Jedi apprenticeship. He finally did something that only Rey, Finn, and Master Luke could do. And Anakin Skywalker, the Chosen One.

Over his shoulder, Kylo Ren laughs in stunned disbelief at the opened holocrons around Marin’s scarred hands. The child in him smiles at the approval from his father, as if they had been at each other’s side since he was born.

Marin’s smile drops when he sees how frantically his father is digging for a pencil to go with the pad of paper he found, no longer radiating gratitude, only desperation.

Kylo Ren just wanted to use him to get into the holocrons so he can get everyone to like him again. Coldness pools in Marin's gut. Anger doesn’t burn, only a blue, deep-seated sorrow.

“You did good. Thank you,” Ren commends, finding his seat at the table. He smiles another genuine smile. He couldn’t have done this without him.

Determined not to be fazed, Marin sits across from him, palm supporting his chin. “So what’s next?” he asks, feigning disinterest.
In response, Ren activates the projector. It’s not a hologram, the technology far too ancient. Instead it’s a rudimentary light projection that needs a flat surface for one to read the information. Ren angles it on its side to a wall. Only part of the projection of symbols can be read at a time due to the vastness the light covers. Ren stands, deactivating the lights of the living space.

The projection of strange glyphs reflects back into Marin’s absorbent eyes. “You can read that?”

“No, but I might be able to translate it.” Ren transcribes the first line of symbols with painstaking precision. Unwanted memories surface. Of his childhood self with his nose buried in his sketchbook, drawing plant life, ship schematics, portraits of his mother. He hasn’t made a piece of artwork since he was a boy.

Shaking off the distraction, Ren completes the first line on his pad of paper. He doesn’t have enough information to crack the code in just one line. He could really use a protocol droid right now.

Ren flicks his eyes to Marin’s pensive staring at the glyphs. He’s the spitting image of Hux, who during the years of their cold partnership aboard the Finalizer would scrutinize screens of weapon diagrams, Stormtrooper datafiles, or other mission reports. Blue light outlining his taut, pale skin, glimmering in his calculating eyes, the memory of Hux brought to life in their son.

Throat bobbing, Ren tears off a clean sheet of paper. He slides it over to Marin along with another pencil. “Why don’t I work on this one and you set up another one on that wall? Just write the symbols down with a space in between so I can write underneath it.”

Marin freezes, torn between his excitement in helping with a project as his instincts always encourage him, and his careful contempt for anything Kylo Ren has ever said and will ever say to him.

Naturally, Ren misunderstands his hesitation and panics. What if he doesn’t know how to read or write? Because that would have been something Ren should have taught him, something Hux would have wanted him to know how to do.

Marin answers for him, taking the offered paper. “Does it matter which one I start on?”

Cracking a relieved grin, Ren pushes over the closest one. Satisfied, Marin sets the holocron to the opposite wall and activates the projection like how he saw Kylo Ren do. He begins from left to right, carefully transcribing the symbols. He fills the whole sheet so he asks for another.

Ren raises his brow, because he’s only filled his half way. And Marin’s symbols look cleaner than his ones.

“I’m good with puzzles,” Marin shrugs. He takes the thin stack of paper Ren hands him between his scarred fingers.

Ren knew his kid was some kind of genius, no thanks to him. He wonders how the twins will turn out, if they’ll be strong like Marin and Hux with their brains, or strong with unique Force-sensitivity like his cousin and his first Jedi master, as well as himself. How he used to be, anyway.

His hand falters on his next glyph. Marin doesn’t know about the twins. About his sisters.

Enough secrets. He deserves to know. Besides, Ren’s anticipating his comments and feelings on the subject of no longer being an only child.

They work in silence, concentrating on getting the symbols just right. Marin completes nine pages
of transcribing the wall of text, compared to Ren’s seven pages, and deactivates the finished holocron. He sets it on his stack of notes, organized and efficient.

“Hey, I need to tell you something,” Ren says, before Marin can begin on another holocron.

Abie’s ears perk up at the break in the silent lull of the Falcon but she stays coiled on the floor, not feeling threatened in the least by her friends.

“What?” Marin asks levelly. This ought to be good.

The truth about the twins begs to be spoken, clawing up his tongue with fervent insistency.

Ren’s lashes beat, meeting Marin’s judgmental eye. There it nags. The fear. His worst fear of being turned away, tormented by the very people he attempts to protect. Destroyed by that which he holds dear.

“The real reason why Hux couldn’t come with me was because—” His anxiety hinders his confession, but he powers through. A half-truth forms to ease his way. “Because he’s with your sisters. He just had them the other day and he’s recovering. He carried them—just like he carried you.” Ren’s guilt spikes, tears pricking in his eyes.

Of all the things Marin expected him to say, he certainly wasn’t expecting that. Sisters? Twin baby sisters? Gripped with awe, Marin fails to control the hope brightening his features. He’s no longer the only child with the burden of Kylo Ren’s pedigree? And more importantly, he’s a big brother?

Kylo Ren could be saying this to manipulate him. But the hope shines through his heart. Hope is an indestructible defense in the face of all odds. “Are you telling the truth?” Marin asks, small and vulnerable.

It’s the saddest question Ren’s ever heard.

“Yes,” Ren nods, stifling the all-corrupting guilt. And I almost killed them. I almost killed them before they even had a life.

But Ren can’t help but think there is hope he can return to Hux and the twins. Because even while possessed by the dark hand, he knew he had to get the twins back to Hux, even if it meant proving his villainy and his liability to Hux and their family. He allowed himself to be caught, so Hux would see how hard he’s fighting the manipulation he’s convinced is ailing his soul. Now that he has Marin with him, everything is falling into place. Soon, everything will be whole.

Marin expels a weary breath, chin puckering. Abie whines and pads towards him, sensing his distress. “Does Hux want them?”

Ren could kill himself. “He does. And he wants you, too. He always wanted you.” The only time he hadn’t was when I made you in a lab and forced him to bear you. “I’m the one who tore you two apart. Which is why I have to bring you back to him. I have to.”

Kylo Ren is making him feel vulnerable, stretching him thin and exposing his underbelly. What if going with Kylo Ren is not only his only option, but the correct turn in his path? Now that he’s betrayed Master Luke…he has nothing here. He can’t ever go back.

“I want to go back to Hux,” Marin blurts. “But, your holocrons. You need to be sure that you’re not a danger. That’s why you left them, right? Because you’re dangerous?”

“And that’s why—that’s why you didn’t come back to Grandmother?” And back to me?

Ren nods, hope blossoming.

“I cut Master Luke’s arm off,” Marin confesses, and there’s no taking it back. “That’s why I ran away.” There it is. The truth laid bare before his father.

Ren’s eyes widen. “I’m…sure you had a good reason for that.”

Biting into his lip, Marin palms his stomach as if to soothe the coiling guilt and shame. “I used the darkness to play with his mind. I wanted him to hurt as I hurt.” He doesn't know why he's confessing this. On top of everything, now Kylo Ren is on this crusade to be good. How strange it is to feel like an equal to, if not worse human being than Kylo Ren.

“The dark side obscures reason. It drives people to commit atrocities,” Ren tells him, earnest. As if he's convincing all levels of himself, from all stages of his life. But what he says next is the farthest from how he feels for himself. “It's not your fault.” He doesn’t want Marin to feel the pain he feels.

Like a douse of ice cold water, Marin bristles. Of course it was his fault. He pities Kylo Ren if he truly thinks he's blameless. Instead of berating him, Marin chooses to activate another holocron.

“Come on. Let’s finish.”

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Hux pushes the incubator atop a gurney, frictionless as it levitates toward the exit of the docking bay. The Mardromitan system’s sun beats down on him in the exposing platform of the bay, marring his babies’ sensitive skin and newborn eyes from their perch. They whine in agony from the confines of their shared incubator. Hux hastens his footfalls. The sun is too much for them.

“Shh,” he coos comfortingly. “We’re almost there.” He inhales the crisp freshness of this new planet. Having spent the past long months spaceside, the pungent marshlike odor of Mardromitan is a welcoming annoyance.

Thankfully he catches little attention from the droves of busy officers, especially now that he’s in the drab of his fatigues instead of a bloodstained medical gown or a decorated general’s uniform. Radiation from the sun bakes his back and he loathes how the twins have to suffer through it. Finally they breach the indoors. But the twins continue to howl. Several doctors and unmasked Stormtroopers-in-training gape in concern. Hux scowls, succinctly commanding they mind their own damned business. Until he remembers that one of these timid workers have been ordered to escort him to his new quarters.

“General Hux,” vocalizes a helmeted Stormtrooper. His salute is sloppy, suggesting he’s far too young for his training to be complete. “It’s an honor to meet you. This way, Sir.”

Hux is led to a bridge, ceiling-high windows bleaching in the white sun. He can see more of the planet from this vantage—the grassland connecting with an estuary glimmering in the high-set sun, attributing to the faint sulfuric smell.

The trooper leaves him to a small room, fitted with a bunk and two standard issue flatbed cradles commonly used for their growing Stormtroopers. All the amenities include a refresher, a small
kitchen, and a pantry full of food, particularly baby formula and other infant care supplies. The most basic of furnishings entail a cushioned armchair, a table, and a large window for the sun to greet them in the morning. This will do for the time being.

“General Hux,” comes an unwanted voice of a caretaker droid. “I’m here to assist you in the care for the infants.”

Bristling, Hux tucks the infants into the room and barricades the door so the droid will let him be. He loathes nanny droids. His childhood consisted of their artificially warm touch more than he’d ever wish to remember. “That won’t be necessary. You’re dismissed.”

“Sir, the High Enforcer was explicit. You need to take this time to recover as well as care for your infants.”

“Leave or I’ll rip your shelling apart circuit by circuit,” he threatens. “I don’t take orders from Phasma and certainly not from droids.” Droids are unreliable, as his medical droids proved to be when delivering the twins. If it weren’t for his misplaced judgement they would have never been taken from him.

With finality Hux seals the door, leaving him and his babies in peace. He expels a sigh of pure relief. It’s just them now.

Their health has nearly been rehabilitated since their capture, but the Finalizer medics told Hux he should keep them enclosed in the incubator for most of the day, only taking them out to change them and feed them.

Hux beams down at his two daughters. This is it. This is what he was meant to do. Covet two perfect, perfect heiresses to carry on his legacy. “You two will rise as the Order will. You’ll prosper as I have. The First Order is everything you could need,” he promises them. But the vow echoes hollowly to his ears, tugging free a thin thread of anxiety. He repeats the words to validate them as the infants gape in bewildered interest and incomprehension.

One of them reaches out with her tiny hand, miniscule fingertips swiping at the air. Hux’s heart blossoms with delight at her motor control, unable to take his eyes off the deliberate motions. The other baby gnashes her toothless mouth. Hux knows that expression because it’s the one Marin made when he was newborn. She’s hungry.

Manically, Hux glares around the room for any intruders though reason tells him no one could get through the sealed door. Reason told him that his babies would be delivered safely as long as he trusted the security technology. Reason told him Ren wouldn’t hurt him, that Ren had his best interests at heart. That Ren had loved him.

He must abandon reason for the time being, for the good of his babies. Sparing one last look at them—counting one, then two, then one, then two, then one, then two—he ignores the thud of his adrenalized heart enough to prepare the formula.

Satisfied with the milky concoction of powder and heated tap water, Hux screws the bottle tight. He can do this. He can do this.

Cautiously, he breaks the seal of the incubator. Stupidly, carelessly so! They’re only in diapers. He hadn’t prepared their blankets. They whimper at the loss of precious warmth, distressed beyond understanding. Clamoring, Hux finds two fuzzy blankets of suitable size for their miniscule statures. Hux gingerly tucks the blankets around them, begging his fingers to stop their irritating tremble. But the twins vehemently disagree with his methods, squirming and whimpering, their
combined strength too weak to budge the blankets to their liking. You’re not doing this right, they seem to say. We are in agony because you’re not doing this right.

If Ren were here, they could each manage a baby, take turns holding and feeding them while the other rests. Hux’s face twists, determined not to succumb to the despair.

Remember. Babies love to be warm and swaddled. Hux turns his back to his squealing babies and flattens one blanket on the cot behind him to tackle his first swaddle. The hand-waving one is first. She is quite resolute. Careful to support her wobbly head, Hux situates her atop the spread. Painstakingly he entombs her into the swaddle. She appears to be satisfied.

The hungry one is second. He wraps her in the other blanket more efficiently having picked up on hiccups from already performing it once on her sister. The swaddle does little to quell her, because she is too hungry for anything else to be of consequence.

Thinking ahead, Hux props the filled bottle on the armchair so that all he has to do to feed her is sit down, cradling her in his lap. His strategy carries out as he planned, and he pops the rubbery tip between her lips and she suckles happily until satisfied. “Feel better?” he asks her, smiling warmly. Her dark, newborn eyes bore into him, studying his noises and shapes.

“You’re a miracle of nature,” he praises. “No one’s going to take you from me ever again.”

The other baby gurgles. She wants to be fed as well. If only there was a way he could simultaneously cradle them in his arms. It might be possible when his gut has healed and the twins aren’t quite as fragile as glass. For now, he compromises like he’s always done and sets the fed baby inside her incubator. It’s designed to regulate to her body temperature so he’s not concerned with her overheating in the swaddle. Now ignored, she groans in malcontent but focuses on the warmth of the soft blanket around her.

Hux feeds the other one, allowing her to slurp all she needs. Like her sister, she scrutinizes him thoughtfully, absorbing all his enchanted facial expressions. Her little fingers form a fist from between the folds of her swaddle, across her chest in a mock salute. Hux warms. One day she’ll be able to hold her head high and salute droves of Stormtroopers as natural as instinct.

Within the confines of this room—four walls, one door, one window—this is their dominion. No one will bother them here until they’re strong enough to return to their post on the Finalizer. Marin will join them too, in time, now that he knows that he won’t ever need Ren again. Once he regains his strength, he’ll pillage ever system for him.

Hux spends the rest of the day organizing their food supply, cleansing their cradles for when the babies can tolerate life outside of the incubators, changing their diapers and tediously fitting them with the little body suits that encase their hands and feet. They glare at him in contempt at the strange textures sheathing their skin but, to Hux’s sheer relief, they are finished crying for the day. They have been crying for most of their lives and now all they want to do is sleep.

Now that they’re snug in their suits, Hux folds their blankets and sets them on their backs. Should he move the cot by the door or window? Which is more likely to be preferable to an intruder?

Hux shuffles his cot to the door, exhaustion weighing him down. He seals the window with the drape and blinds and eases the incubators to the wall adjacent to the door. It’s the safest spot in the room. The infants sleep on, batteries drained.

Hux finds his perch on the cot, plastered to the door with one hand around a blaster. Its bolts are deadly. One shot to any extremity and the intruder can say goodbye to whatever appendage he aims
for. Back to the door, Hux monitors the window like a watchdog. Bloodshot eyes unwavering, fisted hand on his blaster unrelenting.

Until his body fails him, pulling him down into the depths of sleep.

The room is quiet for hours. The Mardromitan sun sets, orange light fading from the cracks between the blinds of the window.

Hux remains slumped against the door, head lolling uncomfortably as his chin digs into his chest. But he’s far too tired to care, body commanding control over mind as it heals itself.

He doesn’t do as much as twitch when a foreign presence appears in the room, lurching toward the twin incubators.

One infant wakes, blinking at the new shapes hovering over her. The other one hums awake too, enraptured at the new colors and shapes floating in front of her. Unafraid and inquisitive, the infants wave their little clothed fists to acknowledge the new presence.

They see the colors. They see the shapes. They see the light.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys liked this chapter! :)  
> as for the creepy end bit: don't worry, the bbs are ok, i just like to build suspense!!!  
:D
“Are you this desperate to get away from it all? From Marin? From me?”

Ren sweeps him close, kissing the grimace from his lips. “You know that’s not true. I’m coming right back,” Ren murmurs, lips brushing Hux’s with every word.

Hux pulls away, gripping Ren’s shirt so he can’t get too far. Tethered in Ren’s orbit. “Then stop kissing me like that.”

“Like what?” Ren leans in but Hux ducks away.

“Like you’re never going to see me again,” Hux accuses.

Brow puckering, Ren steals another heated kiss that Hux is helpless to get away from. Hux licks his lips, chest bubbling—a side effect of being trapped in the confines of Ren’s arms. “You’re so fucking dramatic.”

Bringing a thumb to the swell of Hux’s bottom lip, Ren smiles. Open, honest. “That’s why you love me.”

Hux wakes, a phantom buzz parting his lips. He’s dreamt of that moment nearly every night. It was the last time he saw Ren before he—

Heart in his throat, Hux leaps to his feet. Blaster aimed for the figure looming over his babies’ cribs. “Get away from them,” he snaps.

The otherworldly figure—the woman—turns her head, light peeking from her edges as if eclipsing a sun. “Put that thing down,” she says calmly. “You’re gonna hurt yourself.” She’s a ghost. A translucent, glowing ghost. He glares around for hologram projectors but something unnamed tells him she’s materialized form the energy around them.

Hux ignores the command, eyes boggling at the ghost. Yes, it’s strange seeing through her to the other side of the room, but that’s not why he’s so shaken.

It’s her. The woman from his vision after he jumped off the precipice into the swirling storm. The woman who showed him he was destined to murder Ren and the twins from his perch amongst the stars. The scavenger’s mother. “I thought you were dead.”

Mara Jade Skywalker ganders one final smile to the resting twins. She manifests around them as they are beacons of pure light and heart, miracles who defied odds of certain death within the first forty-eight hours of their lives, who defied the very laws of nature to exist. They are products of love, of the Force, willed into existence to spread their good into the hearts of their tormented fathers. Now that they’re health has been completely restored Mara was able to tether herself to their lights.

“I am dead,” she divulges.

The Force immortalizes those who have died but still have a lot of work to be done in its name, in a feat that could be achieved by sublimating one’s organic cells into a state of pure energy. Some souls are tethered to a place, a person they knew in their life. The Force has chosen these twins to
be Mara’s docking point. She considers this a great advantage in swaying the motives of their fascist fathers. “You’re lucky to be able to see my presence,” she calls over her shoulder, beaming down to the resting twins.

Luck is an excuse made up by cowards. “Get away from them,” Hux sneers.

Surprising him, she obliges, walking soundlessly away from the incubators.

“What do you want?” Hux demands, blaster unwavering. He spares a careful stare to his babies. They are peaceful in slumber, feet twitching in their onesies.

“I’m here to help you. I’ve crossed a great many lines to get here.”

“Help me with what?”

The ghost eases herself on the armchair, swiping her blued hair from her jaw. Hux’s lashes beat as he tries to conceptualize the science and logic behind this apparition. “You’re in over your head. You can barely stand or stay awake. If you won’t accept any help than you might hurt them or yourself.”

Unbelievable. The Skywalkers are so desperate to see control over their bloodline that they rebound from the shroud of death to impose their will. No more will he be bent by these Jedi. “Leave us. You have no business here.” He’s in no mood to game with malevolent spirits.

“I’m a mother. I’ve raised a daughter of my own as well as a nephew.” Before Hux can gawk at her audacity to be of any aid in her nearly transparent form, she continues. “But that’s not what I’m here for. You’ve done a splendid job at taking care of them. Frankly, I’m astonished, given your complete and utter lack of soul. But your body needs to recover. You should accept help from the caretaker droid.” Her truthful berating earns her a glare from Hux, his micro expressions exposing a flavor of resignation. “The Order has been developing a weapon. Smaller and more secure than the Death Star or that dreaded Starkiller, but more catastrophic than you can imagine.”

This isn’t the first time he’s hearing of this. Phasma’s new Order has been diligently, tirelessly solving the errors from Snoke’s administration. And his and Ren’s. “I saw to the development of many new weapons. It’s in the galaxy’s interests to succumb to them.” Typical Jedi, attempting to bargain with the enemy. He has no concern for any of them. They’ve proved time and time again to be pests, harbingers of entropy.

She blinks. “Are you an idiot? Or are you just soulless?”

Hux doesn’t know how to respond to her goading.

“Phasma will stop at nothing to end the Resistance. Once they find them, once they find him, the next weapon will destroy them. Do you have any idea what that means? Your son will be targeted. You still remember him, don’t you?” Mara accuses. Time after time, emotional appeal to Empirical warmongers has failed in nearly every instance. Her only purpose in this posthumous crusade is to ensure these children are safe. They are her family. They deserve peace. They deserve life.

And her daughter Rey, who is already a woman, a more powerful Jedi than she ever was. She needs to do everything she can to keep her safe. Perhaps one day the Force will allow her to visit her but for now she’s only able to manifest around Hux’s twins. And perhaps another day she’ll be allowed to tell her husband that not everything is his fault.

How dare this Jedi ghost presume to know a thing about his motives? “You think I don’t know that? I’m going to take him away from the Resistance and away from harm once I get my strength
back.” It will take time but there’s not another soul he can trust to do the job right.

“Tear him away from the family who nurtured him and gave him a home? Brilliant strategy. He’ll despise you. Maybe then you’ll be satisfied that you’ll finally emulate your father’s legacy of destroying whatever good was born in his son.”

“Leave. Do not return here,” Hux seethes, marching into the ghost’s space.

The twins whimper from their confines. Instinctual, Hux whips his head to them now that they’re awake. By the time he glares back at the ghost, she’s already faded back into the stagnant air.

Shaking off the encounter, Hux tends to his babies. “Who wants to get rocked first?” he hums. They both wail, demanding their father’s attention. They both want their backs patted from the digestion of one of their first meals as breathing bodies.

With great regret, Hux cradles one of them in his arms, little face squabbling over his shoulder while the other one whimpers at the favoritism. Again, he longs for Ren so that his baby wouldn’t have to feel abandonment—stifling the flare of weak indulgence as quickly as it surfaced. Hux rubs her back, gently patting as he’d read about on his research during his pregnancy.

His throat attempts to form a lullaby to soothe her through her small burps. But he doesn’t know any. He was never sung any as a child and he never bothered to learn a single song. Instead he talks. He’s good at talking, and the twins agree with his voice.

“I’ll be thinking of names for you. They’ll have to be the best names. Beautiful names that will be venerated under your great power. I can’t call you ‘this one’ and ‘the other one’ for much longer,” Hux smiles.

By now his daughter makes a small noise of completion, and she prods at his chest with her bundled hand. “Too bad I’ve already exhausted the only namesake I ever entertained.” Marin was given his birthmother’s name, willed so by nothing short of genetic memory. “But I’ll come up with the perfect names, suitable names that you’ll never want to change. And no one will ever dare change them for you. They’ll be who you are.”

After several beats of silence Hux peers at her little face, tiny nose and full baby cheeks, dark eyes narrowing into rest. His heart could burst with every human emotion that he’s ever been afraid of. But the fear dissolves when he looks at his babies, fades into nothing and leaves uninhibited warmth in his being.

When he thinks of Marin, the fear shines back full force, seeding worry deep and tender in the bed of his palms. Unable to bear the thought of Marin despising him, Hux focuses on what he can control. Carefully he sets the snoozing baby down and picks up the other one, balancing her and tapping her back to ease the burps through her body comfortably. She whines at the ministrations but accepts the help.

Hux lays kisses on the dark swirl of her head. They’ll have dark hair and brown eyes, emulating their other father. Their potential murderer. Closing his eyes Hux palms his baby’s soft head, concentrating on the comfort of their presences.

“No harm will come to you. He won’t ever again come near you,” Hux vows.

He misses Ren so badly he can hardly breathe. But how does he know Ren won’t try and hurt them again? How is it that he feels the truth of Ren’s rampant love and devotion so clearly but he can no longer trust him?
Hux eases his babies back into their incubators, as if the seal protected them from every harmful force in the galaxy.

Turning over his small collection of person affects in a pouch from his Finalizer quarters, Hux pulls out the remnants of Marin’s sling-shot he picked up from when he’d lost him. Soon, he’ll come for Marin. Even if it means compromising the First Order’s next strike against the enemy.

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Marin and Ren have just completed transcribing the holocrons, and now they are focused on deriving some kind of key to decipher the Sith glyphs.

“I’m stumped. We might need a translator,” Marin sighs, eye exhaustion manifesting into a dull headache. “Did you come up with anything?” he asks, though he doubts it. Kylo Ren isn’t very clever with these types of things, as Hux told him once. Hux could probably crack the code, having had all of his experience in the Academy.

Kylo Ren doesn’t reply. His fingers clench the pencil in his hands like a coiled serpent, dewy eyes unfocused.

“You okay?” Marin asks, a bit concerned.

When Kylo Ren doesn’t move a muscle, not even to breathe, Marin stands and walks towards him. Abie senses his discomfort and joins him at his feet.

“What’s wrong with him?” Marin whispers to Abie, who snorts softly in confusion.

A red stripe snakes from Kylo Ren’s nose down to his lips, dribbling onto the table. Panic grips his throat. “Kylo Ren? Are you hurt?”

He gasps when those dewy eyes jerk, focusing on him. Then down to his hip. Where Vader’s lightsaber sits.

Marin feels the tendrils of darkness tugging on the lightsaber, and he doesn’t waste another second debating on what to do next. “Abie, let’s go,” he hisses, scrambling for all of the papers with their transcribed glyphs. He sprints to the boarding ramp just as he feels a phantom knife scrape along his scalp, like the tip of a dagger. A monster claw.

Running like hell, Marin and Abie trample over the forest floor. He’s desperate to keep his distance, begging his feet not to send him sprawling on his face.

“Oh stars, Abie. My heart is beating so fast. I almost peed my pants!” he laments. Thank goodness he kept his stack of papers neat. He’s going to have to keep them in the best order possible so he can find his translator get back to Kylo Ren and keep him from killing someone. He doesn’t understand what happened but he knows that demonic glare was not Kylo Ren. It was whatever’s controlling him! It has to be. Right?

In about an hour of walking, he and Abie stumble upon the Resistance’s fortress. He has to get inside and it has to be fast. He already wasted all that time running.

“Abie, you need to stay close,” he whispers when he sees a Resistance technician. Marin folds the
papers, gripping them in his sweat-slicked palm.

He uses his powers to make them invisible to all the technicians. It’s easier when he uses the darkness to help him but most of his subjects frown in fear and discomfort after he’s done with them. Guilt pinches his brow but he must keep going in case Kylo Ren is following him. If he had more time and if there were less people to sneak past, he would do it the right way, abstaining from the helpful darkness.

Drat. There’s Poe Dameron. He’s not someone Marin likes to talk to because of how he controlled his mind and stole away his freewill. So he hides from Poe the old-fashioned way, ducking behind the moving Resistance fighters. Thankfully he gets passed him without having to hurt his mind, and makes it to the office where the translator frequents.

Sliding the door open, Marin sneaks with Abie into the busy deliberation room. Luckily, Grandmother is nowhere in sight. She’s probably at home helping Master Luke fix his arm. Marin’s heart stings. There’s no time to dwell on that.

“Master Marin! Where have you been? Your grandmother has been worried sick since yesterday,” scolds Threepio—just the droid he was looking for.

“Threepio, it’s an emergency. Come quick. We can’t let anyone see us speak!” Sometimes in order to get things going Marin has to act a certain way to get people to do what he wants them to do. Or more specifically, enigmatic protocol droids like Threepio who he’s forced to concoct lofty stories for so that he’ll pay attention.

“Oh, my!” Threepio hobbles in his direction, then twists his joints to portray conflict. “I should really tell the princess that you’re here—”

“She already knows! She sent me here to ask for your help.” If only he could mind-control droids, his life would be a whole lot easier.

“I wouldn’t want to go against her orders but I really would feel more comfortable—”

“Threepio!” Marin snaps, patience thinning. “This is important. I need you to translate these instructions.”

Growling, Marin ushers the tinny droid into the closest private space.

“Master Marin, why must we speak in the closet?”

“Because it’s a secret mission and we can’t risk spies finding out I’m meeting with you.”

“Spies?!” Threepio squawks.

“Yes. Now tell me, can you translate this?” Marin holds up the stack of papers to Threepio’s visual receptors.

Threepio studies the first sheet, gold finger tracing along the symbols. “Yes, I can. I am fluent in over six million forms of communication.”

When Threepio finishes with that, Marin resists slapping his palm on his forehead. “So what does it say?” he exasperates.

“Oh, right, right.” Threepio begins. “The answers to the universe’s questions are hidden beneath the skin of every Force-sensitive and only the apprentices who abandon all allegiance with the
light, and through the sacrifice of both the innocent and the damned—Master Marin, what kind of instructions are these?"

“Please keep going, Threepio. It’s important. Now is there anything in there about eternal life, possessions, deformations, or reincarnation?” He doesn’t have time to hear Threepio freak out over everything in Kylo Ren’s creepy holocrons, all two dozen pages of diligent transcription.

“Oh dear,” he mumbles. “Let me see.” The droid meticulously scours the beaten pages, following Marin’s orders. “Here we are. It says here that accomplishing immortality has been a goal of Sith lords for eons, but any attempt of manipulating the dark side into reviving life where life was no more, or never belonged in the first place, had imbued certain tragedy for its wielders. Does that help?”

“What about apprentices killing their masters? Can the masters come back from the dead to take revenge?” Kylo Ren said Snoke was a puppet master. If Snoke isn’t, what does that mean for his soul?

It takes several minutes but Threepio manages to read all twenty-plus pages. “No, Master Marin. Dead is dead. At least, according to this.”

What is he going to do if Supreme Leader Snoke has come back from the dead to destroy Kylo Ren and these stupid holocrons were just a waste of time?

“What about dark side users stealing souls?” Kylo Ren said he wanted his soul back. Marin still doesn’t know what that means.

“Maybe we should bring the Jedi in on this,” Threepio advises. “This is all sounding a bit too hairy.”

“I am a Jedi,” he corrects, anger spiking. “And I’m asking for your help. Please, Threepio.”

“Alright.” Threepio shuffles a few pages. “On this page it talks about soul-something. The closest translation is—soul-eater,” he says wearily. “These are extremely powerful dark side wielders who can control even the strongest minds, particularly the Jedi. With enough honing, they can kill with just a thought, worlds at a time. And while they have no telekinetic abilities they pose a threat to the very fabric of reality. They are godlike creatures. Quite terrifying. Fortunately there hasn’t been a known soul-eater for nearly ten thousand years, due to the very specific nature of their conception and upbringing.” Threepio shakes off a manufactured chill. “Master Marin. Are you alright?”

Marin feels a tear wetting his cheek. He swipes away the evidence. “What do you mean, specific nature?”

“The soul-eater would have been a product of two people who are as vile as their abomination, created in an act of hatred. Life made where it doesn’t belong. And the soul-eater must live a life away from all sentient lifeforms in order to gain its power. With the right amount of isolation the soul-eater gathers momentum, a craving the darkness in others to harness it for itself to control any and every lifeform, from the simplest of beasts to the wisest of Jedi masters. But just that is not enough. It has to be the right combination of genetics, the right place and time, as willed by the universe into being,” Threepio says. “It doesn’t really make all that much sense to me, Master Marin. We should keep reading another page.”

“Please continue from that page. I want to know more.” Marin tugs Abie in his lap, kissing her soft fur. “The soul-eater. He can take the darkness from others?”
“It would appear so. That’s how it connects with other lifeforms, sucking up darkness like a sponge and weaponizing it. But there’s no guarantee the being will even be human or ever be found, seeing that it can only gain its full power if it spends most of its life far away from civilization. You really shouldn’t worry too much about it. Especially here—it says that when the soul-eater sides with the light side, it can heal, create miracles that only the Force itself would be able to. See, the universe isn’t all bad, Master Marin. There’s always good in things. Like this soul-eater fellow. If it even exists, at all.”

Marin hugs Abie tightly, wishing he was back at home eating cheese bread with Rey or shooting sling-shot bombs with Chewie or hugging Finn after he returned from a daring mission. Before Kylo Ren every came here with his stupid holocrons. “Can you please continue?”

“I’m afraid that’s all the symbols have to say on the subject. I can look at the other pages some more but they all seem to be about methods for choosing Sith apprentices, very particular methods that take up a few pages. Should I read from those?”

“No, don’t worry about it.” Marin wants this terror to dissolve. Why does all of this garbage happen to him?

What if he really is a soul eating monster? What if he’s worse than Kylo Ren, worse than Supreme Leader Snoke?

What if he’s the worst thing that the universe has ever created?

“The only thing that’s left is several long pages of coordinates. Over half of the symbols on these notes appear to be coordinates of secret Sith communing systems, but its written in such a format that even our most skilled astromech would have trouble programming. I’m afraid that’s it, Master Marin.”

“Thank you, Threepio,” he says, feeling far older than his nearly ten years of life. “Can you do me a huge favor and not tell anyone I was here?”

“But Master Marin, you said your grandmother sent you here—” The droid cocks his head, cross with betrayal. “Did you lie to get information?”

“Get used to it,” he mutters. Unable to risk losing any more time, Marin pushes Threepio to his side.

“No, Master Marin, I didn’t mean it!” the droid wails, but his plea matters little to Marin who shuts his power down indefinitely.

He blinds everyone from watching him and Abie, uncaring for their comfort. Including Poe Dameron, who shudders around the unnamable familiarity of the dark side puncturing his psyche.

Marin makes it off base with his papers, Abie trotting in his orbit. It’s nearly sunset and his stomach rumbles for food and his tongue bites of thirst. His life on his home planet—alone with no hope of rescue. That was on purpose. Now he can see. Supreme Leader Snoke knew he was a soul-eating monster so he kept him away from everyone so his loneliness could be turned into a weapon. Now that Marin knows dead is dead, he’s glad Snoke perished once and for all.

When he gets back to the Millennium Falcon, there’s a small bonfire glowing right out in front of it. He hasn’t seen a fire like that since his life on his home planet. Kylo Ren is there, curled on a bedroll.

Ren perks up. Breathing a sigh of relief, he sees Marin approach with his dog. “Where have you
“What happened?” he asks, accusatory.

Marin’s irritation flares at his father’s stupid question. “What, you don’t remember trying to take
back this lightsaber with your mind powers? I ran away for my life.”

Instead of a rebuttal, Ren works his lips with his teeth, face hardening. “Did I hurt you?” he grates.

“No, I said I ran. I can take care of myself.” Marin stifles the animosity. “I think I know how to
help you. You just have to trust me. And tell me the truth.” He has to help his father because he has
to prove that he’s not a monster.

Ren nods. “Yes, anything.” He trusts him. He has to.

Marin finds a place next to Ren, crossing his legs under himself. “Did you create me in an act of
hate?”

Throat tightening, Ren’s claw digs into his palm. “Where is this coming from?”

“It just, tell me the truth.”

and humiliate him. I can’t bear to revisit the memory, how I felt while I was doing it—what
feelings I felt from him—” Ren can’t continue, the confession too agonizing.

There it is. He feels the truth solidifying his path, his very purpose, his nature. “Do you regret it?”


Marin slides Ren the papers, no longer needing them. “I got Threepio to translate our notes. I know
how to help you now.”

“How?” Ren asks. He’ll do anything, anything to get this darkness out of him.

This is just a wild guess. He has no idea this will actually work, but it’s the one thing they haven’t
tried. “I’ll do it. I can use my powers. You need me.”

Fear pricks his spine. Marin going into his head can be dangerous. He doesn’t want what infects
him to transfer to Marin. Ren thinks of Snoke, what he claimed was Marin’s destiny: to command
the hordes of Stormtroopers with his manipulation through his unique, unmatched mastery of the
dark side, no match for any common Jedi.

“But before I do, I need you to know that Snoke isn’t controlling you. He’s dead. You killed him,”
Marin says with finality.

Ren’s claw tightens, but Marin continues. “But even when he was alive, he never had control over
you. He might have pushed you along the way, but your mistakes were your own. They always will
be your own. You made a choice to follow him. Just like my choices will be my fault and Hux’s
will be his fault.” Marin takes Ren’s claw in both of his scarred hands. “You’re not infected. You
don’t have a disease. The dark side didn’t make you do these things. You relied on it for too long
and it led you to destruction. Because it made you more of what you already are. A selfish person.”

Overcome with grief, Ren faces him. “What did the holocrons say? Tell me.”

“They weren’t for you. Not everything is about you. What matters is I can take the darkness from
you. Isn’t that what you want?” If he can help Kylo Ren—the reason for his pain—then he can
help anyone. He might even be able to help himself.

Ren’s heart heaves, at the mercy of his creation. He extends his claw, blue-black veins popping with his straining to expose the open claw to Marin. “Do it.”

No longer afraid, Marin presses his thumbs into his father’s grotesque palm. Marin closes his eyes. He focuses on the congealed black tar around his father’s firelight. He begins to pick at it steadily with an unformed fingernail. His fingernail gets too tacky so he graduates to his unformed fingertips, then both his hands until the black runs down his unformed arms. He shoves the sticky, charred black into his mouth, awakening the dormant hunger.

Abie squeals in fear at her two sitting friends. The air around them is different. She waits and waits for her friend to say something but he only sits in silence, darkening like a blind spot. Abie whimpers, running far, far away from the impending threat.
Luke Skywalker twitches the fingers of his new metal hand as the medical droids equip him with the replacement appendage. It’s almost finished, so he tests out the wiring. It runs smoothly, motions identical to his human one.

“Are you sure you will not be requiring the synth-skin?” vocalizes the droid.

“I’m sure,” he says with finality. There’s no hiding what’s happened.

Rey snaps her father out of his sullen contemplation. “What was it like?” she asks, unable to stave her curiosity.

Luke regards her. He sees her mother behind her eyes. It’s been hardly any time at all since he last thought of her. “I don’t know how I could begin to describe it. It’s—hopelessness.”

Pursing her brow, Rey reaches out to brush her intact fingertips over her father’s new, robotic hand. He allows her to take his other robotic hand in hers, so that they are connected in a loop. Hopelessness, she can understand. Their kindred hearts meet halfway as Rey passes her soothing energy through her father, fully knowing just how it feels to carry the weight of a bloodline on one’s shoulders.

General Organa smiles consolingly to her brother and niece from the door. When Vader nearly killed him after Han was frozen in carbonite, his drive to liberate the galaxy strengthened, a hero emerging from the dust. She’s not sure the same drive has strengthened now that he’s lost his only flesh arm.

Marin’s been gone for nearly two days now, and their search has turned up nothing save for a few footprints. It shouldn’t be this difficult and tedious working with lifeform detectors and trained military search parties. But her heart tells her Marin’s not alone, hiding in the forest.

She can sense that Ben is near.

She felt her son’s arrival the day prior. Not only has that but their transmission of their coordinates showed The Falcon has answered their message, although it hasn’t appeared on any of their scanners. But she’s known for a while that Ben had done something to the ship to conceal it. She’s told as much to Rey and Finn who have been worried for Marin’s safety and mental health since he snapped and used his powers to make Luke hurt himself.

Rey releases her father’s hands, one old and one new, and follows General Organa outside the room to the General’s main living area. They meet Finn, who stares out of the duraglass window to the closest line of trees. In hopes to see Marin trailing towards home, perhaps with his father in tow. “He could be out there with him. It’s too dangerous. We have to go back out there and bring him back.”

“I don’t doubt that they’ve found each other,” the general says.

Finn raises a brow. “And that’s a good thing?”
“He won’t come back unless he wants to,” General Organa urges. “They both will.” They can’t be helped unless they want it.

“She’s right. Kylo Ren might be here to—I don’t know, turn himself in. Make amends,” Rey says. “Why else would Kylo Ren come back after all this time? Probably not just because we asked nicely,” she says, in reference to the months-worth of comming the Falcon.

“Maybe to turn his kid evil,” Finn mutters.

“If he wanted that he would have done that by now,” counters Rey.

Whatever Finn is about to say dies on his tongue when a small white dot bursts through the tree line. It’s the rescue dog, the one he and Poe gave to Marin. This can’t be good.

Finn intercepts the dog outside, petting her consolingly. “What happened, girl?”

Dirt smudged and exhausted, Abie whimpers, tongue hanging out of her long snout. Finn ushers her inside and prepares her meal and water, which she slurps up desperately.

“Something’s wrong. Rey—”

She’s already a step ahead. “We’ll take two land speeders to cover more ground.” They’ve been scouring the wilderness for Marin ever since he left, but returned back to base when nothing surmised. Taking a break. What were they thinking?

On their way out the door, the main tunnel hisses open with an emergency passcode. It’s Poe escorting Threepio, frazzled and out of breath.

All eyes are on them. “Marin was here. He snuck into the base. I felt—I don’t know how to describe it. It was painful,” Poe tells the general and the three Jedi. Like when he was being controlled, and when he was mind probed while in First Order captivity. “But he went to Threepio to translate something. He didn’t wanna be caught.”

“What was it?” the general asks, worry spiking.

“Go on, tell them what you told me,” Poe urges.

Threepio turns to his crowd of waiting listeners. “Yes, Commander. Master Marin came to me and asked me to translate something for you all, pages and pages of handwritten notes—but then I figured out he was lying after he locked me up in a broom closet!”

Rey approaches, patient. “What did the notes say?”

“They were mostly coordinates of systems all over the galaxy with ties to the Sith, information that I believe would have been helpful in the days of the Old Republic, but useless now. And several pages went in depth about Sith apprenticeships—but Marin wasn’t concerned with those. He was mostly concerned with the legend of the soul-eater,” the droid says loftily, enjoying riling up a crowd with his story.

“Do you know what he’s talking about?” Rey turns to Leia, and her father when he joins them from his wearisome rest in his room.


“They were an ancient language. Plenty of tall lines and little marks. In my memory banks the
language is identifiable as Sith-tongue,” Threepio replies.

“Holocrons,” Luke says gravely. “He must have gotten a hold of one, and opened it. Threepio, tell us everything you read on those holocrons. Rey, Finn—search the northeast woods. I sense a shift in the Living Force in that direction. Leia and I will relay any useful information in your ear comms.”

Not wasting another second, Rey and Finn make for the base for speeders to aid in their manhunt.

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Marin opens his eyes. Speeders hum in the distance, permeating the lull of the woods. He lets go of Kylo Ren’s claw, leaving him sitting and staring in the fire, completely deaf and blind to the world. Kylo Ren's nose starts bleeding again but Marin has to go investigate the disturbance. He lets Kylo Ren bleed in silence.

Sparing one last look at the statue—still Kylo Ren, Marin jogs over to the noise. It’s Rey, perched on a long, single passenger speeder. She slows to a stop, sensing her surroundings. She smells fire burning on the wind.

Another few meters and he and Kylo Ren will be found, for sure! Marin panics, tethering onto her firelight. No one’s here, Marin tells her in her own voice. You don’t smell a fire. Your senses are deceiving you. Turn around and don’t come back this way because there’s nothing here.

From the distance, Rey narrows her eyes. She’s still not convinced. Marin growls in frustration. Any harder and he could give up that this manipulation is his doing.

There’s nothing here. Turn around. There’s nothing here. Turn around and don’t come back. Marin snarls with effort, implanting the thought in Rey’s magnificently strong mind. His manipulation of Luke was tied to a wild bout of emotion. This time, he has to rely on skill.

Rey sighs, activating her comm. “See anything?” she asks Finn.

“Nope. Gonna double back.” The comm crackles as Finn readjusts the receiver. “He could be hiding, like how he hid from Poe and everyone on base.”

“He’s probably standing right in front of me making faces,” Rey snorts over the link, trying to lighten the seriousness of the situation.

Marin can’t help but smirk, then fall into a pit of guilt for manipulating Rey.

“Typical,” Finn laughs. “Alright, finish that area and I’ll meet you back at sundown.”

“Affirmative.” Rey takes one last look around, eyes landing on Marin. He holds his breath so as to not give himself up.

Her eyes slip away. Marin exhales when she restarts her engine and whirrs in the opposite direction.

This is important. It has to be just him here helping Kylo Ren. He’s helping him get clarity, scrubbing away the taint of the dark. Not only will Marin be helping him, but if this works he’ll
know how much of Kylo Ren is good. His only fear is that he’ll suck up all the darkness around Kylo Ren’s firelight until there’s nothing left, not even a spark.

Scurrying back to the bonfire, Marin gets back to work. It might just be the dimness of the twilight but his monster claw is starting to look less blue. He still has a lot to much through so he gets comfortable.

A stab of panic lurches his heart. Where has Abie gone?

Abie is a smart puppy. She probably realized Marin would be occupied indefinitely and ran back home. Swallowing, Marin focuses on the task, Kylo Ren’s darkness tainting him like a steeping tea.

The nighttime space-sky twinkles between the sweep of clouds, and Marin decides to call it a night. Kylo Ren’s eyes are red and tired from holding them open for the extensive hours of the cleansing ritual, and it’s nearly time for the sun to rise.

“Hey,” he urges to his father. “Time for bed.” Marin sways upon his booted feet, prodding his father’s shoulder. He doesn’t feel changed from their day’s work. He feels like he’s always felt. Just himself.

Ren blinks, shivering against the icy wind. One second the dusk of twilight framed his son’s wild blond hair and the next his eyes opened and they were drenched in starlight. He looks down at his hands. The claw feels changed on some level, in some inexplicable way. “What happened?” his voice cracks from disuse. His upper lip stings with the crust of dried blood from his nose.

Marin coils around the darkness digesting in his core. “I’m helping you. You’ll be all better and you’ll be able to tell Grandmother you’re sorry for everything you’ve done to her.”

Ren stands, guilt weakening his frame. Marin helps him to the inside of the Falcon where Ren is escorted to his bunk to rest, and Marin sleeps alone in the cockpit again, longing for Abie’s comfort.

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“They need to get some sun,” Mara drones to the fretting fascist father changing his bacta patches on his abdomen. “Their eyes need to see the sun.” This man is the most stubborn person he’s ever met—second only to Leia, who she knew quite extensively in the final years of her life.

When will this ghost let him be? It’s been approximately two weeks since he arrived to Mardromitan, two weeks of diligently caring for his babies, ensuring they are fed and changed and washed, held and kissed and loved. This is the fourth day where the infants no longer needed to be encased in their incubators.

“I’m going to take them outside,” Hux says defensively. There is no one else to talk to besides the Jedi ghost, unless he counts his babies but they contribute little to the conversation. “In a few weeks.”

“In this galaxy, exposure is natural. It's healthy. They can't be cooped up forever,” advises Mara, flickering condescendingly. Hux is reminded of the holoprojection if his father, disapproval filling his room with a blue glow. If this Jedi were still alive, it’s possible she could be old enough to be
his mother. But she never got to approach middle-age, however her death came to pass. Instead she floats through the realms, eternally youthful.

“I know,” Hux sneers in resignation, lips attempting to form a name when he realizes he has no idea what this ghost’s name is.

“My name is Mara. Quite similar of a name to your mother’s and your boy,” she says matter-of-factly. “I always thought it was a sweet coincidence.”

Hux has had enough mind-play. “Don't feel the need to—materialize once I'm outside with them. People might stare.”

“Afraid you'll be caught talking to yourself?” Mara smirks.

Hux ignores her in favor of smiling at his two angels. They hum excitedly at being the center of his attention. “We’re going for a walk, my little ones,” he beams.

He loads up the levitating gurney with the cradles, creating a makeshift carriage. The babies chew contentedly on their fingers, awaiting the adventure. Their eyes never leave the shapes of their father. “I'll protect you,” he vows, spoken more so for himself. He primes a blaster for his hip, and another blaster for his ankle.

Hux looks around the room, a new habit of his, for the ghost woman—Mara. She's gone. It's just them now.

As of sleuthing into enemy territory, Hux pokes his head out, surveying the hall. Graciously, it’s devoid of people and droids. He allows himself to breathe.

The trek down to the main level is a modest one. This facility is equipped with large, room sized elevators for maximum foot traffic efficiency. Hux leads them to the lowest, busiest level.

A crowd of toddlers is ushered by an army of droids. Hux’s lips pull into a smile at the sight of the curious children. He wonders if his daughters will be energetic and lively or reserved and contemplative, or a combination of the two. He can see all the different personalities of the toddlers as they coo in curiosity of their world.

One command from the droids and the toddlers form a line like fire ants, obedient soldiers for the next generation of First Order troops. Sickness twists Hux’s features. A foreign sickness, a contortion of his beliefs, his foundations aching his heart. His most useless organ. If only Ren had cut that one out instead of his womb.

Shaking off the strange affliction, Hux ushers his babies to the outdoor arena. It’s a scenic outcrop that Stormtrooper children and adolescents are without access to, as the peace if nature is a detriment to their careful training. Hux had an identical upbringing, all conditioning designed to prime an individual's natural talents. Because of his underexposure to the outdoors, he'd never had the patience for nature, the chaos, the otherworldliness.

It wasn't until he was exiled that he'd grown used to the natural elements of planets and moons. It's possible he'd even grown an affinity for a sun’s natural radiation, an atmosphere’s flavorful breeze. It brings him back to the time of his first exile with just him and Ren, fighting for survival against the sand and the sky and the sea, with Marin swimming inside him like an unhatched fish in its egg.

It was simpler then. Then, all they were concerned with was fighting for their lives. Instead of their names and reputations, sanity and souls—all far more complicated feats than the primal will to
Hux approaches the final airlock with the gurney. Forcing himself to swallow the uneasy trepidation, Hux pushes on. The twins must be exposed to the air, to the light, the sounds of the universe. Yes, there are artificial sources to gain strength and vital nutrients without ever feeling the light of day. But his babies aren't cogs. They're not going to build up the Order with their bodies and blood, as those toddlers will one day be loyal, devoted men and women dedicated to the unification of this galaxy. His daughters will sit on the top of everything his people have built. They'll change hearts and minds. They're better than them.

Bringing their father back to reality, one of the twins squeal, declaring her right to emote. She does it again when her father's shapes tug into the soft, pleasant contortion that her instincts tell her are positive.

“Almost there, little ones.” Hux breaks the threshold of the outdoor platform, a duracrete path embedded in the earth. It leads them through the thicket of yellow-orange glowing reeds that wave to the new coming family in the passing gust. High in the blue sky, the sun warms the flesh of its new audience. Hux’s babies kick and thrash their arms in glee, as if they can just get up and run and enjoy the pleasant day.

The three settle on a drop in the platform, giving away to a steep incline. Hux depowers the gurney so that the twins are safely set on the ground and he sets down on his knees to bring them both in his lap. He discovered that this was the only way he could hold the both of them, anchored in his knees. The twins squint up at the shape of their father, humming in acknowledgement.

Bending down, Hux kisses each cheek, abdomen only pinching the slightest at the contorted movement. The sun bastes their skin with its warmth. His babies gurgle and grasp their fingers at the air, as if they could grab the sun.

Stricken with the realization that he should have invested in toys for them to play with to develop motor skills, Hux curses himself. In an attempt to quell their desire to touch, maneuver, play, he lends them his hands.

His babies would enjoy Ren’s fingers, for they are much larger than his. He pictures Ren cradling one with his knees, kissing her belly in contentment. If Ren were here, Hux could nap on his shoulder and listen to the rattle of his lungs.

Hux breathes in the air, the faint stench of rot from the marsh pricking his nose. When he returns to the Order, he’ll put all his energy to finding Marin.

“You don't have much time,” warns a familiar accented voice.

“We’re trying to get some peace, Mara,” Hux scoffs, glaring around for any nosey eyes and ears. The twins hum at the comforting shapes and colors of the ghost.

“The First Order is targeting the Resistance as you sit here on your arse! The advantages of their spies are nothing compared to your pull as the highest ranking officer.” The Force has focused her on the First Order’s plans for a Resistance base, just enough information to push Hux in the right direction but not enough to help with a direct location. He’ll have to acquire it himself. “If you do nothing, your son will die.”

“What the hell am I supposed to do?!” Hux snaps, startling the infants cocooned in his lap. “I've got no army. Phasma’s got control of everything that I built and has me on a damned short leash. And who's gonna watch them?” he adds weakly. What if Ren comes back for them?
“You better come up with something,” Mara tells him. “Because if he dies, it's going to be on you.”

Hux grimaces to the spot the ghost stood, now void of her manifestation. “Jedi,” he scoffs. “Which is why you two will never have to worry about them,” he kisses their cheeks again, one, two, three, four.

Marin is a dutiful, clever boy. He will greatly enjoy playing with two little sisters. He was also very protective. Marin had wanted Hux to be safe and he pulled through when he needed him to.

The master strategist crafts a foolproof plan to retrieve his son, far from the Resistance targets. Drovess of Stormtroopers, fleets of ships, nothing less than a war.

The two humming inhabitants of his lap disagree. Who will watch them and ensure they're safe from harm? His only option is to bring them with him—and a warzone is no place for two newborns. Perhaps there is a more subtle approach to saving Marin, one that doesn't make Phasma doubt his allegiance.

Summoning the strength, Hux sets his babies in their respective perches on the gurney. He sets a course for their room to gather his infant care supplies, feeds and changes them for their journey. They disagree with his haste but all Hux can think about is the life in his son’s eyes, glowering in withered disappointment when he realizes his father has truly abandoned him one final time, just before his light fizzes out.

Hux makes one last stop to one of the caretaker overseers.

“You said you want an ‘armored baby carrier?’” grovels the attendant. He's about the age Hux was when he graduated from the Academy, permanent sneer twisting his lips. It's clear infant to adolescent Stormtrooper conditioning was not where he wanted to be at this time in his life.

“For two infants, yes,” Hux orders, straightening his spine.

The cadet has yet to master his micro expressions, to which Hux wastes no time fixating on his officer’s unprofessionalism. Something he most definitely would not have done before the twins.

“Do you want a carriage or something more mobile?” drones the attendant.

Intrigued, Hux waits for the attendant to show him what he had in mind.

“I wouldn't recommend going into battle with this but it can fit two small infants. Kevlar fiber, good with blades, might withstand a poorly aimed blaster bolt, protective against impacts under five hundred kilograms of force—”

“What about lightsabers?” Hux blurts impatiently.

“You're kidding,” the attendant deadpans.

Livid, Hux leans in close over the attendant’s desk. “I could have you on sanitation duty for the rest of your working life for your blatant disregard for authority.”

The attendant purses his lips, eying the hovering gurney of infants set close by to the sneering red-haired man. “No, it probably won't do much against a lightsaber.”

“Anything that will?”

“Not at this facility, no.”
Hux chews his lip. “I'll take it.”

The three head for the docking bay, the sun kissing them goodbye.

Hours later, Hux begins to strap on the carrier. There are two spots that each secure a small infant, two tiny sets of padded straps and foam helmets adjustable for two tiny heads. It would be perfect if it could defend against lightsabers, for when Hux will inevitably have to protect his babies from Ren’s chaos.

The babies whine when Hux tucks them into the straps, flat on the gurney so he can safely and efficiently strap them to his chest. Clearly uncomfortable, his babies whimper at the new and strange confinement. “It's only for a little while. I can't leave you behind,” he consoles.

Paternal instinct tells him this is senseless danger to wander the halls of the Finalizer with them strapped to his chest, a gross oversight in his babies’ safety. But now that he can only rely on himself, Hux has no choice. He waited long enough to get Marin back. He was waiting for Ren this whole time—a selfish, foolish endeavor.

Sabotaging the weapon from the outside will be all but impossible, seeing that Phasma has kept its development so secret that only she and a select few officers know of its location and function.

Its primary function is to turn the core of the targeted planet against itself, rupturing it from the inside through a series of carefully strategized electromagnetic pulses to destabilize the planet, causing a catastrophic implosion. Lethal to all lifeforms, specifically designed for the Resistance’s habit of subterranean construction.

The new weapon is to be used against all known Resistance bases but was not meant to be used until later, when the First Order was able to duplicate the technology indefinitely. It should be at the testing phase, but Hux has been preoccupied for months and especially these past several weeks caring for his babies.

His babies are his investments, not the weapon—just as Marin is. They need to be coveted. They take precedence.

Hux wavers on the boarding ramp, balancing his babies against his chest. They hum in discomfort, little fists balled and eyes wide and gaping into each other’s, as if they could possibly communicate a way out of the confines of their father’s carrier.

None of the officers on the docking bay of the Finalizer speak to him, only pausing minutely to gape in concern.

The bridge greets Hux with a weary salute. Hux ignores them, targeting Phasma from the highest perch. “You cannot activate the weapon. It's too soon. You will fail,” he lies, picturing Marin’s wily smile, bright eyes, loyal heart.

Phasma all but growls, marching from her post. “You're no longer fit for duty,” she seethes, curling her lip at the two miniscule infants strapped to his abdomen.

“Your plan is flawed. Without a backup you might as well blow up our destroyers and save them the trouble.”

Phasma grimaces. So it must be true. Hux knows Ren is consorting with the enemy and wants to protect his fucking boyfriend. There is no worse offense than to deliberately obstruct the play of the First Order’s advantage against the Republic. “Get him out of here,” Phasma says, regret, disgust weighing heavy in her words. Two Stormtroopers move to take his shoulders.
“Don't come any closer,” he threatens emptily, arms raised above the heads of his daughters. “I'm trying to help you.”

“You're trying to help yourself,” she scoffs. What she says next is sopping with pity, mourning the great, capable, ruthless general that Hux once was. “You should have been more careful with your heart.”

Hux flinches. “I don't know—”

“We put a homing device on Ren's freighter. We know he's on the new Resistance base and is now aligned with the enemy, with his original breed. You are finished here.”

Wavering, Hux wraps an arm around the whimpering infants, who protest under Phasma’s angered dismissal.

Ren's on the base?

Ren’s with Marin?

“I didn't know.” he breathes. He knows not what this means for the twins, for Ren, or for himself. All that matters it that he finally has a lead to his son.

“Oh, don't give me any more of your shit,” Phasma growls, shaking her head. Enough of Hux and Ren’s frivolous drama. She will no longer allow them to infect all that she has built.

“He's not with them. I know him. He wouldn't be on their side, ever.” Hux is sure of it. He swallows. “He's there for something else. Allow me to explain.”

Pathetic. Hux is begging to keep Ren safe, floundering in his lies. Phasma cocks her head for Hux to confer in private. “Get back to work,” she instructs the mere dozen officers entitled with the secrecy of the new weapon. Hux’s glare defends against their scrutinizing concern.

“Enough of this. Tell me everything,” she glowers, once they're in private. The drifting stars frame the fine white-gold hairs combed and styled on her head, groomed to an extent Hux hadn't known Phasma to ever do before her leadership.

Hux spills. He confesses everything, from Marin’s conception on the cloner’s planet, Ren taking Marin from him, Hux letting Marin go, their reunion nearly a decade later in Resistance captivity. Ren betraying and abandoning Marin, and himself doing the same. Ren kidnapping and attempting to murder their daughters.

Rarely does Phasma allow her emotions to be seen by her subordinates. Unable to quell the contempt, confusion, she worries her eyes with her fingertips. “You two have never been worth my time. And even less now.”

“Allow me to track Ren and retrieve the boy. He's an asset to us but a threat if he's with them any longer.” His lips twitch, forcing himself to speak more truths. “I was foolish to wait for Ren to return to me. I should have gone after the boy long ago. I should have done more to look for him,” Hux tells her, knees bobbing imperceptibly to soothe the twins.

Phasma curls her lip at Hux’s deliberate action. “I've made use of you when no one else would, housed you like a charity case. So please, General, do me the courtesy of sparing me your lies.”

“It’s true. The boy is very much real, and no doubt will be an asset to our people.”
“General,” Phasma scoffs, “you come in here with your brood strapped to your chest. Don't insult our people by pretending you're acting in our interests.”

She turns on her heel, programming a datapad with several angry taps and swipes. Those infants squeak irritatingly like wounded animals. “Take this. You have forty-eight hours to find whomever it is you want to find on Ithor and get the hell off of it before it implodes. We won't be awarding you any more time. After that, you're done. You're done with the Order.”

Hux’s eyes round in disbelief. The datapad glimmers with a beacon on the forested planet of Ithor, as clear as the beacon was the day he saved Ren from death on Starkiller. Ithor—he should have guessed the Resistance would reclaim an uninhabited planet to lower the risk of unnecessary casualties.

“Don't get too excited. We were already planning on the hit being in that window,” Phasma murmurs, cocksure.

Hux wastes no more time. Unwavering, he salutes her. “You've always had more honor than you'd let on,” he nods. He can tell the complement warms her no matter how hard she tries to stifle it into coldness.

“As have you,” she replies. “And Hux,” she calls after him, when he turns his imbalanced form. “Don't make an enemy of the Order. I'm not Snoke. I don't rely on bounty hunters. Betray our kind and I'll kill you myself.”

Hux smirks, enthralled by her vivacity. She's a formidable proponent and has taken the Order far. She's made a good leader.

For the time being, that is.

Hux turns to the docking bay, not looking back.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing Ren sees when he comes-to from another round of Marin’s treatment is the pattern of sunlight crackling against the padded forest floor, beams bending around the leaves of the tree canopy. Dry tongue flopping around his mouth, Ren blinks around from his lotus crouch for his son. Marin’s off somewhere, likely watching the perimeter.

Ren curls his hands into fists. Two human hands.

After weeks of meditation, Ren’s claw has vanished. Monstrous fingers shrunken to their normal size, nails thinned to human form, blue-grey corpselike skin warmed to olive. Save for a few purplish spider webbing veins, Ren’s arm is largely healed. Normal. Human. All thanks to his son.

His heartstrings tug at the thought of him, his determination and patience. If only he was as wise as his boy at that age, things would have been different. Ren can feel the ghost warming in approval from the soles of the boots binding his feet, large hand palming his shoulder in pride.

“Are you ready to continue?” pipes-up Marin from his side, branches crunching under his boots.

Ren only regained alertness moments ago, and though they’ve already made so much progress, he’d very much like to spend time with Marin while they’re both awake. Their time together has been cyclical—meditation all day until they exhaust themselves, and during the night time they eat and drink and sleep without so much as a good-night.

“Maybe we could take a break today,” Ren suggests.

“Why?” Marin demands. His palms itch, a dormant anger burning. Since he started chewing on Kylo Ren’s soul, he developed a shortened patience, a hot, slippery, anxious worm proliferating under his skin. Like he’s mad for no reason at all.

“My brains feel like scrambled eggs,” Ren quips. “Maybe we could…do something.” The request falls flatly, and Ren peers into the woods to distract from Marin’s scrutiny.

Of course. He’s angry because he’s spent the last two weeks with Kylo Ren. “We’re supposed to be finishing as soon as we can so that you can be safe for the twins and so you can be safe for Grandmother when you go and see her again,” Marin argues, careful not to sound too angry. Kylo Ren’s being awkward and weird about them hanging out. It unsettles him. Marin tries to quell the dark little worm.

“I know, I just thought—” Ren staves his words, thinking to his crate of belongings. To the collection of lightsaber parts and welding tools. Months ago, to a vision of a future that never came to pass on a lakeshore, where Marin wielded his lightsaber proud and enthralled by its brilliant blue blade.

He cannot force Marin to want him in his life. He cannot expect Marin to afford him any slack when he’d earned none at all. Ren heaves a breath of fresh Ithorian air. “You’re right. We shouldn’t waste what time we have.”

They sit in front of the fire, hand in hand. “Any sign of the Resistance?” Ren asks, knowing the full level of Marin’s diversion techniques.
“Not anything I couldn’t handle.” Marin’s manipulation of the scouts—first Rey, then the passing technicians, then Finn, then Rey again, making sure they’re all reading their scanners incorrectly. That way he and Kylo Ren remain hidden for as long as they need.

Ren thumbs over his son’s hands, against the scars rippling his flesh. “How’d you get these scars?” Ren asks him. He’s noticed them many times before but never wanted to know the answer.

None of your business, Marin wants to hiss. Instead he permits Kylo Ren the truth. “Back on my home planet, Supreme Leader Snoke spoke in my mind and had me move rocks from my fire pit. They were really, really heavy but I ended up being able to eventually move them with my hands. I burnt a lot of my skin off but I managed to regenerate some,” he shrugs. He’ll never forget the smell, the numbing scorch, the paralyzing pain. It’s a pain from another lifetime. It doesn’t matter anymore.

Ren gapes, frowning down at the dirt. Suddenly his months of rock-hauling and tower building—Snoke’s training of conditioning his body and mind after the destruction of Starkiller—seems like a vacation in comparison to Marin’s childhood of torture with the dark master he’d trusted enough to hand Marin off to as a newborn. Just when he thinks he cannot feel any guiltier, he bleeds with it.

Marin brushes off all of his father’s further comments and concentrates on his firelight, mopping up the muck. It compounds to the slick pooling in his core, a sign his treatment is working.

Deep in meditation, a warm beacon enlivens a primal part of his heart. But nothing this alluring has ever come from Kylo Ren. It’s coming from outside the enclosure of Kylo Ren’s energy. Marin’s pulled from his meditation, springing to his feet.

Ears perking up like those of a vigilant hawk, Marin reaches out with his senses towards the beacon.

The sharp hum of a ship churns the lull of the forest from above. Marin gasps in awe at its span, larger than a Starfighter but smaller than the Millennium Falcon.

His heart tells him that a familiar force thrums aboard that ship. It was the same one that he felt when he was taken to meet Kylo Ren for the first time.

“Hux?!?” he shouts in elated disbelief. “Hux! I'm here!” he throws his presence for him, using all his might to put himself in Hux’s mind, just like how he did before.

Just when he nearly has a hold on him, his concentration is disrupted to four Starfighters whipping through the air above, chasing Hux’s ship in a deathly speed. Panic throttles him. He’s got to do something!

He diverts his attention to the minds of the pilots. One of them is, of course, Poe Dameron. Poe keeps getting caught in the cross hairs. Disregarding his prior reluctance to hurt Poe, Marin pools his mind too, careful and deliberate. Clenching his scarred fists, Marin closes his eyes and forces himself in. He forces himself far, far into the minds of the enemy.

Back on base, the Resistance fumbles through protocol. They’v never had a foreign passenger transport pierce their airspace in such an unskilled, brazen manner.

“Black Leader, what’s your status?” General Organa voices levelly over her comm to Poe. When the unauthorized ship perforated their security checkpoint, she dispersed Poe and his team to neutralize the threat. The vessel is undoubtedly First Order, given its model and its tenacious disregard for their airspace.
“General,” Poe hisses over his comm, “We lost it. We can't see a damn thing! The ship's gone and something is—”

His comm fizzes out, not an electrical failure but a physical one. “Poe, what's your status?” The general demands, holding her trusted commander in highest priority.

“It feels like—I think the kid's in our heads! I can't see anything. We've gotta put our fighters down. We're outta option—”

The general resonates with shock as Poe crackles out of range. Marin’s seized control of the pilots, goading them away from the incoming First Order ship, possibly hurting them, possibly killing them. It’s not that she fears Marin’s allegiance to the First Order has ingrained in his genetics. His fierce protectiveness has only been awarded to one of the Order's members—General Hux.

Darkness seeping into her vision, clouding the monitor tracking the First Order ship from their underground base. The groans of her team fill her ears before the darkness takes her consciousness completely.

Much later when she wakes flat on the ground, the pinch if a bruise on her cheek from her fall, General Organa stands to pull the scanner logs to find where the scanners last documented the First Order ship.

“It's no use, Leia,” Luke tells his sister solemnly. His knee creaks from the tumble he took outside. The invasion was a familiar stronghold. It was Marin. “He'll keep them hidden. He'd do anything to keep us out.”

The general stands to meet her brother's eyes. “You know I can’t stop looking for him. And I know you don't want to stop either.” She glares to the final coordinates of the disappeared First Order ship. “Get Finn and Rey. Get the stun bombs. We need to make a perimeter.”

When it was just Ben planetside in his once-home, it was only going to be a matter of time before he returned to them. But with Marin’s other father in the mix, there's no telling what Marin will do next.

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Hux exhales. Somehow the Resistance pilots have fallen back, off his scanners. Deceptions he has no time for. He’s only here for one thing. Hux swerves as close to the beacon of Ren’s freighter as he can manage.

The twins squeal in terror at the strange noises, from the discomfort from being bound to Hux’s chest for hours. Hux murmurs assurances as he lowers the ship to a clearing. The only part of the forest large enough is bisected by a stream so Hux carefully maneuvers his ship, landing anchors straddling across it.

Once the ship's settled, Hux prioritizes the twins, hastily unfastening their crumpled bodies. “I'm so sorry I subjected you two to that. I had to keep you safe. You understand, don't you?” he coos, unstrapping them one at a time to lie on their backs in one cradle so that they may retain each other’s warmth. They've both soiled themselves so Hux eases them into fresh diapers and swabs their spit-up with warm towels. Twin watery pouts tremble from their terrifying trauma, begging their father please, no more, never again.
"I'm so sorry," he laments, kissing their foreheads. This won't be a recurrence. These were just extreme measures. He'd never put his daughters in danger like this if he didn't have a choice.

_Hux! Hux, it's me! I'm almost there!_ cries a familiar voice. Hux wrenches his guilty heart from his daughters' pouts. There's only one presence he's welcomed this fervently. With one last look to the twins—who ogle each other with wide infantile eyes—Hux scrambles for the boarding ramp. Heart beating out of his chest, Hux scopes the forest around for a swatch of sandy hair.

“Hux! Hux! I'm right here!” calls the boy from the behind the ship.

Sprinting around, Hux splashes in the muck of the stream. Completely uncaring of his newfound dishevelment, Hux stampedes towards the bobbing blond hair and bright smiling face of his son.

Chest bursting with joy, Marin launches himself into Hux’s awaiting embrace. Hux’s face blossoms into a pained smile of his own, relief wrought with regret.

“I knew you'd come. I knew you would,” Marin whimpers into his father's bony shoulder. He squeezes tight so Hux will never, ever leave him again.

Hux picks him up as if he were an infant once more, holding him secure in his arms. “I shouldn’t have let you go. I’ll never let that happen again,” he vows. His son’s hair is so soft against his cheek, his grip so fierce. Hux can’t fathom how he managed to leave him behind every chance he got.

Gingerly, Hux sets his boy down. Overcome with emotion, Marin squeezes his father’s middle. “Please don't leave me again. Please,” he whimpers. He feels like a baby. For a moment, he forgets the darkness, the scars, the name he bears. All that matters is that Hux came back for him.

“I won't. I swear to it.” His heart aches for what he's done to his child. “I've come here for you. We're leaving.”

Marin sniffs, burrowing his wet face into Hux’s belly. The top of his belly. He's gotten taller since the last time he hugged Hux like this. He wonders if Hux can tell. Then, life smacks him in the face, and he remembers. “What about Kylo Ren?”

Hux stiffens. “What about him?” The lightsaber on his son’s hip glints ominously. He's seen it with Ren, from the visions he Force showed him of a blue plasma blade coming for his minutes-old babies.

Marin withdraws, meeting Hux’s eyes. “He's here...I've been staying with him. I ran into the forest and found him on the Millennium Falcon.”

Brow pinching, Hux studies the surrounding woods. “Where is he?” The twins are safe in the transport. He senses their calm.

“I left him a few minutes that way. He’s probably awake now from our meditation,” Marin says. “I’ve been helping him with my powers. Soon he'll be ready to face Grandmother and atone for how he’s hurt her.”

Soon there won’t be a ‘grandmother’ to atone to when the First Order blows them all to hell. In merely a day the base will have ruptured, and everyone with it, the Jedi, the Resistance. Ren.

He has some time to weigh his options. “Has he—done anything to you?”

Marin thinks of Kylo Ren’s blackout, the menace glowing in his eyes. “No, we’ve been meditating.
We’re almost done. I’ve done a lot to help him with my powers,” he adds, prideful.

Hux smiles, soft and warm. He palms Marin’s cheek. “You’re a very dutiful son,” he praises. Oblivious to the heinous extent Marin's helping had taken a toll on the boy's heart.

Joy bubbling, Marin grins. “I did it so he could be safe for Grandmother, but I also did it so he could be safe for you and your babies. Did you bring them? Are they here?” he asks, excited beyond words to meet his sisters.

Ren must have told him about the twins. Though knowing Ren, he likely omitted that he tried to kill them. “Of course I did. I’m never letting them—or you—out of my sight. Come. You should meet them.”

Heartbeat wild and drumming, Marin follows his father onto his transport. Nestled in one cradle atop a shelf are two tiny, tremendous firelights of life. Now that he can see them—their little heads of dark hair, their blinking eyes, their round cheeks, Marin forms an instant connection. They coo in agreement with the new presence. His shapes are pleasant, much like their father’s shapes.


“Hi there! I’m Marin,” he says cheerily. “I’m your big brother.” The new title, as is the idea of having siblings, is electrifying. “What are their names?” he asks Hux.

“I haven’t named them yet,” he tells him. “Maybe you could help me come up with them.”

A familiar flash catches Hux’s eye. It’s Mara, the Jedi ghost. Hux frowns. She could say anything to Marin. She could tell him that Hux has every intention of allowing this Resistance base, along with anyone he’s cared for in these past long months. But Marin has yet to notice her, for he is too caught up in smiling at his sisters.

Mara spares Hux one last moment of patient scrutiny, before glimmering into nonexistence.

“They’re so tiny. And they smell nice,” Marin says, snapping Hux out of his daze. He leans in close to eye their softness, their purity.

“They do, don’t they?” he agrees. “Do you want to hold one?”

Brows leaping to his hairline, Marin takes a small step back. He thinks of Master Luke’s saber’s sweep of electric green searing into his flesh arm, it thudding onto the floor with finality. His tongue rolls around the congealing darkness tacky in his mouth, running down his chin. Hux can’t see it and neither can he, but he feels its taint. Swimming around the drowning goo. It’s Kylo Ren’s taint. “Maybe later,” he says. He doesn’t want to hurt his sisters, not when they are so small and vulnerable.

Hux nods, palming his son’s shoulder.

“Were they created in an act of hatred?” Marin blurts, eying his father with unfettered earnestness. He doesn’t want them to be soul-eating monsters like he is, if that’s even possible. He wants them to be awarded every joy and contentment the galaxy can offer.

The inquiry comes from nowhere, offsetting Hux’s balance. “Why would you ask that?” It’s an odd, terrifying question, even from the clever mind of his son.

Throat bobbing, Marin reaches out to focus on Kylo Ren. His link with Kylo Ren isn’t as strong as
it is with Hux, because he never has gone so far as to try and connect with him as he’s done with Hux many, many times. Kylo Ren is at the campsite, stationary, most likely in the throes of their last term of meditation. “Kylo Ren told me that he hurt you to make me, that he did it to manipulate and control you. Did he hurt you to make them?” He has to know.

How much of their darkest secrets has Ren told him? “No, we—the twins were miracles. Not that you weren’t, but there was never an ulterior motive for their purpose like there was for your creation. They weren’t supposed to be, but the universe made them so. Science made you—but forces beyond our control made them. Your purposes are all great ones, regardless. Once I bring you to your real home, we can finally get started.” They are critical for the unification of the galaxy, for the prosperity of the First Order, for the defeat of the Republic.

Marin allying with the Resistance has complicated things—as has Ren’s untimely reunion with his Resistance origins, or whatever the fuck he’s doing here. But he’ll overcome these setbacks, complete his father’s objective. Destroy the Resistance, topple the Republic, erect the First Order’s foothold on the galaxy.

Destroy the Resistance—his son’s family.

“You have to protect them,” Marin brings Hux out of his own head, ignoring Hux’s ominous pledge. “You have to. These babies don’t have anyone in this whole universe but you.”

Hux doesn’t have enough time to respond before Marin grabs his arm. “Kylo Ren’s awake. I can sense it,” Marin hisses. “I have to get back to him. We’re so close to finishing what needs to be done.”

“And what exactly does that entail?” Hux asks, skin prickling at the thought of Ren near Marin, let alone the twins.

“We meditate. Are you gonna come or do you want to stay here?”

“Marin,” Hux says, “we are going to leave this place. Together. We have to do it as quickly as possible.”

“But I need more time with him. He has to be safe for Grandmother,” he reiterates. “Hux, it’s really, really important to me that I can help him.” Hux doesn’t understand. He doesn’t have anything to prove.

Hux doesn’t want Ren to come with them. He also doesn’t want Ren to die in a cosmic event, as is Phasma’s plan for Ithor. “It has to be quick. Soon the Resistance will find us—I can’t let them separate us again.” It’s a half-truth. Hux is privy to telling these half-truths for the benefit of the matters that tip favorably towards his personal version of the greater-good.

“They won’t. I’d gotten them to misplace you on their scanners using my powers. And I’ve been hiding from Rey and from the others for weeks,” Marin says, confident.

How remarkable that his son have these masterful manipulation abilities. He surely has become the worthy bearer of his family’s name. But to allow Marin contact with Ren courses a chill in his beating blood. “You’ve been with him for weeks?”

“Yes. He’s getting better in his own way. And trust me, I’m definitely the last person in the galaxy who’d thought that were even possible,” Marin snorts, poking a finger in his sister’s hand. It’s an odd truth to admit. But his efforts have proven fruitful. He knows so from the unignorable rigidity of the budding, needless anger in his heart. “His monster arm looks normal now. And he hasn’t
blacked out and done his creepy parsec-long stare since we’ve started.”

If Marin truly was able to help Ren, then there might be reason to believe he’s not as much of a danger as he was weeks ago. Hux cradles the infant carrier, scrutinizing its Kevlar fibers and synthetic shielding.

If Marin will not leave without finishing whatever he has to do to Ren, then Hux will have to allow him the freedom. He’d do anything to keep the twins safe from Ren’s harm.

But he can’t let Marin go again.

“Will you be able to stop him if he tries anything?” Hux asks, needing to know Marin is powerful enough to protect his daughters.

“Yes, I’ve had a lot of practice with my mind tricks. I’ve tricked Rey multiple times, and she’s more powerful than Kylo Ren. Even on his best day.” It feels odd to brag about manipulating Rey, but Hux has to know he means business. That he can protect him.

The sky hangs dim with twilight when Marin, Hux, and the twins make their trek to Ren’s camp. They couldn’t risk flying Hux’s ship and getting caught on the Resistance’s scanners so they move on foot, Marin toting the bag of infant care supplies in care the twins get fussy. They’ll need feeding soon.

Marin doesn’t really know what’s gonna happen once his parents are reunited again. They didn’t really make it seem like they were still at odds. Additionally, they are liars, so his best course of action is just to wait and observe. “We’re almost there,” Marin confirms, boot cleaving a twig.

Hux blanches when he hears an abrupt crackling up ahead, a dark, looming figure silhouetted by the mute sky and outlined in flickering firelight.

Ren palms through a brush of branches. Pure music enlivens him. The astronomical distance between them has finally folded. Hux is here, with Marin, with their daughters. Hux approaches, searing in unencumbered contempt, caution. Ren knows not the right thing to say. All he can do is wait for Hux to set the terms.

Ren flinches when the twins whine, their faces hidden by the barrier of Hux’s carrier. “Looks like you let someone past our perimeter,” Ren quips to Marin.

Kylo Ren’s jokes aren’t very funny. Marin’s learned that he’s actually quite dorky when he isn’t depressed or angry. Like when Kylo Ren equated his brains to eggs—like, who does that? He smiles anyway, because after everything he’s just glad they’re together again. It feels good. Maybe not right, exactly. But better than before, when he was the Resistance’s vagabond and the Jedi’s embarrassment.

Kylo Ren came to him and wanted his help. Hux came back for him and welcomed him with open arms. What happens next—Marin is almost too afraid to anticipate. “Hux brought the babies,” he tries. “He wants us to get going as soon as possible but I know you’ll have some input on that plan.”

“We need to get moving,” Hux presses. “Marin, can you get to watch the twins while I speak with him? In privacy?” he asks, managing not to waver on the request. Helped or not, monster claw or not, Hux does not want Ren near the babies.

Although he distrusts his strength around the twins, he’s unable to deny Hux such an important task. Marin straightens, nodding up to his father. “There’s a bunk on the Millennium Falcon. You
can set them there and I can watch them.” He’s quite good at watching and taking care of things, like Abie, his puppy. He hopes Abie will forgive him for neglecting her for the time being. Kylo Ren’s stability reigns important. In time, he’ll get Abie back. Abie will be the twins’ guardian angel.

As if he takes up too much space in this outdoor arena, Ren crumples inward on himself, backing away from Hux entirely. He watches Hux’s back as Marin leads him onto the Falcon. After recent events, he’d have thought the Falcon is the last place Hux wants the twins.

But Ren is the problem, not the Falcon. In Hux’s mind, the farther away Ren is from the twins, the better.

When Hux walks back outside the aged freighter, empty of the twins but entrusting that Marin will keep a good eye on them, he finds Ren squatting on a thatch of grass by the glowing fire.

“Are you going back to them?” Hux asks several paces from Ren. A barrier between their three children and Ren.

“Who?” Ren asks. Hux’s voice soothes him, even as he affronts him with callous accusation.

“The Resistance. That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

“I came here for him. Since I was the one who kept forcing you apart, I wanted to be the one to bring you two together,” Ren confesses, sincere and open before him.

Heart in his throat, Ren freezes when Hux steps closer, sitting right beside him. He’s close enough to hold, close enough to kiss.

“You have to leave this place when we do,” Hux says, desperate and low so that Marin won’t hear. He meets Ren’s watery gaze. “You have to promise me you’ll leave.”

Ren clenches his human hands. “I can’t. I still need to see my—mother.” Before his encounter with Solo, his father, beyond the threshold of death, he hasn’t acknowledged his parents’ relation to him, not even to himself.

“I need to tell her she was right. And that I’m sorry.” He needs to tell them all that he’s sorry. Rey and Luke, the two Skywalkers whose family and name he left in shambles when he stole Mara Jade’s life. To Dameron, who he grew up with as a peer and ally, to that traitorous Stormtrooper who was brave enough to never dare pull the trigger. But most of all, to his mother, for the countless ways he’s betrayed her like no son ever should. Hux doesn’t understand. He’s far too alienated from the Resistance, too removed from their purpose and from their connection to Ren. He can see it in his eyes. The contempt, the rage.

And sorrow, though he knows not what for.

Hux glares at Ren, hot and damning. Ren’s decided to be the noble son and atone for his past. To betray the Order, allying himself with the enemy. After everything the Resistance has done to cripple their plight, after all the troops lost and resources squandered at their vile hand—Ren chooses them.

Phasma was right. Ren deserves to be incinerated along with the rest of the Resistance in the Order’s impending demolition of Ithor. Anger hardens his heart.

His weak, malleable heart yearns for reprieve. Hux tips his head forward to capture Ren’s mouth with his own, fervent, passionate heat. A whimper bubbles up from his throat when Ren
reciprocates, groaning into his grief-twisted lips.

Hux forces himself to part, tongue laving his kiss buzzing lips. Ren’s eyes are closed, as if he’s waiting for Hux to come back. Hux’s heart aches when his eyes flutter open in confusion. “What was that for?” Ren breathes.

How hopeless he felt when Ren stole away the twins, how he bounced the barrel of his blaster against his temple contemplating death. “I don’t know how the fuck you think saying ‘sorry’ to your people will get you an ounce of solace. You’re an abject, pitiable failure if you truly think that.” He steals a look to Ren’s tragic countenance, only to cower from his sincerity. “Gods, I accepted long ago that you take great pleasure in torturing me,” Hux says, craning his face away.

“I don’t think any apologies will do much good and I most certainly take no pleasure in hurting you. I’m better now. Since defeating Snoke—since Marin has healed me, I’m a better man.” He’s sure of it. “I’m a better man since I fell in love with you,” he confesses.

But Hux isn’t hearing his declaration of love, agonized by where Ren’s placed him. “How am I supposed to believe that? After everything? How am I supposed to trust you after you took the twins from me?”

“I assume all the blame for what I did. Somehow, with my newfound weakness after Snoke—after I died,” he desperately tries to explain, though the words make little sense to his own ears. “I was more susceptible to the dark side’s allure. Because I knew Marin hated me, I wanted the twins to myself so that way they never would.” Sickened with self-loathing, Ren continues. “But I swear, I swear to you I will not hurt you or them or Marin ever again.”

As always, Ren finds a way to worm his way into his heart, flipping his rationality on its head. “Ren,” his throat swells, but he powers through the torrent. “I am taking Marin with me and I need you to leave after us. You can't stay here.”

“I know it's hard for you to understand, and I get why you don't want me around the kids,” he says, as if they’re common divorcees. “But I owe it to my mother—”

“Dammit, Ren. Listen to me. You can’t be here!” Hux flares, his determination to see Ren to safety his utmost priority. “There's a new weapon. One small and discreet enough that the Resistance won't stand a chance.”

Ren gasps, torn between the two fronts. “What does it do? What's its power?”

“What do you think? Phasma gave me thirty-six hours, and that was nearly a day ago. You need to be far from here before we strike.”

Slumping, Ren scrapes at his scalp. “We have to stop them,” he proclaims, a newfound drive sharpening his vision.

Hux’s stomach churns with dread. “Don't do this. You don't get to do this.”

“I can't let this happen. I've laid ruin to their lives long enough. I won't see to their deaths.” Ren gets to his feet. Intercepting his mother and the Jedi will have to come sooner.

Shooting up, Hux grips Ren’s arm. He forces Ren to meet his eye. “Don't. You have to forget about them. They're pests, or have you lost touch with who you are?”

Sorrow tightens his lips. “I lost touch with who I was long ago. I've gotten my soul back,” he glowers. “Does Marin know about this? That you have every intention in murdering his family?”
“I’m his family!” Hux counters. He’s the one who carried him like a broodmare, for week after week of torment and uncertainty.

Ren’s jaw ripples. Instead of anger, Ren crumples with resignation. “You are. You have his interests at heart. I know you do.” Tentative hands cradle Hux’s face, thumbs gently petting his cheekbones. “But you can’t expect him to forgive you if you let the First Order destroy his home.”

The warmth anchors him, cushioning his core. “I left him with them. He gave me the chance to run away with him and I blew it. I jumped off that cliff after you because I couldn’t bear to live without you.” Such a confession has never bled so freely. It’s the closest thing as a declaration of eternal devotion he can presently offer.

Ren brands him with his kiss, tongue lapping against his own. Then he kisses his cheek, the corner of his eye. It's the most childish, embarrassing kiss Ren's ever given him.

If only Ren would kiss him like that every day.

“Ren…” he says, heavy with exhaustion. “Come with us. Forget about these people and come with us.” He can’t believe he’s begging this, after everything Ren’s done to him. But it’s one of the most honest things he’s ever said. Being with Ren is what he’s always truly wanted. Insanity, insecurity, chaos and all. He’ll take the whole raw, bloody package.

It’s what Ren’s wanted for so long, to be with Hux without the pressure of the Order, of Snoke. To be with Hux like nothing else matters. Because Marin’s helped him, cleansed him so that they can be together again. “I’ve wanted that more than I’ve ever wanted anything.”

For a moment, Ren lurches on the precipice. It’s there—everything he nearly destroyed is there, fixed, perfect, beckoning. Their safe and healthy daughters, Hux’s open, lethal heart, and Marin’s tentative forgiveness. It’s all ready and waiting for him. All he has to do is leave. Hux smiles, a hopeful plea. Ren would just have to take that final step, and everything he dreamt of could be his, without a single shred of a threat to ever come close to rescinding it.

“I can’t,” Ren grates, heartstrings snapping as Hux’s hope flickers to confusion. Betrayal. “I can’t,” Ren repeats. “I can’t just let them die.” Already he regrets the words. He’d take them back just to see the hope brightening Hux’s eyes once more.

Hux wavers at Ren’s final assertion, concave, gutted. He’s unable to speak. Ren’s laid it out for him, bared and honest.

He’s heard enough. If this is where Ren chooses to align himself, Hux will have no part in it. No more will he be complicit in aiding the enemy. He shoves past Ren for the freighter, determined to leave even if he has to drag Marin by the skin of his ear.

Chapter End Notes

REUNITED AND IT FEELS SO...COMPLICATED

i hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!!!! feedback is always appreciated :) thank you
for reading!!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Although I never do this, considering this chapter's content, please be warned this chapter is especially heartbreaking. Quite a bit of the build up comes tumbling down and I just wanted to warn you guys.

That being said, please enjoy the drama! And please let me remind you of the 'angst with a happy ending' tag ;)

Marin pokes at his sisters’ toes, giggling in delight at their tiny, tremendous reactions.

“We are gonna have so much fun as you grow,” he whispers. “We’re gonna play together and learn together. And I’m your big brother so I will make sure that no harm will ever come to you. You’re with me now.” The twins blink and hum in agreement, arms outstretching. They desire to be carried. But Hux is outside so he’s not sure carrying them without supervision would be a good idea.

Experimenting, Marin reaches out with his firelight to the one on the left, sensing her even, resolute spirit. It reminds him of Grandmother’s firelight, cool and blue and pulling like the tide, but resonating a fiery heat like when Grandmother gets when she’s impassioned.

The one on the right, however, reminds him of Hux’s firelight, warm and welcoming like the embrace of the summertime sun, but a bit too aggressive for comfort. She must feel Marin close, so she flares up, gnashing her gums in bewilderment, squeaking little noises of distress. Her sister immediately joins in with her own noises.

“Easy there!” he laughs, enjoying their eccentricities. If only there was a toy they could play with. The only object around is Darth Vader’s lightsaber on his hip, and there’s no way the twins are getting their little hands on that.

He skims around their firelights, playful and energized.

Until their firelights push back. A vision assaults him, emanating from their bright, untainted souls. A grotesque monster claw scraping the fragile case of plastic, tiny wails of new lifeforms echoing in the violent silence. Kylo Ren’s claw looming to a droid, ordering it to gut Hux’s unconscious body and destroying the evidence of his manipulation. Kylo Ren’s even, unfeeling stare as he mechanically wraps the defenseless newborns up in a thin blanket and drops them in a crate.

Hux waking later alone and bleeding, hand muscles spasming around his blaster. His loss is so
great that his only reprieve would be to shoot himself but he can’t muster the courage. He’s lost them. Kylo Ren took them, stowed them away like trophies. Their pained, wailing cries echo in the dark of the bowels of the Millennium Falcon. Alone, helpless. Hour after hour after hour of cold, starving, suffering. Their newborn heartbeats faint and ebbing.

“Marin. Put that down,” comes a calm, accented, matronly voice behind him.

Marin’s ripple-skinned fist squeaks against the might of his grip to Vader’s lightsaber. Blinking away the damning vision, Marin turns to the noise. It’s a woman, a ghost, hands held up in surrender.

“Marin,” Mara Jade says cautiously, “what did the Force show you?”

It showed him enough. It showed him what he needed to see—the real reason Kylo Ren’s come back for him after a lifetime of betrayal and abandonment. He’s here to do what he’s always done. To lie, to use, to betray for his own selfish endeavors. Marin ignites the lightsaber, spearing it towards the ghost’s immortal throat. “Who are you?” he demands. His sisters whimper at the strange thrum of the lightsaber but he pays no attention, glowering at the ghost woman.

“My name is Mara Jade Skywalker.” She eyes the quivering plasma blade, impervious to its destruction but concerned for everyone and everything else.

Wavering, Marin maintains his threat. Rey’s mother? Rey once told him the truth about her mother. “You’re dead. Kylo Ren murdered you.” He spits the dreaded name. He hates him. He hates and he hates and he hates—

“The Force has given me a bearing in the physical realm of the galaxy. I’m tethered to your sisters. I’m here to make sure nothing happens to them or to you. Put the lightsaber down and go outside to talk to your fathers.”

Rage renewed, Marin lowers the saber, stalking around the hall like a predator in captivity. “I am never going to listen to anything that man has to say ever again.”

Mara wilts, drifting close enough to touch. She feels no fear, only sympathy. “He’s your father. He cares about you, about all of you.”

“He’s not my father. He’s never been there for me. You know what he did to the babies! To Hux!” Kylo Ren doesn’t care about him. He only pretended to care just so he could use him like some kind of trinket to offer to Hux so Hux would love him again, after everything he did to him.

And worst of all, Kylo Ren used Marin for his powers to present his healed and redeemed self to Hux so that Hux would forgive him for hurting his babies. Because Kylo Ren is a sick, twisted, revolting human being.

Kylo Ren doesn’t deserve to be forgiven. He doesn’t deserve to be loved.

He doesn’t deserve to live.

“I know what he did. And you’ve helped him overcome his problems. You’ve healed him. Somewhere, deep down, you care about him, too,” Mara implores.

“That was before I knew he tried to kill my baby sisters! He hurt Hux so badly that he tried to kill himself! I’m so sick of him ruining everything!” Marin slashes at the apparition as she disappears, slicing through the wall of the Millennium Falcon behind her.
His baby sisters cry and cry at the startled noise but he ignores them, storming for the boarding ramp.

This seething, twisted darkness bubbles over inside of him. It’s all Kylo Ren’s fault. And after everything, he’s turned him into the soul-eating monster that he was always destined to be. Kylo Ren’s tainted him, made his palms itch and his insides heave like a surge of toxic, muddy water. He wouldn’t have tried to help Kylo Ren if he knew why he wanted to get better, tirelessly absorbing Kylo Ren’s darkness. To be the better person, to be the dutiful son.

The chilling putrefaction that ails him would have lied dormant like a super-volcano. But now that the Force has shown him just who Kylo Ren truly is, Marin embraces the darkness that Kylo Ren gave him, its power and pull. He allows it to mold his malleable heart, guide him through the final step in his transformation.

He’s gonna finish this once and for all. And no one will be able to stop him.

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Outside, Ren shudders around a foreign, familiar darkness penetrating him. “Hux—” Ren croaks just before his throat spasms statically, his instinct imploring Hux’s safety over his own.

Hux is almost to the distended boarding ramp when Ren calls for him, oddly alarming in fervor. He turns. Maybe Ren changed his mind about allying himself with the Resistance. They could all be together. Ren, himself, and the children Ren gave him.

Eyes pleading and confused, his brain tells him to fall on all fours. So he complies, palms and knees pressing into the dirt.

“What are you doing? Why are you doing that?” cautions Hux, turning from the freighter, from his three sheltered children.

Ren says nothing because he physically cannot, jaw locked and unyielding, tongue frozen stiff on the roof of his mouth. His blood thrums to ice, fingers digging in the mossy ground. His body knows what’s coming. It’s something he’s feared before he fully understood why.

The unmistakable hiss of a lightsaber permeates the forest, and Hux spins towards the noise. Ren locks his rounded eyes onto the blade. To the menacing boy fisting the lightsaber. Marin radiates murderous fury, small chest heaving with every breath.

“Marin?” Hux blanches, panic overwhelming him.

Marin marches toward them, babyish face hardened into pure hatred. He ignores Hux, moving past him to Ren—every muscle straining, fighting against Marin’s mental grip.

Hux freezes, unable to accept that Marin has every intention of severing Ren’s head. Executing him like a barbarian who collects the skulls of his enemies to incinerate into ashes for display in his personal quarters.

The boy raises the lightsaber. Unwavering. Conclusive. He says nothing, because there is nothing more to be said.
Ren squeezes his eyes shut, accepting his reckoning.

“Don’t!” Hux bellows. Faster than he’s ever moved in his life, he scrambles for Ren’s vulnerable neck and wraps his arms around him protectively. He bores his wet, pleading eyes into Marin’s azure-bathed scowl. “Don’t,” he sobs, holding up a trembling hand.

“Get off of him, Father,” Marin grates, prepared to use his powers against Hux if he has to.

“You don’t want to do this.” Hux cradles Ren’s head, fingers raking against the short cropped buzz of his skull.

“He needs to die.”

“Please,” Hux cries. “Don’t do this.”

“I know. I know what he did! He needs to die so that he never hurts you or your babies again! Now, get off of him!”

Throttled by Marin’s dark energy, Hux pushes himself away from Ren. Everything telling him to stay, but Marin changes his mind for him. “Marin, don’t!” he screams over the darkness but his son ignores him, poising the blade over the nape of Ren’s neck. It sizzles the skin and hairs there, Ren’s elbows buckling in his agonized crouch, throat spasming against his noiseless, pained groans.

“Please don’t! He cares about you. We both do. If you do this—” Hux lays himself bare, honest before his heartbroken, misguided child. “If you do this, there will be no taking it back!”

Ren gapes into the moss underneath him. He’s been where Marin is. He knows exactly what he’s feeling. He knows exactly what fresh hell Marin will cast himself into if he succeeds. His skin singes from the blade, rippling and blistering from the unyielding scorch. Ren closes his eyes.

“Think about your grandmother. What will you tell her?” Hux pleads. Grasping for any scrap of anything that can stop Marin from beheading Ren.

Marin’s glare falters, eyes clouding with teary shock. “I’ll tell her he deserved it!” Marin growls, ferocity wavering. “I’ll tell her she was wrong. There’s no good in him. I’m protecting you and your babies by killing him. I’m saving countless lives by killing him.” Tears fill his eyes, pouring down his cheeks. The longer the blade sits in the air, the more the tears fall. “He only cares about himself. His power. Don’t let yourself be tricked by him anymore!”

“What if you’re wrong?”

“What?” Marin knows he’s not wrong. He’s never been more right.

“The First Order,” Hux begins steadily, “is planning on destroying this planet. Along with everyone on it.” Hux is thinking of Ren’s head. Of Marin’s soul. For the first time in forever, he sets himself and his pride aside.

Marin stares at Hux, sniffling. At his own lightsaber wielding hand like it doesn’t belong to him.

“I was telling Ren to leave this place so that he wouldn’t perish with the rest of the Resistance. We would all leave and never look back. But he said—he said that he couldn’t let them die. He wants to help them. His family. Your family.”

The boy swipes at his running tears with his free hand, lightsaber humming at the movement.
“This isn’t you. You don’t kill people,” Hux beseeches. “You’re not like me and him. You’re good.” The foreign, uncharacteristic pleas and beliefs bleed from Hux’s lips. To Hux, in his heart, murder isn’t wrong. It’s necessary. It’s more often than not the smartest, cleanest, fiscally responsible option.

But there’s no good that will come from this. If Ren dies, if Marin is the one to murder him, Hux will cease to see a point to anything anymore. He cannot fathom his life in a galaxy without Ren, his life where his son is the force that took Ren from him. And if history truly does repeat itself, he cannot imagine the state of his son’s mind, his soul, if he succeeds. It’ll end him. It’ll be his baby boy’s undoing.

Above, around, below—the galaxy awaits the boy’s decision. As it’s waited for many, many of its children’s decisions, that once made will determine the course of time, the fates of all.

Who lives and who dies. What they live and die for.

The lightsaber deactivates, dropping to the ground. Marin sprints back onto the Millennium Falcon, away from the lightsaber, away from his parents’ minds.

When Ren can finally move, his lungs spasm into a tremendous fit. Wheezing and hacking, his years-old handicap ripping him apart. Only this time, he doesn’t want to ever breathe again.

Hux crawls over to Ren, cradling his skull. Malleable and pliant, he eases Ren to his bottom so that they support each other in the moss.

“It’s alright,” Hux promises him, thumbs skating over Ren’s cheekbones, the scar bisecting his face. Within minutes Ren’s subdued, gaping into space. He doesn’t feel Hux, doesn’t hear his assurances because he doesn’t want to hear them. He doesn’t want to do anything but lie down and die.

But his survival instincts call to Hux, who rocks his frame soothingly like a baby, littering his shocked face with kisses.

“Are you still with me?” Hux asks, needing his answer.

Ren pulls back to meet the calming green of his gaze. He can only nod, tongue failing to form any words.

It’s good enough for Hux, who pulls him into an embrace. “You know that was bound to happen sooner or later. At least now we got it out of the way,” Hux attempts to joke so that Ren can hear a smile.

It appears to have worked and Ren squeezes him tighter, breathing him in.

Hux holds him a little while longer, eventually prying himself away. He has to check on Marin, make sure he’s got a hold of himself. They should probably talk, all three of them, but he decides that it’s best to have some time apart. All things considering.

Hopefully not too long. This planet is about to implode, after all.

“You’ll be alright until I come back?” Hux stands, palming Ren’s back consolingly.

Ren nods, unable to do much else. He blinks his watery eyes into Hux’s retreating back. He’s alone now, fire radiating against the cold sweat to his skin, the burn on his neck a numb ebb.
It’s then that he crumples, too-big hands covering his ugly, sobbing face.

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Marin cowers against the wall opposite his sisters, listening to them whimper and entertain each other. He feels numb, like his blood’s been drained.

Up until the moment he raised the lightsaber over Kylo Ren’s head, he knew what he wanted. He knew the consequences of his actions. He knew that Grandmother would hate him for murdering her son, but he didn’t care. Kylo Ren is too much of a threat to his family.

Hux was the one that brought him back down. Hux’s love for Kylo Ren is more indestructible than durasteel, more resilient than the blade of a century-old lightsaber. If kidnapping and nearly killing his babies, thus pushing him to suicide doesn’t make Hux realize Kylo Ren’s poison, what in this galaxy will?

He doesn’t feel Hux approach until he’s already in the room. Hux sits on the floor next to him, as if they were back on the Resistance cruiser having their chats, before Kylo Ren even spoke a word to him or acknowledged his existence.

“I’m not sorry,” Marin breaks the silence.

With a gentle thumb, Hux wipes away the wetness of his son’s freckled cheek. “I know you’re not.”

“He hurt you. He keeps hurting you and he’s gonna keep doing it. And he used me. And he’s gonna keep doing that.” Marin sniffs through his teary congestion. “I’m done with him.”

Hux reaches for Marin’s shoulder but the boy flinches away. It would be a gross understatement to say Hux has difficulties expressing his feelings, being a comforting or consoling voice to the people he cares about. Which happen to be limited to Ren and their brood.

“I meant what I said. He cares about you. He's your father,” Hux says. The words don't taste like his but they are no less organic. They are his own. “If it weren't for him and his ability to care and love, you wouldn't be alive. You wouldn't exist.”

Marin makes a disgusted face, as if Hux is suggesting something vulgar that he most definitely would never want to imagine his parents doing.

“I don't mean it like that,” Hux mutters. If anything Ren was the sperm donor in some kind of transaction of genetic material that they created Marin with. “When I carried you, Ren and I were marooned on a deserted planet. He took care of us, built us shelter, found us food and water. And because my body wasn't made to bear children, as you grew, carrying you became increasingly painful. Ren comforted me for weeks, in time to help us get rescued. Those days were some of the best moments in my memory,” Hux says for the first time aloud.

Marin sniffs, scrubbing his cheek. “He hurt you to make me.” Marin understands what rape is. He knows now that Kylo Ren forced Hux to carry his child.

Shuddering, Hux nods. “Yes. He hurt me deeply. But I forgave him.”
“I don't see how you could have. I don't see why I should.”

“It helps to know that someone's changed. Or that they want to change.”

Everyone seems to want him to forgive and forget. It'll never happen. “He killed his father.”

Hux quirks his lip in morbid joviality. “But that really messed him up. He's so guilty about that that even I started to see his visions. I mean, just look what he did to his hair,” he snorts, needing to see his boy smile.

But Marin is fresh out of smiles. He shrugs. “He deserves to die.” He swipes at his subdued tears. “But I won't do it. He's not worth it to me.”

The harshness in Marin’s words strike a chill in his heart. “Your father is by no means a good person, but—”

“So he doesn't deserve to die but they do, right? The Resistance? You're gonna sit back and let the First Order blow them up,” Marin spits, seething his glare.

How he wishes Marin would never have learned of his plan, because Marin is too young to understand the casualties of war. “They're the creators of chaos and while it may be difficult to accept—they need to be destroyed.”

“So if Kylo Ren hadn't been here, you'd have just taken me along and let the First Order kill my family?” Marin accuses. “You do realize that's completely demented, right?”

Hux’s eyes narrow, lip curling. Ashamed under Marin’s disgust. “We owe everything to the First Order and must do what we can to protect it.”

“You're a hypocrite.”

“I have your best interests at heart,” Hux defends, determined not to explode like Ren would. Instead he lies, supplying Marin with diversion, false hope. “And now, whether I like it or not, the Resistance stands a chance. Now that I told you two about the plan, Ren’s going to help them.”

Marin gets to his feet, a newfound determination strengthening his shoulders. ‘I'm only going with you if you promise to give Kylo Ren all the information you know to defeat the First Order’s weapons.”

Brows raising, Hux climbs to his feet. Calculating, plotting, orchestrating some outmaneuver for his son’s ultimatum. “Marin—”

“You're about to tell a lie. I can feel it. Enough lying,” Marin orders, unwavering. He uses the darkness, now more easily accessible than ever before, to make Hux unable to argue. “Come on. Get the babies so we can get them to safety.”

There's something in Marin’s words that stifle his condemnation. Hux shakes it off, tending to his baby carrier. “You're right. We must be going. The Finalizer is under my command and we'll be safe there,” Hux instructs, sure of his actions.

The Finalizer? Marin has no desire to be on the ship that Kylo Ren and the Resistance might destroy. Marin eyes his father, the even, measured movements in taking care of his sisters.

Hux stormed enemy territory and put the babies at risk. Marin had nearly slaughtered Kylo Ren for putting his sisters in harm's way. How can he just stand idly by and let Hux do the same?
“We’re not going to the Finalizer,” Marin tells him.

“What?” Hux scoffs. “Of course we are.”

“We are not.” Hux is concerned with his selfish hunger for power, for his name and reputation. Not his safety or the safety of his newborn daughters. He’s in no shape to be making any decisions regarding their safety. “We are leaving but you will not return to the First Order.”

Blanching, Hux’s steady hands still on the infant’s strapped heads. “Yes we are. We must,” he says, but he frowns around his excuse as if he’s losing voracity for the idea. Phasma’s exiled him. But the most prominent part if him, his pride, his selfishness, compels him to envision Marin and his unparalleled power willing Phasma into yielding to him, propping Hux and his children above every officer, every Stormtrooper, every TIE squadron, every fleet of star destroyers.

Condemnation stiffens his son’s countenance. He received Hux’s selfish fantasy. It'll be the last selfish thought Hux will ever have. “It's a war zone.” Marin pushes harder, hoping he can urge Hux into coming up with his ideas on his own.

“If not the Finalizer, then we’ll go to a safe house. There's a base not far from here. I cared for the twins there for weeks without a hint of a threat.” Hux straightens the straps, his feet waiting to be told to move.

That's precisely what they don’t need, to be on another base close to the chaos, to the war. His baby sisters need to be protected. Hux needs to be protected. From the Resistance, the First Order—and especially from Kylo Ren.

Marin eyes Hux’s crumpled contemplation. “We’re going back to your ship and we’ll leave this place. Far, far from Kylo Ren.”

Inhaling, Hux’s golden lashes flutter. “I can’t leave him.”

“You have to. It’s the only option. He has to save the Resistance and you have to protect your babies.”

“But—I can’t leave him.”

Deliberately, Marin forms his lie. “It’s only temporary. We’ll come back when we know it’s safe.” He’ll keep telling Hux that, as long as it takes. He’ll keep telling Hux that for the rest of his life. Marin pushes, pushes, pushes the darkness into Hux’s frazzled mind. Until Hux gives.

“Alright. Alright, Marin. We’ll do what you think’s best,” Hux nods. When Marin smiles, Hux feels as if he’s succeeded in something spectacular.

As a unit they evacuate the Millennium Falcon, abandoning the Ren-stained ship. Hux lays a protective palm over the front of the Kevlar carrier, as if the flesh and bone and sinew could somehow protect them from the universe. Marin grabs Hux’s free hand, escorting him to Kylo Ren’s sobbing crouch.

Marin’s never seen Kylo Ren in such a weakened, shameful state. Not even when he was strapped to a bed for a week when Marin first met him had he looked this pathetic, squabbling in the dirt like an injured animal.

Ren forces himself from the safety of the dirt to the four approaching beacons of light, more familiar than his own signature. He remains crouched, knees pressing in the moss.
“We’re leaving.” Marin is the first to speak, because he chooses to speak for Hux. “Hux is going to tell you all he knows about the First Order’s weapons so you can protect the Resistance base and save Grandmother and the Jedi.”

Ren stands, boring his wet eyes into Hux’s glazed, confused ones. “Where will you go?” Ren asks them.

*Somewhere you’ll never be able to find us,* Marin longs to spit in his face. Instead, he considers Hux’s malleable feelings. He’s doing this for Hux and his baby sisters, after all. “I’m protecting them. That’s what you wanted, right?”

Ren withers, blinking from Marin and up to Hux. To the two little cushioned heads poking out of the carrier. Ren has no idea what his daughters look like when they aren’t screaming in agony. “Yes,” he says. “That’s all I want.”

Cocking his head upwards, Marin places his hand on Hux’s thin arm. “Go on, tell him the plan. All of it.”

Hux narrows his eyes, as if he can’t believe what he’s about to say.

“Tell him!” Marin barks, and its then that Ren realizes what his son is doing, what manipulation he’s poisoning Hux’s mind with. Marin doesn’t fully understand what he’s forcing Hux to do. To knowingly be complicit in saving the Resistance and sabotaging the First Order. Such betrayal was never an option for Hux, who’d fight to his last breath for the First Order.

“It’s alright, Hux. It’s not your fault. Just tell me,” Ren says consolingly. He keeps his hands to himself, clenched at his sides.

Hux complies, throat working viciously against his treacherous words. “The operation is small and remote so the only option is to evacuate given the time you have left. Phasma can control from hyperspace to prevent any attack to the Finalizer, the base of operations. The weapon’s location itself is classified, and it’s possible that only Phasma herself knows how to contact it. It’s also possible there are many models of the weapon in case one of them gets destroyed, so you’ll need to find them as well,” Hux says, brows pinching. He cannot believe what he’s admitting, how viciously he’s crippling the First Order. “Also, she’s tracking you using a beacon they planted on the freighter. That’s how I found you and how she chose the first target.”

Ren nods, accepting what Marin’s doing to him. He turns to his glaring son. “What about you?”

“I said we're leaving.” Marin steps forward, in Ren’s space.

“But we're coming back,” Hux blurts. “We're coming back to you.” The thought is his own, but the words are unconvinced.

Marin glowers to Ren. “Sure,” the boy shrugs, sounding anything but honest. He tugs Hux towards his shuttle. They’re finished here.

Calling herself to materialize since Marin attacked her with a fist of dark energy, Mara Jade blocks the path to the shuttle. Marin glares, yanking Hux past her.

Ren stumbles, eye to eye with the ghost of the woman he slayed decades ago. One of the first lives he took as a boy, condemning his soul and ruining the lives of the people who mattered most to him. Mara Jade greets him, smiling somberly. Unable to move, his throat ripples around everything he never could say.
She’s gone with a thrash of Marin’s hand.

“Wait,” Ren jogs after them, stumbling out if his spell. If he lets them go now, there's no telling if or when Marin will let him be in their lives. “They could use your talents,” he tries, as if there was some way he could get through to his son.

Marin knows Kylo Ren is trying to manipulate him into staying, into letting Hux destroy himself by being with him, but it will not work. “You said you're gonna help the Resistance, so do it. Or were you lying about that, too?”

“I'm not lying. I'm gonna save them, and I'm gonna use what you've done to help me to be with your grandmother. And I'm gonna make it right. I promise,” he vows. “Just—don't go. We're not meant to be apart anymore.”

“I'm keeping them safe! Doing what you should have done. Hux isn't capable of separating his allegiance with the First Order from his devotion to his babies. I'm doing what you should have done a long time ago,” Marin proclaims.

Hux makes a small noise of concern. He can't for the life of him work out how he's keeping his comments to himself. The babies hum and grumble, catching his attention. He rocks them back and forth with his knees.

“Please, Marin. Don't go,” Ren implores.

But Marin isn't hearing any of it. “Go get the ship ready, Father,” he calmly orders Hux.

He can't leave. He tells himself that he can't leave Ren. He just can't. Never again. He tells himself this until his mind is changed for him. Wet eyes pleading, Hux gapes to Ren, his feet moving against his will.

Ren’s unable to let Hux leave so he grabs his arm. Marin glares and Hux rips his arm away, not believing his own actions.

“Marin, stop doing that to him,” Ren grates.

“I'm not doing anything. Right, Father?” the boy quips.

“He's not doing anything,” Hux breathes the blatant lie.

“Get on the ship,” Marin repeats impatiently, forcing Hux to squirm out of Ren’s grip. Hux’s heart thrums, confounded beyond comprehension. He doesn't want to leave Ren. His soul needs him. There's no point in denying it any longer.

But his muscles betray him, shoving his groveling Ren away.

This is his son’s doing, his manipulation, his violation of his own thoughts and actions. Hux trembles under his innate power. “Marin—”

“Get. On. The ship.” The boy holds his father's confused, burning eyes. “We have to leave now.”

“We have to leave now,” Hux parrots. His feet take him to the boarding ramp and Marin follows him without looking back to Ren.

Marin’s blood boils when an unyielding fist wrenches his bicep. He whips his head around to sneer to Ren. “Let go of me or I'll make you tear your arm off.”
But Ren isn't about to allow him to part this time. He needs them with him. It cannot end like this. He refuses to accept it. “I know you hate me. You have every reason to hate me. I hate me. But you have to understand that after I came back from the dead, I vowed to make it right to everyone that I had ever wronged and I made a promise to someone who I never expected to forgive me—I made a promise that I'd never do anything to compromise your safety, your happiness in any way.”

It was a promise to his father when they were together beyond the bounds of the material universe. The limitless energy of the Force reunited them one last time, so Ren could clean up his mess, spare his family of anymore suffering at his hand.

For a moment, his son appears to have a change of heart. The vulnerability of a neglected child longing for acceptance, for someone to be proud of him, for a parent’s unconditional love.

All things he's never, ever had before in his lifetime. One father is deranged enough to believe that prioritizing his climb to power within the First Order and surrendering his children to lives of loneliness, is preferable to simply being there for them, caring for them, running away from his selfish yearnings to make his children happy and safe.

On the other side is his unpredictable, murderous father, who used his son for his powers in order to gain forgiveness for an unforgivable list of crimes. One who's hurt him in countless, inhumane ways, awoken a darkness that he never truly feared because he always knew it was there. And who's begging him to just forget all of this and stay with him.

“And I'm so, so sorry for how I've lied to you and treated you and Hux, and your baby sisters,” Ren continues, wavering yet impassioned. “I'll do anything to keep you, all of you, at my side. I'll do whatever it takes.”

Marin eases his arm out of Ren’s grip. Every fiber in Ren’s being longs to grab him, embrace him, beg until he stays—

But Marin changes his mind for him. His feet do not move, his throat groans soundless against his plea, his hands forming desperate claws against his palms.

The boarding ramp closes around his son’s retreat. Marin’s hold on his mind doesn't waver until they pilot the ship into takeoff, soaring to the cloudless night. When they blast into the higher atmosphere, Marin’s grip on his mind withers away. The cold, wet forest floor slams against his knees.

Ren sobs and sobs, deaf to the whir of Resistance speeders targeting the disturbed stillness of the woods.
Grandmother, comes a familiar, boyish voice echoing in her skull. I’m sorry for what I did to Master Luke, and for causing you trouble. Please tell Rey and Finn that I’m sorry. I’m so sorry for leaving you like this. I’m so sorry. But it’s time for me to go. I’ll miss you so much. Thank you for everything you’ve done for me. General Organa flinches as the voice pulls away.

Marin’s gone.

General Organa comms the pair of Jedi, alerting them of the departed ship, the ship her beloved grandson has left on. “It didn’t show up on our scanners until it was too late. The First Order ship is gone.”

“Where did it come from?” Rey asks, sharpening the scopes of her helmet. She senses a presence that was thickly veiled before, a presence she hasn’t felt in years. It’s a lighter, cooler presence that reminds her of being a little girl.

Finn drives the speeder behind her, scouring the woods. A ping on his speeder’s radar alerts them of a familiar ship. “It’s the Falcon. Rey, do you see it?” he calls over their connected comms. They’ve combed these woods for hours, for weeks, and the Falcon has only just shown up like the wool has been pulled from their eyes. Finn has a bad feeling about this.

“I see it!” she confirms. Without further questioning or hesitation, they hone in on the beacon.

Rey and Finn dismount their speeders, securing their helmets to the seats. In all its dilapidated glory rests the Millennium Falcon aside a small campsite. The fire smokes mutedly, flame dying out in the skittish breeze. Silence hangs like fog as they investigate the sealed Falcon.

Rey attempts to break the seal, fidgeting with the intricate locking panel. It appears to be fitted with a biometric reader, and she doesn't have enough time to try and open it, because Finn smacks her shoulder, his uncertainty and contempt rolling off of him in waves.

It's him, he urges over their connection.

Alarmed, Rey rips away from the panel to guard Finn’s side. Hands ready and able on the hilts of their lightsabers.

Kylo Ren emerges from behind the Falcon, red rimmed eyes low and somber. A mangled device sits in his hands, the First Order’s tracker now inert. The Jedi wait for him to speak.

“The First Order is planning on destroying this planet,” Ren says. “You need to evacuate and move into hiding until their weapons are neutralized.”

Rey steps forward. “What kind of weapon?” she asks, because the safety of the Resistance holds precedence over what animosity the Jedi share with the Jedi Killer. Her mother’s murderer. He still bears the hideous diagonal scar she branded him with, a toll she took before she truly understood
what debt he had owed her.

“I was never told a name but you have reason to believe that the weapon will destroy this planet from the inside out. You must alert the rest of the base to evacuate.”

“Why are you telling us this?” Finn asks, flinching imperceptibly when Ren’s booted foot crackles over a branch. He's seen those boots before but he can't pinpoint when or how.

Why is he? After everything he’s done to destroy where he came from, after the countless lives he’d taken and destroyed in the name of his lust for power? “Because I’ve lost everything,” he admits. “And I have no one and nothing to blame but myself. And I promised someone that I’d do everything I possibly could to make it right.”

“Rey, what’s happening?” urges General Organa in Rey’s earpiece.

She holds her ground. Indefinitely wary of Kylo Ren’s minute movements, any motion, any hint of deception. “Where’s Marin?” she asks.

A flash of grief grovels over his features. “He left.”

“Left?” Finn asks incredulously.

“On the ship that just flew from this system,” Ren says, bereaved up towards the heavens, where his children and his soulmate blast far, far away from him. “He left on his own volition in order to protect his father.”

Still reeling on the fact that Marin’s gone and Kylo Ren is the last person to see him alive, Rey peels her eyes off Ren and onto Finn. The smoke from Ren’s dead fire blows in their direction, singeing their nostrils.

“His other father,” Ren clarifies. He’s unwilling to part with the other truth—the one about the twins—but such deceit always had and always will prove to be fatal. In Marin’s case, at least. “As well as his newborn twin sisters,” he confesses. “They’re safer now that they’re far from me.” Hell, if that isn’t the most truthful thing he’s ever admitted.

Finn furrows his brow. Twins? This all must be an elaborate ploy. “And we’re just supposed to take your word for it? You could have murdered your son and we’d have no way of knowing. Just like that—we’re supposed to trust you?” Finn flicks his glare down to Ren’s hip where his lightsaber sits clipped. Finn knows that lightsaber. It was the first one he ever wielded.

Surprising no one, Rey agrees with Finn. They have every reason to loathe Ren, to require his immediate capture. But they both know that this time, he’s not coming with them unless he wants to.

“I’m not asking for that. All I need you to do is to trust in the ruthlessness of the First Order and that we have to evacuate—”

“‘We?’” Rey parrots.

Quelling his fury, Ren marches towards the Falcon. “Do what you must but you’re not stopping me from delivering my message to the Resistance. I suggest you two find a way off this rock before you implode with the rest of the space junk,” he glares at the defensive-offensive standing Jedi. They’re children compared to him. He can no longer waste time bickering. “And take this!” he shouts, causing the Jedi’s pair of grimaces to deepen. He whips his hand to Vader’s lightsaber, fumbling to extricate it. “I don’t want it. Take it now. Do what you want with it.” Its taint has
cursed him, destroyed everything he’s ever cared for. If it’s up to him, he’ll never brandish another lightsaber again.

Rey lunges, snatching it from Ren’s grip. Ren feels as if a tremendous, leaded weight has been taken from him, now on the backs of the Jedi. Turning to the Falcon’s ramp, Ren’s spine prickles from the fresh burn on his neck.

Surrendering to the pissing contest with her once-cousin, Rey holds up a hand, blocking Ren’s way. “Hold on. If you’re not lying, let us on the ship. We’ll all go back to the base.”

*Rey,* Finn cautions over their mental connection.

Holding her even glower—though Ren has a good six inches on them both, possibly more—Ren nods once. “I have nothing more to hide.” He palms open the boarding ramp, leading the way to the cockpit. In tow, the Jedi push on their pair of speeders, parking them in the walkway.

Ren seizes the pilot’s chair, starting up the familiar sublight engines without further explanation when Rey takes the copilot’s chair, Finn taking the passenger’s side at Rey’s six. The contempt from the two Jedi is a heady distraction but Ren perseveres through the harrowing discomfort, focusing on the confines of his own ship.

It’s then that Finn can see the burn on the nape of Ren’s neck, his dark hair matted with cauterization. He’s only seen that particular type of burn after his battle with Ren on Starkiller, and every once in a while after a treacherous lightsaber sparring match with Rey. He makes no comment in fear of Ren’s escalation.

Ren’s modified the controls enough so that he can operate the bare minimum of the Falcon’s capabilities on his lonesome, his destiny as a servant of the Force. Rey grimaces at the sloppy wiring, all of it strange and new yet it appears to carry a specific, desperate kind of sense.

Transporting them into liftoff, Ren speaks with hardened sincerity. He’s calmed down. “I know it’ll take time—and it’s possible what time I have left might not even be enough—but I’m on a mission.” Ren steals a look at his once-cousin. Behind his eyes flashes the shocked gape of her mother’s corpse, the holy glowing ghost of her immortalized Force-form. Mara Jade smiled somberly in the way his toddler cousin used to smile the times his mother made him apologize for bullying her. “I’ve got one final purpose in this life and that’s to fix whatever I’ve broken. And that means what I’ve done to the both of you,” he divulges, pointedly focusing on piloting overtop the trees.

*He may be lying, but at least he’s not trying to kill us or turn you to the dark side,* Finn sends to Rey.

Not sparing a comeback, Rey comms their base. “General Organa, meet us in the primary landing strip.” She pauses, and pushes out the truth to prepare her aunt for what strange and shocking changes lay ahead. “We’re aboard the Millennium Falcon. Piloted by Kylo Ren. We have information you must hear.”

Information? He’s rescuing them from impending doom. Ren swallows his comments because the decimation from the First Order’s new weapon is of little consequence beside the reparations he must make towards his mother for every cruel, damning thing he’s ever done to her.

*“Affirmative,”* General Organa replies, releasing nothing implicating her awe, uncertainty. *“Are you both alright?”*
“We’re fine,” Finn answers. “Just—going with it. Like we always do.” In the last year they picked up an orphaned boy, only to nearly lose him on a battle on a toxic moon where no child should have ever stepped foot on, trained tirelessly with him for months, and now lost the same boy to the expanse of the galaxy. Finn’s gotten pretty good at just going with whatever the universe throws at him.

It takes only a few minutes for Ren to land atop the main platform, distanced enough to not startle the Resistance with his unwanted appearance.

General Organa marches to the platform, Commander Poe Dameron her right hand. Luke stalks at a distance, having been the hero of this story in a past life. He curls his metallic fingers in anticipation.

She stares evenly at the familiar spectacle of the Falcon, a private muscle in her heart hoping to see Han saunter off like he’s just waiting for someone to try and take this ship from him. The boarding ramp eases low, and the old, hopeful muscle spasms as she bears witness to a familiar, unmistakable pair of boots.

Ren bows his chin low to appear less menacing. After decades of despising her, the sight of his mother floods him with relief. She waits for him to speak first, paying no mind to Dameron, who fists his blaster, narrowing his eyes to FN-2187. Or, the man his once-cousin fondly refers to as Finn.

“You need to evacuate the base,” Ren says. “The First Order is coming here in a matter of hours to turn this planet inside out. We have to leave immediately.”

General Organa crosses her arms. “Give us one reason we should believe anything you say,” she demands. Yes, her son is here, wearing Han’s boots, flying Han’s ship. But how has he regained trust from any of them?

“Like I told these...Jedi,” he nods, “I’ve come all this way because I owe a debt, and I intend on pulling through with repairing all that I’ve destroyed. And I know,” Ren pauses, throat bobbing, “I know you sense that Marin has left the system. I chased him away. I squandered what relationship I ever had the chance of having with him, and with his father. The love of my life,” he laments.

General Organa’s brow purses, allowing her son to continue his bleeding confession.

“And after I struck down Snoke, I came face to face with the atrocities I committed in my selfishness. The Jedi. My father. My—daughters,” his voice cracks, “and everyone who I hurt. And what I’ve done to you, Mother. There aren’t words,” he implores, fierce and determined.

General Organa wavers under her son’s confession, unable to find the hint of deception. Daughters? Can this really be the truth? Has Ben truly come home? Hope enlivens her. She steps forward, boring into her son’s eyes.

The general makes a decision. “Poe, alert everyone about the evacuation,” she orders, not taking her eyes from Ben.

“Right away, General,” Poe replies, hesitating for little more than a beat. Finn and Rey move to help, then halt, as if they’ve forgotten Ren’s moral ambiguity.

“I'll stay with him. You should help with the evacuation,” Rey tells Finn.

That does not sound safe or anything remotely sane. “Are you sure about this?” Finn asks.
Nodding once, Rey passes on her assurance. *The Force will be with me, as it was on Starkiller and as it's always been. I can take care of myself, Finn.*

*I know,* Finn replies, sparing one parting palm to her bicep.

“How long until they strike?” General Organa asks her son, not remarking on his bizarre vulnerability.

“A few hours. Maybe less.”

“What chance do we have that they won't initiate a firefight during our evacuation?”

“They have no idea that I've given you this information. I'm not even supposed to know there even is a weapon, but I got intel from one of their own.”

General Organa raises her brows, a frequented expression for conversations with her only child. As if they picked up right where they left off, as if the last aching years never occurred.

“From Hux.”

She scoffs. “I find that impossible to believe.” But somehow Ben returning to her after all these years is more plausible.

“He was compelled by Marin, using his powers. He's protecting him. You, all of you. I promise I'll explain everything. Just please, please get off this planet.”

Sparing her son a final frown, General Organa tugs Rey aside. “Rey, you don't have to go alone. I can—”

“You can't. If anything…” Rey staves her words, glaring to Ren’s back. “If anything were to happen to you, I couldn't forgive myself. I can handle him if I need to.”

Never did General Organa want her beloved niece to be put in harm’s way to ensure her own safety, but she has faith in Rey’s strength, as well as faith in her son’s restored honor.

“We'll reconvene at the secondary base, the small one on Meris III. I’ll do my best to meet you there as soon as I know this base is cleared,” General Organa says. She takes both of Rey’s hands, passing on waves of reassurance.

She turns back to her son. “We're counting on you to remember where you came from. Who you are.”

“I know,” Ren nods.

General Organa takes one last look at her child, as does Luke. Ren makes no comment on Luke’s twin metal hands peeking from his sleeves, and Luke makes no remark to his wife’s killer. “May the Force be with you,” he tells the pair, hustling back to their compound to aid in their evacuation.

“Time to go,” Rey says, leading the way back to the Falcon. Ren follows in her footsteps.

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“Kylo Ren’s freighter has stopped transmitting. He must’ve found it. We’re waiting for your mark,” alerts one of the officers.

Phasma crosses her arms, glowering to the beacon on her screen. “Fire.”

The payload delivers, an invisible hand clenching into an unrelenting fist. No spectacle, no demonstration. No name, no politics. Only destruction, pummeling the Resistance into dust. There’s a sonorous vibration signaling the weapon’s execution.

On Ithor, the land splits, quaking madly against the rupturing planet core. There are only a few moments to spare for the Resistance transports to flee with every man, woman, humanoid, and droid to find rescue.

“Oh, thank the maker!” Threepio cries, finally locating R2 after trotting around a split in the earth, pummeling the once foggy, flourishing atmosphere with toxic emissions from below the crust. R2, ever the levelheaded one in the pair, finds rescue in the back of the crowded transport.

Threepio manages to make it in the withdrawing boarding ramp before the last ship leaves the system—not before shouting in terror against the torrent of laser cannon fire. “R2, please don’t tell me this is the end!”

R2 chortles his melody to reassure his fretting partner. The end is never in sight for the two of them.

Aboard the Falcon, Ren makes preparations to make the jump to hyperspace. Until Rey, his reluctant copilot, all but elbows him to prevent him from making the final maneuvers.

“Get to the gunner position,” she orders. “We’re not leaving them behind to get pulverized.”

Ren’s first instinct is to argue, tell her to shut up. Spit in the girl’s face or mark her like she marked him. But he’s not that person anymore. The Resistance requires that he becomes better. His family requires it—the Resistance, who all distrust him completely, his son who wants him dead, and the two little baby girls he tried to kill before they had a chance at life.

And most imperatively, Hux. Even when Ren least deserved it, he’d always taken him back in. Hux, the most relentless, stubborn general only gives when erred by Ren.

“I’ll pilot us. I’ve made countless modifications that would take too long to explain,” Ren says, arrogance curling his words.

“It’s obvious you just rerouted the steering command to be used by a single pilot. Go to the gunner position, quickly.” Rey musters all of her patience for her mother’s murderer. “Trust has to be earned,” she adds.

With great reluctance, Ren tears himself away from the pilot’s chair, not wasting anymore precious time arguing. Rey eyes him as he takes the designated gunner position. She was right—it only takes her a few moments to familiarize herself with Ren’s modified controls. Chaotic yet efficient, and although it might prove to be dampening on a battle such as this one, they only have to fire at the TIE fighters and disengage the targeting of the enormous star destroyer until the rest of the ships are clear. The star destroyer drifts, silhouetted by the Ithorian sun. Soon it will have nothing more than a dilapidated lump to shine its limitless energy upon.

The Finalizer drops from hyperspace, and Phasma—High Enforcer of the First Order—approaches the bridge, not quite believing her eyes, despite her officers’ worried assurances and angered countermeasures. Now that she can see that the Resistance is making their escape, one lifeboat after
the next, blipping into hyperspace, she seethes, slamming her fist onto the transparisteel haloing the bridge. Hux—that lying, devious rat! He must have tipped Ren off, been complicit in the sabotaging of the First Order’s offense! Now that the Resistance has scattered, there’s no telling how long before they’ll be able to target them all in one fell swoop. No more sparing the pathetic lifeforms she once allied herself with. She’ll kill him, his boyfriend, and his offspring.

Phasma narrows her eyes at the unmistakable hull of Ren’s freighter barreling past, torpedoing laser cannon fire into a TIE fighter until it explodes. The mission has already failed, but she can still take out Kylo Ren with all her firepower. Seeing red, she marches to her co-commander. “Target that freighter. Forget about the rest. I want that ship destroyed.”

Ren destroys another TIE fighter with his cannons, blasting it to smithereens. Violently, Rey pilots the ship into the most complicated reroute, Ren’s targeting computer scrambling to catch up with it. “What the hell?!” he shouts, loud enough for the pilot to hear.

“Your friends must’ve seen us. We need to get out of this system—ah!” Rey yells, bracing against a particularly damaging explosion. Deflector shields only do so much against dozens of armed TIE fighters and the cannons from a star destroyer.

“Now she wants to leave,” Ren scoffs to himself. Ultimately, he's glad he stayed and helped the last several transports blast into hyperspace safely. He doesn't know which one had his mother or his old master, but he senses they are unharmed.

Once Rey sets the course to Meris III and lets off into hyperspace, Ren allows himself to breathe. The burn on his neck brings him back to the moment he nearly lost his life to his son’s hatred for him. He feels the ghost’s warm reassurance, his unconditional love and devotion to his murderer. Ren closes his eyes.

His chest aches, though the heartbreak cannot be attributed to a single fault, Ren’s heart always, without fail, brings his mind back to Hux. He prays, he prays Marin and Hux will keep each other safe. He attempts, and fails, to keep his mind from broaching the obvious. Neither Hux nor Marin know where the Resistance is going. Even if he wanted to, Marin wouldn't be able to contact him. Enraged at himself and his copious failures, Ren tosses the targeting computer head strap to the floor, palms digging into his eyes.

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Marin washes his hands, eying his reflection in the refresher’s mirror. The artificial spotlight-like lighting sinks his skin, the mangled shadows gaunt and aging. The darkness he harnessed to control Hux thurms like electricity under his fingertips, swelling and reddening his eyes. Although the discoloration looks sickly, it bothers him very little. It looks and feels natural, as if it belonged there all along.

He’s glad he at least could say goodbye to Grandmother while Hux was preparing for lightspeed. He wishes he could have done the same to Rey and Finn and Master Luke, but he’s on his own path now.

“Marin?” comes Hux through the door, as fraught as he's ever heard his father sound.

Marin opens the door, bracing himself for what else he has to say and do to keep Hux from turning
the ship around. “You look tired, Father. Are the babies okay?”

“They're finally asleep,” Hux confirms. His skin prickle against the contrived, manipulated feeling that guides and diverts his actions. Marin is with him, the twins are fed and cleaned and safe from the toils of war. Ren is somewhere, off saving the Resistance. They're going to meet up with him. “You should sleep, too. You're beginning to look older than me,” Hux smiles. Not fully understanding why Marin looks so exhausted.

At the suggestion, Marin yawns, body calling for rest. It's tempting to give in. “Maybe after we chart a course.” Aimless. Adrift. There is no guiding light.

Hux ushers him to the bench beside the snoozing twins. “When I left you behind on Snoke’s moon, I hadn’t fully understood what I’d done until it was too late. I kept this,” Hux says, pulling out Marin’s broken slingshot. “I kept this to return to you. No matter how long it took, I knew I needed us to be together again.”

Marin takes the broken slingshot, his ‘spitter.’ He was such a child when he made this and named it its silly name. Hux kept it safe for him like a token, a promise they’ll be a family one day. Today is the day, and their family is complete.

“We need to figure out how to contact Ren’s ship. It would be too dangerous to use one of the First Order’s distress codes. Would you know where the Resistance would evacuate to?” Hux asks. The Resistance, who he knowingly aided, though he can't recall why.

The peaceful moment of reprieve is over. Marin scowls, fisting the tattered sticks in his hand. “We're not going back for him.”

“Of course we are,” Hux says pointedly.

“Why?” Marin sneers. “We don't need him.”

Hux finds a seat on the pilot’s chair and Marin takes the copilot’s. He takes his son’s hand in his own, imploring with the most genuine openness he can muster. “He's made mistakes. We both have. We should have never abandoned you.”

As stubborn as his parents, Marin’s frown deepens. “We don't need him. You think you need him because he's tricked you into thinking he cares about you. All he does is hurt us. I'm the one that's trying to protect you!”

The twins whimper at the uproar, startled from their slumber. Marin recoils as Hux snaps his attention to them, his father clearly distraught, exhausted from his chaotic day. “Maybe I can make them sleep while you get some sleep on the bunk in the back,” Marin proposes.

“Don't,” Hux snaps reflexively. The last thing he wants to do is make Marin escalate again, to hurt his son in any way. “I know you're powerful, but please don't use your abilities on them. Please,” he swallows.

Shame boils Marin’s blood, his blue-green eyes dropping to the ground. Repulsed by his powers, by his dark, deplorable nature.

Sensing his son’s torment, Hux does what he does worst and pulls Marin into an embrace. “I know you mean well,” he murmurs into his boy’s clumsy ear.

Grateful for the contact, Marin squeezes his father back. Hux is different from Kylo Ren. Hux was the one who carried not only him, but his two tiny baby sisters. And he held them at the same time!
Hux is brave, honorable, and it’s only a testament to Hux’s good nature that he keeps faulting to Kylo Ren.

Hux is the one who didn’t use him for his powers, or lie to him, or treat him like space garbage, or try to murder his baby sisters. Hux is the one who came back for him, and is the one who stayed.

“And your father means well,” Hux tells him. “When he left us for the first time, he did so to destroy Snoke, who never would have let any of us be so long as he lived. The First Order wouldn’t be a safe place for you and your sisters to grow with Snoke lunging in the shadows.”

Marin schools his features into complacent acceptance, far from his true feelings of resentment. Hux will always be loyal to the First Order. And worst of all, he’ll always be loyal to Kylo Ren and all his treachery and chaos. Aching, Marin pulls back, cradling his father’s face between two scarred hands.

“You’re wrong. He made a choice to leave. Just like you made a choice to give me up when I was a baby,” Marin says evenly. He’s past blaming Hux, surmounting the big picture, the grand scheme of things.

Hux gags around his guilt, unable to quell the uproar of sorrow. How he even allowed himself to give Marin up is completely, utterly lost to him. And even again on Snoke’s moon, how he surrendered Marin to the Resistance in an act of selfishness. He could never fathom abandoning his twin babies now. Much has changed in his heart, malleable after years of suppressed longing. For a family, for love.

“He made a choice to hurt you. And now, I have the power to help you when you can't help yourself. Please. Think of a place that you've always wanted to go. Somewhere safe,” Marin instructs. His darkness perforates his father’s Force-sensitive mind, like his in many ways, though infinitely less powerful. His firelight, where Marin’s firelight came from. “Picture the place and hold onto it tightly. Do you see it?”

Hux’s brain feels like putty under his son’s ministrations but the energy needed to overthrow his control is lost, if it ever existed in the first place. He pictures a place only know in his readings, in private files lost to the wills of men stronger than he.

“It’s a beaten memory—Hux calves-deep in a swirling sea on the cloner’s planet Ren had gotten them deserted on, bright light of a sun surfacing freckles on his cheeks. His name is called from behind by Ren, wily grin enlivening his voice. He palms his pregnant belly, heart pooling with affectionate warmth. He feels himself smile. He turns around.

It's painful, it's grating, but Hux wrenches free from Marin’s influence, groaning with effort. If only now was then. They were all together, then, no one paying mind to their modest, tremendous existence. “Don't—I can't. We have to go back to him. Please, Marin. I'm begging you.” I can’t lose him. I love him. I love him.

For a moment, every act of his son’s manipulation of his thoughts and will is laid bare. He can see how Marin’s forced him to aid the Resistance, to leave Ren. He can see how Marin’s darkness has changed him, his pure light dimmed to a seething ember. How his fears of being alone, his hatred for Ren has tormented him, a lifetime of suffering by his parents’ abuse and neglect.

There’s no mistaking that Marin is a product of he and Ren’s failures. Hux mourns his son’s happiness, the light in his heart now tainted with hatred.
For the first time in his entire life, he questions just how much this fight for power over the Resistance, a reign in the galaxy, is even fucking worth it anymore.

Marin lashes out, ignoring his father’s wince. He’s heard about Kylo Ren far too many times for one lifetime. Calculative, Marin forms his lie. “Why would we go back? Kylo Ren is dead.” Marin pushes, pushes the words into fact in his father’s susceptible mind. He forces Hux to believe his contrived gospel. “He’s dead and he’s never coming back.”

“Marin!” materializes Mara Jade Skywalker, but with a sure of dark energy, Marin banishes her from their space. Hux never even noticed, instead collapsing on the floor.

Ren is dead. Ren is dead. How could he have allowed this to happen? Hux scrabbles for reason, strangling around quaking sobs. His soul is ripped in half. His heart has stopped beating. There isn’t a point to anything. Ren is dead and he’s never coming back, Ren is dead and he’s never coming back—

Throat swelling shut at his father’s powerful projection of shock. At a complete loss for words, Marin braces against Hux’s unadulterated grief. The babies squeal in terror, compounding the traumatic eruption in the Force. His father’s agony is his own. It almost makes him take everything back—

Scrambling for ideas, anything to keep himself from weakening his stance, Marin fumbles with his father’s pale, twisted face, begging control between the palms of his scarred hands. “Stop crying,” he orders, not unkindly. He can’t stand to see Hux cry, not like this, where he’s falling apart at the seams.

Hux’s body stops his tears, but his skin blisters and aches. Every inch of him drowns, because Ren is dead and he’s never coming back.

“Kylo Ren isn’t dead. But you don’t care either way,” Marin tries. Hux doesn’t get the chance to weep in relief before his son continues, this dark oil sinking into the folds of his father’s brain. Twisting his memories, severing each link of all the iterations of Kylo Ren in his father’s mind. Hux’s coveted image of his soulmate, shrouded indefinitely. “You don’t care because you’ve never met, seen, or heard of a Kylo Ren in your life. He’s not the father to your children. He’s nothing. Any man with that name or with that face is of no significance to you. He’s no one. He’s nothing to you.”

Hux blinks, tears cooling on his cheeks. He blinks away the darkness clouding his vision. The weary face of his son greets him, eyes wide like saucers.

“Father?” his son’s young voice graces his ears.

But Hux can’t speak. He feels as if something’s missing. His body and mind are trying to make sense of something lost, nonsensically filling and mending the gaps. A body without a heart. A heart without impulse.

“Father?” Marin asks again weakly, bottom of his stomach dropping to the floor. His sisters squeal in confusion, begging to be held.

Hux’s golden brow furrows. His body takes advantage of the artificial gravity and sinks to the floor.

“Father?” Marin sobs. “Father?!”
“Father, please,” Marin pleads, petting Hux’s red hair. “Please speak to me.” Unable to face what he’s inflicted on Hux, Marin lies on his side to mirror his father’s fetal recline. His baby sisters whimper. He can sense their fear. All he feels is fear.

Trembling, Marin sends waves of healing, positive energy to his father’s crippled mind. It’s the first time in months since he used his healing powers.

But Hux doesn’t react. He just—lays there, staring, dull and unfocused. Marin sends more waves of healing, tears striping his cheeks. The twins’ whines fade into silence as they succumb to exhaustion.

Sickness rises in his throat as he tries to connect his eyes with Hux’s, who only stares off, breathing evenly as if sleeping, if not for his unfocused gaze. If Hux is alright, if Marin didn’t turn his brain into goo, Marin vows to never twist or play in Hux’s mind again. He’ll never hurt Hux or his baby sisters, never bend their will. He won’t. He swears to it.

Marin continues his waves of energy to mend the gaps he tore into Hux’s mind. He pictures Hux smiling to him as a baby, hugging him as a boy. He pictures Hux kissing the twins on their round cheeks, promising them he’ll never leave them again.

He gasps as Hux focuses his glazed eyes on him, frowning in confusion.

“Father? Are you alright?” Marin asks tentatively.

Hux reaches a hand to trace Marin’s cheek.

“Father?”

“What happened?” Hux croaks, all thoughts splayed and scrambled.

Relieved Hux is able to speak, that Hux knows who he is, Marin helps ease his father to his bottom. “We escaped. We’re flying through hyperspace without a destination.”

Hux scours his memory, recalling absolutely nothing of an escape. He knows Marin his here to help them, but he just can’t decipher ever leaving the First Order on ill terms. He left the Finalizer with his daughters...

And that was it.

Before the First Order base where he cared for his babies, then something blurry and agonizing that his mind has evidently repressed from his memory, much to his frustration. Before that, months of
pregnancy. Before that, months of isolation after being cast out of the First Order due to his own technical failure, overzealousness in his projects. Before that, years of work under Snoke. Before that, his son’s wide, infantile eyes.

He gave Marin up. Marin, his first born, his birthmother’s namesake. Why did he give him up? It’s as if his heart is trapping the most private miracles and tragedies, a shield to keep him from certain degradation. Most of all, he doesn’t understand how his brood has come to be. A part of himself has been removed, like an organ. His soul aches.

Sensing his father’s distress, Marin cradles his hand. “Father, I know you might be confused about what’s happened. And that’s because—” What is he even going to say? Is he going to ask him if he knows of a Kylo Ren, taking the chance that Hux will revert back to his prior state, and then he’ll have to hurt him all over again? “—because you sustained a concussion in our escape from the Finalizer. I healed what I could using my powers but it looks like your brains might be scrambled.”

“Scrambled egg brains,” Hux mutters like muscle memory. He’s heard the words before, but he can’t recall where.

Marin blanches. Kylo Ren’s stupid scrambled egg saying somehow meddled into their conversation. And he’s the one who brought it up. Sickened that Hux might still have Kylo Ren infecting his mind, he skims his father’s thoughts for any sign of recollection. There’s nothing on the surface. Maybe it was first Hux’s catchphrase that Kylo Ren stole. There’s still hope he murdered Kylo Ren from Hux’s memory.

“Marin,” Hux tries, but he doesn’t know where to begin. “We were—we were just talking about something important. Why can’t I remember?”

Thinking fast, Marin uses his powers to split the skin of his palm, exposing a surge of blood, careful not to let Hux see. But Hux is too preoccupied with sorting himself, that he fails to see his son palm the back of his skull with his bloodied hand. By the time Marin pulls away to show Hux, he’s already healed his wound. “I told you,” he reminds him. “You were concussed. I healed you. We just need to get you cleaned up. We were deciding where to go next when you just passed out. It was before I knew something was wrong, but you’re all healed now,” Marin lies without a single hitch. It’s getting easier every time.

His son’s confidence reassures him, and Hux stands on aching knees. He remembers this ship, the Finalizer, of course he knows of his children—but its disjointed and strewn apart like a charred computer console. How can he not remember how or why he gave birth to them? His head throbs, pulsing with despair. He palms the back of his head, withdrawing blood over unharmed skin. Never in his life has he been at such a loss.

Perhaps his son can help him fill in the gaps. He’s so grateful for his loyalty in this time of impeccable physical, mental, soulful weakness. “Where did we decide on?” he asks Marin, pushing aside the overwhelming confusion. He focuses on what he can control. Though unbeknownst to him, his control will be surrendered for the indefinite future.

“I don’t know. You were saying that there’s one place you know of far from the systems under the First Order’s domain. Somewhere where no one would look for us, away from the war so your babies could be safe.” How easy it is to be the puppeteer, the manipulator, the liar. He tells himself that it’s for the safety of Hux and his sisters, not for self-interested reasons.

“I don’t know of such a place,” Hux says. He has only the most tentative of ideas, a place without a name. He thinks he once lived there, eating the fruit from the trees and fowl from the forest. But he’s not very good at climbing trees, and wouldn’t know how to hunt without a blaster. Someone
or something must have taken care of him. He wants to go back but he can’t remember why.

It’s a private, nameless place in the Outer Rim, a planet he’s faced only in private datafile readings in the years after he gave his son up. It sticks out like a flag in the sand, around the disjointed memories of Hux’s time as a First Order general. The name of the system is buried under layers and layers of soft sand. He wrenches his skull in his hands, not trusting his own mind.

Guilt overcomes him, but Marin stifles it into dust. “Can you think of anything?” He doesn’t have enough knowledge of the galaxy to safely navigate systems that will not be welcoming to their family. They can only beam aimlessly at light-speed for a finite span of time.

“I can, it’s just…my concussion,” Hux groans, begging his memories to cooperate. The harder he tries, the more he feels like he’s dying. An idea strikes him, trusting his son’s abilities. “Perhaps you can look to see the end of the train of thought that I can’t seem to latch onto. You could try using your powers?” His son has otherworldly powers. He’s here to help.

Throat bobbing, Marin nods. He instructs Hux to sit in the pilot’s chair while he takes the other. The boy lacks the overconfidence needed to conquer his fears of hurting Hux again. But he complies with Hux’s request, rubbing his hands together. “I’m so sorry if this hurts. My skills aren’t as refined as—” Kylo Ren is poison, he reminds himself. Kylo Ren is dead as far as they’re concerned. “As they should be.”

“I trust you,” Hux smiles softly.

*You shouldn’t*, Marin’s mind scolds him. Rey’s voice, Mater Luke’s voice, Grandmother’s and Finn’s and Poe Dameron’s voice, delivering a reprimand from everyone he’s left behind.

When his son’s cool palms meet his temples, Hux slips his eyes shut. At first, his son’s ministrations are gentle like a slowly encroaching flood.

It’s a beaten memory—\textit{Hux calves-deep in a swirling sea on some nameless planet, bright light of a sun surfacing freckles on his cheeks. His name is called from behind by a soundless, faceless voice. He palms his pregnant belly, heart pooling with affectionate warmth. He feels himself smile. He turns around.}\n
The storm surges, pulverizing him from the inside. He shouts, face twisting.

“I’m sorry!” Marin laments. “I’ve almost got what we need.”

“It’s alright, I trust you,” Hux hisses like a defense mechanism.

At Hux’s reassurance, Marin’s probing turns violent, his guilt making this infinitely more difficult. He rushes, teeth gritting against his father’s pain. He spins away from those pleasant, loving memories, to the squandered, drowned ones.

His eyes snap open, retreating inward. “Rhiannon. That’s the planet, isn’t it?” He’s never heard of such a system but perhaps the First Order navicomputer will help them chart the course.

That’s not the system he was imagining. He’s read of that system before, famous for its sparse population and temperate hemispheres. “Are you sure that’s the one?”

“Yes, Father. A part of you has always wanted to go there.” That’s all he can tell from his first strategized stint at mind-probing. There’s something about tha system that has nothing to do with the First Order, the Resistance, or Kylo Ren.
Hux cannot be sure, but he trusts his son’s methods. He programs the navicomputer and braces around the ship changing course.

Bothered beyond ignorable, Hux turns to Marin. “I carried you, all of you. Like a female can. How was that possible?”

Marin blinks. “A scientific experiment. We were formed using your DNA and the DNA from an anonymous genetic donor.”

“You really don’t remember that?” Marin’s brow purses, feigning sincerity.

“Really?” he exasperates. Why would he feel the need to go through the trouble? For an heir? To substantiate a life of failures?

Hux scrubs at his neck. “I suppose I do,” he frowns. It seems to fit. The twins whine, needing to be comforted. Remembering his purpose, Hux palms his son’s shoulder. At the twins curious cries, at Marin’s earnest receptivity, it makes sense as to why he’d feel the need to covet these creations, these miracles of lifeforms. They’re his purpose. And he loves them, oh, how he loves them. “Will you help me feed them?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Marin garbles, fearful of his own two hands around his tiny baby sisters.

Hux smiles, guiding his son to the cradles. “I’ll show you how to prepare the formula,” he says, searching for the packets and bottles. He remembers he got these from a Stormtrooper plant, but can’t recall where he delivered the twins. It must have been in the same place.

Marin trails after his father, watching him work through the recipe. All it takes is warm water from the faucet and a thin packet of nutrient powder. To punctuate, he smiles and shakes the bottle until it froths, then scoops out the extra bubbles with a spoon. He hands the second bottle to Marin, who clumsily attempts to mimic Hux’s actions. Thankfully Hux helps scoop the bubbles out. He wouldn’t want the babies to suffer around all that harmful extra gas in their stomachs because of his inadequate bubble-scooping skills.

“I had to feed them at different times because of how fragile they are and how I only have just my two arms. Now that you’re here, they can eat together. Are you ready?” Hux smiles, setting the bottles on the wall beside the ship’s lone cot. Marin’s anything but ready, however he figures he should learn how to. Because this is their life now, together, as a unit. A complete family. Incomplete, a voice tells him. This voice sounds like Mara Jade Skywalker. For all he knows, that’s actually her ghost and not a figment of his imagination.

Hux instructs Marin to sit on the cot so he can pass a baby to him. “Here’s the calm one. She’s always willing to compromise. I’ll take the feisty one for now,” Hux says, anchoring the swaddled baby to Marin’s arms.

Schooling his hands from their uneasy tremble, Marin cradles the baby how Hux tells him to. Hux is awfully good at taking care of babies. It’s like he was meant to. Not fostering droves of infantile Stormtroopers in halls of organized shelves, or however he once described his nightmarish Stormtrooper program as. But taking care of his special little babies the way children are meant to be taken care of. By their loving parents, not a horde of caretaker droids. Marin stings with a juvenile envy for the full childhoods his sisters will have, as opposed to his life of squalor and vagrancy, alone and suffering.

His sisters will never be alone. Not only do they have each other, but they have him, their big
brother. And Hux, their loyal, devoted father. Marin smiles softly at the patent stare of the baby. She bores into him as if she can read past him and scrutinize all the sins and toils he has committed. Dark blue eyes that will mature into their true color, whether blue or green. Or a warm brown. Kylo Ren’s eyes, he fears. She’s Kylo Ren’s child just as much as Marin is.

Hux speaks up again, guiding the bottle to his hand. “And hold it upright, just enough so that she doesn’t suck in any air. She’ll need to be burped anyway but it helps to only have liquid going through the spout.”

Marin nods, concentrating on the task. There’s so much to take account for while holding and feeding a newborn baby. He warms with gratitude that Hux will only have to concern himself with his babies, not the First Order or the war or Kylo Ren.

Satisfied Marin has one of the twins covered, Hux lifts the other in his arms with practiced ease. She chortles in acknowledgement, eager for her meal. In silence Marin and Hux fill the babies’ bellies with nutrients. The calm one in Marin’s lap immediately falls asleep, tiny arms coiled around her head.

Tentatively, Marin pecks a small kiss on his baby sister’s soft head. He doesn’t catch Hux’s loving smile, but he wasn’t doing it for Hux’s sake anyway. It feels good to care for something, to watch it grow. Yawning, Marin readjusts his elbow. The baby’s nose twitches, having absolutely no interest in joining her family in the land of the wakefulness.

By now even the agitated twin has fallen asleep, tiny, toothless mouth hanging open. “I’ll take her and set her down. You should get some rest,” Hux says softly. Thankfully Marin agrees, satisfied at the state of all things. Hux sets his children in for bed, finding a thermal blanket in a side compartment for Marin. The boy’s asleep within minutes. It’s then that Hux allows himself to relax, pushing all his frets from his concussion away. He falls asleep on the pilot’s chair, dreaming of a faceless, soundless, begging voice.

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“General Organa. Do you copy?” Rey asks over her private comm. Only the Jedi and a few trusted Resistance fighters are permitted access to this connection. She hopes, prays everyone escaped unharmed.

“Rey, are you alright?” she replies, after a few minutes.

Craning her neck back to Ren—currently bundled in a bedroll that he keeps in the cockpit, sleeping noiselessly—Rey confirms to her aunt that they’re both unharmed. “Any casualties?”

“None so far. We haven’t got a full headcount but every ship that left has checked in. Finn even saved Marin’s dog,” the general smiles over the connection. Rey prays Marin is safe and knows her aunt is doing the same. General Organa pauses, comm crackling. “How’s he doing?”

“Ren is…asleep on the floor,” she exasperates. Her once-cousin burrows further into the bedroll in response, dead to the universe.

“Is he?”

“Like a baby. It’s weird,” she wrinkles her nose, wishing Finn were here to bear witness.
“We’ll see you on the other side, Rey,” General Organa says, hope lightening her voice. Rey signs off, sighing in the pilot’s chair. She swivels to the side, now eye to eye with a fully awake Kylo Ren.

Dolefully, Ren blinks, unable to initiate a peaceful conversation.

Often in her life, Rey’s found that she must force herself to be the better person. Especially before human men, both familial and otherwise. “Why did Marin leave?” she asks, hoping for the truth.

Ren lolls his skull, ear plastered to his bicep. The burn on his neck blisters but he gives no indication he feels discomfort. “He’s protecting Hux. And the twins.”

“From what?” Rey asks, knowing the answer.

Eyes slipping closed, Ren frowns. “I’ve been unpredictable since the Force brought me back to life. Like an animal, reacting, not thinking. Marin was helping me find clarity before he left.”

Where can she begin to make sense of his confession? “Brought you back to life?”

“I died. The only way I could think to gain the advantage over Snoke was to use myself as a diversion. He held me close from behind, and I put Anakin Skywalker’s lightsaber to my chest,” he palms his scarred abdomen, brow pensive around the timeless name of their grandfather, “and turned it on to kill myself. I was lucky to have taken Snoke with me.”

Rey crosses her arms, the chill of hyperspace seeping into her bones. She knew Snoke’s hold has been lifted, but not the extent of his demise. “You died? How can that be?”

"I haven't met someone who's immune to a lightsaber lancing straight through their heart,” he grovels without much heat.

“The Force could have healed you. Dead is dead. There's no such thing as that degree of resurrection. And if there was, why would the Force choose you? Of all the lives lost in these wars?” she argues, heat rising.

“I don't know!” Ren snaps. Rey doesn't so much as flinch. “But it did. And I was dead. I felt my soul eviscerated. I crossed over where no one has come back from.”

Remarkable how Ren holds himself so highly even in his lowest of lows. “Perhaps that's just what you want to believe.”

“I made a promise,” Ren murmurs, far off.

Rey waits for him to explain, the hum of the Falcon grounding her.

“When I died, I was forced to face what I did to my father. What I’ve stolen from him,” Ren closes his eyes, guilt as heavy as the second he realized his father still loved him, only it wasn’t until he felt his lifeless body tumble down Starkiller’s oscillator that he had. By then, it was already far too late.

“He was there, on the other side. He said there was still time to make things right. And I promised him that as soon as possible I’d return home. I told him I was sorry—” Ren sobs, tucking his wet eyes in his elbow. “And he said it was alright. But when he left, when I woke up alone midflight—I was changed. The dark side was in me, stronger than ever. It was like—I allowed it to control me. It was like it was the final test. And I’ve failed it.” Ren turns to Rey, burnt skin of his neck screaming under the loll of his skull.
He doesn’t know what he could have possibly expected from her, after everything. Anger, hatred, contempt, the whole lot—but not pity. Pity flows. She regards him as if he’s the saddest excuse for a lifeform she’s ever seen.

Rey knows the mind is capable of trapping itself. This wouldn’t be the first time for Ren to get lost in his own head. What she sees in him is remorse, with every instinct telling her to affront him with resentment. She’s tired of building wall after wall to compensate for her family’s atrocities.

“How have you failed?” she asks, encouraging him to use his words as if he were a child.

It’s a simple question. Oddly, it strikes him with a bitter humor, and he laughs, dry and ugly. “I don’t even know where to begin,” he groans.

“You died. The Force brought you back,” she inflects, as if she doesn’t believe it but knows Ren does. “Then what happened?”

Ren figures now is as good of a time as any. He curls his newly human hand, uncurling and spreading his fingers. “I got Hux, um, pregnant. Again. It wasn't supposed to happen. The first time there was surgery and doctors and science. It wasn't natural. But this time—right after we escaped from captivity, it wasn't unnatural at all. We were together how we were always meant to be. But after I left, after I died, I woke up. I felt different. Darker, like a time bomb. And I looked different. I had a monster claw for an arm like some kind of rancor.”

Rey grimaces, patient for her once-cousin to complete his tale. Ren spaces out, observing the curl of his fist. “And?” she prompts.

Blinking his wet eyes, Ren tucks his hand away. “I sent Hux a message telling him that I'd come for him once I solved my dilemma. But after months of isolation, no matter how much research or meditation I did, nothing changed. And I started getting these flashes of Hux in agony, trying to kill himself but backing out. And I figured, hey, enough is enough. I took a risk and went back to him to help. And he told me about—” His throat tightens, “about the twins, and how they were stolen. And I didn’t have time to be grateful or amazed because he said they were taken from him. He said that I took them from him. And I said, ‘no, that's impossible. I would never hurt them or you,’” he scoffs, tears slipping out and down into his ears from his recline.

“But then the proof stared at me straight down the barrel because there they were, right in this damned freighter! Cold and alone and dying. And so Hux left me and took them, and I ran to Ithor where I knew Marin was, where you were taking care of him. He's the one who helped me with my arm and my blackouts. And when Hux came after me—hells, I have no idea how he ever began to forgive me.” Ren scrabbles at the wetness clogging his pained glare. “But when Marin found out about what happened with the twins, he was furious. Rightfully so. He got inside my head and held me down. And came for my head with that lightsaber.”

Fleetingly, Rey toys with the ending of Ren’s story. Perhaps Ren got the upper hand and claimed his son’s life in his defense for his own life. But if anything the guilt, the mourning sinking him into tumult is a testament to how deeply he cares for his son. “What stopped him?” she asks the obvious.

Smiling sadly, Ren’s eyes glaze over in reverence. “It was all Hux. Somehow he convinced him that I loved him.” He flicks his eyes to his once-cousin, her expression unreadable. “And he’s right, he means everything to me. They all do. What’s completely beyond me is that I don’t know how Marin believed him.”

The feedback from the Falcon is ambient to Ren’s small, wiry breaths. Rey readjusts herself on the
chair, finding her words. “Luke was the one who insisted that I train him. Whether it was due to his personal fears or beliefs, I assumed the mantle. It never got any easier telling him that you’d come back when my heart told me that I was vilifying him with false hope. So if it’s any consolation,” she palms her elbow, “you proved me wrong,” she extends.

The air suspends, Anakin Skywalker’s descendants approaching a simulation of a truce. Same generation, opposite sides of the warfront. At least, they previously had been.

But she owes him nothing. He owes her everything.

“Do you believe in ghosts?” Ren shifts gears, throat bobbing.

She hesitates, prickling at the turn of conversation. “I’ve yet to see one myself, but anything’s possible.”

Ren sits up, and Rey forces her hands to remain unclenched. He’s got a punchable face.

“Marin assumed control of Hux and forced him to follow him to his ship. And in the middle of me begging for him to stay, something strange happened. I saw her,” Ren confesses. “Your mother. Mara Jade. I saw her as a ghost, though every bit as strong and resilient as—”

Ren chokes on his words, recoiling when his once-cousin barrels out of the cockpit. Her resentment, sorrow, despair, hatred a tumultuous wave that snaps his mouth shut. Ren closes his eyes. The hand of another ghost palms his shoulder. He smells the worn leather, ears longing to hear the ghost’s confident, crotchety drawl. He finds it in himself to persevere.

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Hux reorganizes his infant care supplies, tucking everything they can’t afford to leave behind in a case for that Marin to carry it easily. They’ve landed at a nondescript spaceport in Rhiannon, the system’s sun hidden behind layers of swirling grey clouds.

“Maybe we can sell the ship to make some money,” Marin suggests. A dark, nagging part of him wants him to force Hux to do it, but not only does the thought of manipulating Hux twist his stomach, he isn't certain that would be the best of ideas. What if they need to run?

“I don't know if we should resort to that just yet.” Hux says calmly. “Here. We'll see how much temporary lodging is, or if there are any overnight permits for our ship. Plus, there's plenty aboard that we could trade.” The standard First Order issued arsenal sits beneath the collapsible wall and floor panels. Certainly scoundrels will be keen on owning a Stormtrooper blaster rifle for a pretty penny.

No matter how skilled at mental manipulation Marin gets, all that power won't be of much use without his father's lifetime of strategic planning and wisdom.

But Marin could always get inside people's heads and make them give them money, but the thought alone makes him feel guilty. Most other lifeforms are just trying to make their way in the galaxy, same and him and his family.

“Marin, help me with the straps,” Hux requests, easing the foam-cap clad twins into their respective compartments in the carrier. His first instinct was to instruct Marin to watch them while
he scouted the newfound territory for any threats and hopefully, a place to park and refuel for an extended stay. But he cannot leave his children, for anything could happen while he's away.

Dutiful, Marin springs to aid his father, adjusting the buckles to maximize comfort and support. “How many blasters should we take?”

Hux's brows raise, and Marin backpedals at his father’s veiled shock. “I meant for trading?” he tries.

“You meant for arming. I must’ve taught you well,” Hux grins.

The commendation falls flat, his warm smile wilting. Marin wishes there were things in his life Hux taught him. But the time for that is now. The belonging he longs for lies ahead, not in the past.

“Get the most concealable ones. One is for me and the rest just shove it in your pack. I don't believe you know how to use one. Or rather, if you should be using one,” Hux chides.

“I've shot some before,” Marin defends, but reluctantly agrees. “But I probably won't be of any use without practice.” There will be time for practice. He and Hux can set up dummies and blow their heads off from a mile away.

Getting their arsenal in order, Hux leads the way out on the ramp, the crisp, heady air whipping his hair in his eyes. “Lovely,” he scoffs over the roaring wind. Thankfully the immense cloud cover eases the sunlight in his eyes. The twins squeal at the new stimulation, never having felt such a brisk wind in their lives.

Rhiannon proves to be an appealing planet, from its moderate population to its clement climate. They docked the ship in a matted field, sparse enough in foot traffic that the grass ripples with the torrent of the timely gusts. The immense landing pad stretches between green hills, faces jutting with cuts of weathered white stone. Whoever constructed the passerby pit stops, like the tool market and merchant supply vending, worked their masonry with the same likeness of stone. Modest castles of white, a testament to mankind’s resourcefulness with the materials at hand.

Not only mankind, from the array of humanoids and alien lifeforms keeping the place alive. Hux raises a brow, double checking the security pad on their ship. His son appears to be unperturbed, unaware of his father’s speciesism and smiling excitedly at his side at all the new landforms and lifeforms.

“Stay close,” Hux cautions.

Marin nods, grabbing his father’s hand. On foot, the unit heads into town. Hux’s first stop is a large market where he approaches a young girl that’s about the same age as his son. She’s got dark skin and calculative eyes, short cropped hair a soft layer of fuzz.

When the girl doesn’t appear to be hostile, he palms the baby carrier protectively and gets within conversing distance. “May we have some information on lodging?” Hux asks.

“There are docks that you can rent for short term stay just east of this port in Greendole. That’s where I live. Everyone here pretty much is just passing through.” The girl winks to Marin, who can’t help his scowl in response. The girl doesn’t seem to mind, smirking in mirth.

Marin’s never really met anyone else his age and size. His whole life he’s spent his days with adults, droids, humanoids. Now that he thinks about it, his baby sisters are the first babies he’s ever met and the only person closest to his age is Rey, and she’s in her twenties. What would it be like to have a friend his own age?
“Thank you,” Hux nods, practicing the pleasantries. The last thing they need is conflict. The girl nods and waves, and Marin stores her face in his impeccable memory.

He’s still unsure if running and hiding is the best course of action. But seeing that the twins have been alive less than a month—according to Marin, because Hux’s memory is still spotty—they’ll need to make a life here until they’re slightly less dependent.

They end up trading the weapons for credits in the next vendor’s shack to a less forthcoming humanoid male, but thankfully he asks no questions and haggles very little with Hux’s proposition. Hux pockets the credits, coveting their potential for sustenance. It’ll be enough for a few weeks of food.

They take their ship east, and just as the girl said, the town of Greendole welcomes them as they dock at a flat plain between large white boulders. Hux explicates the plan on keeping a low profile to his son, who’s eager to explore this bright new place. “And you should always stay right at my side. It’ll give me one less thing to worry about. Remember, we don’t want to draw attention to ourselves before we know no one’s come after us. And please try and refrain from using your abilities unless we’re in private.”

Marin nods, trusting his father’s wisdom. “Do you still want me to bring the supplies along?” he asks, referring to the bag of infant care paraphernalia and foodstuffs.

“Of course. We never want to be caught unprepared,” he grins, adjusting the baby carrier. His spine protests under the additional weight but he vows to never part with his children, powering through the discomfort. Muscle memory pulls him back in time to the aching days of Marin’s pregnancy. He remembers the brutal toll it took on his body and sanity. He remembers hopelessness, pain, and ache after ache—eased by periods of peace and comfort given by a nameless, faceless entity.

Hux shakes his head. He sums up the strange description to his deliriousness during those agonizing times. He probably prayed to some made up force, human fallacy attributing the power of prayer to be responsible for a miracle.

They head into town. This town looks much like the space port but has more buildings, stone and durasteel. Towering high and stretching flat along the roadway, businesses and living spaces connected by streams of pavement on the ground and designated airspaces for above ground traffic. The town of Greendole is mall yet highly functional. They’d be able to learn nearly every business within little more than a month of daily life, if they found the need to stay that long.

Temporary lodging is far simpler to acquire. Other commoners informed them that the pad they landed on is public domain, so theoretically they could dock for as long as they’d wish. If they’re willing to put up with the noise, that is. Hux breathes easier knowing that he won’t be forced to bring his children into conflict over something as simple as shelter. One day they’ll require more adequate, permanent housing. Home life is not something Hux ever anticipated in the First Order, but he’s been blessed with several mouths to feed. How, when, and why he’s got these children are still spotty, unanswered questions, but the fact of his situation is that they’re his responsibility. They have nothing, no one but him.

“Let’s say we celebrate,” Hux grins down to his son.

“Celebrate?” Marin asks. He’s never celebrated anything.

“On our mission’s success! So far I haven’t had to shoot anyone. No Resistance, no enemies from the Order. You were right in choosing this place and you should freely reward yourself,” Hux
commends. Though Marin said he pulled the place from the most private, longed for recesses of his own mind, it was Marin who convinced him that this is what’s best for their unit.

Overwhelmed with a prideful, ecstatic joy, Marin grins from ear to ear. “Let’s get something to eat!”

Laughing, Hux’s growling stomach agrees. “Maybe one of these places serves hot meals,” he says, hand on his boy’s shoulder. Marin beams up at him. A strange rush of familiarity overthrows his balance at his son’s wide, toothy smile. It reminds him of something distant, on the tip of his tongue. A phantom limb’s nonexistent throb.

When Marin senses his unease, he tugs them into the closest shop, which happens to be a cozy dine-in restaurant. His father is exhausted, mentally and physically. He needs a full meal. Meals always make him feel better. Wafts of steamed bread, roasting meats, tangy vegetables, and other warm, welcoming scents tingle their senses. They’re guided to a small table by a member of the waiting staff. She scoots the bench backwards enough for Hux to sit comfortably with the babies still attached.

“This place smells promising,” Marin assures him from across the booth.

By some godly miracle, the twins are fast asleep. Strange how they’ve never been calm enough to sleep while bound to his chest until now, as if this room alone has the power to lull them into rest.

The restaurant is lit by torches of flickering fire. For purely aesthetic purposes it would seem, given the array of technological upkeep within the building. Walls paneled with warm wood and decorated with artwork, Hux appreciates the peace in this time of uncertainty.

Until the uncertainty resurfaces, unable to be ignored. Hux catches the eye of an older woman, who stares at Hux from behind the serving counter. Alarm prickles him at her even, thoughtful scrutiny.

“What’s wrong, Father?” Marin asks, whipping his head around to the object of Hux’s concentration. His father’s zeroed in on some older human woman, her shoulder-length rose-gold hair pinned on the sides of her head. He doesn’t know why Hux is so concerned. She’s petite enough that one blaster bolt from Hux’s weapons will probably take her down easily.

Hux’s throat bobs, hand coiling protectively around the baby carrier. The twins are still fast asleep, devoid of concern for their wellbeing. “Do you sense anything from that woman?” he asks, low for only Marin’s ears.

Concentrating, Marin reaches out, skimming her thoughts. Not emotionally charged enough to commit anything as technical as most of his other manipulations without hurting someone, Marin can only pull vague emotions.

One thing’s for certain, Marin doesn’t sense any immediate threat from her. Quite the opposite, in fact. He senses trepidation, fear, and bewilderment. He senses hope, and a stubborn, resounding disbelief. He focuses, relying on his clumsy skill. She’s thinking of someone old and long gone, someone who’s caused her a great deal of pain.

“She’s not a threat. I don’t think so. But I think she wants to come over to talk to you. You remind her of someone in her past,” Marin explains, keeping his eyes to himself. “I don’t think she’s planning on ratting us out.”

“Can you be sure?” Hux asks, a bit frantic, as the woman whispers something to the worker who
gave them a table. He doesn’t want to lose what they’ve already tentatively made for themselves. Just a pocket full of credits and a place to park their stolen ship, but it’s paradise compared to the disorienting fear resulting from his concussion caused memory loss.

Marin’s eyes widen into the polished wood between them in an attempt to be inconspicuous as the woman finally makes her approach, hands wrapped together. They’re roughened with a lifetime of manual work.

“Welcome to Greendole’s finest place for dining,” she greets, presenting a hand for Hux to shake. He only hesitates a second before taking her rough hand in his smooth one. “What brings you all to Greendole, and more importantly, to my restaurant?” Her accent tips like Hux’s, like Marin’s. She wants to ask something else, something important, but holds her tongue.

Hux pulls away. Another unmistakable wave of familiarity tingles in a thin layer beneath his skin at the contact. He knows that he’s never met this woman before. He knows this. “We’re just traveling. You have a wonderful place. My son brought us through by grace of the smell alone,” he says, hoping flattery can distract her from details about their purpose here.

She nods, something sorrowful pinching her features. If he didn’t know any better, it would appear that her rush of emotion was just summoned by the sound of his voice. Surprising them both, she turns her attention to Marin. “Aren’t you sweet. What’s your name, dear?”

For the first time in a long time, the boy doesn’t find the need to lie. “I’m Marin,” he says, tucking his scarred hands out of sight.

The woman smiles bright like sunlight, watery with unveiled disbelief. Hux has seen the smile before, coy and youthful, immortalized in a printed photograph. He knows her because he came from her as his children came from him. “Well, how about that,” she gasps. “Marin is my name, too.”

Chapter End Notes

yes, Hux’s birthmother confirmed! For the record and in case you aren’t aware: In canon, Hux’s birthmother had never been given a name (I think), and all we know about her is that Brendol Hux knocked her up while he was an Imperial and she was a kitchen servant.

I hope you guys liked his chapter!!
“Really? Marin is your name?” Marin asks, interest piqued. He supposes his name isn’t too strange. Others in the galaxy might have it.

Swallowing thickly, the woman beams down at him. “Well, I go by my surname, Aems. But yes. Marin is a family name.”

Marin raises his brows, feeling a tad important. It’s then that he sees his father ogling the woman—Aems, she goes by—in unadulterated shock, disbelief. Vulnerability.

What’s the matter, Father? Marin sends to Hux through their private mental connection, for discretion in front of the nice woman. She has rough hands like his and it makes him feel more connected to her than just in name.

Aems regards Hux, hope shining in the greens of her eyes. “Do you know who I am?” she asks just above a whisper, hinging on Hux’s reaction. “You do, don’t you? That’s why you’ve come all this way with your beautiful children, Armitage?” Tears slip down her cheeks and her lips twist around a sob.

Marin narrows his eyes. “Armitage?” he mutters to himself. The name feels familiar, like the name of an old friend. What’s she talking about? he sends to his father’s uncharacteristically unreceptive mind.

It’s as if he’s short circuited like a water-splashed control panel. Hux doesn’t know what to say, what to think, what to feel now that he’s face to face with the woman he’s tried to scrub from his life. His birthmother was an ideal he never would allow himself to indulge in—the love from a family not for societal and political profit, but the love from a person because they’d given him life. Though he’s never met her and knows she never saw to his childhood development or even into adulthood, his heart bursts with this reconnection. This is closure, heightened into hopefulness for something more.

“He told me you were dead,” Hux says. All his life he thought his father had killed her, but the Commandant only struck him with those words when he began to ask questions.

Overcome with the grief of a life with her only child taken from her, Aems brings a trembling palm to her mouth. She longs to embrace him. Hopefully he’ll allow it. “Brendol’s wife—he knew she could never have children. So he took you from me despite everything I tried to do to keep you. Day after day, I constantly relive the moment he ripped you from my arms on the day of your birth. Your name—your name was the last thing I shouted to him.”

That day has forever haunted her, coated in her own sweat, tears, and birthing fluid. Her newborn son cradled in her arms, impossibly small and bright against the dim lighting of the detention cell. Brendol Hux, the Commandant, had imprisoned her shortly after he’d learned of her pregnancy and saw to the delivery of his stolen heir.

“Give him to me,” Commandant Brendol Hux orders, gravely with remorse. “Say your goodbyes, Aems. It’s over.” He instructs the medical droid to escort itself back to the medical wing, taking
every measure to hide the truth of his affair and his bastard son. But the truth will always bleed so long as liars give life to secrecy.

“Please, don’t do this,” she pleads, “Just let us go. Don’t take him. Please, Brendol.” She cradles her squealing newborn to her chest, wrought with heartbreak.

“We already decided. He comes with me and I let you live,” the commandant snarls, unwavering.

“He’s all I have. If you take him, you might as well kill me!” Desperately, she palms her son’s tiny head, cowering against the wall. She can’t stand, the topical anesthetic injection from labor already melting away, legs numb and crippled. So she crawls, slipping around the slimy floor in anguish.

The commandant claws at his hair. “Marin,” he barks, using her first name. “Say goodbye to him. Now.”

“Fuck you!”

The commandant lunges, punching her jaw. She groans, but doesn’t relinquish her hold against her squealing child. “I won’t let you take him! I won’t let him turn into a monster like you!” Aems cries.

Another fist sends her into the wall, her only instinct to protect her child. In a moment of weakness she loses vision, concussed and agonized. The commandant pries her child from her limp arms. “No…” she slurs.

But it’s already too late. “No!” she shouts after him, void of purpose, void of life without her child. The door seals definitively and she pounds against it until her hands bleed. “His name is Armitage!” is her final words to her tormenter. Because above all, she knows how little power she has in the Galactic Empire, how below she is to the officers and the commandant who will transform her child into a murderer. She sobs, mourning her child’s life.

After almost thirty-five years, by some miracle, her son has returned to her. She’s kept up with the rise of the First Order, simultaneously celebrating Brendol Hux’s inevitable death, and grieving him knowing he was the only connection to the child he ripped from her arms. Armitage Hux— officer in the First Order and harbinger of planetary genocide. She was only privy to information by word of mouth, never risking leaving her home on Rhiannon for pictures or holorecordings of her Armitage, lest one of Brendol’s pawns learn of her and send a scout to finish the execution Brendol never could do himself.

“I blame myself with what’s happened to you. How you grew up in that wretched academy. You have to know how much I would have given my life to protect you from your father. I was too weak, too powerless to keep him from tainting you. You have to understand,” she begs.

Hux’s muscle memory kicks in once more. His children were all ripped from him at some point in time. By some nameless, faceless thing with more importance than he can fathom. His mind races in all sorts of torrents, pure reaction.

He doesn’t want to think anymore. He’s here, now, with his birthmother. His mother. Her unconditional love is eternal, imprinted on him from his lifetime of structure and order, both chasing and running from this feeling of hope and acceptance. His shell has chipped away as he crumples, the vulnerability of a child surfacing. “I understand,” he chokes out.

Tentative, Aems slides in the booth next to her son. She cups his cheeks in her palms, careful not to
jostle not the one, but the two precious infants cradled in his baby carrier. An infinite amount of questions skate across her tongue but for the moment, she holds them, smiling hopefully into her son’s withered countenance.

Across the table, Marin gapes, consuming all of the wondrous readings from the pair before him. Simultaneous facts professing like singing wind chimes: *I’m your mother. You’re my son. You’re my mother. I’m your son.* Marin’s eyes boggle heinously wide. He can’t believe it! Rhiannon—Greendole—this restaurant—each and every moment leading up to Hux reuniting with his mother after a lifetime of being kept apart. His mother!

Marin is her name. Marin’s his name because he knew his father wanted him to have that name, its predominance to him ingrained in his genetic code. Marin is her name but she goes by Aems, just as Armitage is his father’s name but he goes by Hux. Which presents the obvious—Aems is his grandmother! He has another grandmother! One grandmother on Hux’s side of the family, one grandmother on the other side.

Marin’s so ecstatic that he completely forgets he erased Kylo Ren from their lives. Of course, he snaps back and remembers, because Kylo Ren is a taint that must never be allowed to bleed into their world. There is no other side of his family.

Timid as a mouse, Hux brings a hand to cradle his mother’s cheek, studying their likeness. Both fair skin, even bone structure and slim figure. Green eyes that he knew never came from his father’s cold grey ones. They both sport red hair and though hers has gotten less vibrant with age, it’s plenty colorful. She can’t be much older than her fifties, eyes still crisp and lips still full.

Aems closes her eyes. It’s been a lifetime since she felt so complete. She straightens and gets to her feet. “Oh my goodness, you must be famished.” She indulges in one parting pet to her son’s cheek, breathless as the sight of her son’s incredible babies and the handsome little boy across the table. “Don’t move. I’ll come back with something fresh and steaming.” She scurries into the kitchen, shouting good-naturedly at her chuckling staff. This appears to be a great place to work.

“What just happened?!” Marin gasps.

Lips twitching, Hux beams to his firstborn. “That’s my mother.”

“I know that now. Did you know she was gonna be here?”

“Of course not. How would I have?” Hux defends, heart singing with newfound hope. “You were the one who took us here. You’ve been holding out on me. Hiding away my own mother,” he jibes easily.

Stricken, Marin misinterprets completely. Guilt manifesting unequivocally for what he’s done to Hux’s memories, the stress he’s caused him, the fact that he’s hiding away Kylo Ren for as long as he’s able—it almost makes him crack right then and there. But then Hux smiles in the bright way that makes his eyes squint and his teeth show, and he remembers why he suffers.

“I was only joking. It makes sense that you’d pull this system from the recesses of my mind. I read reports that this system was connected to her. The Empire never really unclenched on its members—but before I had you and lost you, I had an extreme disinclination to…sentiment. In every form. I did everything I could to forget where I came from—an affair my father had with a kitchen servant.” He aches around a lifetime of resentment for the blood that beats his living heart. As the days pass on, now more than ever his father’s blood that beats his heart is an affliction. Whereas his mother’s blood enlivens him, tingling the skin of his cheeks until they throb from smiling too hard.
Marin bows his head, shaking off his guilt. “Kitchen servant? At least with her skill she’s got this restaurant now. That’s something spectacular.”

“Indeed,” Hux smiles warmly. She moved on, had a life. It’s more than he could have dreamt.

Smirking deviously, Marin cocks his head. “Armitage? How come I didn’t know your name?”

“You never asked,” Hux shrugs, playful. It’s a hidden identity, so deep and disoriented to an extent that Marin could never pluck the information. Armitage was a naïve boy as frail as a twig and as sensitive as fileted skin.

Aems returns with a humongous tray of food a few minutes later. Twin bowls of stew dusted with fresh herbs and spices, glistening yeast rolls, a cup of sweet caf, and a cup of hot chocolate. She sets the two meals up in the motherly way she’s always dreamed of. She pulls up a chair, palming her chin. “I hope you are impartial to rotisserie meats. The house stew is quite popular amongst the locals.”

Marin grins excitedly, the enticing sight of all these new, delicious smelling foods before him. Aems, his grandmother, slides him the warm, chocolate concoction. “This looks amazing!” he commends.

“How old are you?”

The question is a bit stumping. Marin looks to Hux for answers and when his father has none, sinking with dreary guilt for his lifetime of neglect, he makes up an answer. “I’m nine-ish.” It sounds right, and it’s an answer he can live with. “My baby sisters are only a few weeks old, however.” Marin and his father’s stomachs yearn for filling, and in tandem they spoon some of the delicious stew.

“Sisters? Oh, they’re angels,” she croons wistfully at their slumbering faces, cuddled together like blissful sardines. “Armitage, you must tell me—have you abandoned the First Order to care for your children?”

Hux allows the name, welcomes it. How could he not? “Yes,” his heart answers for him. “They’re all I have. Marin and I—we left during a skirmish with the Resistance. I realized it was too dangerous for the twins to be in that environment. But by the end of it I sustained a concussion so terrible that Marin had to pull us out of there,” he says, proud of his son’s bravery. Such a dutiful son. He’ll never convince himself that he deserves his loyalty.

Marin schools himself into sincerity, snubbing the guilt for lying to his father, and now his grandmother, too. “But don’t worry. He’s all healed.” He looks to Hux for permission to divulge something private. Receiving Hux’s approval, he continues. “I healed him using my powers. I’m a Force-sensitive.”

Aems’ brow tightens, confused. She looks entirely too much like Hux, green eyes calculative. “A Force-sensitive? Like a Jedi warrior?” she asks, the terms not in her daily vernacular but she’s not uneducated. She knows of the Empire’s plight against them, their extinction. When she was a child, it was widely believed the Jedi were the most powerful enemies of the Empire. But the Empire has long since fallen and she knows not where that leaves their enemies. It’s not that she doesn’t believe her grandson. She just doesn’t quite understand.

“It’s true,” Hux assures her, in awe of his son’s remarkable skill and unparalleled power. “He’s got extraordinary talents. Mind reading, healing. He’s the one who brought us here. We were looking
for somewhere that we’d be safe from the war, from punishment for my desertion, but when my mind failed to come up with anything tangible, Marin pulled the hidden secret from me. He brought us here. To you,” he adds, proud.

“I’m not a Jedi, but the Force is strong in our family,” Marin says before he realizes what he’s come close to admitting.

“That’s incredible,” Aems tells him. She can no longer restrain herself and she palms Marin’s youth-softened cheek. “Tell me,” she turns to Hux. “Is there a reason why you’re not with your partner? Their mother—where is she?” Aems fears the worst, that possibly her Armitage had a partner who was ripped from him, leaving their children with only one parent.

Marin waits for Hux to speak. He must know Hux has made sense of the gaps that must be filled now that Kylo Ren has been murdered from his heart.

“It’s a strange story, but you shouldn’t worry. There were…experiments that I’d undergone. Twice. My concussed mind can’t quite pick out the details of how or why, but I was the one who carried them. In a sense, I’m their ‘mother.’ There isn't another parent,” Hux confesses, agreeing with his mind’s shorn supplication of the truth. He believes it because there is no reason to believe otherwise.

Visibly shocked, Aems smiles in awe. “That's incredible,” Aems says, grateful at such a miracle but relieved at her son’s account. At the very least, his family is here around one of her dining tables. They may not have much but all that matters is they’re together.

“You know, my worst fear was that you would come here. To Rhiannon, to my restaurant,” she confesses. “Only, you wouldn’t feel your connection to me, nor I to you, and I’d send a waiter to your table and you’d order and then you’d eat. Then you’d leave, and we would never cross paths again,” she says, a tear slipping to salt her lips. Hux is so affected by her tragic fantasy that he trembles, a visceral response that summons his own fears of losing his brood.

Aems shakes her head. That isn’t how their reunion happened. She knew who he was before she even saw him. “But you are going to stay here?” she asks. After a lifetime of hoping to find her son again, she couldn't bear to let him slip through her fingers.

Heart skipping a beat, Hux’s lips curl in tentative joy. “We would love that,” he answers, truthful. Now that he's found his birthmother, he must know everything about her. She must be in his and his children's lives.

“Aems cries. “If you'd wish to stay here, my house has quite a lot of extra space. That is, if you don't already have a place to stay,” Aems proposes, eyes glittering at Marin’s jubilant disbelief.

Marin beams to his father, anticipating his acceptance of his grandmother’s proposal. This is just what they’d been working for. A home, safe from the persecution of the First Order, from the war. From anyone who's ever tried to tear them apart.

When Hux vehemently accepts, Marin cheers, guzzling his warm cup of delicious hot chocolate.
All Ren wants to do is sleep.

He and Rey landed on Meris III just short while ago. She abandoned him in the cockpit, ignoring every word he pleaded. He supposes it wasn't the worst interaction they've had.

His mother greeted him when they clamored off the Falcon, instructing him to keep his distance from the other members of their faction until a decision on his status can be made. So he tugged out a bed roll and told her he'd be just up against a nearby patch of grass, lying in the Millennium Falcon’s shadow. The star dusted space-sky looms overhead, interstellar heights limitless above.

Hux is gone. Marin’s gone. His daughters are gone. Ren closes his heavy eyes, breathing on the steaming woodlands. As long as his heart beats blood in his chest, he knows Hux is safe. Hux's deathswitch, his only blessing.

Yet he sleeps like a corpse, his body sinking into the spongy grasses. He dreams of long, persistent earthworms burrowing into his flesh, transforming his organs into nutritional decay. His time-begotten body decomposes into brittle skeleton, nearly dust until a familiar presence pulls him from his peace. He blinks awake, disturbed to find his body intact.

General Organa flops down a round mat. It's deep into nighttime and it isn't until she illuminates their shared space with a small, diffusing lantern that Ren can make out the meditation mat. Woven blues and whites of finely twisted cloth. It looks like one he'd helped her make as a boy. It never occurred to him that she might have kept anything they made together.

“You still dream loudly,” his mother acknowledges his hellish fantasy, sitting beside him.

Ren sits up. It’s a courtesy for appearances. He has no drive to do much else. “Did they decide what to do with me?”

His mother raises her brows, surprised he chose to speak. She chooses her words carefully, heedful of her son’s wounds. “They’re angry you’re not incarcerated. Very few could believe your information is what saved us from massive casualties.”

Ren cannot blame them, for he’d played a part in ruining lives of countless lifeforms. He’d murdered sons, daughters, husbands, wives in the name of a selfish greed for power.

“That is, until an empathetic Jedi cut in and shared with the faction the true extent of what she believed to have changed in your heart.”

Ry is one of the last people he ever expected to be on his side, especially having learned of his strained confession on the Falcon. He’ll have to be sure to thank her, if he ever musters the courage. “Did she tell you what happened with Marin? With Hux and the twins?” is what crawls from his throat, shame burning through.

The general was grateful Rey used her discretion with admitting Ben’s defection from the First Order to their faction—the vital information for the attack, Ben’s valorous efforts to stay behind for the few remaining lifeboats, and preserving the most intimate details of Ben’s plight to her and Luke’s ears—the torment he inflicted on his children, Marin trying to kill him but couldn’t make himself pull through, Marin blasting away on a shuttle with every intention of never to return again. “She told us enough.”

“Did she tell you that I died?”

“In so many words.” Rey had said that Ben had been driven into delusions by the severity of his flagellation and guilt. Of course, she’d wish to hear what her son believes from his own heart.
“I killed Snoke. I—tried to kill myself and took him with me.” Struggling with his cramped elbows, Ren rolls up his shirt for his mother to see the scar between his pecs. It’s faded from grey-blue to fleshy white since Marin healed him.

General Organa studies the gnarled scar. Sorrow dulls her eyes, and Ren knows immediately where her tired mind has drifted from Finn and Rey’s account of Han’s death. She brandishes a device that looks like a blaster at first glance. Ren waits for his mother to explain. He wouldn’t blame her if she took his life now, after everything he’s done.

“You won’t be incarcerated, but if you are to stay among us, they demand you be tracked. This applicator is for a homing beacon.”

Ren almost protests, demands the Resistance stake their claim on his life for all he’s done to their people. He’s stolen husbands and wives, daughters and sons. There is no greater loss than to lose one’s family.

“I’m gonna shoot it somewhere that you won’t be able to remove it. The nape of your neck is what we agreed on.”

Recoiling, Ren digs his fingers into the moss. Ashamed at what his mother will find there, the rippling burn marring his neck given by his son. He’s too sickened with shame to voice any argument or explanation for the mark, so he wordlessly pulls his uneven hair to the side, bowing his head for the guillotine.

His mother’s small gasp summons a spill of tears welling in his eyes. She knows what the burn is from, having spent her life around lightsabers.

“Hold still,” she instructs, and Ren closes his eyes. With the cool kiss of the applicator, the tracker embeds into his skin, the computer placing it deep between his vertebrae. Any other day he or anyone else would have shrieked in agony, but Ren only flinches, imagining the hatred in his son’s voice, the pain in Hux’s. “I’ll get you some topical for that. And for the burn,” his mother says, not requiring an explanation. Not yet.

“No, it’s fine. My mind is on other things. I barely feel it,” Ren tells her, and it’s the truth.

The general finds her place on the mat, grimacing as her son curls in on himself. He looks smaller, like she could scoop him up and kiss his temple before tucking him into bed. Her connection with her son could never sever. She knows where the burn came from, from Rey’s account, yes, but more so from the imprinted, heedless stain. Her grandchild’s hatred, his fear centered on that one spot behind Ben’s head.

Marin feared he would become someone irreversible. By killing his father, he would have. Gone would be the little boy, out would come the soul-eater or whatever dreaded tale the Sith and the Jedi have spun to temper powerful and misguided Force-users. Her heart tells her that since Ben’s head is still attached, the little boy will always be.

On the other hand is her own son, the killer she unleashed to the galaxy. He had become someone irreversible. Gone is Ben, the little boy, but the story is far from over for Kylo Ren. But it’ll be a cold, frozen-over day on Tatooine when she’ll ever refer to him by that awful name.

Like a child, Ren sniffles, scraping away drippings from his nose onto the moss. He focuses on his mother’s silent presence. It’s cool and welcoming like the morning air. He catches the eye of a haggard, familiar face far off in the shadows.
When Ben and Leia turn around to look at his direction, Luke Skywalker curses himself for interrupting what should have been a private moment between mother and son. Of course, Leia cocks her head for him to join them. It’s Luke’s choice on whether or not he complies.

Ren doesn’t object, for what he has to tell his mother and uncle will affect them both. Luke nods to his wife’s killer, who swallows in return, and finds a spot next to his sister in the grass.

“He was—” Ren grates, closing his eyes for one brief, blameless second. “He was there when I woke up on the other side. Han Solo. He said I couldn’t run away like he did. I had to face what I’d done to my family. I promised him I would. I told him I was sorry.” Ren sits up, imploring into twin pairs of shocked, mournful eyes.

Ren forces himself close to his mother and his old master. “And I am. I am so, so sorry for taking him from you. I was weak. I never deserved my father’s forgiveness when he gave it to me and I don’t deserve any of yours.”

In that heavy, tremendous moment, it doesn’t matter who Ben was, who he is, or who he will become. In that moment, Leia—not the General—sees her boy, the one she taught how to read sheet music and braid hair, how to care for others and treat his baby cousin with respect even if she was too playful for his old soul. The boy who she kissed and held, who when asked if he was a planned child since his parents weren’t married, when Han said he was an ‘accident’ she quickly amended that and told Ben he wasn’t an accident, but he was a ‘surprise.’ The boy, now a man, who’s a post-mortem shell reborn and alive after the end of a lifetime of calamity.

“You’ll get them back,” General Organa promises, fervent with a newfound hope.

His mother’s vow strikes something vulnerable and Ren sinks a fist into the spongey earth. His throat is too tired to form a proper acknowledgment.

Leaping the full distance, General Organa places a palm over her son’s tight fist, knuckles popping against the damp grass.

On her other side, Luke takes his sister’s hand in his inhuman one. He does this for her, and only her. He doesn’t even look in Ren’s direction.

It isn’t much but it’s more than Ren could have hoped for. Ren allows himself to breathe.

Luke can’t shake the wrongness of having Ben close, the burning resentment flaring. But for now, he basks in his beloved sister’s well-earned hope and celebration.

Chapter End Notes

a bit of a mellower chapter! hope you guys enjoyed. :)
Chapter 14

Rhiannon’s sun sets through the kaleidoscopic plate glass of Aems’ restaurant, clouds clearing in a fiery haze. Aems tugs on her coat for their trek to Hux’s shuttle. The change in atmosphere from inside to outside causes Hux’s babies to wake with squeals of contempt. He murmurs soothing words, rocking them gently. Cheeks dimpling, Aems revels in her son’s care for his children.

“We are docked just over there. How far is your home?” Hux asks, lightness of familial comfort easing his steps.

“It's about a mile east of my restaurant,” his mother replies. “I leave a speeder in the garage below but it can stay there for the next few days. I hope you and your little ones will find a way to call the property home.” This is everything she could have dreamed of—reunited with her only son years after he was surrendered to the First Order.

“I'm sure we will, Mother,” Hux smiles, the familial title riveting and strange on his lips. However he’s glad he used it as it earned him a congenial smile and a warm hand between his shoulder blades.

Hux pilots the ship using his mother's instructions, a bearing beyond the town and through a valley of stony cliff faces. Atop a green hill sits a house with a sturdy foundation. The stolen First Order ship settles in the field at the base of the hill and Aems informs her curious son and grandson that her property stretches acres until the land gives to the sea.

Marin is the most forthcoming with the infant care supplies, stacking the cradles on one another like crates. He looks to his father, who adjusts his babies against his chest.

“Are you happy?” Marin’s forehead puckers, craving Hux’s answer. After everything that’s happened, that’s all he truly cares about.

Warmth blossoms in Hux’s heart, and he palms his son’s skull to plant a kiss on his head. “I've never been happier,” he answers truthfully. There's nothing in this galaxy that could possibly make him happier.

If Hux is happy, safe from the war, what guilt he feels for leaving the other side of his family, and of eradicating the taint of Kylo Ren from Hux’s memory, will be worth slaving through. “I’m happy, too.”

Together they discover their new home. Wind trembling pastures ease upwards to the homestead. Beige paneling embedded in in a white stone foundation, large windows and an architecturally askew roof that favors the beach. What Hux hadn’t seen before was a smaller house that has most of the same design qualities of the main house, though more lonesome in comparison.

Aems opens the door with a brassy key, welcoming her family inside. Marin sets the cradle down.
He'll have to go back for the other one because they were too heavy, but now that they're home, they have all the time in the world.

“Here we are!” Aems chortles. “There's the kitchen, the living space. And down that hall are two bedrooms. I'll move into the smaller one so you can have more space.”

Hux falters. “You don't have to do that—”

“Please, Armitage. I insist. All these years I dreamt of this moment so vividly and there's no way I'm making you cram into the guest bedroom,” she waves a hand, a lifetime of hope filling her joyously to the brim.

Marin helps set up the twin cradles atop a flat shelf in the master bedroom. His father instructs him to lay out the baby blankets on the bed so that the twins can be freed from their confines. Gingerly, Hux unfastens the straps. He passes on an earnest look to his mother. He wants her to meet them, the two precious little babies who are now promised to live a life of peace in their new home.

Aems carries one into her arms, elbow adjusted into an assuring cradle. Captivated, she ogles the baby's dark, dark eyes blown wide at the new face beaming down at hers. Aems places a tender kiss on her brow. A vow to protect and to care for as long as blood beats in her heart. She reciprocates the love on the other twin, coveting her tiny, tremendous reactions.

“What are their names?” she turns to her son, rocking the infant to her breast.

It’s a question he cannot answer. He panics. What if in his concussion he forgot the names of his own children?

What else has he forgotten?

“Father hasn’t named them yet. It’s been a while since they were born but he wanted to make sure he thought of the perfect names. Everything’s happened so fast,” Marin assures them to quell Hux’s startle.

“Oh. Yes,” Hux shakes his head. “It’s just—my mind is exhausted.”

Aems lays another kiss to the baby, warming all over. “Would you like to rest? I'll set up the room while you get some shut-eye in the guest room.”

Trusting her to care for them as he would, Hux agrees and finds the second, smaller room. His tired muscles gratefully accept the comfort. Aems escorts Marin into the other room, each of them supporting a twin. Soft cooing, fluttery laughter, and murmuring lulls him into a placid peace. The people in this home are the only ones in the whole galaxy he trusts. Breathing in and out his nose, Hux cuddles up to the pillow.

In place of the pillow he imagines holding a form, a torso, a chest to lay his head on. The smell his tired mind fabricates is earthy, distinctive and male, unlike the crisp cleanliness of the linen. Eyes slip shut, breathing in and out the imagined scent.

It comes to him in his dream. A man, taller and broader than him. He smells like the earth, like a breath of planetside wind after a lifetime of suffocation in cramped recycled air. Hux burrows his face in his chest. Loss stings sharp and piercing. He's apart from someone he loves. But his dreamself cannot look up—for he fears the form that he already does not know is already gone.

Outside the closed door, Marin’s senses brush on Hux’s subconscious alarm. Panicking, Marin scratches his fingernails against his bumpy palms. “Grandmother,” he calls her to illicit an
emotional response, a diversion for his true motives.

Naturally, she smiles brightly at the name. She never imagined such a coveted title would be bestowed upon her. “Yes, Marin?” she hums, assisting him with organizing the formula packs. This will do for several more weeks but just the thought of going into town for some infant care supplies excites her, as well as new clothes for Marin and for Armitage. Everything they could possibly want, she’ll give it to them.

“I’m going to check on him,” he nods to the door, where Hux tosses and trembles. “I sense he’s having a bad dream.”

“Oh,” Aems says, caught a bit off-guard. “Of course. Let me know if he needs anything.” She eyes Marin’s retreat, curious to the extent of his Force-sensing. A lifetime of simple living after her banishment from the Empire has shown her many strange sides of this galaxy, but never has she fully understood the Jedi religion. She wonders how Marin knows so much about something so archaic.

A wave of unease surfaces. One day her son and her grandson will divulge the atrocities the First Order bled onto them, and she’ll be there to listen and love and promise them that the deviltry of the Order’s taint will never reach them again.

Marin eases the door to the smaller guest room open, breathing steadily as he approaches the bed. Hux is on his side, curled up and shriveled under the blanket. Clutching the pillow for dear life, unconscious eyes blind to the world and sealed, steady streams of tears melting through.

Oh, Stars. Hux is suffering through a nightmare. Marin’s gut pits with shame. He’s the one who did this to him. He should have known he was too weak, too volatile to perform such an extensive memory wipe. Childishness tempts him to wake Hux up, tell him everything he’s done and how he’s lied and deceived him.

He must force himself to not react brashly. He must calculate. Nightmares are a small price to pay for a lifetime of safety, away from Kylo Ren and his monstrous black soul.

Biting his lip, Marin places a hand on Hux’s wet cheek. Concentrating, he skims the source of his father’s torment. It’s Kylo Ren. Of course it is. The Hux in the dream clutches Kylo Ren’s abdomen, contorted inward, clawing at his back. He feels Hux sob in a feral confusion—he knows something is fundamentally wrong with the order of things in his heart. The Hux in the dream keeps his eyes averted from Ren’s pensive face, unable to summon the courage to look.

It’s too much. It’s all too much. With a hiss, Marin snubs the vision. He stomps on it, pulverizing it to dust.

Marin pulls his hand from Hux’s slackened, wet cheek, exhaling in relief. The dreams are gone. Kylo Ren is gone.

A familiar presence enters the room. Marin knows who it is before he turns around.

Mara Jade Skywalker illuminates the silence, crossing her blue-white glowing arms in contempt. “What, you’re not gonna make me disappear?” she speaks after a tense moment.

Marin lowers his voice so as not to wake his father. “You were getting in the way,” he explains. He doesn’t expect her to understand.

“That I was,” she nods. “What you're doing—it's a mistake. You're going to hurt your parents and yourself.”
“As far as me and my real family are concerned, I only have one parent. Who I'll protect until my dying breath. You won't be able to stop me,” he dismisses. If he has to, he'll push Mara Jade Skywalker from every crevice until there's nothing left of her. “No matter what you do, you won't turn my father against me. He trusts me. He loves me.”

“You sound like him. Like Ren,” she cocks her head.

Rage hardens him. Stifling the criticism, Marin glowers to the shakes outline of the ghost. “Don't come back here. You'll only make things more painful for him. He can't interact with anything that connects him with his past, and especially with Kylo Ren.”

Mara levels with the misguided boy. “He has you,” she counters. Marin is becoming more and more like Kylo Ren every day.

Her implications bruise his pride, his dignity. He's nothing like that selfish, murderous monster of a man. He forces himself to ignore her, turning back to Hux. He'll be able to hide Mara Jade’s visage from Hux if she tries getting in the way again. He's getting better and better at manipulation. By now, it's second nature.

Hux’s eyes fly open. There’s a cool presence on his cheek—Marin’s hand. Marin is grimacing like he tasted something foul.

“Sorry,” Marin retracts his hand. He’s sorry for a great many things. He scrutinizes the empty room, breathing easier now that Mara Jade has vanished.

Hux eases on his bottom, cheeks twitching at the wetness around his eyes.

“You were crying. I thought you were having a bad dream,” Marin explains.

“Whatever it was, it’s escaped me.” Hux peers to the window, comforted by the picturesque grey sand beach. The sea is a welcoming sight. Hux loves the sea.

Careful not to divulge anything else, Marin sits on the bed. He then does what he’s always wanted to do, kicking off his boots and sliding up to his father’s side. He could fall asleep there if Hux let him.

And Hux does. Marin falls asleep to Hux carding his fingers through his hair.

Hux smiles, grateful for everything Marin’s done for him.

What would he do without his son?

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“Are you sure you all will be alright today while I’m at the restaurant?” Hux’s mother asks, pouring him a steaming cup of caf. “I can take another week off. It doesn't have to be today.”

Hux graciously accepts the beverage, breathing in the vapors. “You've already done so much, Mother. Please, get back to work. Can't have you lazing around like me,” he smirks, comfortable enough to joke after merely five days of cohabitation. Aems laughs, smile drooping when Marin pads into the kitchen. His eyes are heavy, baggy like he hadn't slept in days.
Because he hadn’t. Not fully. Every night for the past five nights, Marin has felt Hux dream of Kylo Ren, lesser and lesser as the night lapse. But consistent enough that Marin must leave his own mind from his recline on the living room sofa bed, and into Hux’s torrential dreams.

“Darling, have you been sleeping alright?” Aems asks, concerned for her grandchild. Maybe she should stay, just a few more days.

“I did. It's fine,” Marin shrugs. Nothing’s wrong. Hux is getting better. Steadily so, but it's happening. Soon Kylo Ren will be nothing besides an echo in his memory, a formless nuance. Indistinct, tangential, able to be shaken off like a forgotten dream.

“Are you sure?” She unslings her pack. “I'm there's anything you need, just let me know. I mean it, Marin. There’s another guest bed in the extra house out back. If the couch isn’t comfortable, we can set you up there. Though I would prefer us to be under the same roof.”

“It's alright. Maybe Father and I can go for a walk along the beach?"

Hux raises his brows. “That could be arranged. After you have your breakfast, of course,” he admonishes.

Satisfied they have an agenda, Aems passes a final smile to the pair before heading off to work, leaving them to their own devices.

Hux sips at his caf. “Alright,” Hux grovels, breaking the silence.

“What?” Marin asks noncommittally, dragging his feet to the refrigerator for a pitcher of milk to steam some oats. It's a meal he'd often prepare for himself back on Ithor. He made it for his other grandmother on occasion when she didn't have time to cook for them. Back when he was pretending to be Master Luke’s Padawan learner.

“Out with it,” Hux deadpans.

Marin makes a puzzled face, tending to the mixture.

“There's something you're not saying. You've got that look in your eye,” Hux admonishes.

“Do you want some oats?” Marin diverts the inquiry.

Hux sighs. “Sure,” he says instead, grateful.

This is the first time Marin has ever prepared a meal for his father. Taking every consideration—the proper two to one ratio of water to dry oats, the sprinkle of salt and sweetener, the shavings of peppery spice and slices of fruit—Marin sets the concoction on the counter, stirring it to release the steam.

Graciously, Hux takes a spoonful. “Where did you learn to cook like this?” he grins, eyes widening.

“Um. The Holonet.” He never uses the Holonet. He never even had access to it. Master Luke taught him his special recipe, once upon a time. Of course Grandmother’s spices and fruits are different, but he came up with something similar. Marin wonders if Master Luke is having trouble cooking with his new limb, or if he has enough skill with the robotic limb Darth Vader gave him to help him with the one Marin gave him.

Hux snorts, oblivious to the extent of his son’s turmoil. His son is misrepresenting the truth. He
lets him pass this time, indulging in the delicious breakfast. “Ready for that walk?”

Marin smiles in relief. This is his life now. No longer will he be burdened by Kylo Ren’s bloodline. “Of course! Want me to get the stroller ready?”

His mother had gone into town to purchase a stroller on the third day of their new life. It’s a jewel of a contraption, two lined beds in a mesh cradle with a smooth handle lined with simplified repulsorlift controls. There’s a mechanical tarp to block out the sun, adjustable depending on the weather. All in all, the stroller is more than enough for a mere walk along his mother’s private beach.

Hux smiles at his son’s enthusiasm for their excursion. The twins are washed, fed, and dressed in the brand new outerwear his mother also purchased. Two matching plush body suits, each decorated with different cartoon critters sewn into the chest for spectators’ enjoyment. Hux goes as far as to brush the fine, dark hairs on their wide-eyed heads with a damp rag, keeping their hygiene maintained even for this simple little stroll.

“When will they start speaking? I know they won’t be reciting any speeches anytime soon, but I’m just curious,” Marin asks. “They already seem so receptive.” He wags his finger on one of their toes. She yelps in vehemence.

Chuckling, Hux pets his son’s wild hair. He’ll need a haircut soon. “Let’s focus on getting them outside safely for right now. Take this, would you?” Hux requests, passing Marin a canteen. He’s getting pretty good at being careful for his babies’ sakes. Everything in order, every mouth fed and wiped clean. A greater purpose for his new life. The twins are arranged in the stroller, each forehead earning a kiss. With them he lays down two identical stuffed toys—tail-less rodents with cotton eyes that his mother purchased with the stroller, void of removable, swallowable parts.

As a unit they emerge into the world. The sun is out today, bestowing fresh warmth in Hux’s hair. They trek a foot-beaten path to a hilly barrier between the sand dunes, stroller humming along. Ocean waves ebb in a high tide. Hux inhales the saline air.

A memory surfaces. Someone’s calling his name behind him. He dares to confirm his suspicion, glaring to the house. There’s no one there.

“What okay?” Marin perks up. His lethargy from the past ill several nights isn't weighing him down so much anymore. The sunlight has bleached his concerns. The sun on his home planet, as well as the sun on Ithor were both adequate suns. But this sun is a sun he shares with his father and sisters, as well as his busy grandmother. He wishes she didn't have to go back to work, but he’s comforted knowing they are all safe here.

“Looks like we're both a bit jumpy this morning,” Hux snorts, shaking of the unease. “You know,” he side-eyes his son, who paces in the white sand alongside him, the lapping ocean to their right. “If we're staying here, we're gonna have to look into schools.”

Marin bristles. “Schools? For who?”

“For you, obviously,” Hux says, playful.

“I don't need to go to school.” He never thought their new life would include school. It's just supposed to be them, and only them. A real family. There's absolutely no room for anything or anyone else. “Besides, I thought you were gonna teach me.”

“There's only so much that I can teach you, Marin. You should socialize. Have friends. Take up…
extracurricular activities.” He wants his children to be healthy, happy, accomplished individuals. He wants them to have everything that he can give them, especially now that they're forced to live outside the cushion of the First Order.

Marin can't help the grimace twisting his lips. “What about you?”

“I've already finished schooling, you know that,” Hux smirks. His babies hum in unison at a passing gust. One of them squeezes her toy to demonstrate how much she's grown in strength in the first month of her life.

“You need a job, right?”

“Being a single parent is a full-time job,” Hux reprimands. “But you're right. We need to pull our weight. Grandmother is generous but we are plenty capable of helping out.”

“I could get a job,” Marin suggests. “Like the girl at the spaceport. She looked like she was having a blast.” He remembers her warm, dark skin, her short cropped hair and narrowed eyes. He wonders what her name is, if she lives nearby.

“Marin, you haven't even hit puberty. Schooling is important.” Hux can sympathize with his son’s adversity to the idea of a classroom environment.

“Can we not talk about this right now?” Marin asks, clearly frustrated. Because, seriously. School?

“I'm useful with the twins. I don't see why I have to go anywhere.”

Brow puckering, Hux palms his son’s shoulder. “This isn't about you going anywhere. An education is what's best for you. I think your grandmother said the closest school is just on the other side of town. West Greendole. We probably passed it on our way in.”

Still unconvinced, Marin trails along the water, skimming his boots in the sinking moisture. The sea glows an icy blue yet is warm to the touch from of the radiating springtime sun.

“We'll discuss it later. Since your grandmother is a local, maybe you might have a change of heart when it's coming from her.”

Marin nods. His eye catches the distinct glow of Mara Jade’s ghost from the corner of his eye. Reacting, he blinds Hux from her aura, and shoves her into nonexistence with scrunch of his nose.

Later becomes that evening. Hux and Aems prepare twin bottles of formula for the babies. The new bottles his mother purchased are equipped with internal baggies that prevent extra gas from irritating the infants’ stomachs. In the master bedroom, Marin is entertaining his sisters with their favorite toys.

The twins haven't been able to sit up yet but Hux has given them their ‘tummy time,’ meaning they have plenty of exercise wiggling on their bellies on the carpeted floor or in their respective cradles. ‘Tummy time’ is an important practice a parent must perform with their infants, as he's learned with the help of one of the many resources his mother has in her reading corner.

Aems has an entire shelf devoted to infant care and development. Including one book filled with different baby names from every civilization. That book has been particularly helpful. He's got a few bookmarked pages. He can’t help but sink with sympathy, lamenting for what was stolen from both mother and son when Brendol took him from her.

“There are a few wonderful schools for Marin. A few of my employees have children enrolled,” his mother says.
“I'm sure of it. The problem is that he's never really been in that kind of structured environment. We'll have plenty of calls home to look forward to, that's for certain,” Hux sighs. “I dunno if you've seen it yet, but Marin can be…”

“Stubborn?” Aems suggests knowingly.

“Controlling. If things don't go his way, he'll do whatever he can to make it happen. It's in his blood.”

“He does what he does to protect you and your daughters,” Aems reminds him. “I can feel it. Inexplicably so, but I can feel how deeply protective he is of you three.” She's always had a sense about these things, like how she knew Brendol was using her. Like how she knew the echoes of the Empire were never gone, that it would rise from its ashes to threaten the wellbeing of even more systems. Which her son inevitably became a large part of, his bloodstained hands maneuvering control.

Hux’s own Force-sensing powers can be easily attributed to his mother's natural foresight, as faint as a critically blind man’s ability to see changes in light and shapes. In drastic comparison to Marin’s abilities, as incredible as they are terrifying. “He's always been that way,” Hux says without confidence. He's missed a shamefully large part of his son’s life.

“I believe that,” Aems replies. The formula is ready and the mother-son pair moves onto the next room to fill the twins’ bellies with food.

Hux broaches a sensitive subject, hesitating by the bedroom door.

“Mother,” Hux wrings his hand on the prepared baby bottle. “I've been doing some reading from your bookshelf.”

Aems raises her fine gold brows. “Oh?”

“Taran and Seren. I thought they would fit for names. It wasn't easy but I managed to find names that spoke to me.” In several dialects modified to Basic, Seren means star, powerful and inspiring. Taran means earth, grounding and resilient.

“Those are beautiful names,” his mother beams. “Come on, let's break the news to their brother.”

Both Hux and Marin feed one, smiling down to her owlish brown gazes. “I've decided on names,” Hux tells his son. “This one is Seren, and that one is Taran.”

“That's incredible,” his son grins. “I love those names so much already. Hello, Taran. I'm Marin. Our names kind of rhyme!” he giggles into Taran’s twinkling brown eyes. “I love you, Taran,” he murmurs, a promise for the rest of their lifetimes.

Hux pets Seren’s smooth forehead, gazing into her warm brown eyes. “You’re very special, dear,” he assures to her wet, wide infantile stare. His mother says ‘dear’ and he’s adopted the term. No one can judge him here for being too soft or loving. “Your brother and I love you very much.”

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Ren’s alone outside the Falcon, like he always is. He’s made himself a fire pit to warm himself, not
going inside the Falcon for anything more than basic sustenance and to use the refresher. He spends his day sleeping, mourning like a widow.

Sometimes his mother stops by to visit. Sometimes Luke, too, but never without Leia. Rey and Finn have passed him a few times, acknowledging him with little more than a glare. Poe Dameron pointedly ignores him just like every other Resistance member, always from a distance, always a veiled threat.

Ren closes his eyes.

_Hux smiles brightly, professing vows of love for the infants’ ears. Seren and Taran are their names. Hux kisses one and Marin kisses another, though the vision omits the twins’ faces. Ren has no idea what his daughters look like when they aren’t screaming in agony. But Marin and Hux—they both look happy. There’s a sickness clouding Marin’s green-blue eyes but his smile is genuine. Hux’s eyes are glazed and far-off, like he can feel Ren spying on him, but his cheeks pinch with a matching smile, and are even starting to freckle._

Gasping around the vision, mind clamping down on the miracle he'd witnessed, Ren gapes to the stars swirling bright with the tilt of their galaxy. He allows himself to weep.

The Force has given him a gift, such a precious, priceless gift. Hux and Marin are alright. His daughters are alright. Seren and Taran. He’ll hold those names locked inside his heart.

A blur of white snaps him back to reality, and he scrubs at his cheeks to bring himself clarity.

It’s Abie, Marin’s little white dog. Abie sprints up to Ren’s face to lap at him with affection. Ren squints, unable to help a tentative smirk at the dog’s joyous greeting. Abie is the only lifeform truly happy to see him, it would seem. He full-on smiles when she pounces and pounces until he gives, and he lies down flat on his back to give her more access. Indulging in a petting of her warm fur, scratching behind her floppy ears. Abie agrees with his ministrations, licking his mirth-scrunched eye socket in return.

“Abes? Abie? Where are ya, girl?” calls a familiar voice behind him, one he’s heard screeching in anguish under the burn of his lightsaber crossguard vent.

Finn huffs, dreading passing Kylo Ren’s wallowing grounds. But Abie ran off in this direction. All Ren does is lie on his ass and sulk. If Ren really wanted to do well on his promise to Han Solo, he’d make more of an effort.

Forcing himself to pass Ren’s campsite as quickly as possible, Finn speed-walks a good distance away, eying him with his peripherals. Until he stops, because of course Abie has made an ugly new friend.

Ren sits up and Abie coils in his lap. His gentleness makes Finn falter as he lifts the puppy up to right her on her four little paws, anchoring her towards Finn.

But Abie is having none of it. She squirms from Ren’s guiding hands to climb in his lap once more, laying her head on his thigh.

“Abie, c’mere, girl,” Finn calls, but she closes her eyes in complete and utter comfort. Ren tries to pry her away again, and Abie makes herself clear. She’s not going anywhere.

“Um,” Finn scratches his head. A year ago he could have never imagined he’d be offering what he’s about to offer. “If you want, you could watch her for a while. If you want.”
Ren narrows his eyes, eying the snoozing puppy in his lap.

“She’s supposed to be Marin’s playmate, but—” Finn clears his throat. “Anyway, she doesn’t eat much and spends the day running around. You can watch over her for a while. Until Marin comes back.” Being noble was never meant to be easy.

Carding his fingers through the puppy’s soft fur, Ren looks up to meet Finn’s eye. He nods. “Thank you.”

Finn exhales his queasiness. One step at a time.

A FEW THINGS:

- i made sure to bring up hux’s force-sensitivity and how his mother shares it (which is where he inherited it from). just to be clear, it's minute and more like foresight, unable to ever be weaponized like the skywalker side of the fam.

- bABY NAMES!! Seren and Taran! I hope you like the names. I thought it was important that they had their own names, not Padme Jr and Leia Jr or whatever. i want the bbs to have their own identities and not be burdened with a name, if that makes sense? like "ben" is, and hux is (ben has a jedi name and hux has his dad's name, i apologize if im not making sense LOL but all you have to know is that the twins are Good and Innocent force-babies)

- marin get over it, youre like 10, you just have to go to school ok

- mara jade dishing major truth teas to marin, and of course the kylo in him is too stubborn to listen!

- kylo + marin's space doge = everything

- #GoodGuyFinn, that's what makes him a hero!! but he doesnt have to LIKE IT
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Today is the day that Hux decides to put his foot down about Marin’s schooling. He chooses beach picnic day. Outside underneath the sunny sky, Aems divvies up the bread and sliced sausage for her son and grandson while Seren squirms on a soft blanket. Bouncing Taran on his knee, Hux eyes Marin’s scowl at the seascape. Marin often scowls, even in his sleep.

“Marin,” Hux calls. By the levelness of his grandmother’s gaze, Marin can guess what his father is about to propose. His scowl softens to false patience.

Smiling, Hux prepares Marin’s bread and sausage. “The autumn is approaching. Your grandmother and I already have looked into a few schools for you. Since you haven't had any proper schooling we'll have to sign you up for placement exams—”

Hux staves his words when Marin shoots to his feet to march towards the water, shoulders stiffened offensively. There’s something out there.

“What is it, dear?” Aems inquires, concerned.

Marin pays her no mind. Out there, far where the water reaches the sky, zooms a transport. From the look of it, it could be a freighter. Marin glowers to the nondescript freighter, assuming the worst. There's no way Kylo Ren found them, unless he has a tracking devise infused into Hux’s bones or something equally as barbaric. Marin’s skin pimples, panic rising.

The freighter makes a sharp turn, revealing its black and blue armored hull. Marin exhales, and breathes in the fresh, sea-salt air. It’s not the Millennium Falcon, and Kylo Ren is still parsecs away. Kylo Ren will never be able to find them.

“What's the matter?” his father demands, less patient.

“It's nothing. We're safe here,” Marin says cryptically.

But Hux can't shake off the unease, stifling it for later. “Come sit. Your grandmother made you lunch,” Hux orders, not unkindly. He taught his son to value their family’s efforts to care for one another.

“Thank you, Grandmother,” Marin complies. Unable to hold in his griping, he chews aggressively until he's eaten enough to warrant conversation. “I really don’t want to go to school.”

“I know it will be hard to adjust. But we've been here over a month. It's time to commit to your path,” Hux says, kissing Taran’s bulbous cheek. She tugs her tiny, plush lips into a toothless smile. His daughters’ began to smile a short while ago and their little smiles always bring joy bright in his heart. Seren hums, needy, gnashing her gums. She, too, smiles, her deep brown eyes widening in primitive expression.

“Father, school won't be a good fit for me. I can feel it. I'm not going to get along with anyone or have any regard for authority, so you might as well save your money for something more important,” Marin shrugs.

“At least you're honest,” Hux snorts. “School will teach you discipline. Remember what I told you
about discipline? And besides, Greendole has a public institution for children your age.”

If only Hux knew what he was truly capable of, Marin wouldn't have to do something as frivolous as school. He can bend people's will. Make them do whatever he wants, even the most incredible minds like Master Luke, Finn and Rey. He doesn't need an education or a specialized job. He can just make people give him their money or their ships, and with enough practice he'll be able to read their thoughts like lines in a book.

He could trick the entire town of Greendole into giving their family a stipend of cash flow, that way no one would lose too much of their hard earned money, and they'd all be wealthy and Hux would never have to leave, Grandmother would never have to leave, his sisters would never have to leave. They could be just the four of them on this beautiful beach.

“Just take the placement exams. Please. For me, Marin. If not for yourself, take them for me,” Hux implores. He kisses Seren on her forehead, marveling at her squeals and hums.

Frowning, a bit ashamed, Marin picks at his bread. Hux can be so persuasive sometimes. Still, he stands his ground. “Father, I can't. I'm sorry. It's just not on my path like it was yours.”

Aems and Hux share a worrisome look. Perhaps they can try another day. The school term doesn't commence for another few weeks. There's still time for Marin to decide to do what's best for his future.

Later that night, Hux gathers what few moments of alone time he can muster between his passionate son and his dutiful mother, and his two smiling daughters. All four of them are playing in the living room, and Seren and Taran are immersed in the new play tents Aems purchased, even after her son pleaded that she go easy on the presents.

Hux brightens the room with a small antique lantern, igniting the flame with a striking pad. The windows creak open to welcome the warm nighttime air. Stars peek from between the clouds to wink at the countryside. The peace is derailed by a surfacing memory, the incident on the beach with the transport glittering atop the distant horizon. Marin’s fear was so palpable. He doesn’t want his son to live like that, always looking over his shoulder.

Hux blinks, straightening his spine. Another memory surfaces. A never-ending sea, his sore body bobbing gracefully along with the current. He held onto something sturdy, something that would prevent him from plunging deep and drowning.

A phantom fingertip traces along the scar bowing his abdomen. Heart rate spiking, Hux hikes up his shirt to fumble with the gnarled scar. It healed improperly. He can't remember why. Given all the experiments and miracles of science, how could his surgeons neglect to properly heal his scar?

His lips catch between his teeth, summoning tears to his eyes. Blearily, he looks out to the starlit sea for answers. There are none.

Almost an hour later, Marin finds his father curled up and dwarfed atop the crisp bedsheets. The staggering waves of sorrow had drawn him into the room. Marin tucks his too-long hair behind his ears for more clarity.

Marin has had to invade his father's dreams to wipe all of Kylo Ren’s taint from Hux’s heart. But never has he had to console him when he's wide awake, gaping endlessly to the glittering seascape. Something’s missing. Something’s missing. Something’s missing, passes through his father’s sullen mind.
“Father?” Marin calls when Hux doesn't do as much as blink at him. Hux’s eyes glint dimly, red rimmed and vacant. Lump in his throat, Marin palms his father’s thin shoulder. It’s then that he recalls that Hux hadn't eaten the bread and sausage at the beach. Hux hadn't eaten much of anything today, nor yesterday.

Remembering his purpose, Hux sits up. “Shouldn't you be in bed?” By bed, he means the living room couch. Aems had made enthusiastic plans to add on another bedroom to the west side of the house. In the meantime, Marin takes the cozy couch.

“You were crying.” Marin can't help but wilt with guilt.

Hux sniffles, finger-combing his shaggy hair. “I'll be alright,” he says, but he doesn’t believe it.

“Is it anything in particular?” Marin asks, nonchalant so as to manipulate Hux into revealing whether or not his brain reverted back to its prior state.

The skin of Hux’s scarred stomach twitches with the graze of the phantom touches. His tongue finds his words. “Something is wrong.”

Blanching, Marin schools himself into false perplexity. “What do you mean?”

“Something is wrong. Missing—I don't know what. Can't you feel it?”

“I know it's strange being away from the First Order, Father. You're just gonna have to—”

“Maybe there's something you can do,” Hux interrupts, manic. “You can look into my head? To see what's wrong?”

“I don’t know if I should.”

“Please?” Hux begs.

Forcing the tremble from his hands, Marin places both palms on either side of his father’s skull. He concentrates while inside Hux’s mind, turning over his pages for an adequate response. Marin opens his eyes. “It’s the First Order. You just miss it, is all. Do you really still want to operate under their terms? I don’t know if the four of us would fit into that niche if you were to ever go back,” Marin says. Manipulative and suggestive. He wants Hux to believe him. To never want to leave.

“I know. And that’s a sacrifice that I’m making,” Hux breathes. After his concussion he was longing to return to the First Order. It would make sense that even though the need for his rank has diminished over the weeks of his new life, the yearning would hibernate. “Thank you, Marin.”

Marin says nothing, moving for the door. Hux is tucked into bed by the time Marin begrudgingly proposes one last thing. “I’ll take the placement tests, and I’ll go to whatever school you want me to.” He will do what he has to do in order to lessen Hux’s stress. Sometimes, he'll have to put himself second—something Kylo Ren was never able to do.

Hux sits up on his elbows, grinning and wide-eyed. “You’re serious?”

“Yep,” his son nods. “Good night. I love you, Father,” Marin adds, warming from the admission. It felt right to say. He’s doing everything out of love.

Awe blooms over Hux’s features. He tries not to think about how strange those words sound, like he’s never heard them before. Maybe he’s heard them once or twice, but he can’t imagine who
would say something like that to him. “I love you, too.”

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The base on Meris III has nearly completed its full construction. A mountain fortress peeking through the fog, the landing strip enlarged to fit a several fleets of Starfighters, and a network of security shields to compensate for the ground level and above ground level sections of the base.

By week three of the new Resistance base, General Organa managed to get her son to park the Millennium Falcon from his lonesome field and with the rest of the docked ships. Ren still sleeps under the stars, alone with his dog, the two inseparable.

“The chatter has been quiet,” General Organa tells her son one afternoon. He’s already told them everything he knows about the First Order. Since Ren had deserted the First Order for almost a year, most of what he told them was already known, with the exception of two spies that had already fled the planet of Ithor back to their devilish base. “I still want you to read over our classified logs to see if anything of value jumps out at you.”

Ren tosses Abie a small piece of his ration stick. She catches the nibble with a succinct gnashing of her teeth. “I don’t know if the others will have anything to say about that.” The logs carry sensitive information. His mother might be on his side, but not the rest of the Resistance fighters. And definitely not the Jedi.

“Well, I’m the woman in charge. What I say goes,” she smirks, one of her easy jokes.

Focusing on Abie, Ren gathers her in his arms and gets to his feet. “I’m gonna give her a bath.”

General Organa knows her son. He’s in pain, a lulling depression. Not the tumultuous, angered depression of his youth just before his fall. But a depression much like Han’s after he lost his son to Snoke. “You did a good thing, rescuing our base from destruction. It hasn’t gone unnoticed. I need you to know that.”

Ren nods, putting the rest of the ration stick up for Abie to nibble. He’s not convinced and she knows it.

“You can bathe her in one of the refreshers at the citadel. Probably has more room than the sink on the Falcon,” General Organa suggests. Slowly, but surely, she’s trying to push her son in the right direction. Shutting himself away will only force him into a deeper depression. She knows so is because the same thing happened to Han.

He breathes out his nose, unconsciously tugging Abie close to his chest. “Alright.”

“And stay for dinner,” she says, crossing her arms.

Ren can’t keep away the grimace. “I don’t think that’d be a good idea.”

“Yes it will,” she assures him, lip quirking.

Ren wishes he had a mask, something to keep everyone from staring at him. He follows his mother into the newly built base, Abie poking out of the crux of his muscled arm. Thankfully she doesn’t bark at all the affronted, glaring faces. She wags her tail, blinking around the artificially lit tunnel.
To her, the Resistance fighters are all happy to see them.

His mother escorts him to a door. It doesn’t look like a public refresher. When it slides open, it reveals a residence. His mother’s meditation mat sits in the corner along with several unpacked crates set to the side. The rear of the residence stretches far to a glass door balcony overlooking the far side of the foggy mountains. Accepting that he just got tricked into visiting his mother’s place, Ren follows her direction to the refresher.

“She had me fooled,” Ren murmurs to Abie, setting her in the tub. Abie ogles him with dark eyes, evoking a surge of comfort with her patient stare. He begins the regimen of soaping and scrubbing, making sure the water spout temperature is just right.

Outside in the main living area, Rey and Finn file in with their Jedi master. Rey prepares the boil for the soup while Finn starts the rice. Chopping up the rehydrated meats and vegetables, Rey frowns pensively out to the foggy evening, clouds easing over treetops. There’s so much green. It would be pleasant if there weren’t a hole in her heart. It feels strange to be without Marin. For months he was such a lively, spirited boy. Yes, he had his troublesome, angry days. They both did. She only hopes that wherever he is—far between the stars with his two baby sisters and his other father—that he’s safe. Happy.

Finn’s ears perk up at a soft, canine yelping from the refresher. He whips his head to General Organa when he realizes that dinner will have another Skywalker at the table. “Why is Kylo Ren here?” he stage-whispers to the general.

“Why is Kylo Ren here?” he stage-whispers to the general.

“I invited him,” she says simply.

Rey and Finn exchange a look of malcontent, and Luke raises his brows and shrugs as if to tell them ‘Yep, and I didn’t try and argue with her and neither should you.’

Sighing, Finn sets up another place for dinner. The general hasn’t had time to unpack her new home, so he tugs out more dishware from the crates. Everything had to be ordered brand-new because all of their belongings had been destroyed in the last attack. All except for the small chest the general keeps in her bedroom, keepsakes from her past life.

“Do you have any more towels?” comes Kylo Ren from the small hall, toting a swaddled, sodden Abie. He freezes. The Jedi and the Jedi Killer are all finally under one roof and Ren’s got a half-dried puppy in his arms.

Luke’s the one that moves to grab another towel from the unpacked crates. Ren grates out a ‘thanks’ and shuffles back to the refresher to finish drying Abie’s tangled fur.

“All right, then,” Rey mumbles, bracing for impact. By the time Ren finishes with the dog, the general and the Jedi have already made up the table, and it’s time to eat. Rey glares to the place setting where Ren will sit. Knowing Ren, he probably took extra time in the refresher to avoid doing chores. But Rey stifles the criticism. It’s more likely Ren didn’t want to get in the way.

Abie sits at Ren’s feet after greeting Finn with a kiss, two little white paws on his smudged cargo pants. At least she’s happy. All her friends are here. She has enough joy to fill the room.

Ren sits aside Finn, who sits across from Rey, who sits aside Luke, who sits across from Ren, with General Organa at the end. Naturally, General Organa breaks the awkward silence. She turns to her son as she’d done many times at the dinner table to Marin. During Ben’s childhood, dinner at the table was a rarity. She made a point to spend as many dinners with Marin as she could. “So have you thought about what I asked?” she questions.
Ren swallows his mouthful, careful to watch his manners in front of the people he spent his life despising. “Yes. If no one else has a problem with it. I’d like to get a second opinion from someone else, if that’s allowed.”

General Organa raises her brows. “That’s good to hear, Ben,” she says easily.

Ren forces himself not to react, instead averting his eyes to his table neighbor, which happens to be Finn. Finn’s really, really interested in mixing his soup and staring at it like it’s about to change color.

“I can still call you that, right?” his mother adds, extending the question like an olive branch.

Rey’s spoon clatters against her bowl. Next to her, she feels her father nudge a metal finger against her arm and she takes his hand under where the other tablemates can’t see. They’re doing this for General Organa and everybody knows it.

“That’s fine,” Ren nods, not perturbed by the use of the name at all. In the First Order, Snoke made it treasonous to speak of his given name. Now, after everything, it doesn’t feel like treason. It feels obsolete. He was Ben, but there’s no denying that he isn’t anymore.

His mother smiles, eyes twinkling. “Any plans for what’s next? Besides helping us with intel.” She knows he’ll want to go after Hux. It’s only a matter of time before he makes the choice to run or stay. That’s why he’s been in limbo for the past several weeks—sleeping next to the Falcon as if he fears it’ll take off without him.

“I’ll…help in any way I can,” Ren says after a moment. He will. He made a promise. He also made another promise—to be in his son’s and daughters’ lives. Ren finishes most of his food and drops the dish of meat and rice for Abie to nibble off of. She eats the all the scrapings and lies on her belly.

Rawness bubbles up from Ren’s throat. “Do any of you know where Marin would go?” he asks, too earnest, a little too desperate that he no longer sounds like the Kylo Ren they know and hate.

Rey answers after several beats of strained silence, releasing her father’s hand. “We don’t. We already sent a probe to the planet we found him on last year, but it was deserted. He’s smarter than that.”

Mustering acceptance that hope might be lost, Ren nods, raking his once-claw into his hair.

“But there are the network of Resistance spies who’ve all been made aware to report back if they cross paths with him,” Luke adds, tabling his personal vendettas. “We all want him safe. That’s what’s important.”

“Thank you,” says Ren. He meets his mother’s eye. He matches her somber, reassuring smile.

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This is it. Marin’s first day of school.

Hux combs his too-long hair to the side. He considers a hair tie to clean up his look for dropping Marin off at the schoolhouse but decides against it. Maybe there’s a barber in town, one that
wouldn’t object to a large baby carriage parked at their workspace.

Thankfully, the placement tests showed exceptional development but the school administrators notified Hux that because his son had never been in a classroom environment, he’d be placed with boys and girls and etcetera his own age.

Hux compulsively swipes at his shaggy hair, styling it to his usual part. Somehow, when he looks back at his reflection, he doesn’t find the style very fitting. He has a few spare minutes after readying the twins for the day so he experiments. Twisting his hair on the sides and pinning it with two of his mother’s barrettes. His reflection looks too feminine, as expected, but he smiles unashamedly. Oddly liberated. He already bore three children. How much more feminine can he get?

He meets Marin in the kitchen to fashion his son’s breakfast—a toasted pastry. A treat for his special day.

Marin narrows his eyes at his father’s strange hairstyle, but says nothing. He already feels sick.

“How can I have some of that caf?” Marin asks, dead serious.

Hux snorts, because that’s a first, even for Marin. “Caffeine is bad for children, and you are, in fact, still a child. As much as you would like to disagree.”

Marin stuffs the pastry in his mouth, obligated to finish something Hux made. He rarely cooks anything besides baby formula, and when he does, it’s from a package and he almost always gives Marin most of the portion. His father looks a bit too skinny these past several weeks.

“You have your pack ready?” Hux asks once Seren and Taran are tucked in the stroller.

Marin hums an affirmative. “You sure this shirt is okay? It seems a bit too formal.” Marin dresses in a collared, pressed blue shirt tucked into fitted pants that they picked up on one of their shopping trips. Well, it’s something Hux picked up. Marin was indifferent until he actually had to wear the clothes.

“Nonsense. You look very professional,” Hux smiles. Together they make the walk to the schoolhouse. It’s about a thirty minute walk from the house to town but the morning sun shines pleasantly between the clouds. Marin points out the different types of plants—the reeds, the grasses that flower blue and white, the tall greenwoods bending in the distance with the easy breeze. When he complains about the length of the walk Hux smiles and assures him they’ll take one of Aems’ speeders every morning. He just wanted to be sure they could walk it in case they don’t have any other choice. There’s no such thing as being over prepared.

In town, Hux eyes the townspeople without his characteristic incredulity. It feels good to move in the right direction. To be normal.

“Here we are,” Hux tells his son when they approach the schoolhouse. The building is several stories tall, faceted with stonework and high windows. Hux has been inside only once to fill out the proper paperwork but just from looking at its surface one could infer its utilitarianism. “Do you want me to walk up with you?”

“That’s alright. I’ll head to the office first to find my first classroom.” Marin breathes a heaving breath, trying to goad his anxiety.

Hux bends to lay a kiss on his son’s cheek. “I know you’ll make us proud.” He waves his son off, vowing to be at this spot at the end of the school day. Marin hikes up the stairs to brave the
uncharted territory.

“It’s just us now. Your brother is off to do bigger and better things,” Hux tells his babies. He passed a park on the way in town. Maybe he could buy some lunch and let them enjoy the new, busy environment.

He lays out a blanket at the base of a grass-bedded tree so that his daughters can get some exercise and playtime. They hum and coo at the stimulus, shaking their toys and squirming on their bellies.

“You both are getting so big,” he commends, picking up Seren to kiss her cheek. She smiles brightly so that her dark eyes squint in mirth. Little fingers extend to grab his nose, a little bit of drool dripping from her mouth at her humming and gurgling. “I love you with all my heart. I always will,” he vows. He sets Seren back down, mopping up her spittle.

Because he can’t pick one up without wanting the other in his arms immediately after, Hux greets Taran with a kiss, as well. “I love you so much,” he promises. “One day I’ll be walking you to the schoolhouse, and you’ll wave good-bye to me and start your own life.”

Of course Taran simply hums, not yet understanding just how tremendously rare it is to be loved by the once-ruthless, once-General Hux.

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After several hours of class, Marin knows one thing for sure.

School is so incredibly boring.

It’s not that he thinks he knows everything. But the kinds of things that the teachers discuss—from math to chemistry to biology—all of it he knows or is at least familiar with. The only subject that might pique his interest would be botany, but that’s only a shred of what’s covered in class. He doesn’t really have to take notes because of his memory. And he has to deal with this for years?

Also Hux overdressed him, so much that it’s a bit embarrassing. The other boys and girls and indistinguishable humanoids are in tee shirts and denims, some with abstract designs printed on them. He wishes he had more clothes like them, not the pressed, solid colored, fancy clothing Hux bought for him.

But his wardrobe was only a small, superficial concern, just like his concern with the scars on his hands. What if someone asked him about them? What would he even say? A dark lord had tortured him with fire and the only way he managed to not need medical treatment was the fact he has special Force-healing powers? Thankfully, none of the other students pay him any mind.

Except for one student, one with a familiar face who slides into the desk beside his. The girl from the space port, those months ago when he, Hux and the twins arrived to this system. She gave them directions and led them to Greendole, the comely paradise they call home. As a greeting, she smirks at him and he smiles awkwardly in response. Her hair is a bit longer than the last time he saw her, black and frizzy around her skull in a soft, even halo.

When teacher leaves the room, ordering the students to work quietly on their first reading assignment, several of the kids whisper and giggle instead of focusing like Marin is. Including the dark skinned, frizzy haired girl from the spaceport.
“Hey, I remember you,” she says excitedly. “You came to Rhiannon over the summertime. You and your family.” Her accent is flat like Finn’s and Luke’s accents, unlike his and Hux’s clipped ones.

Marin nods, wanting to return to his work. He doesn’t want to be unprepared if the teacher calls on him.

But the girl isn’t having his silence. “My name is Lisbeth. What’s yours?”

“Marin,” he replies disinterestedly, nose in his assignment.

“Is this your first time going to school or do you actually like to dress like you’re going to a funeral?” Lisbeth teases.

He doesn’t appreciate being teased. Does this girl even know what he’s capable of? He’s sent Resistance pilots to their near-death, scrubbed minds, mastered telepathy. He’s the son of the two most powerful members of the First Order, the descendant of the greatest Jedi that ever existed, the Sith’s legendary Soul Eater—

But somehow he replies with: “I guess I stick out like a sore thumb, don’t I?” he admits shyly, appreciating the change from a constant state of being mothered over at home to friendly banter, playful and light.

“Just a bit. I wouldn’t fixate on it. Everyone here is pretty chill,” she assures.

“Chill?” Marin asks, before he can stop himself.

“You know, easy-going. Relaxed,” Lisbeth laughs. “We get a lot of odd-balls in Greendole. Like the daughter of a retired bounty hunter turned therapist.”

Just like that, Marin forgets what he’s supposed to be working on. “You are? That must be—interesting.”

“Yup. My mother retired years ago, but she still has too many enemies to count. Especially her father, that lying, scheming, hypocritical old bastard. Now she works at the clinic,” Lisbeth shrugs. “What about your family?”

Looks like Lisbeth has some unsavory members in her family, too. He’s comforted. Until he realizes he has to say something in response. Bristling, Marin concocts an adequate answer. “I just have my father. He was a…criminal but he’s retired. And my grandmother. She owns the restaurant west of here on Pool Street. And my baby sisters. They’re just, um, babies,” he babbles, clearly oversharing.

“Aww,” she coos. Then she raises her brows. “Wait. Your grandmother? Miss Aems? I love her restaurant. My mother and I have been going there for years,” she gasps.

It would appear that this town is a bit too small for comfort, if everyone knows everyone. “Yes, that’s her.”

“I didn’t know she had any grandchildren, or children for that matter. I always thought she was an old widower,” Lisbeth shrugs.

The careless comment makes Marin prickle with irritation. “Well, the man she had a child with stole away her only son and left her life in ruins so she’d probably take being a ‘widower’ as a compliment,” he snaps. Both Hux and his grandmother told him their takes on Brendol Hux. Each
end of their respective stories ended with him wanting to punch something.

Lisbeth raises her dark brows. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know,” she replies, mournful.

Guilt overcomes him. “No, it’s—I shouldn’t be so reactionary. I’m sorry.” Besides, she can probably relate to selfish, incorrigible men in her life more than most people.

“‘Reactionary?’” Lisbeth snorts.

“Um, yeah, like—”

“I know what it means. It’s just an interesting word for an eight year old,” Lisbeth grins.

“I’m ten,” he defends, even though he’s rounded up by a few months.

But Lisbeth only giggles some more. “You’re a funny boy, Marin. I like you.”

The teacher returns to the classroom and everyone shuts up, pretending like they weren’t all whispering like thieves. Marin sighs at their predictable behaviors, turning back to his work.

By the time class is over, it’s midday. The teacher dismisses everyone to lunch. It occurs to Marin that he doesn’t actually know where the lunchroom is. He wants to ask Lisbeth but she’s already left the classroom.

Marin’s lips tug into a smile when Lisbeth pokes her head back in the emptying classroom. “Follow me if you don’t want to get lost,” Lisbeth calls for him.

Lunch is a whole other story. The lunchroom seems civilized enough. Lisbeth is kind and allows him to sit with her, and everything seems alright until he realizes he doesn’t have a lunch. No money, no hidden bag in his pack. He didn’t think to pack one, food being the least of his concerns. Hux must not have thought to pack one either. Or he forgot.

“Wow, you were telling the truth about not going to school before,” Lisbeth frowns. She tugs out her own lunch—a nice little insulated pack with containers of vegetables and other little snacks. “Here, we can split it. Just this once, though. I’m not in the habit of catering to charity,” she teases.

If they’re gonna be friends, Marin will have to get used to her teasing. Good thing he already finds it more and more endearing. He pops a crispy snack into his mouth. Maybe school won’t be so terrible after all.

Marin’s first day of school lets out in a rush of children from age six to twelve. The stampede hurries down the stairs and he trails after them, scouring the sidewalk for Hux.

Even though he didn’t ask this of her, Lisbeth is at his side. “I hope you had fun today. See you tomorrow!” she waves, walking in the direction of home.

“Bye! See you!” he smiles awkwardly. He’s glad his day revolved around Lisbeth.

“Look at you,” calls Hux behind him. He’s alone. He’s gotten a haircut, much shorter than he’s ever had as long as Marin’s known him. It makes him look boyish. “You made a friend already?”

Marin blushes. “Oh, that’s Lisbeth. She’s in one of my classes.” Somehow, he’s surprised to see his father after school like he said he’d be. As if he expected for that to fall through, for Hux to have something better to do.

But Hux is here, and not only that but he’s clearly tickled that Marin’s made a friend. “Does she
live nearby?”

“I don’t know. It’s only my first day. I barely know her.”

Hux laughs at his son’s terseness. “Let’s go. Your grandmother is home early preparing a special dinner in your honor,” he smiles, palming his son’s back.

“Sounds good. I hope you’ll eat tonight,” Marin blurts without thinking. He’s never commented on Hux’s self-neglect.

It’s evident from the confusion pinching Hux’s brow that his careless remark affects him deeply. Before he can summon something to say, Marin shifts gears.

“I really like your haircut. It makes you look professional. And thank you for picking me up today. Are Seren and Taran at home?” He beams to Hux, grabbing his smooth hand in his bumpy one for their walk. He’s careful not to mention Hux forgot to pack his lunch. It’s alright. He doesn’t mind making his lunch himself.

Hux breathes deep from his diaphragm. He knows Marin sometimes doesn’t have a filter. Some things he just can’t explain to his son, as receptive and calculative as he can be. Leading them on the path homeward, Hux shakes off the anxiety that comes with thoughts of food. It’s not that he’s starving himself. He’s just lost his appetite for little more than basic sustenance and steaming cups of caf. “Yes, they’re home. They’re excited to hear about your day.”

Marin smiles a genuine smile, grateful their days are spent worrying about things as frivolous as home dinners and what types of clothes appropriate for school—which he still wants to talk to Hux about, the war between the Resistance and the First Order a lifetime away.


Chapter End Notes

>if you're wondering why hux kisses his babies so much, its because he loves them and never wants to lose them, also im obsessed with hux kissing his babies
> awk skywalker fam dinners, RIP Finn
> hux needs to have more food :
>!:D Marin has a friend!! she's not just a plot device, i promise!

I hope yall enjoyed this installment!!!
Hux pours everything into his children. For months and months, he watches them grow.

Marin attends school, always completing his assignments as soon as he gets home. He spends a lot of his time helping Hux with chores while Aems goes to work. The addition to the house took a long while, but Aems managed to contract some of the best carpenters in the area with the most efficient, capable droids. Hux had insisted that she use the money from selling the First Order ship they came here on, solidifying their permanency as residents. By the end, Marin’s room is a small, cozy corner of privacy. A long bed to accommodate his growing height, a shelf for his tools and books and devices he’ll need for school. It even has a small desk.

On days where they’re all at home, they spend time together reading, watching programs on Aems’ home theater system, or playing puzzle games on the living room floor. Occasionally, Marin even leaves on the weekend to play with her friend Lisbeth in town.

Hux reads to the twins nightly, daily, whenever they aren’t playing or eating or sleeping. Taran begins to babble the most and Seren follows in her path. They develop their muscles, their functions, filling Hux’s heart with pride and awe.

By the time they've already began to sit up and wiggle on the ground, Hux’s mother brings up the possibility of Hux getting a job.

“You could work two days a week while I stay home with them on my days off,” Aems suggests. He already works so hard, exhausting himself with infant care. He could use some adult interaction.

As if he hadn’t heard her, Hux giggles and chats with his intuitive baby girls. They've come to like the cognitive puzzles he bought for them. Little wooden shapes that fit in various holes. Most of the time they like smashing them onto the floor while yelling “rah, rah, rah!” and grinning in triumph as they clang and smack.

“Armitage,” she calls, and Hux blinks in recognition.

“Everything alright?” Hux asks while moving Taran into the play pen.

“I was wondering if you wanted to get a job. Just two days a week, at most,” Aems tries.

“A job? What kind of job?” He already has the most important job. Seren demands interaction but when Hux bends at the waist to sate her need, Taran is there to squeeze her sister’s sticky fingers in her own. They’ve remarkably self-sufficient.

“Any kind, really. Have you ever thought about what you’d have wanted to do if you weren’t in the military?” ‘The military’ meaning the First Order—the fascist, authoritarian movement he once
devoted his life to.

Silence serves as his answer. Aems takes charge, pulling out a small personal computer. “You might not like this but I’ve already spoken on your behalf to the local college. One of the administrators there is a longtime customer of mine and she gave me some information on part time jobs that you might be good for.” She swipes open the monochrome screen to splay out the various descriptions, and passes it to her son.

Hux frowns down in concentration rather than dismay. Some of these he could actually see himself doing—archives attendant, lecturer, even a podcast reporter. He allows himself the luxury of considering these open doors. “I’ll look over them. Thank you, Mother.” Hux swallows, getting a bit ahead of himself. “I just don’t know if I could say goodbye to them, is all,” he admits, staring heedlessly at his chattering twins. Their hair is growing, fine wisps of dark brown, their eyes solidifying to their lifelong color. A warm, deep chestnut.

Aems heart heaves with sympathy. “I don’t want to force anything on you. I know they’re your world. Just consider it.”

Hux does, more so for his mother than himself. He gets a job organizing the sleeves of holodisks and paper books and other archival forms of media for the adult students. It’s monotonous, honest work. He’s never done anything like it in his life.

After the first day of work, he doesn’t try and run out the clock to return home to his babies. He knows they’re safe with their grandmother and their big brother. During his shift, he appreciates the soothing, boring silence.

He comes home to his children. Marin studying his mathematics, Seren and Taran in bed with changed diapers and warm onesies, his mother greeting him with fresh, hot tea and a kiss to his cheek.

Everything’s perfect.

Until one afternoon while Aems is at the restaurant, while Hux is preparing a simple dinner and Marin is doing an assignment at the table—Seren and Taran say their first word.

“Ren!” Seren shouts, crawling to the glass backdoor. “Ren! Ren! Ren!”

Hux sets the knife he was using to slice the leeks down against the cutting board, palming his damp fingers against his cooking apron.

“Seren, sweetheart, don’t get too close to the door,” he admonishes as he run-walks to her aid. Taran is crawling after her and joins the cacophony of shouting, “Ren! Ren! Ren! Ren!”

“You two will be the death of me,” Hux groans.

At the table, Marin’s pencil snaps in his fist.

“Ren,” Seren declares, one finger tapping against the glass.

Hux gapes in astonishment. The window begins to spot with water. With rain.

Rain!

“Ren,” Taran concludes, tracing a little finger against the thickening rivulets of rain, infantile eyes only able to see the first few feet before her. There’s nothing in view but the splattering, squiggling
rain against the clear glass.

“Yes! That’s rain!” Hux cheers, picking Taran up to nuzzle her soft cheek. They’re already so intuitive, matching forces of nature with their proper names. “Rain. Rain, rain, rain,” he grins as his daughter’s eyes widen at the white noise of the intensifying rainfall.

On a sure path, Marin trundles the glass door to the side. Carelessly enough that he almost pinches Seren’s little finger with the door’s seam! Hux doesn’t have time to properly scold him when he sees the knife from his cutting board in his son’s white-knuckled grip.

“Marin! What are you doing?!?” Hux shouts after him. But Marin presents his back, fists clenched and shoulders stiffened. The rain beats his hair flat against his skull, his clothes darkening with the pelleting rain water. Marin cocks his head predatorily to the span of their backyard and stomps for the hills separating the grass from the beach.

Frantic, Hux sets Seren and Taran in their playpen and rushes after his son. He chases against the whipping wind and pouring rain in the direction of the beach, where his son had ran off to with zero explanation.

When he catches up with him, Marin twists furiously. “What are you doing?! You have to go back!” he growls to his father, as if Hux is the one breathing fire, the one who manically ran off into a rainstorm with a kitchen knife.

“What am I doing? What the hell are you doing!?” Hux hisses.

“You left Seren and Taran alone! Get back to the house! Now!”

What has gotten into him? “Marin, they’re fine. Give me the knife.”

“I’m checking the perimeter. You need to go back to Seren and Taran and make sure they’re alright.”

“Checking the perimeter for what? Talk to me, please,” Hux implores.

Marin snarls to the sea, ignoring his father’s cries. He has to know if Kylo Ren has found them. “There was someone out here. Someone who’s coming to hurt us.”

That doesn’t explain much. Regardless, Hux scours the horizon for intruders, threats, finding no one. “Did you see anyone?”

Marin adjusts his grip on the handle of the blade. “Seren and Taran saw him. They must have.” He swallows. “They were shouting to him.”

“What?” At a complete loss, Hux checks around for tracks, any signs of disturbance. Nothing. “The only thing they were shouting was ‘rain, rain, rain!’ They were pointing to the rain,” Hux exasperates, splaying his hands out to the torrential downpour.

Heart throbbing in his ears, Marin grimaces, begging control over his emotions, his worst fears. The darkness taunts him. It’s unbearable. “Really?”

“Yes,” Hux breathes. His heart breaks to see Marin in such despair. “Please give me the knife,” Hux repeats, patient.

Marin blinks down to the sand in a parsec-long stare, and holds the knife out for his father to take.
“Please. Come back inside,” Hux says softly once the knife is in his possession. “We’re safe here. I promise you.”

Led feet take Marin back home in Hux’s footsteps. Once the knife is safe in the kitchen sink, Hux drops to his knees before his son so that he’s the one looking up to his height. He cradles Marin’s wet, frowning cheeks. “We’re safe here. No one is ever going to hurt us as long as we’re here, as long as we’re together. I promise.”

Unable to do much else, Marin nods.

He dismisses himself to his little nook of a room. He shuts the door, slinks on the floor, cradles his skull between his bent knees, and sobs. He sobs like a baby, as hard as he can until the tears run dry.

He hasn’t cried this hard since the first time his heart truly broke, the first time Kylo Ren abandoned him.

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“I don’t know how you let it get this bad,” General Organa chastises her son. She picks up her blade, adjusting Ben’s head right where she needs it.

Ren hasn’t gotten a haircut from a human—let alone his mother—in years, probably decades. Humans can’t be trusted to obey their programming like droids can, unless that human is one of the few people left in this galaxy he trusts. His mother.

“You’ve got mats in the back. Abie doesn’t even have mats,” she sighs, slicing them out with dexterous practice. She evens out the strange cut he gave himself months ago, the haircut he explained to be the most ergonomic for the helmet he wore while searching for the cure to his post-resurrection physical and internal ailments. But as Ben described, the Sith holocrons he found on Moraband were necessary in helping Marin realize what would become of his destiny if he were to stray towards the sickening shroud of the dark side.

“It’s not like she can brush mine out for me like how I do hers,” he tosses back, nose crumpling at the extent of hair his mother is hacking off and dusting the towel over shoulders.

“If you slept indoors, maybe you would have more access to a proper refresher—and the Falcon’s doesn’t count.”

“I don’t just use that one.”

“Or that nearby stream.” General Organa permits herself a smile. It almost feels like old times. Muscle memory brings her eyes to the closest doorway, expecting to see Han bust through with one of his tired ideas to develop the Falcon.

Ren sighs. Allowing his mother to clean him up is the least he could do, for none of his information sifting has proven fruitful in the eyes of the other Resistance fighters who want his head on a stick. No one has yet to cross him—or cross their General Organa, more so—with the exception of the constant stink-eyes and occasional spits of phlegm in his direction, or the rare yet jarring insult. *Monster. Killer. Killer’s on the loose. Murderous pig. Jedi Killer. Child killer. Monster. Monster. Monster.*
“But I’m serious. You should move in here.” She’d always believed, hoped, prayed her son would come back to her. It’s difficult, near impossible to have him participate in anything besides dog-sitting. Yet considering his children and partner have disappeared with little hope of being returned to him—she’s not willing to give up on his full assimilation.

Ren grimaces as another lock of hair flops to his side. “I like to keep myself mobile.”

“Figures. Your father always said the same thing,” she snorts lightheartedly as if they’re in another universe. But they’re not. This is their universe—the one with Ren’s father’s blood on his hands.

Before Ren can comment, his mother runs a brush through his hair and presents him her small mirror.

Ren blinks at his tired reflection. His hair is shorter than it had been in years, evened out from the sides and long up top. His ears are emphasized laughably so. But he’d rather have people laugh at him than tell him all those terrible things he already tells himself.

“Thank you,” he nods, turning around to pass her the supplies.

His mother’s lip twitches as if she’s about to speak, but something buzzes on her belt. It's her comm, and she reads a bit of information off it before excusing herself. “There's food in the refrigerator,” she says. “I should only be gone for a few hours. Make yourself at home.”

Abie shoots up from her nap at the commotion. She's grown significantly over the past several weeks—her tail longer, her snout more dramatic, her fur long and fringed that requires more grooming on Ren's part but he doesn't mind. It's therapeutic, brushing out her tangles.

When he and Abie are alone, Ren begins to snoop around. Everything in his mother's private quarters is new, from her modest furnishings, to the drapes that cascade over the high windows, and the soft sofa. He could imagine living here. It's more secure than his field, and significantly quieter. And the only person who could run off with his ship is Rey.

Or Chewie, who hasn't been on base in months. His mother assured him it's because he's on an extensive mission. But he knows Chewie’s gone because of him.

Ren pads into the other room of the quarters, his mother's bedroom. There's little else but a bed, a wardrobe, and her personal refresher. And a nondescript, locked and sealed chest. Unfortunately he's too nosey to ignore it and he investigates the genetically coded panel. He places the length of his finger on the glass and the case unseals without a hitch.

Inside the chest are stacks of small computers and datapads. He ignores them, favoring the effects in the other side of the chest. They're all his. They're all Ben’s, the very first child he killed.

A small poster he once had in his room, tales from the novel series about the pirates of the Moons of Iego. Woven bracelets and folded paper crafts, jaundiced with age. A whittled piece of wood rudimentary carved to his mother's likeness, without a face because the detail was too difficult to accomplish. There's a partner to this piece, one carved to his father’s likeness, but like nearly everything left of him, it's nowhere to be found.

Ren seeks comfort in Abie’s soft fur, scratching the space behind her ear that makes her tail wag and her black eyes slip closed. He finds a slip of paper of a printed photograph. It’s from a time between the wars. Han Solo slings his arms around Luke and Leia’s shoulders, their eyes glittering in a timeless youth, as immortal as the most honest breath of hope.

Taking a deep breath, he exposes the contents of a small folder. They're several drawings of Ben's.
Ones of his mother, details he easily recognizes as the Falcon. Ones of his father, who would only sit still long enough in his sleep, so in all of the sketches his eyes are closed and his bottom lip hangs low. On their own accord Ren’s cheeks pinch in mirth, recalling his father’s incredulity at being his involuntary model. Back then, Ben thought it was the cleverest prank in the world.

Ren sifts through a few more effects, the twisted little wicker baskets and the stone engravings with simple geometric designs. His mother kept all of these momentos, after everything he’s done to her. She never gave up hope on being reunited with her child.

And neither should he.

Later that night, when his mother returns from duty, Ren excuses himself to the Falcon. He tells her it’s because he has to keep the engines maintained lest he have any new leads on Marin’s location. He’ll take anything at this point. Even though he technically can’t leave the base as per the Resistance’s compromise, Rey and Finn would be more than enough supervision if he needs to go. His mother knows as much. The only thing stopping him from being reunited with his family is time.

Ren has Abie pooled in his arms. He carries her as if it’ll stop her from growing into the enormous breed she’s genetically destined to be. But Abie doesn’t mind one bit. Her friend is great at carrying her without making her uncomfortable. She’d even be content to sleep there. Ren lays a private kiss on her furry skull.

A grey movement makes his spine stand erect. It’s his old master.

“It’s been awhile since she’s been this happy,” Luke tells his nephew. His Padawan, his wife’s killer.

Ren frowns. For a moment, he thinks Luke is talking about Abie. He’s not used to with conversing with Luke, so he only can cock his head like an animal.

“Not talking about the dog. Though she does look like the luckiest lifeform here,” Luke says. “Leia’s glowing like I haven’t felt in ages.”

“I just want to do right by her for once,” Ren says, sincere. He wouldn’t be here, if it weren’t for her. He would leave, if it weren’t for her. He’d do what his father had always done and ran from everything good he’d ever had.

Luke scraps his boots along the padded forest floor. He holds his head high as he breaks through the clearing, silhouetted by overhanging starlight. He looks past Ren, to the darkness between the trees like something is poised and ready to lunge for their throats. “Do you know why I left?” he asks the gaps spacing apart the trees.


Oddly, Luke snorts and shakes his head. “I wanted you dead. I wanted to murder you,” he says, far off, like he can't believe his own confession.

The noises of the wildlife fill the beats between the pulsing of blood in Ren’s ears. He waits for Luke to continue.

“I knew if I stayed in the fight that there wouldn’t be anything that I could do to stop that impulse. That anger, that bloodlust—it was the dark like I never experienced before. I knew that if I stayed and if I found you, I’d take you from her for good. Then it would be over. Without you, it would be the beginning of the end for all of us. For everything.” It’s the worst fate imaginable if Leia ever
lost her son at her brother’s hand. The end of a path the galaxy’s been treading for centuries.

Then Luke cracks, the trim façade he’s held up for the months Ben’s returned to them. Even farther back, from the moment his daughter found him on Ach-To and demanded he take control of his destiny with an offering of a timeless relic. He clogs with tears and in the corner of his eye Ren grimaces at his withered profile. “When I left...I wasn’t hiding Rey from you or from Snoke,” Luke confesses. “I was keeping her away from me. Because I was...still fighting that festering darkness. I couldn’t trust myself. I haven’t trusted myself in years, so I did what I thought would save her and—cauterized our damned bloodline from her memory. I saw it as the only way.”

Ren bows his head. He’s never heard anything like this from Luke. “Do you regret it? Leaving her there?” Ren asks, because he has to know.

“Hell, Ben. There’s nothing I regret more.”

The air around them shifts, like they’ve used their combined strength to shift a great stone. Ren asks another question he’s been dying to ask. “Why do you let me stay? If you spent so long hating me. How can you stand it?”


Ren swallows, flinching against the flagellating words.


Already he’s learned more about Luke than his youth of apprenticeship. Ren wants to ask Luke if he could ever care for him again, let alone love him.

Luke’s glare warms to a knowing, earnest smile. “And because it makes Leia happy,” he tells him. “There’s nothing I wouldn’t do to keep her smiling. Nothing.” They share a consoling nod. This, too, Ren can relate.

There’s another of Luke’s laments he can relate to. Ren lets go of a fear that’s been devouring him from the inside out. “I think it’s best I’m apart from Marin and them. Already, I’ve pushed him further towards the dark. It’s my fault. I can feel it. It’s best we’re apart.”

“Remember when I said I regretted tossing my daughter to the wolves? That didn’t resonate with you at all?” Luke exasperates.

“Except this time, I’m the wolf. They’re better off without me.”

But Luke shakes his head. “You don’t believe that any more than I had. You’re gonna get your kid back, and yes, I want him back even after this,” Luke says, punctuating with a wave of his newest metal hand. “Though I am gonna have to lecture him about respecting people’s appendages, especially if they only have one left.”

Ren’s grimace flatters. Luke made a joke. An incredible, morbid joke. A testament to their incredible, morbid reality. It’s no longer a question whether or not Luke could have the capacity to care for him again. He never lost it.
Marin tries his hardest to spend as little time alone as possible. Thankfully Hux and his grandmother are always happy to see him, and Seren and Taran greet him with laughs and smiles. And shouting, too. Piercing, impassioned shouting. They crawl along the carpet with their little hands and knees, hair curling in brown wisps around their ears, two little white teeth sprouting from their grinning gums.

*Where are you going, Marin? Aren't you gonna play with us today?* Seren and Taran seem to ask from their concerned babbling when Marin laces up his boots.

Hux raises his brows from his recline on the reading chair, folding his book in his lap. “Off with your friend again?” he asks his son. Marin’s good about balancing his responsibilities. Rarely does Hux have to reprimand him. Unless he counts the incident with the kitchen knife a few months prior.

“Yep. Lisbeth invited me over for dinner with her mother.” Although Marin has spent tons of time playing and studying and talking and *talking* with Lisbeth, he never had the pleasure of going to her house and meeting her mother. Even if he never met a single member of Lisbeth’s family, he considers her to be his best friend.

“Dinner?” Hux grins. “That’s wonderful. Will you need a ride home?” His heart thrums warm, overjoyed that his son is going on dinner dates with schoolmates. Experiencing a full, enriched childhood. His only regret is that it didn’t happen sooner.

“Lisbeth is gonna pick me up and drop me off.” Marin’s lips form a smirk. “Her mother let’s her pilot all the time. Who knows, maybe I’d be good at piloting—”

“Forget it,” Hux laughs. “Ask me again when your balls drop.”

“Father!” Marin gasps, clearly tickled at his father’s crassness.

“Go on. Enjoy your night,” Hux waves him off. Seren and Taran yell their excited little ‘goodnight’ yelps.

His son chuckles, locking the door behind him. Hux smiles softly, standing on his well-rested feet to tend to his daughters. Taran babbles to get his attention while Seren sits on her diapered bottom to fumble with her toys. “Hello, my sweetheart. Are you ready for dinner?”

She appears to know what that means, so she reaches her arms up, eager to stretch tall like her father. Hux gasps. She’s standing!

Taran really wants her father will make her something to eat, too. His features arrange appreciative of her efforts, so she wobbles but maintains her position so that he’ll understand just why she’s working so hard. Hux finally obliges, kissing and humming against her cheek. “Ah!” she giggles at the odd, tantalizing buzz.

“Ready for the vegetable mash?” He’s been serving them homemade purees of fruits, vegetables, sweet beans—all his mother’s recipes, for he can’t cook worth shit without them. She’ll be coming home anytime now, probably toting some fine dessert from her kitchen for Marin to try.
Tomorrow is the weekend, the days he goes into work for several hours, communing with other adults in the calm, professional environment. A usual bout of anxiety blossoms at the thought of parting from his children, but he knows that’s just instinct. He’ll never truly part from his children ever again, so long as he’s able.

He sets Taran on her highchair and does the same with Seren, despite her protests against getting pulled from her favorite toy. She squabbles and pouts but allows herself to be picked up. “Seren,” he tells her soothingly. She knows her name—they both do—so she meets his eyes, despite her sniveling. “It’s time to eat. Don’t you want to join Taran and me at the table?”

At the sound of her sister’s name, Seren’s cries hum into soft whimpers. If Taran’s doing it, then maybe it’s not so bad.

Outside, Marin breathes in the saline air. It's twilight on this side of Greendole, stars just starting to glitter. Lisbeth’s speeder hums in rapid approach. He’s never had the privilege of getting a ride from her speeder but they agreed that it would save time for such a late meeting. And Lisbeth also said it would be fun. Marin likes fun, or at least he used to.

Once she breaks she scoots forward to let Marin slide on the seat behind her.

“Hold on tight! Try not to scream or bugs will fly in your teeth,” she advises, eyes narrowed through the plastic of her goggles

With the utmost respect for her personal space, Marin places his hands on her shoulders. Until Lisbeth propels forward and he yelps and squeezes her waist for dear life. Lisbeth’s laughter rings high and bright over the wind roaring in his ears.

Everything is just as it should be.

Lisbeth leads him to a large suburban neighborhood. Homes of all sizes and colors, all levels of landscaping. This neighborhood seems to have something for everyone.

“My mother is at the store in town but dinner is in the cooker. She said you can eat as much as you like, just be sure to rinse your plate,” Lisbeth says once their speeder is parked at her house. It's a small, modest house, with a flat roof and big flowering bushes.

“I'm good at cleaning, so don't worry.” It's true. Hux relies on him to do a lot of the more difficult chores like cleaning the outside panels of their home and scrubbing the shower so Grandmother doesn't have to strain herself. ‘Your grandmother works so hard. We owe her everything for giving us a home,’ Hux would tell him whenever he had put up the slightest indignation.

Her front door slides open with a mute hiss. Inside is as cozy and welcoming as he'd always imagined. Warm with stewing, spicy food, fireplace lit upon entry, shelves of knick-knacks and sculptures and framed pictures.

It’s all fine and congenial, observing the different fixtures in his friend’s life. Until one specific picture catches his eye.

“Marin, do you want any buttered bread?” Lisbeth calls over her shoulder. When Marin says nothing, entranced with something on one of her shelves, she repeats herself. She shakes her head. It's kind of cute how Marin gets fascinated with little details of certain things. He’s like a puppy.

The bottom falls from Marin’s stomach. Because of the one specific picture.

One specific picture, a printed photograph, framed and dusted with time. A candid picture that
could only have been taken by someone who knew the man that he's known only in pictures, in nostalgic, late-night stories. In bloodline.

For the man in the picture is none other than Han Solo.

Chapter End Notes

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“Marin? Dinner is ready, ya goof,” Lisbeth snorts to her oblivious friend.

Han Solo. Framed and hung on Lisbeth’s mantle in her family home. It’s probably been on Rhiannon longer than he has, from the dust and age of the gilded frame. A million terrifying questions surface, his heart thudding like a trapped animal.

Han Solo is not the only man in the picture. His arm is slung around a man with dark skin and a funny moustache and a matching grin. He’s got a familiar face but Marin can’t put his finger on where he’s seen him.

His eyes flick back over Han Solo’s cheery, easy smile. Grandmother—not Aems, but his other grandmother—had a picture where he smiled bright and uninhibited. In that picture, she and Master Luke were under each of his arms, youthful and vibrant. Celebrating the fall of the Empire. Not yet understanding that the war was far from over.

“Oh, brother,” scoffs Lisbeth over his shoulder. She takes it upon herself to set his place at the small dining table as if she were some housekeeping droid. He better not get used to it.

Marin feels his friend approach behind him. “What's got you all bent out of shape?” she asks, nudging his shoulder.

“Is that—?” He can’t form the words, the shock of everything flubbing his tongue.

She huffs a sigh when she sees just what Marin is boggling over. “Oh, relax. My mom and I don't really get along with Grandpa.”

Marin pales. “Grandpa?” Are he and Lisbeth somehow related? Cousins? Siblings?!

“That's who you recognize, isn't it? The great Lando Calrissian,” Lisbeth scoffs and rolls her eyes. “And I’m Lisbeth Calrissian, daughter of Naedie Calrissian,” she explains loftily, as if this was the stuff of legends. “I never thought you would have to find out like this. No one really asks about him anymore.”

Lando Calrissian. He's one of his grandmother's friends from her lifetime fighting in the Rebellion. If he remembers correctly, he was Han Solo’s best pal, his brother in arms. As far as Marin knows, he’s still alive.

“Yeah,” Marin nods. “Sorry. It just caught me off guard,” he lies. Once again the universe twists and pulls him back into Kylo Ren’s chaotic bloodline.

“But please don’t tell my mother that you recognized him. It’s not exactly a secret, but the only reason why we’re alive is because she got us away from his war.” Lisbeth tugs Marin’s arm to get him the table.
“That's good you got away,” he swallows, letting himself be lead. “My father told me Lando Calrissian was a hero of the New Republic. But I know that the war can tear families apart. It nearly destroyed mine.” Marin stirs his bowl. “I'm glad you made it out unscathed, Lisbeth.”

“Is that where you came from? You father was in the war?” She remembers Marin’s father from the first time she met them. He looked so stern holding his little babies, firm with an underlying cuteness, just like Marin does.

Hux was in the war, only he was on the opposite side. But Lisbeth doesn’t need to know that. “In a sense,” Marin divulges. “We just really had to get out of where we were.”

“I can relate. The last mission my mom went on, Grandpa…got my father killed. I was only a baby, but I know my mother never forgave him. She’s told me that it was because of him that both of them didn’t die, but I know she still blames him. And I believe her, too. Why else would he distance himself from us if it wasn’t guilt?” Lisbeth stares at the table. “I don't have any memories of my father. I feel worse for my mom than myself,” she admits.

“I’m so sorry,” Marin says mournfully.

“It's alright now. We got away. Mom was a bounty hunter for several years to make ends meet while I stayed with friends, until about four years ago when we decided to settle down on Rhiannon and do more honest work. Rhiannon is where families go to be left alone. I'm sorry I never told you this before. I wasn't sure how you'd react.”

Marin swallows, guilty for keeping such a large part of himself secret from her. He glowers to Han Solo’s printed, smiling face. Their grandfathers were best friends, and he'll do anything to ensure Lisbeth never, ever finds out. “Is it alright if I ask why the picture’s up? If you and your mother don’t get along with him?”

Sadness clouds Lisbeth’s dark eyes. “It’s the last thing she has of her mother’s.”

Marin doesn’t have time to express his sympathy when the front door hisses open, and a tall woman who looks nearly identical to Lisbeth trudges in, speeder helmet at her hip.

“Lis, how many times must I tell you that if you wanna keep your speeder privileges, you have to store it properly in the garage?” Naedie trudges inside, toting a reusable grocery bag on her muscled forearm.

“Sorry, Mom. I was just so excited to show Marin around. This is Marin, by the way!” she says with a cheesy smile, slinging her arm around his shoulder. Like Han and Lando, as chummy and cheery as the haunting photograph.

“Oh, I almost forgot. Hey there, hon,” Naedie waves. “Marin, is it?”

“Mhm,” he nods, praying to whoever is listening that Naedie doesn't recognize him, as if she could read his genetic pedigree from her perch in the kitchen. “Dinner is wonderful, by the way. Thank you for inviting me.”

Lisbeth’s mother raises her brows, passing her daughter a look that can only be translated as ‘Where’d you find this one?’ In the most congenial, sincere way, of course.

“Marin’s in one of my classes but we already chose our classes for next year and we made sure to have at least three together,” Lisbeth informs her mother. Naedie makes herself a bowl and sits across from the pair.
Marin sits up a little straighter, finding the need to be on his absolute best behavior. “Yep. Lisbeth has been very kind to me. I had a bit of a rough start to my life here in Greendole,” he says to Naedie. He can see the tiny resemblances between her and the picture of Lando.

Naedie smiles in bemusement to her daughter. Her friend is quite the miniature gentleman. “And where did you come from? If you don’t mind me asking.” She knows from painful experience that one often changes their place of residence to eradicate their past.

“We were displaced because of the war. We were visiting friends on Ator when the First Order destroyed our home. After that, my father couldn’t risk being on the frontlines, because of my two baby sisters. We moved here, in with my grandmother,” Marin spins the lie easily. He’ll have to tell Hux about the lie later to get their stories straight. Not that he would ever allow Naedie and Hux to meet. What if she somehow recognized him and knew he was of the First Order?

The thought of Naedie somehow connecting him and Hux to Kylo Ren is terrifying. He doesn’t know what he’d do if they knew who he really was. He could always alter their memories, but he doesn’t have an intimate of a hold on their minds like how he does with Hux’s. He also wouldn’t be able to supervise them to make sure the memory alteration actually was successful, without giving himself away.

Marin’s heart sinks. He knows the best solution would be to stop being friends with Lisbeth. But that isn’t an option. Lisbeth has already become such a pillar in his life.

“We’re glad you all are safe,” Naedie replies, sincerity warming her smile.

Marin exhales, beaming to Lisbeth, his best pal. “I’m glad, too.”

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Ren wakes from his slumber. He pulls himself from the couch and falls into his peaceful, rehearsed morning routine. Two portions of caf, three portions of fried eggs, three of fresh multigrain rice, and two portions of fruit. He serves the plates—spooning out each breakfast item for both him and his mother, doubles of the eggs and rice for himself.

It’s been over a year.

A year of loneliness since he assimilated into life among the Resistance, since Marin left with Hux and the twins. Ren’s spent the year on what’s really a glorified house-arrest. His mother has given him a large surveillance terminal to pick through the Resistance’s interceptions so he could scour their data for any leads on his family’s whereabouts. She says the other members are aware he has this access, but he doesn’t believe her.

Even if Ren wasn’t tethered planetside, he’s unsure he could get anywhere roaming the galaxy for Hux and the kids. All he has is the nominal chance that Resistance spies would find the wanted General Hux, something Ren hopes never happens. Hux and their children are away from him, but that means they are safe and away from the war. The fact the time bomb that connects his heart with Hux’s still hasn’t ruptured in his chest is proof enough.

Apart from the occasional, precious vision of Hux smiling and of Marin glaring contemplatively, there is no sign of their return. He has nothing, only fragile, resilient hope. Somehow, he pushes on.
Abie pounces up to him, eager for her breakfast. She’s grown exponentially. She still trots along at his heels as if she were still pint sized.

Marin will be almost twelve now. Maybe he’d have already begun to sprout up like a bean stalk like he did at that age; by thirteen Ren was nearly his father’s height. Seren and Taran will be chatting Hux’s ears off in no time, if they aren’t already. He closes his eyes, absorbing the breakfast scents. Hope enlivens a fantasy behind his eyelids—one where he serves up a heaping breakfast for Hux and their children.

It will be the morning he finally asks Hux to marry him. He'll sneak a ring at the bottom of his cup of caf, and Hux will drink it until he stares incredulously at the little circular impression at the bottom. And he'll conceal his shock with reprimand—“Ren, that's so unsanitary,” he’ll grovel against the smile brightening his features. “I love you,” Ren will vow. “I love you. There's nothing that could ever change that.”

“Breakfast looks good,” General Organa greets her son as she pads into the living space.

“Oh, uh, yours is over there,” Ren murmurs, attempting to smile. His mother knows him well. She can read the tension in his shoulders. He’s overthinking things again.

His mother guides them to the small table, adjusting her robes. “You sure the couch is fine? I can always get you a real mattress,” she tries. Of course, Ben politely declines, claiming the couch is more than enough.

Ben’s been on her couch for a month or so. It better than the cot on the Falcon or the grass under the Falcon, and way better thank his perch at his muddy stream. At least here, she can watch over him. Make sure he doesn’t get too lost in his head.

Everyone pretty much ignores him, except for his mother. Rey and he only see each other when passing one another in the halls, and those painfully awkward dinners every few weeks. Finn, he sees a bit more frequently. He comes by his mother’s quarters mostly to visit Abie. Chewie has been AWOL since Ren arrived on Meris III, when it was clear Ren was never gonna leave.

Luke does the same, except he does entertain a conversation every once in a while, regarding their reciprocal, tentative amnesty towards one another. Luke keeps up an odd humor about arms whenever Ren looks at them for too long, saying “I’m glad it was me than anyone else. I’m kind of the expert.”

For the most part, Ren keeps to himself. A hermit of sorts, only leaving his mom’s residence to take Abie on her walks and tend to the Falcon’s mechanical imperatives to keep it in prime, working condition.

“Back to the Falcon, I assume?” his mother asks him at the table.

“Yeah. There air filters need changing. I’m probably gonna have to clean them manually because I have no idea where to find replacements,” Ren explains after he swallows the fresh eggs. “And then I was thinking that I could get started on replacing a lot of the damaged exterior panels. But the problem is I just don’t know enough. I don’t wanna mess with something that doesn’t need to be meddled with.”

“Maybe Rey could shed some light,” General Organa suggests. Already her commlink is buzzing with alerts. Finn and Poe are back from a search and rescue mission after a skirmish on one of the Mid Rim Republic-majority territories.
Ren bristles at the thought of his cousin’s scorn. She’s an adult and can keep things civil, but never friendly. Agreeable, but never pleasant. He murdered her mother and ruined her life, after all.

“Maybe,” he shrugs. It helps being ignored. He’d rather be ignored than burned. It’s a fact that prevails in all of his personal relationships, with the exception of Hux—who he’d rather be scorned by for a lifetime than be ignored or forgotten.

General Organa places her commlink in her pocket. The information can wait. “Your father would have been proud of you.”

Proud of what? Ren doesn’t know where to begin. He’d stopped being selfish. He said he was sorry. But after everything, he managed to lose the one thing that ever stood a chance at bringing him back to life, even at his worst. He’s dying every day without Hux and their family. “I don’t know if that’s a good thing, all things considering,” he admits, before he can quench the thinly-veiled insult to the dead.

His mother laughs like cheerful music. “Hell. You’re right on the mark. He was a scoundrel.”

Ren’s smile blooms naturally. He even chuckles as he forks the rice around his plate. The sensation sits warmly in his chest. It might even be happiness. It strikes him as odd. Happiness derived from the most unlikely of subjects with the most unlikely of people. But he can’t imagine anyone else in the galaxy who could share such a relatable, human feeling towards the late Han Solo.

“Go on, eat your growing foods,” his mother chastises. Ren is all too happy to oblige.

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There’s a woman with deep red hair. She leads Hux to a clearing. The sky is dim enough to see the glow of stars illuminating the grassy bed before them. About ten meters away from them sits a man, salt and pepper hair tugged into a ponytail at the base of his skull. He’s facing away, reclined in the lotus position.

Four beams of electric crimson break the stagnant lull of the jungle. Both to the right of the older man, whose face is obscured. The woman yanks Hux back from lunging to aid the meditating man. Hux doesn’t understand his protectiveness over this man.

The woman holds up a hand. She wants him to watch.

A beam of blue shoots from his side, its uncanny brilliance revealing the extent of the man’s graying hair. The figures with the red lightsabers come into view.

Two young women. Identical twins. Black hair twisted into braids down their skulls and over their shoulders like twi’leks. Dark eyes, athletic stature, regal profiles and cutting jawlines, fisting red lightsabers in each hand. Breathtaking in their beauty and potential for destruction. Hux’s heartbeat falters with raw sentiment. He knows exactly who these women are.

The man stands, cocking his saber in challenge. He turns to them. Waiting.

The sparring match is unlike any Hux has ever seen. A flail of reds and blue, streaking in the growing darkness, blades hissing and parrying. Their fluidity and fierceness haunts him. Where did his baby girls learn to fight so murderously?
Through the trees overhead, the sky dims to blackness, succinct and final. Nighttime incurred unnaturally, manipulated by the hands of mortal men. A blood red stab of light permeates the cloudless sky, growing exponentially within every beat of Hux’s racing heart. He’s never been on this end of such destruction. The light grows stronger, hotter, inflaming the atmosphere with its relentless scorch. Helplessly, he stares to the gray haired man who critiques the girls on their battle form, oblivious to the bleeding sky.

Corneas blistering, Hux faces his fate.

There’s nowhere to run.

“Papa.”

Nothing.

“Papa!”

More quiet. More nothing.

Seren picks up her pillow and sets it on Papa’s stomach. His eyes are closed and his face has no smile, frown or anything, so the rest of him stays still. Taran tugs on Papa’s shirt. She wants his eyes to open.

Hux hums to wakefulness to his active twins adjusting his clothing from his sprawl on the recliner. He loathes that he’d fallen asleep so easily, but the twins kept him up all night with their yelling and demands. Normally his girls aren’t as talkative that late at night. There must have been something in the air that day.

His confusing nightmare is already forgotten. He never remembers his dreams anymore. He lost the ability to long ago. All he knows of are the residual feelings that stain his morning, or afternoon, in this case. This time, it’s hopelessness.

“Papa is sorry,” Hux mumbles, referring to himself. He uses the title ‘Papa’ so that it’s easy for his babies to say when they want his attention. Sometimes—most of the time—they just yell his name all day. All the infant care resources say that talkative babies are healthy. The fact his babies are twins help their communication skills. They have each other to keep themselves busy. “I just wanted a bit of a nap. Grandmother should be coming home soon. Marin, too,” he tells them, squeezing their little fists.

Seren and Taran cheer now that Papa is sitting, his eyes open and bright. “Up? You want up?” he asks them.

Of course they want ‘up!’ They shout in unison—“Up! Up!” ‘Up’ cannot come fast enough.

The twins can’t quite walk, but they sure can scoot, crawl, stand and bounce on their knees. After a whole morning of exercise in their little leg bouncing training toys, Hux would have thought they were too tired to stand. Alas, they persist, for being in their father’s arms is the greatest reward they know. He grants them each a spot on his knees.

“Kisses?” Hux asks, proposing they start another round of one of their favorite games.

Immediately, Taran understands. Games like ‘kisses’ are so exciting. They make Papa laugh and smile. She leans in to Papa’s cheek and buzzes her lips on it until Papa wails in shock. This is the funniest game ever! Papa makes the craziest wails. She laughs and laughs and laughs. Seren catches on, repeating the game on his other cheek until Papa wails more dramatically, and she
laughs and laughs. Soon they are playing kisses together, and their laughing lips tickle Papa’s cheek.

Hux chuckles a melody along with his daughters. He can't take much of the credit for this game. It was Taran who discovered that both she and her sister enjoy spitting on their father’s face, watching him wretch in fake disgust. They have a few other games he designed to help the twins learn about interactions, other than the standard developmental puzzles and toys. Like the one where Hux lies on his belly and Seren and Taran take turns stacking their toys on his back and head, and when they're all out of toys, Hux shakes like a dog and they laugh heartily at their mess.

After ‘kisses’ Hux sets up a program for his babies to watch. This one is about the strange lifeforms that live in asteroids. It's for children, so all of the props are puppets that sing and make little dance routines. Seren and Taran watch the program with apt concentration, chewing on their fingers until Hux gives them their freshly cleaned teething rings.

Marin comes home just as Hux is preparing Seren and Taran’s early dinner.

“Marie?” Seren demands at the commotion by the front door. “Marie?” They can't quite see him, but it's as if they could sense his proximity like little computers. Hux is pleased, until he realizes exactly what is giving them this ability. The Force is on their side, as it's on Marin’s. He wonders what will be the extent of their powers. The thought is off-putting.

“Marie? Kisses?” Taran inquires. Hux laughs. Marin rarely plays games like ‘kisses’ with his sisters but when he does play, and his fake expressions melt to sincere ones at his sisters’ reactions. A precious, fragile illusion that his children will be children forever, never having to experience the burdens of adolescence and adulthood.

“Maybe later, Taran,” Marin brushes off his sister.

“Hey!” Seren greets her big brother. “Kisses.”

“Not now,” Marin says, a bit harshly.

Hux frowns, scooping his daughters’ favorite conglomerate of sweet bean and root vegetable mash in two individual bowls. He adds granola for texture, to help them strengthen their little teeth. “Is everything okay? You seem troubled.”

Marin tosses the cabinet for a cup for some water. “You don't know already?” Marin asks after a moment of hiding from his father’s gaze.

Concern piques, pinching his brow. “No.”

“The school didn't call you?”

“Why would the school call?” Marin can't mean what he thinks he means, but he also can't be sure that he missed any messages. He's been occupied with the twins all day.

Marin sighs. “A few punks had something to say about my hands.” They told him he looked like a womp rat, and ‘all he's missing are the gangly fingernails.’ Lisbeth was his aide but it only made him angrier when they teased them about their secluded relationship.

“And what did you do?”

“I shoved one in the hallway and now I'm suspended. He should have minded his own damned business so I wouldn't have had to touch him.”
“Watch your language,” Hux snaps. His son is too young to be cursing freely like a soldier. “You can't let these kids get to you. I told you that you have to go over their heads. It's like politics.” He's a bit more upset that his son got into an altercation than the fact that the school suspended him. An odd, uncharacteristic thought, because Marin should be able to defend himself against troublemakers—but Hux just wants Marin to be safe and happy. Bullies aren't worth losing his slot at the school.

“Politics, right.” Marin gulps down his water, refilling his cup.

“I'll go in and speak with them. Maybe if I tell the school with what happened to your hands—”

“I don't want them to treat me any differently. I just need to be more careful.”

“Alright,” Hux nods, permitting his son’s agency. “How long is the suspension?”

“Two days.”

“Well, that's two days of ‘kisses’ with your delightful baby sisters,” Hux grins, cradling his son’s skull. Marin’s nearly at his shoulders. His boy is growing so fast. One day he’ll be a man, heading off in the galaxy to carve his own path. Hopefully Marin won’t want to go too far. Hopefully he’ll never have to say goodbye. Overcome with nostalgia, Hux kisses Marin on his head, something he hasn't done in months.

“Mara! Kisses!” Taran shouts. But when Hux turns to tell them, ‘yes, Marin will gladly play ‘kisses’”—Taran and Seren are facing the opposite side of their play pen, bouncing on their little feet. Shouting at an empty space. Dammit, this is what they were doing last night! Which is why he barely got any sleep.

“Darlings? What is it?” Hux calls, preparing his dinner ritual.

“Kisses, Mara. Kisses!”

“Marin, go and tend to them for me, please.”

Dutiful, Marin complies. Where Hux saw an empty space hovers the Force-ghost of Mara Jade. She tends to appear while the twins are napping, to keep her presence private. She's long since given up on telling Hux the truth of his children's other father and his son's betrayal, because Marin is so damn keen on disguising her from Hux. Marin’s keen on controlling an unhealthy amount of his father’s life.

But never, ever has Marin dared touch Seren and Taran’s minds. Not in any manipulative, soul-bending fashion. For now, he allows the twins to see and communicate with her. This is the first time they've acknowledged her by name.

Marin groans, using his powers to hide this impending conversation from Hux. Oblivious, Hux continues preparing the twins’ feeding station.

“I wish I could play ‘kisses.’ Would you mind taking them up on their offer? For me?” Mara Jade asks him.

Marin pets his sister's dark, wispy hair. “Please go away,” he tells the Jedi ghost, not bothering to face her.

“I'm sorry you had a bad day at school. That's all I came here to say.”
“How do Seren and Taran know your name? You shouldn't have taught them that. You're just gonna confuse them,” Marin sneers.

“I didn't teach them anything. They're like you. They have abilities that they were born with that they don't understand.” Mara Jade paces to Marin, translucent hand hovering at his back. “Which is why you can't ignore your bloodline forever. It's catching up with you. The only way to ensure your sisters’ safety is to have them trained in the ways of the Force before they do something they don't mean to do—”

“I can train them,” he interrupts, arrogant. “So if that's your only concern, do what you do best and evaporate.”

“You can’t, Marin. They need guidance. They need to know where they came from.”

“I’ll guide them!” Marin hisses, lowly so Hux won’t turn around and see him barking at thin air like a mad dog. “The only family they need lives right here.”

Mara Jade flickers, but doesn’t yet dissolve. “One day, it won’t be able to be ignored. They’ll find out where they came from. They’ll learn everything. It’s inevitable. I’m so sorry, Marin.”

Graciously, Mara Jade’s ghost finally disappears from existence. Marin forces her infecting words out of his mind. At least her house-calls are becoming more infrequent.

“Gamma!” the twins greet closed front door. Marin glares to the door, on edge. The twins are already able to sense Grandmother from her approach outside the house. What if Mara Jade is right? What if one day, they’re able to sense more things? Like everything Marin has been hiding from them?

The front door swings open, revealing Aems, just as the twins predicted. She beams to the restless toddlers. “How are my little darlings?”

Seren and Taran bend and wriggle until they exhaust themselves, only to get up for another round of bouncing. Their excitement for seeing their grandmother knows no end.

Marin slides to the side to give his grandmother room to hug and kiss the babies. Dispassionately, he shuffles to the dining table to poke at his homework. His hair is getting long enough since his last haircut to hang loosely around his jaw. He could probably wrap it up in a hair-tie.

An idea strikes Hux. “Marin,” he calls for his son’s attention. “Maybe we could go to dinner tonight. Just you and me.”

“What?” Marin’s genuinely surprised. He and Hux have never really done anything together, unless it involves the twins, like going shopping or to the beach for a picnic, or to the pediatrician or the park.

Enthusiasm budding, Hux sets apart the bowls of food puree at the table. “I can ask Grandmother feed Seren and Taran while we take a speeder and go into town.”

It isn’t until Marin feels his lips tug into a smile that he realizes that he hasn’t smiled at home in weeks—only with Lisbeth at her house or at school when they aren’t getting into fights. “Okay.”

Of course, Aems vehemently agrees, nearly shoving her chuckling son and grandson out the door. She slips Hux some credits and tells her not to worry about spending his nest-egg, the money he’s been saving from his short shifts at the college archives.
“Maybe we can try that fish-fry place on the water?” Marin proposes once they secure their helmets. Hux chooses the speeder that has all the proper safeguards in place, the one that goes the slowest, the least cool-looking of all three of Grandmother’s speeders, and he still makes them wear helmets. Marin’s too excited that he doesn’t have the slightest inclination to argue.

“I don’t see why not.” Fresh fish sounds like the perfect dinner to kick off his son’s first official school suspension, his plight against a school system that values compliance over the justice of a firm hand.

Once Hux makes sure Marin’s seatbelt is secure, the father-son pair zoom down the foot-beaten road—Hux straddling the driver’s seat and Marin snug in the much smaller backseat like a baby in a cradle. It takes them a bit of time to locate the exact street the fish-fry is on.

They begin their search along the street that runs parallel to the sea. It’s thickened with rush-hour ground speeder traffic, but the drive is pleasant as it’s bordered by Greendole’s miles-long boardwalk. Hux has driven by the boardwalk but never had the pleasure of walking along on it. “Over there, on the left,” he hears Marin call, and follows along with his son’s directions.

This restaurant is a similar style to Aems’ restaurant, with an array of decorations, casual atmosphere, and an assortment of waiters. The hostess greets them with a smile and seats them at the window with the view of the sea. Marin studies his father’s fascination with the sea. He’d love to go out and swim with him one day, but that would entail having to admit to Hux that he never taught him how to swim.

Hux breaks the companionable silence. “So other than the fight, how has school been? Other than the incident. We rarely talk.”

“Oh, it’s been fine. Not really challenging enough, though.”

“Not everything has to be a challenge.” There was a time when he would have believed differently. “But it’s good to challenge yourself. Have you thought about participating in an after-school activity?”

Marin shrugs. “I dunno. Nothing really seems to interest me. Lisbeth is in this club where they crack puzzles and I’ve been to a few of their meetings. But it’s kind of boring and senseless.” No offense to her, but he’s had a lot on his mind lately. And puzzles remind him of how Kylo Ren used his love for puzzles, his sentiment for a real family, and his powers to take away his darkness. He doesn’t like puzzles anymore. He already thinks of that man enough already.

Puzzles are probably incredibly boring for a boy like his son, Hux supposes. Regardless, he’s glad Marin has someone to look up to. He’s had the pleasure of meeting Lisbeth several times, all in passing, but he knows she means well and keeps his son happy and spirited. However, when he asked to meet Lisbeth’s parents, Marin told him that Lisbeth’s mother is too busy for that and that he shouldn’t worry. “What about your interests in nature?”

“Like a ‘nature club?’” Marin asks in befuddlement. Because seriously. Nature club?

Hux chuckles. “No, I mean more like—” Hux finds the proper words, never having to think about these types of things before his family became his entire life. “You could volunteer at a shelter that cares for animals or wild plants, or other lifeforms in need?” Marin has always had a caring heart.

“That might be cool,” Marin admits. He never really thought about it until today. It’s not a bad idea. It might even be a good one.
All in all, their outing is so far a success. The evening is beautiful, the menu organized and appealing. Everything is pleasant.

Until the waiter shows up.

At first, Marin doesn’t really think anything of the waiter’s appearance—tall, objectively handsome, dark hair, bright blue eyes, athletic build. To Marin, the waiter might as well be a gungan.

He only begins to care when it’s painfully obvious that Hux cares. He’s never seen Hux’s eyes light up and his mouth soften into a smile at another person that wasn’t a member of their family, let alone some random stranger who’s talking to him about fried fish. And worst of all, the waiter is smiling, too! Marin reaches out with his Force-senses, a feat he hardly ever uses these days. The waiter’s friendliness, his attraction is genuine, as opposed to the chance that he might just be simply working for his tip, but the distinction is irrelevant. Both the waiter and Hux are getting all kinds of ideas in their heads that make Marin’s skin crawl.

“I’m surprised I’ve never seen you around here,” the man grins, all dimples. “I know I’d remember you.”

Hux actually blushes, the girlish tingle a foreign yet welcoming sensation. “Well, we kind of keep to ourselves.”

“That’s a shame,” the waiter adjusts his sleeve, exposing his defined forearm like a damned peacock. The waiter has the nerve to finally acknowledge Marin, tossing him a cheery, “Hey, bud!”

Marin replies with a mere blink and a “hey” when Hux snaps out of his little spell. “And what would you recommend?” Hux asks in an attempt to veer the conversation back from where it was turning, hands poised on the table. He’s at dinner with his only son, his firstborn. He doesn’t need to be unnecessarily chatting up attractive waiters.

“Definitely the broiled blackfin. It’s a local favorite,” smirks the waiter.

“Sounds good.” Hux raises his brows to Marin, who all but growls, “I'll have the same.”

When the waiter finally peels off, Marin palms his skull.

“Spit it out,” Hux deadpans.

“He's only being nice to you to get a good tip. Sorry, but it's the truth,” Marin shrugs, clearly lying.

“So? It's fun to chat people up.” Before their new life in Greendole, before his months of isolation with his spritely daughters and his loving mother and son as his only company, Hux would have never pegged himself as the flirting type. But he can't remember the last time he'd been with someone, if he ever had, at all. It’s getting increasingly lonely. And since they got here, there’s been something missing in his heart. Perhaps this might be it.

“By people, you mean men,” Marin grumbles.

Somehow, someday, Marin will understand what it's like to long for someone to be close to. “Is that what this is about? The fact he was male?” Now’s as good a time as any. Hux’s heart rate picks up a bit. “You do know I like men, right?”

The comment brings a fire behind Marin’s eyes. “Men are selfish.”
“You do realize that we are both men—”

“I mean other men,” Marin argues. “The ones that think they deserve everything. They lie and they use and only think about themselves. They may trick you into thinking they truly care about you, but they're just gonna end up hurting you.”

At a loss, Hux leans in close. “Marin, where is this coming from?”

But Marin isn't seeing reason. “Like Brendol, if I must name one. He hurt Grandmother and stole you from her even though he did nothing to deserve you. He forced you into bearing his name and turning you as a cog for his war machine—”

“Here are your waters!” comes the untimely greeting from the waiter. Marin lashes out with his mind-sensing and sends the impulse into the waiter’s brain to splash the water over himself.

Hux gapes, the commotion by the waiter’s ‘mishap’ unseen, unheard, as he reels from his son’s confession.

“Damn, I'm sorry. Did any of that get on you both?” asks the waiter, attempting to mask the state of his sopping white shirt.

“It's fine,” Hux says after a heavy moment. The waiter dismisses himself to leave Hux an opportunity to grasp the exact implications of his son’s outburst.

The silence stretches on until Hux breaks it once more. “My father isn’t blameless in deciding the course of my life. But know it was my choice. It was my decision to kill the people I've killed. I'd do it again if the galaxy demanded that I must.”

Marin’s sullen glare focuses on the space between them.

Breathing deeply, Hux continues. “It was my decision to make then, just as it's my decision to make right now. To stay here and care for you and your sisters. I'm content to do this for the rest of my life.”

Would Hux feel the same way if he knew exactly what he was leaving behind? Would Hux hate him if he realized?

But Hux will never find out. He won't. Marin hasn't spoken the name ‘Kylo Ren’ in over a year. Kylo Ren is a stain on his memory, nothing more.

“You, the twins, your grandmother—you're everything to me. No man will ever come between you all and me. Do you understand?” Hux implores.

Marin nods, basking in Hux’s words. No man will ever come between them. He’ll ensure it. “I understand.”

The waiter returns with the new waters, laughing off his earlier spill. Somehow Hux doesn't make the connection between the spill and Marin’s powers.

“I think you could do much better,” Marin suggests, surprising them both with the comment. It's obvious he's trying to lighten the mood.

“Oh?”

“And he's too young for you. He probably acts like a little kid.”
Hux’s brow rises to his hairline. “Sometimes I wish you still acted like a little kid,” he smirks. Marin’s only twelve but he’s already burdened with so many responsibilities of adulthood.

The waiter approaches with their plates of food. Eagerly, Marin digs in. Hux is content to watch his son fill up on the battered fish, nibbling nonchalantly at his own plate.

Of course the waiter shows up to interrupt their peace. Only he’s changed into a muscle shirt. Marin’s nose crimps. Is that even sanitary?

And evidently, Hux’s hunger is in the wrong place. He forks over half of his fish on Marin’s plate, ogling the definition of the waiter’s biceps and shoulders. It’s subtle but Marin can tell where Hux’s mind has disturbingly reverted back to.

“What else?” the waiter asks, gripping his hands together.


“Coming right up.”

Marin bristles, shoving fish into his mouth. He eats the piece Hux gave without complaint. At least Hux had most of his fries.

When the dreaded waiter returns, a cup of caf isn’t the only thing he’s planning on extending to Hux. “So I don’t normally do this, and please don’t tattle to my boss, but I was wondering if there’s any way you might be interested in letting me take you out sometime?”

Hux’s eyes widen. His hesitation is too much for Marin, who forces his gaze out the window in order to avoid slamming his fist into the waiter’s face.

“Thank you for the invitation. But I’ve got a lot on my plate presently. I don’t really have time to go on dates,” Hux swallows. Not only is he busy with his children, there’s a niggle feeling in his gut that knows he doesn’t want this man. It has nothing to do with the man personally. It’s on his end. If he were to date him, perhaps even sleep with him, that would be one of the greatest errs of judgment he could commit.

The waiter accepts the defeat easily, nodding sullenly. “If you’re ever free, you know where to find me,” he smiles, sliding over the tab and instructing him to insert his credit chip at the terminal on their way out.

“Did he really have to do that in front of my own son?” Hux grumbles to Marin, who’s picking at his food in a childish habit.

“Like I said. Selfish.”

Hux sighs into his caf, wishing they chose a different restaurant for their special father-son meal. Nonetheless, he’s glad they took time to themselves. The last few minutes of their dinner is completed in silence.

Marin sits up and readies himself to leave. “Can we walk along the boardwalk?” he requests, as if nothing is amiss.

Hux wipes the unpleasant interaction from his memory. “I’d like that. We can watch the sunset along the water.”

Arm in arm, Hux and Marin head for the terminal to swipe their chips. Hux is the most efficient at
it so Marin leaves him that job.

While Hux turns for the door expecting Marin to follow him like a duckling, Marin ensures that he doesn't leave without lashing out one final impulse into the waiter's mind. Causing him to toss a full pot of boiling hot caf on his arm.

The man's scream is music to Marin's ears.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so who remembers Naedie? :D she's an OC but made her debut in Chapter 7 of Sunstroke. she was there on a ship where a certain couple welcomed their firstborn into the galaxy. I hope you guys found that satisfying hahahha :) thanks so much for reading!!!!! and for the record there will NOT be any hux/others, even while hux is in this ren-less mental state, if you were concerned.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ren may not be allowed to leave the base, but the Jedi can. Between missions, Rey and Finn have been following up on every lead, every hint that could possibly lead to Marin’s reappearance. They’ve gone on at least a dozen separate trips, each path’s end frayed and dry. Nothing to indicate there could ever be a trail, let alone one that’s run cold, but they cannot lose hope. They owe General Organa as much. She’s lost far too much already.

And Ren, too, but he’s kind of the one who’s the most at fault.

Unfortunately the Jedi must table their side quest, for new threats have augmented. Poe Dameron, Finn, and Rey step off their ship for reconnaissance with their general. There have been terrifying developments from their most recent interplanetary mission. A program that involves the First Order’s source of power now that the dark side users have all but vanished—the vast legions of Stormtroopers.

“And what are they calling it?” General Organa asks, blood pressure rising.

“They don’t have a public name for the new program yet,” Poe nods, splaying out the datafiles along the screen with a hand. “But our reports show batches of Stormtroopers undergoing conditioning to make the First Order less permeable to our spies. They’re developing a sort of hive-mind to permit them to communicate at every distance. Our spies will not be able to gather valuable information like how they’ve been doing. The Resistance, the Rebellion. It’s what’s been saving our skins for decades. Now that the First Order is outmaneuvering us—we need something they won’t ever be able to match.”


The air suspends with unease, as the fate of the galaxy is shrouded with uncertainty.

Rey breaks the silence, offering a seed of hope. “Or an ex-Jedi. With strong ties to the creator of the original Stormtrooper program.” She senses movement from the corner of her eye. “Finn, don’t look at me like that.”

“Screwing off to a faraway corner of the galaxy is one thing, but even if we could find Hux, I’m a little skeptical that he’d actually be willing to help us. Ren barely does, and he’s supposed to be one of the good guys now,” Finn explains. He doesn’t know what’s worse: the fact that Rey proposed it or the fact that it’s the best lead they have. Kylo Ben-Ren is the best lead they have.

“I’ll talk to Ben,” General Organa says. Everyone’s eyes drop to her, glaring. She stands her ground. She knows her son better than anyone, though her heart goes out to the resilience and determination of her allies. “He wants to help.”
When General Organa approaches her son, he’s aboard the Millennium Falcon, dissecting the engineering panel. Carefully, reverently. He’s crafting a living memorial, treating every section in need of repair like an artifact.

Cautiously, she explains their hopes and concerns for his cooperation. Her heart breaks at the raw sorrow flashing in his eyes, ebbing off his soul like a dying tide.

“You know I would do anything to find him again,” Ren mutters, unable to temper the resignation from his voice.

“Ben, I know you’ll be with them again. I can feel it. In the meantime,” she says, and takes a heavy breath, “I think it’s time you start accompanying Finn and Rey on missions.”

His sorrow sharpens to a faraway glare. “That’s a bad idea.”

“There’s more at stake now, and you might be our last line of defense. Come to the compound tonight and we can talk strategy. Deal?”

“But—”

“There are a million reasons not to go with them, to work as a team,” his mother flares, her natural, honed energy amplifying her presence. “The fact of the matter is, they need your inside knowledge. Even if it’s just to get their foot in the door, they’ll take it.” She sighs, readjusting. “Finn and Rey have been taking leave to look down every dead end for your kids. Now’s your chance to prove to everybody else you’re an asset, not a threat. That way we can get you out there to look for them.”

Shakily, Ren nods, and General Organa leaves the mechanic to his ship.

Ren’s heart sinks. He didn’t know that Finn and Rey have been searching for his family. He hadn’t even asked them to do it. Not only that, but Ren would do anything to help his mother. It’s just been so hard—

“Seren, you’re walking! Look at you. Come to Papa. That’s it,” cheers Hux. Ren sees Hux from Seren’s point of view, her arms stretching out on both sides of the vision as if he was watching from a holo-recorder atop her head. The visage of Hux falters as Seren drops to her knees—but the right herself, determined to go the distance. Hux’s green eyes twinkle in admiration. Ren almost doesn’t recognize him, this happy, jubilant man.

Who’s content to live a life far, far from Ren. Content to raise their children on his own, without so much as a transmission to let Ren know they’re alright.

The vision changes to Marin. He’s noticeably older, cheekbones and jaw more mature, eyes hard and calculative. He’s attempting to give something a bath, and from the two swatting arms, Ren knows it to be Taran. “Hold still,” Marin grovels, moving the rag over Taran’s eyes, partially obstructing the view. As if somehow, Marin knows through the interstellar distances separating them that Ren is watching. Begging to be reunited with them. The cloth moves and the vision is filled with sweet music that Ren only barely registers as Taran’s laughter. Marin even cracks a smile.

Blinking away the vision, Ren sinks into the nearby booth, cradling his skull in his palms. As natural as breathing, Ren rubs at the lightsaber scar on the nape of his neck.
A few weeks later, the Resistance is finally ready to take on one of the Stormtrooper developing plants in the Mardromitan system. The plan—to retrieve any and all information regarding the genetic modifications to the infant Stormtroopers. It’s simple enough: Rey and Finn pulling information from their computer interface with Ren as their guide so they don’t waste time pulling information off the wrong terminal or trigger any unsavory reactions from the facility. The council permitted Ren to go off-world. He’ll be closely monitored by the Jedi, as well as the implant, and his mother’s pressing trust. General Organa’s trust is worth far, far more than any subdermal, spine-lodged tracker.

Rey steps into the Millennium Falcon’s cockpit, surprised at what she finds. Ren had reversed his alterations, undid the selfish handicap he inflicted on the controls. Now the only way that the Falcon can fly is with two pilots. Ren volunteered the ship, explaining it can outmaneuver any TIE fighter.

She all but rolls her eyes when Ren takes the pilot’s chair. He narrows his eyes as if to challenge her in not an entirely unfriendly matter. Reluctantly, she lets Ren have first dibs. Not that he’s earned it, she’s just above frivolous pissing contests.

Outside, Poe escorts Finn to the flight-prepared Falcon. “You sure you don’t want me tagging along in my own bird? There’s no such thing as having too much backup,” Poe asks, seriousness eased with his charm.

But Finn shakes his head. “General’s orders. We need to keep our party as small as possible and the Falcon’s the only ship that can break the security shields of the base. Besides, somebody’s gotta look after this place while we’re gone.”

*You two are adorable*, comes a cheeky message from Rey, who’s already ready to go.

*Alright, I’ll lock up the ramp*, Finn replies, flushed but suppressing a smirk.

Poe chuckles at his barely noticeable concentration that tells him Finn’s not entirely in his own head. Typical Jedi, always telepathically talking shit.

Finn finds a spot at Rey’s six, Ren a constant in his peripherals. It’s the first time they’ve all been together since they stumbled on Ren in the Ithorian forest, right after his family left him. Before that, they were in Starkiller’s forest, maiming and bludgeoning each other. But given Ren’s years’ worth of self-imposed isolation, he’s surprisingly well adjusted. The unlikely team departs from the base with strange efficiency.

They’re not even at their destination and they already have something to argue about. “You two were planning on making our landing at lightspeed?” Ren complains. There’s no way that could possibly work.

“I’ve seen it done before and I know Rey can do it,” Finn defends.

“In the Falcon? Who would be crazy enough to do that?”

Rey cuts in. “Who do you think?” Han Solo was one of the bravest, craziest men she’s ever known. She holds what few memories she has of him close to her heart. An even more precious few of them from her pre-Jakku childhood returned to her early on in the process of remembering where she’s come from.

Ren reacts visibly, seeming to hollow out behind his eyes. “Even if the Falcon could, I doubt I’d be
able to pull us out of it unscathed."

“I can. If you move,” Rey levels, a bit jovial, more so than anything she’s ever said to the man.

Only hesitating a stiff moment, Ren complies. From the pilot’s chair, Rey instructs both him and Finn to brace for impact as the Falcon thwacks from hyperspace, hull protesting against the muddy surface like a skipping stone.

The Falcon groans to a halt. “That was lucky,” Ren murmurs, rolling his fingertips into a crick in his neck.

“Luck had nothing to do with it,” Rey says, sparing no more pleasantries. Perhaps Ren was meant to come along. If the Force had far more grand plans for him than dying at the hands of his dark side master, it certainly will have plans that exceed splattering like a bug against a First Order occupied planet.

Ren glares at the reeds obstructing the view of relatively calm First Order airspace around the compound—enormous windowed buildings atop blocks elevated from the marsh. They’ve got a long, tumultuous walk ahead of them by the look of the expansive marsh, the tall golden grasses, and the high hanging sun bathing Mardromitan in orange light.

The two Jedi secure their respective lightsabers in waterproof cases that holster on their belts, tightening their boots against their calves to minimize water seepage. Ren opts for a blaster tucked in between the small of his back and his cargo pants. He never plans to touch another lightsaber again.

Finn and Rey make mental notes of Ren’s weapon. It’s a bit surreal, the three of them a team, scouting wetlands to break into a Stormtrooper plant. Intelligence told the Resistance that whatever is in their labs will be helpful and seeing that Ren is the only one on the Resistance base who has ever been here—once or twice before the completion of Starkiller—they made the arrangement.

Rey keeps her once-cousin in her peripherals, Finn at her six. She senses no deception from Ren. She hasn’t since he returned. After all, a glorified nursery is a terrible place to unveil Ren is actually a sleeper cell for the dark side, when he’s spent over a year at the heart of the Resistance doing little more than playing with his dog and fiddling with the Falcon.

They approach a platform, void of any lifeforms, and Rey and Finn call to the Force to assist in their leap. For Ren, he uses no such assistance, using pure upper-body strength to get him where he needs to be. He grunts like a dog, boots scraping along the duracrete noisily. The Force hasn’t been his ally in years. He doubts he’ll ever reconnect with it how he used to. Thankfully, the two Jedi make no comments on his clumsiness, aside from Finn’s glare that says be quiet.

Once in sight of the closed door, Rey and Finn use their Force-strength to dismantle the closing mechanism, shorting the wiring with a succinct crunch of energy. Ren can’t help but be colored impressed.

Rey cocks her head once the hall is clear. “Where to next?” she asks Ren, who tries his best to give adequate directions. Remarkably, he is able to chauffeur them to a proper computer access point, where Rey begins to unlock the data with her computer interface probe, similar to the one in their favorite astromech droid. R2 was a little too conspicuous for the mission, despite being highly skilled at hacking and notorious for getting into trouble.

So far, the hall is void of patrol. Until the unmistakable chattering of a school of youngsters begins to trickle down the bend.
“How much longer do you need?” Ren hisses, unable to imagine what would happen if they were cornered by a swarm of Stormtrooper children and their caretakers.

“For a full uplink? Eight minutes,” Rey replies.

“Eight?”

“R2 would have done it in a minute but he wouldn’t have made it past the swamp,” Rey defends. “We’re not gonna be able to get all of it if the uplink is cut off prematurely.”

The voices are getting closer so Ren is forced to improvise. Squaring his shoulders, he heads for the commotion.

Finn and Rey trade concerned glances—because really? Is he doing what they think he’s doing?

Ren begs his heart to stop ricocheting like an errant blaster bolt around a magnetically sealed chamber as he peers around the busy hall, eying for any adults or anyone with real authority that he can take hostage momentarily. As he expected, and feared, Ren only sees the not so easily persuaded caretaker droids that herd the youngsters—about a dozen attentive four and five year olds of all colors and genders, though all completely human. They’re in uniform—not armor, only identical black fatigues—and holding tiny training blasters to get their grips accustomed to the weight. It’s a detail he picked up on during one of his and Hux’s heated arguments back during their partnership. After Marin was sent away as a newborn. Back then, they only ever discussed their work and not the growing personal conflict between them.

The droids are about to bring the children over the threshold where they will no doubt give away Finn and Rey’s location, so Ren goes with his gut. He whips around the corner, blaster aimed and finger hovering over the trigger.

Rey and Finn trade looks of shock at the three blaster bolts in the distance that undoubtedly came from Ren. Rey types in another command to pull the hidden datafiles. “Finn—”

“I’ll go check on him,” he nods, hand calm on his lightsabered hip. He peers over the edge of the hall, brows raising at the spectacle before him.

The crowd of unharmed, inquisitive children patently stare at Kylo Ren, all three caretaker droids lying slumped over, blasted backs a scorched maw.

“You’re our blaster… instructor?” asks one of the boys, chin angled to Ren’s height.

Ren nods, sticking to his story. He adjusts his hands on his hips. “Your caretaker droids planned for this. They wanted you to see that an enemy can come at any moment. When you least expect it.” Ren’s eyes flick to the tag on the boy’s uniform. “Don’t forget your salute, AN-4546.”

The little boy’s eyes round to saucers, pinning his blaster in one arm and saluting with the other in a tiny, closed fist. It’s a little endearing, his fervency, and Ren can’t help a small grin.

“What’s your name?” comes another child, one of the girls. She has light features and an accent that reminds him if his son. “Why are you covered in dirt?”

“I’m Captain Ben,” is what he comes up with. “And I’m in costume.”

“Costume?” the girl makes a face.

“I’m playing the part of the Resistance scoundrel. They have taught you about the different villains
and scum that are outside of First Order bases, correct?” Ren asks, putting on a stern look of disapproval.

A few of the boys and girls nod, eager to please. But the mouthy girl speaks for them. “They haven’t. They’re lying.”

Ren frowns. “What do you mean?” Why would they lie?

“They want to do well enough that they don’t have to go through reconditioning,” she explains easily, tossing a condemning look at her subordinates. It’s clear she’s being groomed for leadership amongst the ranks. Their little cherubic faces wilt in shame. They know what’s next.

Reconditioning. The thorough, sometimes violent and terrifying therapies that the Stormtrooper program heavily relies on for programming. As the children grow to adolescence and adulthood they surmount their fears of the sensory deprivation, sensory overload, chemical, and spiritual therapies, even as the therapies increase in ferocity. The only word to describe it is inhumane. But it does the job. It’s been doing the job for decades.

“That won’t be necessary,” Ren instructs, heart breaking.

“Captain Ben, are we going to the simulation rooms?” comes another child, eager to play with his weapon.

“The training rooms are closed right now. There was a power surge.”

“A power surge?”

Ren ignores them, squaring his shoulders. “For now, we’re going to practice our marching. Everybody remember how to march?”

“Yes sir, Captain Ben,” they reply in unison. They’ve been practicing marching ever since they could walk.

“Assume formation…” Ren holds up a hand. Their little feet take them into their ordered pairs. “And…to the rear. March!” he concludes, letting them take themselves back where they came from. None of them dare to look back.

Whoever finds them will no doubt ask them what happened to their droids, and when they explain that they were following orders from a disheveled ‘Captain Ben’ the ‘blaster instructor’ if there’s even such a thing, they will be forced into reprimand, possibly reconditioning.

Ren sighs, his lifetime of sins and calamity threatening to steal his second wind. But if he timed everything right, Rey and Finn should be finishing up right about now.

He intercepts Finn, who’s forced to be amazed. “Nice, uh. Plan,” Finn nods. It worked. It was weird as hell to watch, though. Surreal, too, remembering his lifetime of complacency at his Stormtrooper plant. A childhood of torture and brainwashing. It was no childhood at all. Finn surmounts the horrors of his past every day.

“Almost got what we need?” Ren asks, pressing their timetable.

“Just about. Rey?” Finn calls, shuffling towards her. She pulls from the terminal, adrenalized now that they have what they came for. They made excellent time.

But sometimes, most times, plans fail. A sharp siren pierces from unseen speakers, two trundling
blast doors threatening to seal them in the hall. Apparently Captain Ben’s class was far too forthcoming with the details of their fictional instructor.

One green, one blue plasma beam ignites the space. Instinct tells Ren to affront the twin beams with his glare. But the Jedi are already a step ahead. They head for the direction they came from, blades carving through the sealed door.

A bizarre pocket opens in the wall, revealing a hissing mouth to deploy a weaponized gas. It’s evident the First Order has created some kind of gas chamber as a trap—the first of the kind Finn has ever heard of. Whether the gas is there to kill them or render them unconscious for questioning is irrelevant, because Finn stops the cloud from reaching their end with a concentrated burst of Force energy.

“Got it!” Rey shouts once her saber carves a complete port for escape.

Not waiting for Rey’s further assistance, Ren rams his shoulder through the opening, wrenching the mangled metal free. He plows through it with a groan, abused shoulder protesting. Muscle memory brings him back to the time on the planet where he had kidnapped Hux, dislocating his arm at the hands of a traitor’s explosives.

It’s rare Ren goes for long without thinking of Hux.

“This way,” Rey encourages. The team misses getting trapped in another chamber down the next hall. There’s only one more twist to go until their exit.

Naturally, Ren’s the one that gets shot in the back.

The bolt comes from nowhere. They didn’t even know they were being tailed, and of course Ren is the largest moving object. Bolt sizzling into the meat of his left side, Ren stumbles forward, yelping like a wounded dog.

_Dammit_, Rey and Finn concur. They dive to drag Ren up by his enormous shoulders. “Shit!” Finn complains, because this dude is truly as heavy as a bag of bricks. The Jedi call to the Force to help drag Ren in his pained daze, until his legs finally decide to catch up.

“Over there!” Finn shouts to the hatch as he supports most of Ren’s enormity. By some miracle all it takes is one stab of Rey’s lightsaber to the control panel and the hatch trundles open, bathing the chaos in orange sunlight.

With all the concentration she can muster, Rey sends Finn and Ren down the cement platform with a push of her palm, deflecting blaster bolts from a herd of suited First Order officers with the green of her blade.

Finn would have landed on his feet if not for the miscalculation in balance, the bag of bricks with his arm slung around Finn’s shoulder. It was only inevitable, he thinks, when he and Ren face-plant into the sulfuric, rotten mud below.

Grimacing, Finn coughs out the splatter of mud that got in his mouth. “You okay?” he groans. Oh shit. Ren isn’t moving.

Rey lands with far more poise and lunges to her two partners’ aid, and rolls Ren onto his back. Miraculously he coughs up the filthy brown mud, face twisting at the agitation to his fresh blaster wound.

Finn gets to his feet, slipping around like a fish out of water. “Can you stand?” he asks, barely able
to do the same.

Achingly, Ren nods, forcing himself to power though the pain. *Fuck,* that’s bad. Like a chunk has been blown off his side, like half his body got caught under a bantha.

The reeds manage to give them enough cover until the base finally pulls it together and scrambles their TIE fighters. Yet again, the Force is with them and they make it on the Falcon and into the air before the first round of laser cannon fire. Rey pilots the ship, instructing a much less skilled Finn into being her copilot, as Ren writhes on the bunk, painting the duraleather with bloodied mud. The Falcon carries them into hyperspace, back to the shelter of Meris III.

“I think—my ribs are broken,” Ren gasps once they land, face twisting around the agony to the Resistance medics ushering him onto a repulsorlift gurney. Shockingly, they don’t hesitate to come to his aid. Either they can’t recognize him under the congealed mud and are treating him like any other patient, or they’ve come to not completely despise him during his quiet year. By the roughness of their ministrations, it’s clear that neither is true. They’re just being forced to do their job for the man they loath to see communing on their base.

“Let’s see if this was worth it,” Rey nods to Finn, who only cares about a hot shower right about now, but he follows anyway. Three paces in, Rey wrinkles her nose. “You should probably cash in that shower. You smell like death.”

Finn doesn’t need to be told twice. He passes on a good-natured ‘not now!’ to a cackling Poe and beelines for the closest communal shower.

Later that cycle, General Organa finds a seat as her techs break the bad news about Rey, Finn, and Ben’s mission. She’s already on edge after tending to her injured son asleep in the medbay, abdomen wrapped in large patches of salve.

“General, the Jedi’s interface probe didn’t have a trace of any datafiles that give way to the new Stormtrooper changes. Our best guess is that they never had the files on Mardromitan to begin with. There’s got to be a hub of information, we just haven’t tapped into it yet. Or found it,” the tech explains. The First Order’s base of operations has been mobile for the last several years since Phasma’s reign, but there’s always been chatter of a home system. The head of the serpent. They just don’t know enough.

“Dammit,” General Organa curses, shaking her head to a frustrated Rey. “Anything of value that we did take?”

The tech raises his brows. “Facial recognition pulled up some our most wanted First Order criminal on base. General Armitage Hux.”

Rey and the general share their shock. “Is he there?”

“No, but there’s round the clock surveillance of him stationed there over a standard year ago. He was at the Stormtrooper plant for over two weeks.”

“What was he doing?” General Organa frowns.

“Um…” The tech punches in a riddle of commands, “I saw a few minutes of the found footage. I can’t really—make much sense of it. I don’t know if it’s even relevant,” he shrugs. Without further prompting, the screen blips alive with the scene.

It’s a strange, pleasant scene: Hux arriving on the base with a slight limp, pushing a repulsorlift gurney with what appears to be two tiny infants encased in an incubator. General Organa and her
niece watch raptly as Hux escorts the infants into a room, the recording shifting feed from the hall cameras to the room’s far camera.

Cupping a hand over her mouth, the general’s eyes glisten as Hux labors over them. Preparing food hastily, fumbling with clothing, wrapping them inexpertly in their swaddles as they protest from being set down. His lack of skill combined with his desperation breaks her heart.

It’s evident that these infants are his own. These are Seren and Taran, as Ben told her before. Ben’s daughters—the ones he almost got killed in a dark side daze. The ones Marin ran off with between the star systems.

“May I have a copy of this?” General Organa breathes.

Cupping a hand over her mouth, the general’s eyes glisten as Hux labors over them. Preparing food hastily, fumbling with clothing, wrapping them inexpertly in their swaddles as they protest from being set down. His lack of skill combined with his desperation breaks her heart.

It’s evident that these infants are his own. These are Seren and Taran, as Ben told her before. Ben’s daughters—the ones he almost got killed in a dark side daze. The ones Marin ran off with between the star systems.

“The tech’s brow pinches but he refrains from voicing his puzzlement. “What part?”

Ren doesn’t come to until the next day. His skin and hair have been scrubbed of the mud, but his side aches with residual healing. Given his bone damage, he probably won’t be healed for another few weeks.

Sadness, understanding flashes over her warm eyes. “I have something for you.”

Ren blinks his leadened eyes, attempting to sit up when his mother begins to set a datapad.

“Unfortunately, out of everything you three pulled from the plant on Mardromitan, there was nothing tied to the recent research and development rumors for the new breed of Stormtroopers.”

“Shit,” he breathes, damaged ribcage protesting, though at this point he’s used to the sting.

“But it wasn’t a complete waste. It helps to have any and all information that we can get our paws on.” She passes her son the datapad, his recognition of Hux instantaneous. “We did pull hundreds of hours of footage of him in one of the private rooms. I thought you’d want to see it.”

Ren can’t help but ask, vision blurring with tears as he watches Hux seal himself away with their daughters, scouting the room for predators. “Is he…?” What if he’s there? What if he was right there, and Ren crossed paths with him without even knowing? His lungs tighten. What if Hux is already gone and he missed his chance?

“No. These recordings are from well over a year ago. There’s about two weeks of them together, until he leaves on the ship he came there with.” She hands her son an earpiece. “There’s some audio, too. I haven’t seen much of it. I figured it’s private.”

Hope bubbling up his throat, Ren takes the earpiece and thumbs it into his oblong ear. “Thank you.”

General Organa indulges in something she hasn’t done since Ben was a boy. She stands and lays a
warm kiss on his tangled head of hair.

Ren inhales, affection from a lifetime ago sharpened in his memory. His mother tells him to get some rest, leaving him alone with his recordings.

Brow pursed, Ren replays the first recording. He gapes dolefully at the two infants sealed in their incubators, barely a few days old. This must have been after he returned to the Finalizer to tend to Hux, see what was causing his distress that Ren felt from parsecs away. Ultimately it was him, him and his deviltry, the dark side weakening his agency until it nearly pushed Hux over the edge as well as claimed the lives of their newborn children.

Ren snorts when Hux threatens the dutiful nanny droid, then wilts as Hux tends to the twins. “You two will rise as the Order will. You’ll prosper as I have. The First Order is everything you could need,” Hux vows to their daughters. He repeats the words to ensure the twins understand. Gods, Ren missed the sound of his voice. Inflecting with anger and annoyance at anyone and anything that questions him, melting to the soft, revered warmth towards his children.

The Hux on the recording scopes the room predatorily, as if threats could somehow walk through walls. Ren’s heart falters at the tenseness in Hux’s spine, the fervency in which he prepares the baby formula in the kitchenette sink. Hux is exhausted, pushing himself on adrenaline, desperation, and the need to take care of his babies. Hux unseals the incubator, and Ren spasms at the sound of the shrill, aching cries of the twins. A tear slips from Ren’s eye as Hux struggles to satisfy their cries, fumbling with blankets and muttering with uncharacteristic fragility. The camera’s stationary setting gives Ren just enough of a view of the distress twisting Hux’s composure.

With inexpert concentration, the Hux on the recording rethinks his strategy and begins to wrap each wailing baby in a swaddle. Which helps still one while the other cries on, until Hux finally gets the prepared bottle in her mouth. “Feel better?” Hux hums. “You’re a miracle of nature. No one’s going to take you from me ever again.”

Ren slumps, stifling the self-destructive urge to roll on his injured side until the physical pain is all he can think about. This was before Hux had come to Ithor and tried to rescue him from the First Order’s destruction of the Resistance base, Ren reminds himself. Hux wanted them all to be together. He chose him.

The Hux on the recording eventually gets the twins to sleep. But he doesn’t fall asleep himself before shoving the room’s only cot to the door like a barricade. Ren knows Hux planned on staying awake longer than he actually had, from the uncomfortable slouch against the door, his blaster primed in his hand.

Ren watches Hux sleep for a while, his bony chest rising and falling. The golden cascade of his hair blurred to a warm grey in the monochrome of the recording. Fuck, he misses him. He wonders if Hux misses him, too. He tries so hard not to think about how Hux has yet to contact him, not a single ping.

When Hux shoots up, blaster aimed at the empty space above the twins’ cradles, Ren wonders if he’d truly lost his mind. Until Hux’s one-sided conversation reveals the unformed entity is on the side of the Resistance and on the side of the fate of the twins and Marin, and it’s clear to him Hux isn’t arguing with something self-fabricated. Ren remembers the ghost of Mara Jade, her wise, even stare as he trampled after Marin and Hux and the twins strapped to his chest. Her ghost must only be for Hux’s eyes, not for anything as man-made as a camera.

Seeing Hux on this recording is like seeing mutest starlight overhead, fully knowing the light that
shines in one’s eyes is light that’s traveled for countless lightyears. Ancient relics of space for his human eye to finally witness.

Hux begins to rock one of the twins, tapping her back with gentle certainty. He’s growing more confident in his caretaking. Hux even begins to hum a song, until he stops as if not knowing the next note. Ren watches on, enraptured. “I’ve been thinking of names for you. They have to be the best names. Beautiful names that will be venerated under your great power. I can’t call you ‘this one’ and ‘the other one’ for much longer,” Hux says with a smile. “I’ll come up with the perfect names, suitable names that you’ll never want to change. And no one will ever dare change them for you. They’ll be who you are.”

Hux lays kisses on the dark swirl of her hair. Closing his eyes Hux palms his baby’s soft head, Hux murmurs all the promises that he’ll never break. “No harm will come to you. He won’t ever again come near you,” Hux vows, face taut with regret, clearly meaning their other father. Ren’s powerless to stop the tears from surging a storm.

Chapter End Notes

i hope you guys liked the update! this is probs the only kylo/resistance/jedi heavy chapter for a while. next week we get back to hux's side of things! Also that last bit with Hux and the babies is from one of the first chapters of Lodestar where after Hux finds the twins on Kylo's ship, he goes to a stormtrooper base to care for his bbs and he's like hysterical bc of his trauma and everything.
Marin places his long arms atop his head, panting from his summertime jog. He slides a tab on his travel tracker, a device secured on his wrist. He’s done about ten percent more sprinting than yesterday. All in all, his workout is almost complete.

Over the last few years, he’s developed a liking for exercise. He even got Grandmother to buy him a personal computer along with his travel tracker, where he can access the holonet for different types of training to strengthen his growing body. And due to Hux’s persistence, he still has plenty of time for schoolwork. He always keeps his marks up while building his physical strength, and has a healthy balance for time with his sisters and of course, time for his best friend Lisbeth.

“You’re legs are longer than mine. It’s not fair,” she groans, once she catches up. “You have a biological superiority.”

“That’s not true,” Marin defends. “You just have to put the work into it.”

“Yeah, yeah. In another year you’re gonna be even more gargantuan.”

She’s probably right. It’s been over two years since he and his family arrived at Greendole. Seren and Taran have long since learned to walk and have been running around him in sloppy, spirited circles. Hux still has his job at the college archives, even in the off-season. Grandmother’s restaurant is still one of the best places to be in all of Greendole.

Marin’s sprung up like a chute of wild bamboo, almost as tall as Hux and a bit gangly if not for his forming bulk. Lisbeth is tall too, like her mother Naedie, but Marin has several inches on her. He imagines Lando Calrissian is tall like his daughter and granddaughter, wherever the hell he is.

“So does your running gadget tell us if we’re gonna get rained out?” Lisbeth pants, smirking at his wrist.

Intent to fulfill her request, Marin fiddles with the tracker. “Let’s see...” His tracker blips. It’s gonna be another dry day, drizzly at best. “Not likely, Lis.”

Marin gapes at Lisbeth’s sprinting form, a hilariously far distance. Wow.

At home, Seren and Taran are diligently plucking little crispy snacks from their plates at the table, one by one in their chubby-cheeked mouths. Grandmother is setting up dinner in the slow cooker so Hux doesn’t have to worry about it while she’s at work tonight, already in her work clothes that Hux had freshly pressed.

Marin flops on the living room couch, fully expecting Hux to storm in reprimanding him about his sweat over the clean furniture. Only when Hux comes in, he isn’t in his usual housewife home wear. He’s tucked in a buttoned shirt, snug pants, and shined shoes. Shined shoes? Seriously?

“You sure you’ll be home for the night?” Hux grins to his son, completely bypassing his scolding
session. He’s being uncharacteristically spirited.

This is the second time Hux asked him this in as many days. “Yeah, why?”

“Because, I’ll need you to watch the twins for me. Grandmother will be at work late, and I’ll be out.”

Marin can’t stifle the incredulity. “Out?”

“Out,” is all Hux says.

This won’t do. “Out where?”

“Can you watch them or not?” Hux asks, diverting the question. He and Grandmother share a silent conversation with their twin earnest looks.

“You didn’t tell him?” she chastises her son.

Hux clears his throat, readjusting the part in his hair.

Marin’s heartbeat spikes. Is that hair product shining red and blazing in his normally soft tangles? “Tell me what?”

Finally Hux spills the words Marin never wanted to hear. “I’ve got a date.”

“A date?” Marin glares. “With who?” Hux can’t go on a date. He has a family. He has more important things to do than be in a romantic relationship. And knowing Hux it’s probably with —“Is it with a man?” he blurs. Hux doesn’t need a fucking man.

“You see?” Hux sighs to his mother. “He has this thing about me dating men.”

“Marin,” Aems admonishes. “You know better than to judge your father about something like that.”

“It’s not—that wasn’t—” Marin sits up, mopping at his wild hair. “It’s fine. I don’t have a problem with it,” he lies. “You’re really going? Why? With who?”

“Remember what I told you? No one is gonna come between me and you all,” Hux tells his son, meeting his green eyes. “I’ll be back tonight. Please get the girls to bed for me.”

Marin frowns. “But—”

Seren and Taran wag their double ponytails as Hux says his goodbyes to his two little angels. “Bye-bye, Papa!”

“Bye-bye, my little ones,” he kisses their wispy, dark heads of hair. They beam up at him with their dark eyes. They bear eerily familiar pairs of eyes, like he’s seen their eyes in his life before the one he’s dedicated to his children. It’s rare that the strange feeling will surface, but he never forgets how it makes him feel.

And just quickly as he came in the room, Hux leaves, the speeder droning in the distance. Marin’s nostrils flare around his panicked breaths.

“Your father deserves to be happy, dear.” Grandmother bends over the back of the couch to peck a parting kiss on Marin’s cheek. “I’m off to work late. I love you.”
“Love you, too, Grandmother.”

Palms sweating against his knees, Marin stands to ask his baby sister’s for guidance. “Papa might be in danger, Seren and Taran. There’s got to be something we can do.” He indulges in the childish monologuing. The twins are surprisingly good listeners. They blink to him in serious consideration.

“Marie, juice. Juice in a cup,” Taran demands, condemning him with her dark stare.

Seren nods in agreement. “Me too. Juice in a cup.”

“Okay, juice first. Then, we hatch a plan.”

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His name is Don, and he works for Hux’s mother. Hux agreed to go on a date after the first time Aems proposed it, admittedly desperate to be in the company of a tall and handsome stranger. Don carries himself as a man with authority, which sweetens the deal. Hux finds authority sexy.

On the ride to their date spot of choice, Hux goes over the details he plans on divulging of his and his family’s past. Some half-truths, some outright lies. But while he’s determined to protect his post-First Order life, he is equally as determined to let out some pent up emotional and physical frustration.

Hux finds the bar that Don suggested, groaning internally at the unstable social atmosphere. Well, he has to start somewhere. Hopefully they can get a table on the patio.

Later in the night, Hux occupies the outdoor table on the side with his potential suitor, stirring his lightly alcoholic beverage with a twig of spice. Don—dark hair slicked back, sleeves of his henley tight around his biceps. Don’s conversation, however, is a bit dry. Mostly about his troublesome landlord, his other variety of lifestyle adjustments, and his past as a traveling merchant before he got into the chef business.

Unfortunately, Don visibly zones out anytime Hux brings up his children. Hux doesn’t really see this going anywhere, but it doesn’t mean he can’t have a bit of physical fun in the meantime. Don’s nice to look at and listen to. He's even got a waft of cologne that piques Hux’s hidden and underused carnal reactions within.

Down the next street, a few spectators eye the odd group combing the ground level speeder road. Marin’s parked his speeder at the public sidewalk, securing the straps of his toddler carrier. On his chest and on his back are strapped Taran and Seren respectively, their bright, giggling faces soaking up all the strange changes on their environment. This is a whole new adventure.

Marin rarely takes them outside, unless it’s with Hux or just to the beach in the backyard. Never has he used their toddler carrier, and certainly never while piloting a speeder. He learned how to drive Lisbeth’s speeder months ago and was confident enough in his skills to not fret over the safety of his sisters.

Seren and her sister have never had this much excitement. She gasps at the changes of light and sound and all the new faces ogling in their direction. Her sister babbles to her but she can’t see her. Marin is a big giant wall between them. She brushes her little fingers high to tangle in his sandy, wavy hair that tickle her head. “Marie, I want down,” she grumbles, not very comfortable bouncing
on his back.

“Not now, Seren. Here, eat a sweet bean stick,” he whispers, twisting around to pass her one from his belt in her tiny fist. She munches on it happily, silencing her for the time being.

They've passed four of the six bars and restaurants Marin would think Hux would go for a date. He's about to give up when he stumbles on a dimly lit bar with a patio serving as its sit-down area. The blue light shines off Hux’s red hair as he laughs at something someone said.

Someone being the large, muscular man across the high rising table. Marin’s hands claw into fists, blood thudding in his ears. A small part of him feared the worst, that Kylo Ren had found them and Hux was smitten with him even with their past barred from memory. But that was only his torment speaking for him. Hux has found a new potential home wrecker.

“Papa!” shouts Taran. She only has one concern in the entire universe: to smile and love her Papa, completely uncaring that she might ruin Marin’s mission. Marin jumps and claps a hand over her mouth, and the urge rises to use his powers to keep her quiet. But he can never muster the courage—just like how he hasn't manipulated Hux into doing anything he didn't already want to do since they came here to Greendole. So he settles on using his other talents. Like sneaking around and letting Taran chew on his fingers.

“Papa? Marie, where Papa go?” Seren hums sadly. She's not able to see him. Taran said ‘Papa’ but she can't see him. Coldness pools in her belly. She loves her Papa so much.

“We are hiding from Papa. It's a new game. Do you understand? So hush, now,” Marin says in an attempt to quiet their fussing.

“What?” they ask in unison, not yet able to conceptualize the act of deception.

All but growling in frustration, Marin shuffles down the other side of the bar, back behind the building where Hux won't be able to see. He zeros in on his target, reaching it with his powers to the man across the table from Hux.

“So then what happened?” Marin hears Hux ask using his Force senses to magnify his words. A smile warms his voice.

“The ship’s engine was full of those little mynocks. Just nibbling all the shelling. Scared the hell out of me that I dropped my towel and by then I was completely naked outside my ship. In retrospect, I should have dressed before checking why the power went out, even if I was mid-shower,” the man recalls his humorous anecdote. Marin wants to drive his fist in his face for seemingly no reason at all.

“Oh my,” Hux laughs. Marin wilts. Hux is genuinely enjoying his date. It almost makes Marin second guess himself. Just for a second, he considers turning around and going home.

Until he sees the selfish, disgusting heat in the man’s eyes. Marin pushes into the man’s thoughts. Don is his name. Don is already thinking about all the ways he can use and debase Hux, in graphic, perverted detail. Now Marin has a reason to break his nose.

But he can’t just go over there and start throwing punches. He’s got Seren and Taran to look after. And obviously Hux would find out when the man tells him who hit him. Which cannot happen, because Hux must never find out the extent of his meddling. Solidifying his tactic, Marin hands each of the twins another set of sweet bean sticks so they won’t be too distracting.

Marin concentrates, twisting the man’s thoughts and actions. Hux is in the middle of telling Don a
simple anecdote about a pediatrician visit when Don yawns obnoxiously, comically loud. Hand over the mouth, too. Marin snickers at his own ingenuity, making Don blink tiredly in annoyance.

Hux falters in his story at Don’s strange reaction. Because—what the hell?

“Sorry, I’m just,” Don shakes his head, frowning at the odd urge to yawn again. “I must be more tired than I thought.”

“Oh,” Hux mutters, munching on his dessert.

From the distance, Marin pushes another command to Don, a shockingly complicated maneuver, making him bend over Hux’s plate and sneeze noisily. Wetly, sloppily, all over Hux’s pristine dessert.

Hux reacts bodily, slapping a palm over his mouth. “Maybe we should call it a night,” he suggests, not bothering to keep the disgust from twisting his lips.

“Oh fuck, I’m sorry. I don’t know what came over me,” Don apologizes. Marin pushes into his mind again, feeding him words. “Must be my Bakurian fever. I’m probably having another outbreak.”

“Outbreak?” Hux deadpans.

Marin grins deviously, making Don form the words. “Oh, don’t worry. It’s transmitted through sexual contact.”

Hux nods, accepting that this date was a complete disaster. “Well, I really should be going. Thank you for dinner.”

Success! Marin pumps his fist, elated with pride. He feels powerful. As if nothing could ever happen without his say-so.

There must be a way to make Hux never want to date him again. And hopefully, never want him to date any man ever again. Marin makes Don pat his hip and shake his head in disbelief. “I must have forgotten my credits at home.”

Hux glares. “Oh, for the love of—don’t worry. I’ll take care of it.”

While Hux is fingering in his pocket for his credits, Don gapes in complete puzzlement the force that took over his logic and reasoning, sipping at his beer. Marin actually laughs. All too easy.

Flying too high in celebration, Marin carelessly probes Don’s mind. And sends a muscle spasm from his brain to flail the beer from his hand onto the table between them. Shooting up to his feet, Hux groans as his lap is splattered with the sticky drink.

“Are you kidding me?” Hux shouts in annoyance. Because really? Really?!?

“Papa!” Taran laughs. There he is! Jumping up like he’s ready to play another game. “Papa! Papa —ah!” she yelps when Marin sprints for the farthest direction.

Dammit! Cementing a hand over Taran’s blabbing mouth, Marin lunges for the nearest shadowed alleyway. He only senses Hux’s confusion, his ‘did I just hear…? No, no, it couldn’t have been.’ He’s nearly in the clear until—

“Papa!” shouts Seren, strapped to his retreating back in perfect view of their confused and beer-
splattered father. “Hi, Papa!” Yay! Papa is running towards them! She’s excited to give him a big hug and kiss. She’ll kiss the mad that he’s wearing on his face right off.

“Marin!” Hux calls, dumbfounded.

Maybe, just maybe, Marin can use his powers to twist Hux’s mind. But he doesn’t have the gall. There’s nowhere else to run. Marin turns, wincing as Taran greets her Papa with a cheery wave. “Hi, Papa! Hi, hi!”

Never had Hux expected to find his children unsupervised in a dark street-side alley. Interrupting him on his date, even though it was a complete and utter failure. “What are you doing here? Are you and the girls alright?”

Marin scrambles for the right words. “Woah, it’s you,” Marin nods, feigning surprise. “I was just taking them for a walk. Did you enjoy your date?”

“A walk? In town? After sundown?” Hux brackets his hands on his hips.

“Yes, a walk,” he replies indignantly. As if they actually needed walks like dogs.

But Hux isn’t having it. “Tell me the truth. You put them in harm’s way and I demand a real answer.”

“No, I didn’t. I was watching them,” Marin defends, forcing himself not to slouch.

Hux isn’t an idiot. “You followed me.”

Scrambling for answers, Marin paces close, as if Taran’s smiling face could somehow dissuade Hux from scolding him. It works only long enough for Hux to kiss his baby on her cheek and palm her head consolingly.

“Tell me,” Hux growls, leveling with his only son.

“Taran and Seren missed you so much. They wouldn’t shut up about it,” Marin presses, clawing on tight to his secret.

Hux narrows his eyes in scrutiny. “How did you get here? Did you walk?”

Dammit. Marin knows Hux would vehemently disapprove of him driving one of Grandmother’s speeders. “Yes.”

“Taran, sweetheart,” Hux leans in to kiss his daughter on her forehead. He knows Marin is lying. “Did you go fast? Zoom-zoom fast?”

Warm brown eyes widening, Taran laughs, recalling their crazy speeder trip from home into town. “So, so, so fast! So fast, Papa. Marie went fast.”

“I see.” Hux glares to his irresponsible son. “What the hell were you thinking? Did you even put them in their seats or did you let them hang of your back like monkeys?”

Flushed with shame, Marin frowns to the ground. “I didn’t even go that fast,” he lies.

Unbelievable. “So you took Seren and Taran from home—after sundown, jumped on a speeder without their safety seats, and followed me to a bar. Did I miss anything?”

“I wouldn’t let them get hurt,” Marin defends.
“Excuse me if I have a hard time believing that,” Hux groans, shaking his head. He looks back to his ruined dinner table, Don nowhere in sight.

At his father’s impulsive action, Marin bristles hotly. “At least I’m not trying to bring home some stranger. Some man who could hurt them.”

Under normal circumstances, Hux would go easy on his son for worrying and blaming and getting angry. But Marin willingly, deliberately put the twins at unnecessary risk! “I knew it. You didn’t come here for them. You came here to spy on me. You put them in danger because you couldn’t let me go on one date—”

“Men like him are disgusting! All they want to do is come into our home and do whatever they can to use you. He wasn’t gonna take care of Seren and Taran. He doesn’t care about them. All he cared about is using you.”

“Using me?” Hux badgers.

Could Hux really be this ignorant? “All he was thinking was about getting you cornered so he could have sex with you! That’s all he was thinking about. I came here to protect you and to make sure he never lays a hand on you, or Seren and Taran for that matter.”

Hux can’t even begin to wrap his mind around what kind of deranged beliefs his son has been harboring. Speechless, Hux mops a hand over his mouth.

Something fragile shatters in Marin’s heart, and there’s no stopping his torrent of emotion. “He was never gonna truly care about you. He’ll hurt you, again and again. He’ll never change. He’ll be a selfish, terrible person forever, and there’s nothing that will change that.” Tears fill his eyes. He’s not talking about Don anymore. He never truly was. “He has no place with us! He’ll never belong with us! We’re your family. Not. Him.”

There’s got to be an explanation for his son’s behavior. Something bottled up, that Hux can’t even begin to fathom. Anger evaporating, Hux meets his son’s wet eyes. “Marin. Please know that I would never let anyone hurt you or the twins. Please understand that.”

Marin smacks the frustrated tears from his cheeks. Skating on the edge. The smell of Kylo Ren’s skin and hair burning under the scorch of his lightsaber piques in his tormented memories. “I’ll make sure of it. In my own way.”

Admitting a momentary defeat, Hux instructs Marin to give him the twins and to take the speeder home and come back with the twins’ safety seats, as well as a helmet for his own head. Seren and Taran are incredibly happy to be sitting on their Papa’s lap, listening him tell stories with his long arms wrapped around them securely. They kiss his smiling cheeks. Hopefully they can go zoom-zoom fast again soon, back home, so they can finally eat their dinner.

There’s no more ignoring what’s happened with Marin. A chill pricks him when he goes over his son’s tirade.

It finally dawns on him that Marin knew what Don was thinking. He used his manipulation skills to read him, and there’s no longer a doubt that he used the same skills to ruin his date. But he bypasses the anger and disapproval, fearing for his son’s mental wellness.
Not even a week after the incident with Hux’s failed date, Hux approaches Marin with an idea.

“You want me to go to therapy?” Marin asks, throat closing around his aversion to the idea.

“No. It's not therapy. It's counseling,” Hux explains.

“Therapy, basically.” He's not offended. If Hux thinks he's crazy, so be it. At least he'll be able to keep their family safe.

Hux joins his son on the sofa, smiling comfortingly. He passes Marin a mug of hot chocolate. “You haven't let me tell you the best part.”

Marin takes the drink. He really does like sweets. “What?”

“I've arranged for you to meet with Lisbeth’s mother. She's a trained psychologist. I just want you to be able to talk to someone who you can trust.”

Lisbeth’s mother? Naedie Calrissian? “And you've met her?” Marin asks. It's not that he dislikes Lisbeth’s mother, but she's only one degree of separation from her father Lando Calrissian, and he's only one degree of separation from Han Solo. He doesn't feel comfortable knowing she and Hux met.

“No, but her name came up when I went to the school for resources. I told the clinic that she would be a good match for you. And I spoke to her over the clinic’s message channel and she told me that what you two discuss will be entirely confidential. It's her duty to keep any and everything you say from not only your friend Lisbeth but also from me.”

“You told the school?” What if he does end up going to therapy and the whole school finds out?

“The counseling her clinic provides is very renowned. Several of your peers are enrolled in sessions.” Hux palms his son’s cheek. “It's for your own good.”

Marin frowns into his warm cup of hot chocolate. “How long do I have to go?”

“Once a week. Just for a little while. I suspect you'll enjoy getting your frustrations out in the open. Just imagine it: a whole hour’s worth of cursing my name,” Hux grins knowingly.

“I wouldn't curse your name,” Marin mutters. “But,” he swallows, anxiety goading. “I'll try it out.”

Hux kisses his forehead. Marin might be nearly six feet tall, and his cheekbones might point high and masculine, and his shoulders might be getting broader than his own. But he's never too old for a loving kiss.

Marin meets with Miss Naedie the following weekend. Hux waits in the clinic’s lobby, promising to take him for a walk along the boardwalk afterwards to celebrate.

“You don't have to discuss anything that you don't want to,” Hux encourages.

“Don't worry, I won't give up our evil past,” Marin snorts.

That makes Hux laugh comically loud, causing a few of the clinic’s patrons to ogle them in scrutiny. Hux sobers. “Thank you for doing this. I'll be out here when you're finished.”

The attendant calls Marin in, and with a deep, deep breath, he passes the threshold and meets Miss
Naedie on the other side.

Naedie greets him with a warm smile. “Marin, good to see you. Follow me.” She guides the boy to a softly lit alcove. It’s private if not for the window overlooking a courtyard, a few of the clinic’s patients and staff and medical droids thrumming peacefully below.

Marin finds a spot on one of the three identical cozy armchairs, and Naedie takes the one closest to him.

“How has school been going?” she begins. She’s not recording their session, not in any obvious way. Marin imagines she has a hidden camera somewhere, cataloguing his micro-expressions for scientific analysis.

Marin scrapes his nails against his palms. “It’s been uneventful.”

“Uneventful? How so?”

“Just the same old, same old.”

Naedie nods, rolling the words around. “Do you like when things stay the same?”

Genuinely considering the question, Marin studies the wall, its plaster casing giving the appearance of papers folded in on each other. “I appreciate consistency.”

“What do you do when things change?” she asks, non-confrontational.

He schools his features into complacency. “What do you mean?”

“When they veer from normalcy?”

He pauses a little too long. “I figure it out.”

“It’s good to plan. Your father must be very proud of you,” she commends.

Marin doesn’t really know what to say to that.

“You’re lucky to have him. Fathers don’t always stick around.”

Marin’s lip twitches. “Hux is really more like my mother than anything,” he says.

Naedie chuckles. “Is he?”

“Well, yeah. He’s very...motherly.”

“What about your actual mother? Where is she?”

Marin supplies her with a partial truth. It’s the best way to lie. “Hux is my only parent. He carried me and my baby sisters in his womb. It was part of an experiment.”

Something flashes in Naedie’s eyes, something akin to visceral recognition. As if she’s doing the math, calculating Marin’s lies and stripping them apart. His heart races. He’s just about to scratch the surface of her mind with his Force powers when she shakes her head.

“That’s incredible, you know,” she says. “You and your sisters are miracles.”

“That’s what my father always says,” Marin smiles softly.
Naedie nods, wistful. He suspects she’s imagining her own father, their convoluted history.

“I’m sorry,” Marin mutters, without thinking.

This piques Naedie’s interest. “For what?”

He really shouldn't have said anything. Cursing his miscalculation, Marin sends another figurative apology to Lisbeth. “I know about Lando.”

Marin can see Naedie get a whole shade paler. He adjusts his bottom on the armchair. “Lisbeth let it slip. I don't mean to stick my nose where it doesn't belong, but I just wanted to let you know that I'm really happy you and Lisbeth made it out of the war. I'm glad you both are safe.”

Amiably, Naedie meets Marin’s shy smile with her own. “I appreciate that. I love my father, and I loved my mother, but I knew Lis should grow up in peace. I didn't want my fight to be forced on her.”

“She is lucky to have you.”

She concedes, chuckling to herself, recalling every detail of her and her daughter's very typical teenager and parent relationship.

The meeting is going swimmingly, Marin decides. Miss Naedie gets him to discuss his goals after his schooling is over. He wants to care for plants and animals and other lifeforms. He tells her that Hux once told him he should volunteer at a shelter for ‘unfortunate lifeforms,’ as he put it. But it never came to pass. Hux never really pushed him to help others. It’s never been one of Hux’s priorities.

“You enjoy helping others?” Naedie inquires, heedful of the time limit to their session.

“I do.” Mostly his family, but sometimes he helps his teachers, his peers and genuinely enjoys it.

“And what does your father think when you try and go out of your way to help?”

“I mean, he appreciates it when I help Grandmother. He says it's my duty.”

“What about when it isn't?” Marin frowns. “When wouldn't it be?”

“Like if there's someone in need. Like a woman with a bag that needs carrying, stuff like that.”

“I dunno. Hux and I are really only concerned with ourselves.” He's never really helped anyone that unnecessarily. He can imagine he would be more inclined to do so if he completed his Jedi training. “We like structure. When things go according to plan.”

“That's good,” she nods. Marin expects her to ask ‘what do you do when you fail?’ or ‘do you choke under pressure?’ But the adversarial questions never come. Miss Naedie is here to talk with him, not judge him.

The session ends on a good note, discussing his little sisters and their unique behaviors, his grandmother and her business. When Marin leaves the office, he's already looking forward to the next session.

Hux is still in the lobby right where Marin left him. “How'd it go?” he asks, setting down a slip of reading material he was thumbing through while Marin was inside.
“Really well, actually,” Marin replies, truthful. “Miss Naedie was easy to talk to.”

Hux breaks into an elated grin, and Marin can't help his own from blooming.

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“Off to the cool kids table, Poe?” smirks one of Poe’s pilots.

“You know how it is,” he jibes, tray of foodstuffs in hand. “Gotta keep up appearances.”

Luke, Finn, and Rey set themselves up at one of the cafeteria’s tables, gorging on a late lunch after a busy morning of training. They greet Poe with nods of comradery.

Kylo Ren slinks in, his dog trailing after him in hopes for some lunch. Pointedly, he ignores the table of Jedi and friends. He stands in line behind a pair of glaring Resistance medics. Rey can sense their unbridled animosity from the length of the cafeteria.

“Dammit, I can’t believe I’m finally about to admit this,” Finn groans, eying Ren while viciously chewing his soup-dipped roll.

Rey frowns. “What?”

“You can’t judge me for what I’m about to say.” Finn braces for judgement anyway.

Rey urges him with an unimpressed look. “Finn…”

He sighs, meeting her bright eyes. “I feel so bad for him. There, I said it.”

As if it isn’t clear who Finn’s referring to, Rey starts. Until a succinct clatter startles her to look in Ren’s direction once more. Ren’s tray of food is splattered on the duracrete floor and his dog tries in vain to lap up the food. The two medics smirk as Ren attempts to clean up the mess they clearly made, including the dark liquid striping his cover shirt and cargo pants. But Ren pays their teasing no mind. He focuses on cleaning up the mess.

Finn shakes his head at the whole scene. “Just look at him. I don’t even recognize him.”

“I dunno, can you blame those guys?” Poe asks. “It’s not exactly undeserved treatment.”

Finn makes a face that says _what the hell, obviously I know that_. “I don’t just mean the tray flipping. Like, he doesn’t even do anything. After that one mission, it’s like he’s a zombie.”

“He was a zombie before that, too,” Rey concedes. “And the fact that you feel for him is only a reflection of how noble you are, Knight Finn,” she nods, the nickname one of their favorite Jedi jokes.

Finn chuckles. “Well, Knight Rey, I take that as a compliment.”

“It’s gonna take time,” Master Luke speaks up. The only person who’s truly come around to spending time with him is Leia. If not for her, Ben would probably lock himself away on the Falcon, meandering in the nearby forest like a hermit. Luke couldn’t be more grateful they’ve rekindled their relationship. He and Leia always had faith that could be done. The rest of the Resistance, however, doubtful. He and Ben are on speaking terms, yes, but there’s way too much
baggage to be dissected in just a few standard years.

It’s been over two years, and Rey still has yet to have a complete conversation with Ren.

“What about you?” Finn turns to Rey. “Do you feel bad for him?”

Does she? Can she? After everything he’s done to her and their family? He lost his partner, his children—but he’s taken the lives of countless partners, parents, and children. He’s ruined countless lives, destroyed families, entire worlds.

“There’s a huge difference between empathy and forgiveness,” she says, uncharacteristically cold. She stares far off, finding the goodness in herself. “But yes, I pity him,” she continues. “There’s been enough suffering in this galaxy.”

Luke smiles fondly at his daughter’s wisdom. If only Mara Jade was alive to see her now.

Across the cafeteria, Ren wads up paper towels to clean the sopping mess from his shirt. Abie whistles consolingly. What those medics did was considerate compared to the cacophony of horrors he once inflicted on their friends and allies. He finishes his meager cleaning job, snatching something portable to eat on his way back to the Falcon.

Ren hasn't gone on a Resistance led mission since the mishap on Mardromitan, the planet that Hux nurtured their daughters on for the first few weeks of their lives. There isn't a day that goes by where Ren doesn't pull up his screen captures of the security footage. Besides Marin’s dog, the recordings are all he has of Hux and their children. That, and the uneven scar marring the nape of his neck, inflicted by his son’s vengeful hand.

As he understands, the Resistance hasn't felt the need for his assistance. Including his mother, they feel far, far more confident in the skills of the Jedi and their talented Starfighter pilots like Dameron. Heroes deserving of praise and improvement. Not mass murderers. And he’s still on planetside-arrest.

Ren slogs outside in the damp afternoon air, his twists of dark, unkempt hair frizzing in the buoyant atmosphere. He hears a scuffle of footsteps to his right flank, but pushes on, albeit a bit faster on the mark.

A sharp butt of a blaster whips into the susceptible flesh of his skull. Agonized and blinded, Ren scrabbles for control but the assailants are too fast for Ren to keep up.

“You think you're one of us? You think we don't know what you are?” they hiss, driving their boots into his stomach. Ren groans around their onslaught, begging for his muscles to work. His ears ring as Abie barks and snarls. One of the men shouts, and from the corner of Ren’s tearing eye, he sees Abie gnawing at his sleeve.

Two bone crunching smacks echo in his head, and the beating stops altogether. Panting, Ren blinks up at his savior.

Chewbacca gnarrs in contempt at the pitiful state of Han’s son. He cocks his furry head. You should be more careful, he gnarrs in Shyriiwook. The Princess would be heartbroken if anything happened to you.

Ren whimper, clutching at his cracked and possibly fractured ribs. He can just make out Chewbacca’s growls. “Thank you,” he winces. These are the first words he’s spoken to Chewbacca in ages. They were the last words he spoke to his father before he released him to the bowels of Starkiller’s oscillator.
Chewbacca hums curiously at Abie, who yelps in civil acknowledgement. Bending down, Chewbacca pats her head. *Neat dog,* he growls.

“She’s Marin’s.” Ren gets to his feet, body screaming as he straightens his spine.

*You’re watching her for him?* Chewbacca inquires. He has many fond memories of that troubled little boy. He has many fond memories of this troubled boy, too.

Shyriiwook is a far more complex language than Ren remembers, so it takes him a while to work over the familiar whirrs and gnarrs. “Yeah. Just until he comes back.” It’s been years, several threesome years. He never would have made it on his own.

*How’s the Falcon?* Chewbacca tries. The Princess—the General—told him Ben had commandeered it, taken care of it over these years he spent away.

Ren hacks violently around a spasm of his scarred lungs, one of the many torments to his body that were of consequence to his own free will. There are more potent torments that inflict on those around him, as a consequence of his deliberate, malicious actions. Including Chewbacca, who he’s never truly apologized to, nearly eight years after Ren had killed his best friend. Eight years. A lifetime ago. So much has changed since then.

Chewbacca’s question has yet to be answered. A garbled, wet, “I’m sorry,” claws from Ren’s throat. It takes everything in his heart to meet Chewbacca’s wise, patient eyes.

Chewbacca makes an undecipherable soft purr, and Ren half expects him to deliver to his skull what he delivered to Ren’s two assailants.

*I know,* Chewbacca says after sensing Ben’s distress. Clearly, he knows exactly what he’s apologizing for. He’s had years and years to come to terms with Han’s death, with Ben’s betrayal solidified by the stab of his electric red blade. *I know you would take it back if you could.*

Ren nods, wrapping his arms around his battered stomach.

Abie pads over to lick the warm tears on his cheeks. She hums as her new furry friend murmurs a consoling growl, leaving her alone to lick her friend’s wounds.

The doors he had just left from slides open, and Ren flinches at the disturbance, lest the Resistance fighters come back for another round of beating.

But it isn’t them. It’s the saintly trio. Naturally, Finn, Rey, and Poe are the ones to see him at his peak pathetic state.

Finn frowns to Rey. *Did he just—*

*Get his ass beat? Probably,* she replies over their mental connection. She nods to Finn to propose what they discussed moments prior.

Finn steps up to the plate. “So. We talked about the possibility of having you join us on missions. Mostly Rey and I, maybe sometimes Poe. We haven’t told General Organa yet, but we’re pretty sure what her answer may be.”

Ren doesn’t bother getting up. He’d like to be on the ground for a while. But he’s oddly touched they came up with this on their own.

It’s Rey that speaks up next to clarify Finn’s shaky proposal. “By missions, we mean search
parties. We’ve been looking for them. Your family.” She tries not to be fazed by Ren’s vulnerable stare. “We think it would be best if you came along. Now, I’m fairly confident the council won’t agree to letting you leave unsupervised, but as long as you’re with us as our ward—”

“Let’s do it. I’m ready,” Ren interrupts, shooting to his feet.

The raw humanity in Ren’s smile has the trio reflecting tentative smiles back. Hope. Hope is a powerful force that shines luminously in souls, particularly in ones that were once certainly damned.

Chapter End Notes

marin you are NOT being a very good ally...let your dad be gay in peace! (even if you are inadvertently preserving him for kylo in the future lmaoooo)

i really hope you all liked this chapter!
Chapter 20

Hux pushes his cart of books to the next aisle, pointedly ignoring the inquisitive ganders of the archives patrons. He's by no means a new face to the other employees, but most of the students are only here from a few weeks to a few months. The institution isn't categorically a long term school like the academies on Arkanis.

But the students look at him with colorful interest and concern, as if he's the one out of place and temporary. It's not enough to cause discomfort, just enough for him to notice he just might not belong in their judgmental eyes. Hux takes his cart of books to stack in the places in which they fit.

Students occasionally disregard the archives rules and reshelve books where they don't belong. One book sticks out, its spine reading *Between the Shadows: How the Empire Never Truly Fell* is tucked with books on paper craft and Felucian tablecloth weaving.

The fact that this particular displacement angers Hux disproportionately to how it should, as if his father is taunting him and his chosen lifestyle from beyond the shroud of death, only worsens the severity of his shift. He wants to go home and play with the girls and indulge in homey comforts, like popping open a roll of premade biscuit dough and have his girls fold in little cheeses and meats in the dough to bake for a midday snack.

Hux focuses on his work. His shift ends as he passes off his desk to the filer scheduled after him. He refuses to refer to his boss as such, for he only follows the instructions he chooses to. Marin seems to be the same in that respect, insubordinate to his superior unless it suits his needs or the outcome has no personal stake for him.

He's nearly out the door from the archives when one of the students he recognizes in passing stops him with a small wave. Hux forces himself to complacently greet the young man.

"Heading out?" the stranger asks, friendliness all that he projects. Hux eyes the man's physical superiority to him, his dark hair tugged up into a ponytail. He's averagely handsome. As much as Hux wishes he was on his way to his speeder, he enjoys ogling averagely handsome men.

"Yes. My replacement is at the front desk and he'll be happy to help you," Hux tries. After the debacle with Don and his son's mildly improving attitude, Hux can't distract himself from his children. The risk is too great.

The man smiles looks a bit caught off guard. Hux swallows, on instinct. It's clear the man has no interest in getting his help for the archives. "That's not it. I just was wondering if you have any plans tonight. A few of my friends and I are having a get together downtown. I was hoping to extend the invitation."

Impulsively, Hux flushes. "I'm flattered, but..." he tries to find the right phrasing. "My current situation doesn't allow for dating."

But this isn't what the man meant at all. He laughs off the misunderstanding. "Oh, I didn't mean it
like that! You're a good looking dude, but I'm more into the ladies. I just thought, since I've seen
you working here for the past few semesters, it looks like you kind of keep to yourself.”

It's sickeningly sweet the way this man extends comradery, and Hux can't help but be intrigued. “I
do kind of keep to myself. Maybe a little too often. I appreciate the offer but I have my kids at
home. I can't leave them unattended tonight.”

“Kids? Wow, how old?” he man asks. His easy to please interest reminds Hux of someone from a
past life.

“Two three year olds and a thirteen year old,” Hux replies. My, how time flies.

“Sounds anything but boring.”

Hux shakes his head. “You don't know the half of it,” he says, and smiles at the barrage of feeling
that tides over his heart whenever he thinks about his children.

The man smiles back, then extends a hand. “I'm Rinn, by the way.”

Hux hesitates a moment before accepting the man’s handshake. “Hux.” Rinn. The name makes his
stomach flip.

“Well, Hux, if you have three year olds, maybe they'd be interested in visiting the aquarium I
volunteer at. It's maybe a ten minutes on foot from here. Plenty of stuff for little kids.”

Rinn flourishes a small plastic card with a glittering logo. *South Greendole Aquarium and Science
Center*. Hux takes it between his slight fingers. “You volunteer?” An idea strikes him. “Do they
have any programs for teenagers?”

Rinn smiles, all dimples. Hux is glad he already knows the man would never be interested in
dating him. He doesn't want another incident like last year, the one and only time he went on a
date.

“There are plenty. You should stop by sometime. I'd be more than happy to show you the ropes,”
Rinn says. “Well, I won't hold you up any longer. I'm sure you’re dying to head out. Glad I caught
you in time.”

Hux mutters a thank-you and manages to shake Rinn’s hand. “I really appreciate this. My son and I
haven't been ok the best of terms. Maybe this is the fix we need.”

“Oh, not a problem. I'm glad I could help.”

Hux excuses himself and pockets the card, vowing to revisit it soon.

When Hux gets home, Seren and Taran are in the living room playing with their toys. His mother
lounges on his reading chair, eyeglasses poised on her nose and datapad in hand. Marin’s friend
Lisbeth is there, working diligently alongside him. Their noses are in their books but Hux can feel
his son’s senses on him. Like Hux just snuck out and Marin’s been waiting up all night. The very
idea is preposterous, and Hux snorts on his way to the kitchen.

“How was your day?” Marin asks, probing veiled and subtle.

“It was fine. The usual,” he hums, preparing a cup of tea. It helps him relax.

Lisbeth offers Hux a greeting, who reciprocates one without a hitch. She's never really talkative
when it comes to Marin’s dad. It’s not that they aren’t friendly, but she fears she’ll say the wrong thing or piss him off somehow. Hux has this air about him like he only cares about the people living under this roof. Like, only them. Like everyone else on Rhiannon could die and he wouldn’t care, as long as his family was safe.

When Hux finds a place with his tea in the living room, his girls greet him with smiles. “Papa, how are you?” asks Taran from her play area, bright like sunlight.

“As wonderful as ever,” Hux grins, always happy to converse with his intuitive toddlers.

“As wonderful as ever?” Seren parrots. She loves repeating words and phrases, just like her sister.

“Of course. What did you and Grandmother do today?” His mother smiles at him from across the room. He knows she loves spending her days off with her grandchildren.

“Gramma went to the park. We walked by the flowers,” Seren explains, scooting on her bottom to get a toy from her sister’s pile. Taran obliges. She knows better than to fight over their toys.

“Oh, flowers? What kind?”

“Big lellow ones,” she says. “And blue ones. I tried to grab them but Gramma said it would poke my hand.”

“Good thing she made sure you wouldn’t get hurt on the pretty yellow and blue flowers.” Hux can feel the aquarium’s card through his pocket. “Would you like to go have fun with sea animals this weekend? You might be able to see some neat things. Maybe even pet them.”

“Animals?” Taran perks up. Taran loves animals. There are so many animals that live outside their home. “What animals?”

“All kinds. Big ones that swim, little ones that crawl. We can all go. We can make a day of it. And then we can go to Marin’s favorite food window on the boardwalk. How’s that sound?”

His girls cheer in excitement, earning a twinkling smile of approval from his mother. She truly is the guiding light of his life.

Marin shuffles at the table. “What’s this about animals?” he asks nonchalantly. Lis focuses on her assignment, hoping Marin and his dad can keep things civil.

“I almost forgot to ask the person who this activity hinges on,” Hux says singsong to his girls, who smile at the delightful noise from their papa.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Marin bristles.

“It’s an aquarium. There are volunteering opportunities there that I think will do you some good.” Marin frowns. “Is therapy not enough?” He turns to Lis, who knows how Marin ultimately feels about therapy sessions with her mother. “No offense.”

“None taken,” she shrugs. She eyes him as if saying, ‘put out the fire you're breathing.’

“I really hope you outgrow this brooding phase,” Hux grumbles. He doesn't allow his son much of an opportunity for rebuttal. “You still have at least a few hours of free time a week, or every other week. It'll look good on your transcripts. If you ever decide to pursue higher education.”

Marin straightens himself out. There he goes again, being angry for no damned reason at all. It's
not Hux’s fault. Anytime he gets angry, he’s immediately reminded of that holocron prophecy Kylo Ren had shown him, all those years ago, and that just makes him angrier. If only he could talk it over with someone. But he can’t just tell his therapist that to some long gone, ancient, dark sided society, he might be the harbinger of the galaxy’s destruction. And he certainly can’t tell Hux that. He doesn’t need that kind of stress.

“Alright. I’ll try it out,” Marin says. “Maybe Lis could come along.” Lisbeth makes a noise of confusion that goes largely ignored by him.

“I don’t see why not,” Hux hums. He’s just glad Marin quenched his arguing in the bud. Maybe this is what’s been missing in his son’s life.

The weekend arrives, and the unit approaches the aquarium. They find public parking in a garage, Hux’s speeder fitted with proper safety gear for the girls, and Marin and Lisbeth’s speeder helmetless and irresponsibly fast.

Lis smiles giddily watching Hux unstrap the ostentatious belts and pads that secure the twins, from their chest harnesses to their bulky helmets. Marin sighs at her titillation. Clearly she has no idea how annoying and tedious Hux’s strict safety regimens are.

Not for the girls; Marin would much rather have them encased like canned fish. But Hux hasn’t let him pilot speeders alone without having him check diagnostics first, in front of him, after he tried lying and saying he already had.

Hux takes a little hand in each of his larger ones and leads them onto the street. Some of the commoners coo in adoration of the adorable bouncing girls, to which Hux smiles stiffly. He’s not unused to the attention, unfortunately.

“Is this it?” Taran asks when they approach a large glittering building with sky-reflecting windows and a sign with an aqueous logo punctuating its purpose.

“Yes, dear. We’re going to go to the refresher first, after we buy our tickets,” Hux tells his girls. Marin holds the door open for Hux and the girls, as well as a family that trails in after them. Hux smirks at his son’s thinly veiled impatience.

They purchase a family pass for the year, to which Marin and Lis gawk at. Hux seems awfully sure that they’ll enjoy their time here. He probably doesn’t want to let Marin get any ideas that his volunteering is optional.

Lis and Marin hover in the outside hall of the refreshers while Hux tends to the girls. They can hear the girls elevate their voices in the echoing chamber from the outside of the door, along with Hux’s hushed reprimand. The twins love hearing their own voices, and what they can do.

“This place is pretty cool,” Lis tells her friend. Marin displays only indifference at the immaculate ocean themed fixtures, like he’s too old for this.

“I guess.”

“I thought we talked about this,” Lis frowns. “This ‘having fun’ thing. You’re slacking off.”

“I just get on edge, you know? With anything that involves my father. And others.” Especially others.

“You, on edge?” Lis says, dripping with sarcasm.
“Oh, Lis. You know what I mean.”

The refresher door slides open to reveal Hux and his giggling toddlers, their eyes wide and excited towards the high ceiling skylights. Large ornamental fish and whale sculptures cascade from the ceiling downward. The twins poke their pointer fingers in awe.


“Yes, it certainly is. Ready to see some big fish swimming around?” Hux tells his girls. “This way. Now if Papa lets go of your hand, you have to remember to follow and stay close, understood?”

“Yes, okay,” the twins say. Seren reaches over to Marin’s hand in a silent request to hold his instead. Her big brother obliges, but he doesn't smile as bright as Papa does. At least he smiled this time.

The unit moves to the first exhibit. It's a floor to ceiling wall of transparisteel encased fish tank, with droves of small and large fishes alike, all shapes and sizes from as large as a dinner table to as small as the palm of Seren’s hand plastered on the tank. Hux marvels at his daughters’ interest and intense awe at the enormity of the display.

“Ooh!” Taran gasps when a striped sea turtle paddles by, all six of its fins moving in synchronization. “Papa did you see that?”

“I sure did,” Hux smiles, resting his legs on a nearby bench.

A smaller, infantile turtle zips right after it. “Lis, look it. It's so tiny,” chuckles Seren, needing her friend to see the tiny turtle.

“Wow, do you think that one is his mommy?”

Seren frowns. She wants to learn a new word. “What's a mommy?”

Lis’s eyes widen to saucers. She can't believe what she just said! It's so insensitive and careless. She looks to Marin and then to Hux, who are both suppressing surprised smirks. “Um…a mommy is like a daddy. Or a papa,” she tries.

Thankfully, Seren understands. “Oh okay. Papa is mommy?” she asks, wanting to make sure.

Somehow, Lis managed to make it worse. But Marin and Hux are only interested in the hilarity of Seren’s observations versus Lis’s backpedaling. “Um. Yes?” is what Lis comes up with. The answer appears to appease everyone enough, even Hux, who's abnormally benevolent today, and Marin, who always supports Lis on all fronts.

They move on to the tubelike hall that leads to the other exhibits, the concave transparisteel submerging the patrons into the deep sea world of fish and cephalopods. Seren and Taran babble about nearly every creature, begging their papa to pick them up to see the creatures up close.

Marin feels a bit better now that his sisters are having fun. The impending fact of his possible future volunteering here doesn't seem so daunting anymore. It might even be fun.

Tank after tank, small and large, saltwater and freshwater, fish and mammal, the girls eventually make it to the kid’s sections—the petting pools. Hux is a bit wary of his daughters exposing themselves to unnecessary germs, but he sees plenty of hand sanitizing stations.

Seren and Taran stand on two stools with their bellies to the edge of a small pool, Hux hovering
behind them. There's a woman instructing them how to touch the critters, and what to expect when they try and do more than touch.

The instructor looks down at the small crowd of children. “Now these creatures have shells and exoskeletons, but they can still feel things. Careful to ask for an adult helper to pick them up and show you what they look like from all angles,” she says in an animatedly friendly voice. “And can you all show me how many fingers we are using to touch?”

Seren and Taran know the answer. The lady told them just moments ago. “One finger. Like this,” Taran says, holding up her pointer finger.

“That's right! And Mommies and Daddies, please watch your little ones and make sure they're not bending too far into the water, okay,” says the instructor cheerily to the parents.

Seren is glad Lis taught her that new word, or she would have been confused. “Mommy, catch my legs if I fall,” Seren tells Hux, who flushes in embarrassment but offers the visibly perplexed instructor a shrug. He supposes she's not wrong.

Behind them, Lis groans in shame and Marin elbows her in amusement. At least she got Marin to smile.

“This one, Seren. It's a pokey,” Taran mutters to her sister. The little shelled creature crawls towards Seren as if to greet her and share its strange texture.

Seren giggles when it brushes under her fingertip. “Papa, look it. It likes us.”

“Of course it likes you both. You're hands are probably the cleanest of all the ones they've seen all day,” he says, marveling at his little girls. A nearby mother of a splashing, blabbing toddler tosses him a dirty look, to which he challenges with a perfect sneer.

Hux is confident his girls could play in the touch pools for hours, but he warns them to get their touching in so they can move onto the other exhibits, including the carnivore one with live feeding demonstrations. Hux is probably looking most forward to that, even if it's crowded.

Hux sees the ‘volunteer’ tag on the instructor’s shirt. Perhaps she might have some information on volunteering for his son.

“Lis,” Hux calls, and the pair come over from their corner of gossip. “Would you mind tending to the girls while Marin and I talk to the volunteer?”

“Not a problem,” she says enthusiastically. Oddly thrilled Hux asked her to do something, as if he actually likes her as a person.

“You, come with me,” Hux tells his very large, very young son. Marin expresses no ill emotions at the shortness in Hux’s tone, but his blankness is always foretelling of what's to come.

They chat with the volunteer girl, for a short while about the programs offered at the aquarium. The girl smiles up to Marin. “You're looking for something to puff up that resume? Are you graduating up to the college this year?”

“Oh, no. He's barely a teenager,” Hux says, talking for him. “Just something for the future. Never too young to think about that.” There's something in Hux that falters at his son appearing as a college student. He's only just turned thirteen. Somehow, the very thought of seeing his son as a man sinks his heart with unease.
“Oh, okay. Well, most of our programs are for students sixteen and up. But I'm sure I could talk to my supervisor. They might let you sign a waiver or something,” says he girl.

“What if I have a referral? Will that do any good?” Hux pushes.

Marin doesn't like to be pushed. “From who?” he asks, low.

Hux holds up his hand in a gesture that says ‘don't start with this.’

“With whom?” asks the girl.

“Rinn. I know him from work.” Hux ignores the confused tenseness from his son, focusing on getting Marin a position at this establishment by any means necessary.

“Rinn? He's my superior. He should be at the carnivorous fish and amphibian exhibit upstairs. I could comm him, if you like. He can probably expedite the selection process.”

“Rinn?” Marin frowns. He's never heard of a Rinn. Hux has never mentioned him. And the name sounds suspiciously familiar, and familial.

“Shut up and let me help you,” Hux mutters to his son through his teeth, and turns to the girl. “No need. We can just make our way up there. Can't we, Marin?”

After a heavy moment, Marin gets control of his possessive feelings. He knows he shouldn't overreact. This is just a professional interaction. A business transaction. “Yes,” he tells Hux. “Of course.”

Hux blooms into a smile. “Well then. Thank you for your time,” he tells the girl, who appreciates his thanks and goes back to the touch pools.

“Let's get your sisters to the sanitizing station, before I have a fucking stroke,” Hux smirks to his son, who laughs, all teeth.

Hux falters once more. Not only is it extremely rare for Marin to smile, let alone laugh in front of him, but as the days pass on, as Marin gets older, Hux sees the minute, steady changes in his boy’s inward attitude and outward appearance. His smile, for one, dimples in such a way that makes Hux’s heart lurch in remorse for something he lost long ago. Sometimes Hux’s mind plays tricks and his heart summons the same nostalgia in his daughters’ twinkling brown eyes.

Hux and Lisbeth help the girls sanitize their hands and ready them for the next exhibits. They pass through another tunnel, this time the only sources of light are the bioluminescent fins and tendrils of the sea creatures soaring high above their heads. The girls gasp and gaze in awe.

“It's like stars, Papa,” Taran says, astonished. “Marie, look, his arms are lighted,” Seren tells her brother, needing him to see the strange willowy, glowing creatures bowing overhead through the glass.

“Yes, his arms sure are lit,” he corrects. The girls’ attentions are solely on the creatures and not their brother's grammar lesson.

“Something like this would have probably terrified me when I was this young,” Lis murmurs to Marin, so Hux and he girls can't hear. “Then again so is Hux. And you.”

Marin snickers. His friend never fails to make him smile. “You find us scary?”
“Not thirteen year old Lis. But three year old Lis would have probably peed her pants.”

Hux turns around to find his son and his best friend snickering like thieves. He's so glad Marin’s found someone to connect with.

They pass through more floor to ceiling wall-side tanks, Hux intently watching as his girls weave through the crowds to get to each exhibit. Marin and Lis are off in the corner chatting and flipping through the information screens. Hux would very much be content if Marin had a future with her.

He'd also be content, even excited to meet the girl's mother. But anytime he asks, Marin opposes as if it were a cardinal sin. Perhaps he doesn't want the girl's mother to think he's trying to court her by making their parents meet. Hux frowns, because his son is definitely too young to be thinking about courting anyone.

They approach the elevator that takes the masses up to the next level. Hux carries Seren and Marin carries Taran, until Taran politely asks for Lis to hold her for their trek to the upper levels. The twins’ little legs and feet are sore but it does little to dampen their exhilaration.

The carnivorous fish and amphibian exhibit is by far the most crowded of all the halls, and it's for good reasons. Lifeforms of all creeds gather to watch beasts devour their prey. But it isn't a celebration of death and destruction as one would imagine, but an expression of the fragility of life, as well as the importance of appreciating the passage of energies from one being into the next. This demonstration just happens to involve lots and lots of teeth.

Hux finds a booth to the side where the crowd is thinner and where the exit is closer. Seren and Taran gasp at the expanse of the pool before them. It's hard to believe this is the second floor. Hundreds of paying patrons sit and chatter in anticipation for the show.

The announcer, who Hux immediately recognizes as Rinn, stands above atop a catwalk with his arms held high, welcoming the families of Greendole to the show.

“That's him, the man who's gonna get you a position here,” Hux whispers to his son, grinning freely at the prospects of Marin having fun and enriching weekends at this aquarium. Maybe he'll even be able to feed the jaw snapping fish like Rinn is, bringing awe and fascination to the eyes of children like his inquisitive daughters.

When Hux’s eyes light up, Marin focuses his senses on the man downstage. “That's Rinn?” he asks, glaring to Hux. His father is so smiley that it's remarkably suspicious. Marin loathes when his father smiles at strange men.

“Yes, and he's very kind so when I take you to meet him, you better behave,” Hux tells him, like a threat.

Keeping his animosity to a minimum, Marin braces through the rest of the show. He senses his father’s appreciation, admiration, his hope, which only heightens his indignation.

The show carries on with daring dives of the animal experts, shocking reveals of the fishes abilities, all centered around a lively coaching from Rinn, with Marin as the only member of the audience who’s glad when it's over.

Hux lets their unit know to hang back so he can speak to Rinn about Marin, despite his girls’ resounding ‘but we wanna go see more fish, Papa.’ To Marin, this alone is a bad sign. It's not like Hux to ignore Seren and Taran’s innocent demands. Even if Hux is prospecting to talk to some man.
“This will be good for you. You haven’t even tried it out yet.”

Rage flares behind Marin’s eyes. As much as he’d like to let this go, carry on with their day, appease Hux and the girls, it’s evident that Hux is trying to use him to get with some man. “Good for me? Or for you?”

But unbeknownst to Marin, getting with Rinn is the last thing on Hux’s mind. Hux solely cares for how his son may benefit from the program. “Stop being so dense,” Hux sighs, shaking his head at his son’s insolence.

Lis, ever the mediator, places a hand on Marin’s muscled shoulder. “Take it easy, will ya?”

As if under her calming spell, Marin closes off, tempering his anger. Has it always been this hard to control it?

Once the arena has largely cleared, they make their way down to the base of the stage, right next to the edge of the railed tank. Venomous fishes and clawed amphibians slosh through the crystal water and Hux holds his daughters’ hands a bit tighter at the creatures’ chaos.

As they approach, Rinn immediately recognizes Hux. A pleased smile graces his handsome face as he makes his way down the stage’s stairs. “Hey, Hux! It's good to see you, man.”

“That was an impressive show. I would have never found fish interesting before today because of it,” Hux comments.

“Glad you enjoyed it.” Rinn waves to the toddlers and the teenagers. “Looks like the gang's all here.”

“This is them, yes,” Hux says unnecessarily. Seren and Taran are too busy holding all their attention on the carnivorous fish nibbling the remnants of their feed. “This one is Taran and this is Seren. I can’t remember the last time they’ve had this much fun.” Hux cocks his head to Marin. “This is my son, Marin, and his friend Lis. Marin is very much interested in the program here. Aren’t you, Marin?”

“Um. Yeah.”

Hux barely contains his glare. This attitude might not bode well for a position here. Must Marin always be so stubborn?

But Rinn doesn’t seem to pick up on Marin’s animosity. “Sweet deal. Y’know, there’s tons of different stuff here. Are you over eighteen?”

“I’m thirteen,” Marin replies, guarded.

“Holy cow. You look so grown up,” Rinn laughs, not picking up on Hux’s withered acknowledgement of his comment. Hux doesn't want his boy to get old too quickly.

“Well, there's not an age limit. Only a maturity limit. As long as you can follow rules and the safety protocols, you should be alright.”

“I can't thank you enough,” Hux beams. Maybe this is exactly what his boy needs. He releases Seren’s hand to shake Rinn’s hand.

A bit too long, for Marin’s standards. The rage simmers like a ripened stew left to overheat. “Father.”
Hux continues chatting with Rinn about the programs, holding up an impatient hand to Marin’s glower.

Marin won’t let up. “Hux,” he hisses. A bark of a noise, disturbing in its familiarity to Hux’s keen ears.

“Excuse me one moment,” Hux says to Rinn, who understands, although confused by Marin’s use of Hux’s name.

“What?” Hux says, low enough for just his son to hear.

“I don’t like this. I want to leave.” Marin scowls, lurching away from Lis’s concerned pressing.

It’s just like Hux thought. His son is so painfully stubborn. He can’t say he doesn’t know where he gets it from, but even he knew how to behave at his age. “You haven’t even tried it out yet. Rinn said there are plenty of roles you can fit into.”

“I’ve heard enough about Rinn,” Marin snaps.

Lis steps in. “Hey—”

But Marin isn’t having it. “I see what you’re doing.”

His son wreaks disrespect. “I’m helping you. And if you’d stop thinking about yourself, you’d see that. Now go over there and have a proper conversation. That’s final.”

Swallowing his pride, his seething contempt at what Hux is making him do, knowing exactly why Hux is making him do it, Marin forms two fists and marches in the direction of his father’s potential suitor.

Hux tosses back condemnation when his son looks back at him, deathly angered. Marin will have to outgrow his laziness and withdrawal from society.

Up on the platform, Marin begrudgingly listens on to Rinn’s babbling. His voice, his stature, hells, even his name reminds him of someone long forgotten. Someone he prays he’ll never see again.

“And this is probably something I’d have you start out with,” Rinn demonstrates, chopping up fresh slabs of pink meat. “Nothing too exciting, but I’d feel more comfortable that you begin with assisting other volunteers and zoological engineers until you get a bit older.”

Marin says nothing and only nods. He’s indifferent to chopping up fish chum.

Rinn explains a few more types of jobs Marin would be good for, a lot of them heavy lifting oriented due to his stature. Marin is barely able to express anything other than base noises acknowledgement until Rinn changes the subject.

“So your dad is pretty cool for letting you do this. Lots of parents would rather their kid focus on schoolwork or organized sports. You’re probably the youngest volunteer here,” Rinn says, when he untucks one of the many safety handbooks.

“My father doesn’t always make the most responsible decisions. It’s probably one of the most obnoxious things about him,” Marin shrugs, flipping through the book nonchalantly. As if he hadn’t just said something completely inappropriate.

“Oh,” Rinn frowns. He doesn't really know what to say to that. “I dunno, he seems like a cool guy.
Easily the best part of visiting the college archives. At least for me anyway,” he says, implying little else but friendliness.

It's certainly the wrong thing for Marin to hear. Like a fuse burning to its final inch, Marin swells, lashing out. It's a hiccup of a moment, one Marin will barely recall in the times to come, when Rinn’s knees receive the foreign impulse to launch himself over the lowered railing and down into the pool of gnashing, monstrous carnivores.

Shouts ring cacophonous in the chamber as Rinn falls legs first downward. There's a split second where Marin’s vindictiveness is speared with shock, and immediate remorse.

On the ground level, Hux thrusts the twins’ in hands into Lisbeth’s, dashing for the stairs upstage. When he reaches the top, he sees an angry, fearful, misguided young man who's made possibly the biggest mistake of his life. He blinks once, and he sees another man's memory. In this memory, the young man has done something terrible, unforgivable, and he cannot take it back.

Surprising everyone, Rinn groans in relief, completely unhurt. He never hit the water, instead colliding with an energy barrier set on preventing death by ravenous sea monsters. Rinn gets to his feet atop the turbulent, ferocious fish, who can't take a bite out of him because of the barrier, as much as they would like to.

Other employees and volunteers shout down, assuring Rinn the barrier will hold until they can get someone to help. Hux breathes an endless sigh of relief. He gapes to his son, who instead of expressing relief that Rinn is unharmed, Marin’s shock is focused inward. He’s disturbed. Guilty.

“What the hell happened?” Hux asks, afraid of the answer.

Marin finds the words. “What's that supposed to mean? He's safe.”

Hux bores into his son’s glaring eyes, his chin angled upwards to his height. “Don't make me ask again.”

“Nothing happened!” Marin snaps. “He just fell. What don't you get about it?”

Rinn is currently being hoisted over the edge by a team of volunteers. Hux's gut swims with dread. “Don't lie to me. Don't keep things from me.”

Marin looks as if he'd been slapped. “We should never have come here in the first place.”

His son’s irrational contempt makes his heart hurt. I can’t say it. Don't make me say it.

Challengingly, Marin looks as if he dares him to admit that he pushed Rinn over the edge. It's untrue that he pushed him. But Marin had caused Rinn to spill over with a lashing of dark energy, manipulating his bones and muscles like a puppet.

“Tell me you didn't have anything to do with this,” Hux begs, low enough for just his son’s ears.

But Marin can't. So he doesn't.

Hux’s heart breaks. It's not that he’s opposed to murder. Far from it. But seeing his son resorting to selfish, impulsive violence of any kind, to anyone, strikes a chord within. “What were you thinking? He could have gotten injured, or worse.”

“Who cares?” he spits angrily. It's what he deserves for poking his nose in Hux’s life.
He'd cry if not for his bitter resolve. “What happened? What did he say to you?” His boy isn't a psychopath. He's not a killer.

“What happened is that I'm not gonna let you use me to get with some man.”

“What?” Hux exasperates, at a complete and utter loss.

“You heard me. You made a show of bringing us all here for him, and pushed me to work with him like it was some kind of prize. I've told you time and time again that men like him are garbage. I just never thought you'd stoop so low and use me like a pawn.”

Hux’s glare withers to heartbreak. “Is that what you think of me? That I’m doing this to—get with Rinn?”

“It's fucking blatant how desperate you are. This damned aquarium and the damned volunteering —”

“Rinn is my friend. And I’m your father, and the only reason I've been pushing for this is for you,” Hux growls, powering through his heartache. “I’ve been trying so hard to help you accomplish something. Give you something to do and be proud of. How could you possibly think I’m doing this for anything or anyone else besides you?” Hux hesitates a moment before holding up an authoritative hand. “You know what? We’re leaving. I should have known you weren’t mature enough for this.”

“I should have known all this was to get in some man’s pants,” Marin counters, and he knows the claim is unfounded as soon as the words leave his lips.

Hux recoils, shame for a crime he hadn’t committed singing his cheeks. He turns away, his son victorious.

But victory is the farthest feeling from Marin’s heart. The family leaves without a parting thank-you or apology to the errant staff or even an explanation to Lis and the disappointed twins.

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“Anything you wish to bring up today, Marin?” Naedie asks, hands bracketing the armrests to her chair. Marin is doing the same in his adjacent chair, digging his nails into the leather.

“I assume you’re referring to the aquarium debacle. I’m sure Lis told you.” He’s done thinking about it. Despite Lis’s demanding, he’s kept the specific nature of the incident under wraps. And Hux hasn’t spoken a word of it, not even a reprimand or a backhanded comment. It’s almost as if it’s never happened in Hux’s eyes, if not for Hux’s weariness and stolen gazes of concern in his direction.

“I’d prefer to hear it from you.”

If it’s the truth she’s looking for, she’s not getting it. She probably knows it. “The fish and I didn’t get along. I prefer my usual ways for spending my free time.”

“Was it just the fish? I heard someone got injured.”
“There was an accident, yes.” Nothing more, nothing less.

“Did it disturb you?”

“It freaked my little sisters out, that’s for sure.” He remembers their worried blubbing while he prepared them for their ride home. Hux’s earnest assurances to preserve their innocence. I promise the man is fine, sweethearts, Hux had said.

“I’m glad you could keep it together,” Naedie comments. She often comments on how she feels. Marin suspects it’s one of her techniques.

Marin shrugs. “Somebody has to.”

“So now that the aquarium is a bust, what are you gonna do during your free time?” she asks, shifting gears.

“What I normally do. I like running with Lis, going into town with Lis. Playing with my sisters. Sparring, exercising. You know, physical training.” He enjoys being tall, growing muscle, and attuning his body with the threats of the universe.

“Training? What are you training for?”

Marin forces his fingers to lay flat, against their natural instinct to claw into fists. “What do you mean?”

“You said you’re training. For what?”

“Not like that. I’m not about to go into battle or anything,” he smirks, laughing it off. “I like honing my physical abilities. Lis does, too. We like to learn new techniques and exercises. It’s fun.” He doesn’t plan on going into battle unless utmost necessary. Anything is possible. He tries not to think about it.

“Sounds like a lot of fun. You enjoy the rush?”

“Something like that,” he replies. “Growing up, there was a lot I couldn’t control. It feels good to finally have some semblance of it, you know?”

Naedie cracks a grin. She looks a lot like her father, the Calrissian he has only met in story and photographs. “You’re still growing up.”

This makes him laugh. It doesn’t feel like it. Childhood feels like a lifetime away.

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Ren storms off the Falcon, a withdrawn Finn and Rey trailing after him. General Organa intercepts her son and the Jedi with caution. When her son ignores her greeting and barrels into the bowels of the base in the direction of his mother’s quarters, she turns to Rey. “What happened?”

What happened is this is one of a dozen trips Ren has made with them offworld since their mission a year ago. Each trip is solely to search and gain information on Hux’s whereabouts. This time, while scouring Ator, they actually had a bite. It was the closest they had to a lead since Marin had left. Rey remembers Ren’s fragile hope, his determination to take every advantage of this new
The lead was a Chiss bounty hunter who taunted them about his involvement with the wanted ex-General Hux, years and years ago while Hux was on the run from Snoke. Of course, he ended up knowing nothing of his present whereabouts. That didn’t stop Ren from pressing and pressing, for that Chiss was the only hope he currently had, thus leading the Chiss to taunt Ren—’Oh, yeah! I think I remember now. The mouthy little thing. The boys and I have got him bent over a table in the back. He was just asking for you’—until the Chiss’s face collided with Ren’s boot. Using her natural authority, Rey had forced Ren to stand down and wait for them back at the Falcon.

At the details of Rey and Finn’s story, General Organa sighs and dismisses them, as always thanking them for their tolerance of Ben.

Rey and Finn exchange a meaningful look. “No, we want to help. It’s not a problem,” Rey says.

“Yes. We wanna find Marin, too. Even if Ren is...unpleasant,” Finn nods.

General Organa smiles, her heart extending to her son. She’ll give him all the alone time he needs.

Inside the base, Ren hovers outside his mother’s quarters before turning swiftly on his heel. Blood pulsing in his ears, Ren doesn’t bother cowering from the other Resistance personnel glaring at him in the hall as he beelines for the communications room. It’ll be occupied by only one or two techs because of the time of day. There are several open terminals, and he slams down on the stool at the terminal farthest from the others. He spends the next several hours drowning his sorrows in white noise and irrelevant, fragmented transmissions.

Ren wrenches the headphones close to his ear, lips twisting around a pained grimace. There has to be something, there has to be something—

“Anything?” comes a familiar voice of Dameron, muffled around a puffy croissant.

Ren says nothing, turning the volume up. He’s not in a gaming mood, or in any shape to make nice with his once-enemies. Certainly not Poe Dameron, the man he personally, proudly tortured, and took great gratification in doing so. Once upon a time, anyway.

“Saw Chewie was back,” Poe says, topping off the croissant. Ren’s looking particularly distraught. It would have been rude to ignore him. At least, that’s what Finn says. And Finn is his hero.

“Yes,” Ren says, popping the ‘p.’ Chewie extends him many courtesies he doesn’t deserve, like keeping the Falcon, nodding and humming in acknowledgement as they cross paths. And not ripping his arms out of his sockets.

“I heard about what happened with the bounty hunter. I’m sorry,” Poe tells him, wanting to do little else than make Ren feel like someone cares.

When Ren neglects to respond, Poe considers a few other things worth discussing. “You know, when your kid was around, I never spent that much time with him, and I regret it.”

This gets Ren’s attention. He meets Poe’s eyes, dolefully setting the headphones to the side. “He’s a good kid,” Poe continues. “Who knows, maybe he and Hux are out there doing the same thing you’re doing. They just don’t know where to look.”

Ren is powerless to clear the blurriness of tears, and Poe offers a kind, handsome smile. “You’re doing a good thing, man. It’s not over,” Poe says. “See, this? What you’re doing for the general and for yourself? It’s gonna come back to you full force. And that’s when you’ll have that second
chance you’re due.”

Finally, Ren nods, lips wobbling into an expression that’s not entirely a smile, but it’s nonetheless appreciative.

He waits until Poe parts with a salute to tug the headphones back on, turning the switches to gouge each connection. The blip and hum and garbled chatter of the intercepted coms. Ren covets his focus, determined not to lose his resilient hope.

Chapter End Notes

unfortunately not much has changed for our fam (kylo still being a sad sap, hux still being a confused/lonely housewife, marin being a cock but this time feeling bad about it somewhat.) I promise next week we’ll have some much anticipated developments!! ;) thanks so much for reading!! comments and kudos are always appreciated!! :D
“Papa, I wanna go out,” Seren grumbles, longing to chase the hopping birds on the beach. Papa has to get her sister ready because she was lucky enough to have gotten Papa to get her ready first. But Taran *always* finds something to hold them up.

Hux gets Taran changed and into her little underpants with some tiny padding for any accidents. The girls are very good about using the toilet but Hux tells them the special underpants are there as a backup plan. “Seren, dear, we're going out in just a minute. Where is the blue dress? Can you pull it from the pile?” Hux asks his little one, already nearly four years old. It’s beyond him how the time has flown by.

The blue dress sits atop the pile of freshly folded clothes. He and his daughters always work as a team to get ready for their day of adventure. So out of habit, Hux arranges the dress or shirts they need atop somewhere where one of his girls can retrieve it so they can participate in their morning routine.

Seren walks over on her slippered feet to the dress Papa needs. Without the rest of the pile tumbling to the floor, she tugs it free and presents him her prize. It took a while to understand the ways tall piles of clothes can tumble if you don't tug it just right. “Here it is,” she smiles.

“Thank you,” her Papa commends. Seren loves to help her Papa dress her sister because when they work together, things just go by faster. It's time to go outside already. She's waited long enough.

“Papa, I want a hat. I want to wear a hat on my head, like Marie does,” Taran requests. She ignores her sister's indignant groan.

“It's time to go. You don't need a hat,” Seren argues. Seriously, she just wants to go outside.

But Hux isn't having it. He wants both his girls to be comfortable. “We don't have hats like Marin’s hats, Taran. What about the visor?” he asks, holding up the little pink headband with a strip that blocks out the sun.

“No, no, the soft one. It's so warm,” Taran whines.

Hux sighs. He knows the one. Marin’s black ‘beanie,’ he calls it. “Alright. But we'll have to get it from his room. I think he's still asleep.”

“I got it!” Seren shouts, trotting out of their room.

“Try and keep it down, dear,” Hux begs after her, adjusting Taran’s little arms in her long sleeved dress. “I'll have to get you your own hat. One for your little bitty head,” he grins, anointing her dark, curly head with a kiss.
Marin growls against the relentless arm across his throat. Kylo Ren’s arm shifts pressure to his paw of a hand and crushing his windpipe. Tears prick in his eyes as his father drains the life from his lungs, his dark, seething glare burning as hot as the unbridled hatred in his heart.

Seren walks over to her big brother's room, pushing in in the door with a gentle palm. Her keen hearing among her other senses pick up a distinctive quiet lull coming from her brother's rumpled bed. She gasps. His eyes are closed but his cheeks are wet and shiny. He's crying!

“Marie, Marie, wake up! Are you okay?” Seren asks worriedly. She shoves at his big-giant shoulder but he won't budge. “Marie, please wake up.”

Just as his dream self loses his dwindling breath, Marin trembles awake, eye to eye with his concerned little sister.

“Are you okay?” Seren asks, beating her deep brown eyes into his. They're Kylo Ren’s eyes. Both Seren and Taran take after him in most physical aspects. It’s haunting. Just like the nightmares he stifles and suffocates. They’re becoming more and more frequent. He doesn't know what this means.

“I'm fine. Why are you in here?” he demands, throat roughened with sleep. He curls his blanket up to his chin, refusing to sit up.

But this matters little to Seren, who combs her fingers in his light hair. It's what she likes Papa to do to her hair when she's upset. “Everything around you felt sad. Were you having a nightmare? Were you getting chased by a rancor?”

Marin suppresses his need to cry. “Something like that.”

“You know that Papa will protect you. He's got a big blaster. A big one as big as his head.” She holds her arms out to show Marin how serious she is.

Her enthusiasm gets a chuckle out of Marin. “I don't doubt that.”

“I remember!” she declares out of nowhere. Ignoring Marin’s confusion, she scouts the room for his soft hat that Taran likes. “Found it. I found your hat. Taran needs it. Bye-bye Marie,” she waves, leaving him alone in the morning-lit room.

Marin sighs, stretching his long arms over his head. From his window he sees Hux and his sisters walking to the beach, Taran with his too-big hat flopped on her little head. Hux will keep them safe, to the best of his abilities. But Marin was able to do what Hux couldn’t. He destroyed Hux’s totalitarian tendencies and power lust, helped return him to his mother and opened his heart to a family’s love, and eradicated Kylo Ren from their lives.

If only he was able to twist his powers onto himself and erase his taint that plagues him even in his dreams.
“Far below the ocean waves, a gnarble lay in bed. All night long his gnarble dreams kept swimming in his head. He dreamt a dream of swimming up to see the sky above, lit up by the sun in colors he just knew he'd love,” Hux reads from one of the books on his mother’s bookshelf. Seren and Taran are cuddled together on his lap, chewing their sweet bean sticks with rapt attention to the storybook. “But gnarbles never swam that high; their fins were much too small. Their tails were thin and floppy, which didn't help at all.”

“But this gnarble liked his fins and had no problem with his tail. So when he woke, he knew that he just couldn't, wouldn't fail.” Hux changes his voice to fit the character to give his daughters the most exceptional book-reading experience. “I'm swimming up above the waves to see the sky of blue. I've never seen it even once, and now it's time I do.”

The vibrant colors of the painted pages catch Taran’s eyes. Seren’s eyes drift to her busybody brother rattling around in the kitchen. She tries her best to pay attention. “But the other gnarbles warned him that he shouldn't swim so high. As did the blyfish family that always swim close by.”

Hux roughens his voice animatedly depicting these not-so-friendly fish. “No gnarble's ever swam that high, it simply isn't done. A blyfish might just make the trip, but we know you're not one.”

The story turns to terror when Seren and Taran’s hero gets into trouble with a fictional foe. “Oh Mister Subbalubble, please don't eat me up for lunch, I'll bring a yummy plant instead, for you to sit and munch. If I could see the sky just once, I'd be a happy fish. To do one flip above the waves would be my only wish.” Seren laughs at her Papa’s silly voice. He makes everything fun and pleasant.

In the kitchen, Marin prepares his ingredients for one of his nutrient shakes. He plans on waiting for Hux to finish with Seren and Taran’s story time to turn on Grandmother’s food processor, even if he’s on a strict timetable. He’s meeting Lisbeth outside in fifteen minutes and still has to take out the trash bins, and there’s only so much daylight left today.

Taran yelps in surprise when their garble gets caught by a creature known as a plink, munched up into his throat with no hope of escaping. The garble wallows and wallows, swimming around the plink’s throat in despair. “The plink was very ticklish and he couldn't hold it in. He tried to cover up his laugh with his giant plinkish fin. But his mouth was open long enough for the gnarble to swim free. He swam so fast the hungry plink did not have time to see.”

Seren gets so excited that she helps Hux flip the page, eager to find out if the gnarble made it to his goal. “Far above the ocean floor, above the gnarbles’ homes,” Hux continues. “Above the blyfish families and dancing water-gnomes, Above the swimming gungaloo and slimy dundledun. And then the gnarble flipped high above the waves and smiled at the sun. The end.”

Given her big brother’s sadness this morning, Seren wants to share the joyful story with him. “Marie, you should read this story. ‘scuse me,” she trundles off Hux’s lap, snatching the book from his hands before he even has time to close it. Taran grumbles but let’s Seren have her way. At least she still gets to keep Marin’s hat on her head.

“Taran, do you want to color? Papa bought you some new coloring books,” Hux grins.

“Yes, please;” she raises her brows, content to do her favorite, lonesome activity. Papa always has the best ideas. He sets her up at the activity table, unstacking her coloring sticks just the way she enjoys.
“This book has asteroid monsters. And this one has forest monsters. That one has water monsters, and this one has mountain monsters,” Hux suggests. Taran loves monsters and other strange lifeforms told in stories and on their favorite recorded programs. Diligently, she turns to the first page of her mountain monster book and fills her wampa with all the colors she can fit, inside and around the confining lines. She plans on filling each page with color until the book is bright like Grandma’s bushes of flowers.

“Marie, look. This book is so crazy. Look at it,” Seren badgers in the kitchen, determined to speak over Marin’s too-loud blending. Hux glows with fondness at his daughter’s adamancy.

By the time Marin’s nutrient-full concoction is finished, he drinks it right out of the container. Hux doesn’t mind, as long as he scrubs both the inside and outside afterwards.

“This book is fun. You should read it,” Seren demands.

Good-naturedly, Marin smirks down at his little sister. “Can we read it together when I get back home?”

“Where are you going?” Marin is always leaving. It doesn’t seem to bother Taran and Papa as much as it bothers her, but her feelings matter, too. “Can we read it now?”

“You just read it. We could both read it with a fresh mind. Later, Seren. Promise,” Marin chastises. He really has to get going.

Hux joins in on the conversation from across the room. “Let Marin go, dear. He’s on his schedule. We still have to work on your counting blocks. There’s lots to practice.”

Papa always has good ideas. She sighs, defeated. “Okay.” Reluctantly, she finds her place on the floor to use her counting blocks like Papa showed her.

Of course, Hux senses Seren’s malcontent. “Sweetheart, Marin goes and does his running. Which means he’ll be too tired to complain when we make him do things afterwards,” he tells her, loud enough for Marin to hear.

“I said I was fine with reading it when I come back,” Marin shakes his head, quirking his lip at Hux’s sassiness.

“Like I said,” Hux grins, kissing Seren’s pouting cheek. “He’ll be too tired to complain.”

Marin laughs, tugging the bin of compacted garbage out to the main road. In the distance, Lisbeth is already almost here, her speeder glinting in the high sun.

“To the white cliffs?” she asks once Marin finds his usual place behind her.

“Yep. And park high so we can get some climbing in. And maybe we can spar in the sand of the beach below.”

“Damn, that sounds like a lot,” Lisbeth groans over the whipping wind.

Marin chuckles. “That’s kind if the point!”

Back at home, Hux monitors his daughters as they work on their individual activities. They’ve already begun to develop their own unique personalities. Seren is rambunctious and passionate in a loud way, much like Marin used to be as a younger boy. Taran is more quiet and contemplative, but not afraid to speak up at any injustices she sees. Of his three children, Marin is by far the moodiest,
but Hux attributes that to growing pains.

Hux is proud of his achievements. Hux is proud of who he's grown to be. His children are his life, and there's nothing that could ever make him believe otherwise. His most regrettable decisions occurred when he only lived for himself, his power, his father's name, and put his family’s happiness second.

Glowing with fondness at his daughters’ diligent workmanship, Hux snuggles up on his favorite armchair and pulls out one of his favorite nonfiction texts. It's a well-organized culmination of the Empire, scribed by an ex member after its fall, published several years after he was born. His mother must have acquired it shortly after her exile and kept it among her other texts to covet her nostalgia of the Empire. He too shares that nostalgia, for the memory of such greatness is all that's left of it. Here on Rhiannon, anyway.

Hux thumbs through the well-worn pages, content to read and reread until Taran pads over, politely requesting to be held. As always, Hux gladly obliges.

“Papa loves you,” Hux murmurs.

“I love you, Papa,” Taran mumbles sleepily. Across the room, Seren feels her sister calming to sleep for an early slumber. Seeing Taran on Papa makes her want to sleep, too. She tucks her counting blocks away and strolls over to cuddle on the other side of Papa’s tummy. It's warm and soft, especially when he sets his pictureless book down and wraps his arm around her back.

“Papa loves you both so much,” Hux says. The twins make two little noises against his chest and he chuckles at their adamancy even while exhausted from their busy day.

His eyes flick to the adjacent armchair. They play tricks on him, fabricating a large, masculine form like a mirage in a desert sun. A practiced, lonely sadness stings behind his eyes. Hux blinks it away. His children and his mother are all that he needs.

Later in the day, Hux wakes from their communal nap to a soft clink of the front door. Aems greets him with a hushed smile, grocery bags full of all kinds of local produce.

“I didn't mean to wake you,” she hums. “Want me to set them in their beds?”

“Please. I think my legs will need to be amputated from blood loss.”

Aems takes Seren and Hux takes Taran, beanie and all, into their beds. They cozy up to their pillows, slipping back into slumber for an early night’s sleep. Their beds are in the same room as Hux’s, with nothing dividing their space.

“Are you feeling alright, Armitage?” his mother asks, once their door is closed. Hux and the twins still share a room after nearly four years.

“Why wouldn't I be?” What more could he want? His children are safe and happy. They're growing up in a stable, loving home.

But Aems sees through his denial. She palms her son’s high cheekbone. It's sharper than it used to be. Her Armitage has a slim diet, despite how often she expresses her concern. “You've got a sadness in your eyes. Your heart is lonely.”

Her words spark something vulnerable. “Mother, you of all people should know what it's like leaving your people.”
Aems raises her brows. “This isn't about the First Order and you know it. I'm worried about you.”

Hux’s forehead puckers. “Mother—”

“Just promise me you'll take care of yourself. I just want you to be happy.”

“I am happy,” Hux defends.

Aems smiles and toesthes up to kiss her son on his cheek. With that, she leaves her son to stare at the empty space beside him.

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“What the hell? Again? Seriously?” Lisbeth groans, barely catching her breath. “It's like you're trying to prove something to this damned beach!” Marin has made them chase the shore, scale the uneven ridge, and around the other side, and back again. They've probably beaten a path if their own by now.

But Marin isn't hearing it. He wants to go another round. He wants to run in a circle until his feet bleed. “Just one more time, Lis.”

“How 'bout you go one more time, and I sit here and try remember how to breathe.” Lisbeth plops in the sand, cradling her sore chest.

Marin doesn't really wanna run without Lisbeth by his side. “No, you're right. We could spar instead.”

“Oh, for the love of—Alright, we'll spar in ten,” she compromises. At Marin’s obsessive pacing, she glares. “Just take a break, would ya? You're giving me motion sickness.”

Marin stills, joining Lisbeth in the sand.

“It's getting late,” she says. “You doing okay?”

“Yeah,” Marin believes. “Just… I just have a lot on my mind.”

“No kidding,” she snorts. “How are the little squirts?”

“Busy. Hux always has something for them to do.”

Intrigued, Lisbeth cocks her head. “Does he have a girlfriend?”

Typical Lis, bouncing from one tangent to the next. “Why, you advertising?”

“Shut up. I'm curious.”

“No girlfriend.”

“How about a boyfriend? He seems like the type.”

“The hell does that mean?”

“I dunno, I just get that vibe. He reminds me of a lonely old widower.”
Marin sighs. If only she knew how close to the mark she was. “If you really have to know, he
doesn't. But not for the lack of trying. My father both willingly and otherwise attracts the attention
of unsavory men.”

His answer perturbs her. “You make it sound like you’d prefer it if he were attracted to women.”

“I don’t care about that,” he grovels. “I just…he really picks the worst types of men. Selfish,
controlling men. Dangerous ones. He only picks the ones that are attractive on the outside and
rotten on the inside. And they’re not even that good-looking.”

“So, he likes the bad boys?”

“That’s putting it lightly.”

Lis nods. It makes sense a prissy, proper, little man like Hux would be into the big, brawny,
scoundrel types. But Marin doesn’t have to know obvious it is. “Does he have any friends?” she
asks.

“He has us,” Marin defends. There’s nothing wrong with that.

“Damn, that's sad. And before you say anything about you and me, I have more friends than just
you. You just have me. And my mom,” she teases. Lis has never really grown out of her teasing.

“Hey, quality versus quantity. And who are these other friends you have?” he smirks.

Lis makes a face. “They go to another school,” she jokes.

Their banter is a welcoming conversation. “Sure, Lis. Sure.”

An idea strikes her. “Maybe our parents can be friends. I know you’re always saying they don’t
have to meet, but who knows. Maybe they’ll fall in love and have little mixed babies. If your father
still has his man parts,” she jibes, knowing full well how Hux had carried three children to term.

“What the fuck, Lis!” Marin grimaces.

“I'm just saying!”

“Trust me, me and you are more likely to get together than Hux and your mother,” he scoffs before
his brain catches up with him.

Lisbeth is clearly touched. “Marin, are you proposing that you carry my mixed babies?” she asks
whimsically.

The idea is so preposterous that he tosses his head back, laughing at the setting sun.

“I'm serious! You'd look so cute carrying my baby in your stomach.”

Her antics never cease. He's grateful for the distraction, since the painful running and climbing
barely did a thing to keep him out of his own head. “I don't know why I even bother,” he laughs,
when the opposite couldn't be truer.

--
Marin is sick.

He’s sick and tired of the nightmares, the memories, the triggers. It’s as if he’s still letting Kylo Ren control him, even from the interstellar distances separating them. The only way he’s ever going to get over him is if he stops dwelling.

So Marin eventually takes Lisbeth up on making their parents meet. It’s about time, anyway. There hasn’t been any sign Naedie suspects anything from his family. He trusts her, and trusts Lis with his life. He’s so fucking tired of living in fear. He wants to start living, to start actually being happy.

They decided on meeting at Aems’ restaurant one evening. Seren and Taran are settled in two highchairs and dipping their fries in the creamy sauce they enjoy. Hux readjust the yellow barrettes in their wavy hair that pins their bangs to the side.

Marin is in the booth beside him, tending to a tall beet juice that makes Hux wrinkle his nose. “It's high in vitamins,” Marin shrugs.

“You eat like a rabbit,” Hux says, though he’s proud his son has health in mind. It's the silver lining to Marin’s obsession with being fit, capable, and imposing even with his youthful lankiness. Give it another year or so, he'll look like a grown man.

Marin accepts Hux’s critique, nerves bubbling in his stomach. “Lis and Miss Naedie should be here in a few minutes,” he says. He passes a bemused smile to his grandmother's curious gaze from the kitchen, his way of signaling it's almost time. This union is a good thing. It’s progress.

Hux murmurs instructions to his daughters on how to say hello to new people. They know Lisbeth well but like Hux, have never met her mother. “And what do we say when Miss Naedie says hello?”

Seren and Taran reply in unison. “Hello!” they smile their thousand watt smiles. They even finish chewing before speaking.

Hux commends their manners, tucking their hair behind their ears. “Excellent. What about if she brings you a present?”

“Was she supposed to?” Marin frowns.

“No, I just like seeing what they say,” Hux whispers.

“We both will say ‘thank you thank you!’” Seren nods. “And give her hugs,” adds her sister. Taran puckers her brow, considering the fact there might be something she forgot. “Oh! And a thank-you note.”

“That's right.” Hux sees Marin snort out of the corner of his eye. His baby girls are the brightest stars.

The front door swings open with an electronic chime. Naedie and her daughter walk in as they've done many times before, having been regulars at Aems’ restaurant for years. They walk to one of their usual tables to meet Marin’s family. Something long overdue but they were looking forward to nonetheless.

Hux stands to greet his son’s counselor and her daughter whom Marin befriended first. Immediately, Hux is reminded of a mentor from his youth, Vice Admiral Rae Sloane, who bears a passing resemblance in outward appearance to Naedie. It's been awhile since he's thought of her.
The drive she instilled in his heart still remains to beat to this day.

“Pleasure to meet you, Hux,” Naedie smiles, extending a hand to shake.

Hux meets her enthusiastically. “Over the months, I’ve heard so much about you. I’m glad we’re finally getting a chance to meet.”

“Likewise,” Naedie says, after a brief blundered hesitation. If this is the first time that she’s met Marin’s father, then why does it feels like she's spoken with Hux before? His voice is familiar, unpleasantly so.

She stifles the unease. Probably just another malformed memory from the war getting crossed with her current ones. She must have run into him at the store or the school. “Hey Marin,” Naedie waves a hand, to which Marin smiles.

“Thank you guys for meeting up with us,” Marin replies, needing to put in his side of the greeting. Hux appreciates when he behaves maturely. He’s really grown up.

His confidence is high until Lisbeth palms her belly animatedly, feigning pregnancy, thankfully out of Hux’s line of sight while he chats with his mother. “Lis, shut up,” Marin laughs. That joke is so inappropriate!

“Mixed babies,” she mouths.

“You’re a terror.”

“Naedie, it's so good to see you,” comes Aems’ melodic greeting. “Who knew our families would become this close.” Aems has known Naedie and her daughter for years and watched little Lisbeth grow into womanhood.

To Hux’s and Marin’s surprise, Naedie pulls Aems in for a hug. They’ve been friends for ages. Marin smiles. Meeting the entirety of his family really has been overdue.

“And you both must be Taran and Seren. Who is who?” Naedie beams to the two well behaved little girls.

“Hello,” they wave, cheerful. “She’s Taran,” the right one confirms, and “she’s Seren,” comes the left one.

Naedie laughs, tucking her and her daughter into the booth. “You’re both so precious. So which one of you is older?”

The question clearly stumps them both. It stumps everyone. Hux doesn't know, and neither does Marin. The only being who was there to witness their birth is Kylo Ren, but as far as everyone at the table is presently concerned, Kylo Ren is a name of the past. Meaningless to everyone except Marin, the boy who killed his memory, and who wakes up shaking off Kylo Ren’s thumbs bruising his throat.

Hux’s smile falters. To him, it’s one of the many things he can't remember before their lives here on Greendole. He regards Naedie with honesty. “That unfortunately will remain a mystery. I’m sure Marin told you that we left the war shortly after they were born. I don't have any memory of the day they came into the world.” It's a statement of fact. Hux has the angry, rippling scar low and uneven across his abdomen, and it tells him that not knowing is probably for the best.

Lisbeth frowns at Marin’s sudden standoffishness. But she understands. The war is a terrible,
endless hell.

Naedie apologizes, but Hux waves her off. “What's important is that they’re safe. That's all that matters in the end,” he says, and Naedie nods in agreement.

Taran politely requests some of Marin’s beet juice and he lets her have a curious sip. He chuckles at the silly face she makes. Yes, Marin thinks fondly. The life they’ve made here is what matters, no matter what.

Aems has one of her workers carry over the night’s special: a seafood and pasta dish with the finest tea in the pantry. Naedie and Lisbeth commend Aems’ dishes, enjoying the company. Even Hux blossoms from his prim and proper shell.

The tension in Marin’s shoulders slowly eases as the night carries on without any hitch. But as all things inevitably do, the threat of potential harm to his family pulls the night apart like a tattered cloth.

Miss Naedie’s eyes narrow, calculating over Hux’s features. Marin catches the very, very subtle profiling. He would have thought that she just has the instinct to read people because of her profession, but that just makes her all the more dangerous. She knows how to look through people like Marin does, but she doesn't rely on the Force to do so.

Hux tends to Seren’s sloppy pout with her napkin while Aems chops up some pasta for Taran to serve herself with her rubber tipped spoon.

There’s something eating at Naedie, and Marin has to find out. It's a secret that he's a Force-sensitive, even from Lisbeth. Naedie was in the war and her father was one of the most prominent generals in the Rebellion. There is a strong possibility she would be able to feel and recognize his powers pushing into her mind.

Marin trusts his senses. He skims her thoughts with a fine sweep of his powers, just barely enough to pull up a fragmented thought from Miss Naedie’s mind.

The First Order.

Lisbeth elbows Marin in his solid arm. “Pst, what's up with you?”

Marin pulls away. He knew he shouldn’t have gotten close to the Calrissians. He knew it and he did it anyway. Now their lives could be ruined because he wanted to keep Lisbeth friend. What’s even stranger is that he’s not shoving Lisbeth away from him, lunging for her mother’s throat—because Lisbeth and Naedie are his friends now. Now Naedie knows about Hux and that means she’ll rat them out to the Resistance, and that means Hux will be captured and imprisoned and **executed**—

“Father, I need to speak with you,” Marin interrupts, fingernails spitting open his palms. “Alone.”

Hux is used to his son being tense, but Marin’s interruption is alarming, so he excuses them with a pat of assurance to his mother’s shoulder. By now Aems is accustomed to Marin’s emotional fluctuations.

Once they’re alone outside on the sidewalk, Marin palms his forehead. How will Hux react to being found out?

“What is it?” Hux asks, imploring into his son’s pained grimace.

Marin swallows. “I’m so sorry I couldn’t prevent this. I should have been more careful. I’m so
“Naedie. She recognizes you. I saw her staring at you and I thought she was just being judgmental but that wasn’t it at all. I looked into her head and she knows you’re from the First Order. Please, Father, I didn’t mean for this to happen, I didn’t mean it—”

Stunned, Hux pulls his son in for an embrace, holding his head onto his shoulder with a warm, protective hand. “It’s not your fault. How could you have known?” Hux says, squeezing back when Marin holds him tight.

Marin wishes he was small again. Now he’s as big as Hux and even bigger in some places. He did know. He knew Naedie had connections to the Resistance and he befriended Lisbeth anyway. This oversight will undoubtedly have consequences.

“Please, you always carry so much on your shoulders,” Hux says comfortingly. “There’s still time to fix this.”

Marin pulls away from his father. “How?”

“We don’t know how much she knows. Maybe, if we find a way to get rid of them, we don’t have to be afraid,” Hux says. He’s shifted gears, calculative and taciturn, much like the Hux of the past. More is at stake, now, the livelihoods of his children and their safety and happiness.

“Get rid of them?” Marin runs cold. Is Hux suggesting what he thinks he is? “But—Lis is my friend. Please, just let me see what they know. It’s probably nothing,” he backtracks.

But to Hux, the threat of capture and more imperatively, the threat of being separated from his children burns a murderous simmer. No one will keep them apart. He’ll do anything to keep things how they are. “We might not have a choice.” It’s hard for his son to understand.

Marin thinks back to the most coveted advice he received as a young, young boy. It came from his grandmother, the one he ran from nearly four years ago. “There is always a choice.” He refuses to be taunted and ripped apart by his fears.

The words get through to Hux, his ruthless, murderous father, the same father who makes up all the voices for the characters in picture books that he reads to his daughters.

“Let me talk to them. If I explain why you left the First Order, they won’t dare try and turn you in. Lisbeth told me that her mother made an enemy of the Resistance after her father got her husband killed. She’s like us. She wants to be safe, just like us. Please, Father.”

Hux nods. “I trust you. I know you'll do what's right for us.”

Guilt stings but Marin conceals it with practiced ease. “I will. Not now. I don't want to talk about it in public. I'll go over to their house tonight and explain everything.”

“You sure you don't want me to be there with you?”

“I know I can get through to them. I'll fix it. I know I can,” Marin implores.

Mustering the strength to pull himself together, Marin leads the way back to the table, making up some excuse about digestive problems to Lisbeth and her mother. Dinner ends peacefully, but not without Marin tugging Lisbeth aside to ask to come over to speak with her and Naedie about
“something serious.”

“Not your indigestion?” Lisbeth deadpans.

“Lis, I have a few confessions to make. I owe you both honesty.” Marin passes a look of reassurance to Hux, who is busy tending to cleaning up the twins but looks up long enough to pass on a wave of calm right back to him.

Much, much later in the night, Marin is seated at the table across from Naedie. Han Solo’s immortalized printed photograph smiles back at him. Marin certainly never met his grandfather, but somehow it feels like Han Solo is telling him “You got this, kid,” from beyond the mortal realm.

Lisbeth comes into the dining room with her tray of caf's.

“I suppose I should get on with it,” Marin mutters, praying his plan works.

Once the cups are arranged, Lisbeth takes a seat aside her mother, the table a barrier between them. They look at him expectantly. Patient, cautious.

“Hux is from the First Order. He used to be a general on the Finalizer, and was in control of that star destroyer along with a fleet and a planet destroying weapon that he helped design and operate. He’s spearheaded countless acts of violence and murder. He’s a criminal. But we left shortly after Seren and Taran were born. We didn’t want to live like that anymore.” Marin forces his head high, forces his eyes not to waver.

Naedie doesn’t look at all surprised, unlike Lisbeth, who palms her mouth in shock. Her mother speaks up for her. “How did you know I'd figured it out?” Naedie asks.

Marin’s throat bobs. “I'd gotten skeptical after learning about where you come from. The way I saw it, it was only a matter of time.”

Lisbeth narrows her eyes. “You’ve known of our family history for years, that we came from the Resistance and the Rebellion. Why are you telling us now?” Finding out her best friend has been lying to her all these years has been a hard pill to swallow. Though she knows he's done so to protect his family, it hurts knowing he's continuing to lie while trying to come clean.

When Marin hesitates, Naedie extends her hand across the table. “There's something you're not saying.”

He can trust these people. They're more than friends. They're family. “I'm a Force-sensitive. I can sometimes catch people's thoughts if I concentrate hard enough. I...I felt in your mind that you recognized my father as a member of the First Order. I’m so sorry. I was just—so terrified.”

Thinly veiled contempt flashes through Naedie. “You can see inside people’s heads?”

“Yes, but only if I see them as a threat. I was just scared. I’ve never done it to you, to either of you, until now. Please understand. My father has given up that part of his life.” My father’s first instinct was murdering you both when I told him you knew where he came from. “He’s not hurting anyone anymore. We just want peace,” Marin begs. “We just want to be together. We’ve been apart for so, so long before we came here and I wasn’t gonna risk losing it.”

Lisbeth has already made up her mind. Her mother taught her to carry compassion just as heavily as caution. “I won’t tell anyone. It does explain a few things, like why he terrifies me. But he hasn’t hurt anybody.” She meets Marin’s eyes. “And no matter what you may think, I still trust you. I
always will.”

He can’t help the enthralled smile brightening his face. He tempers it, for this all will be blown if Naedie can’t align to his side.

From the resentful contemplation tightening her mother, she might have more knowledge of Hux’s past than Lisbeth does. Naedie meets Marin’s hopeful eyes. There’s something else behind her veil, something Marin is tempted to scratch.

Naedie bores into him. “Is that all you have to tell us about your family, Marin?”

“Yes, I swear.” There’s nothing else in his past that deserves drudging up.

She shares a silent breath with her daughter, and turns back to the sweating mess of a boy across from them. “Alright. We won’t say a word. We’ll do everything in our power to ensure your family will be protected as if it were our own.”

Marin could sob. “Thank you. Thank you so much.”

Leaving his caf untouched, Marin is escorted by Lisbeth to the door so she can give him a ride back home. Naedie sighs. Bless her daughter and her forgiving, open heart.

Outside, Lis asks Marin what life was like in the First Order. Because he cannot ever admit the truth about Kylo Ren and his life alone on his home planet waiting for his training, nor his year with the Jedi and the Resistance, Marin lies once more, and spins a tale about a life of order and work and discipline and unwanted haircuts. Lis, naturally, is understanding and compassionate. He will never deserve her.

Back at the Calrissian residence, Naedie stands and faces the family hearth. Mussing the even coat of dust on the countertop, Naedie picks up the photograph of her estranged father Lando Calrissian and his best friend, Han Solo. She closes her eyes to revisit a strange, vivid memory from what ended up being one of her final tours in the Resistance alongside her father.

While aboard the Limera IV, the cruiser commanded by Calrissian that was surveying the Outer Rim for enemy intelligence, one of the Resistance’s probe droids picked up a distress beacon with a First Order signature. There was a man, who they’d later discovered was from the First Order, who had been experimented on and impregnated and then had given birth aboard their ship.

Naedie opens her eyes, shifting her focus in the picture from her father and to his best friend. Aboard the Limera IV here was another man with him, a man she’d known mostly from reputation. A Force-sensitive, a traitor, and quite possibly the only man as cruel and wicked as the heinous General Hux. The son of Han Solo one of the few men she’s ever allowed to hold her daughter.

Hux. The name, the face, the voice. It’s all clicked. There’s no other explanation.

She tosses her room for one of the many relics of her past. A Resistance comm unit, only programmed to communicate with one address.

Father, she types out. I know you haven’t heard from me in a long time. Please answer back as soon as you receive this. The message is transmitted through the interstellar distance between them.

The weight from contacting her father after all these years brings tears in her eyes. Only a few minutes pass before the notification blinks. She taps on the screen.
Naedie, is that really you?

A tear escapes. *Yes, this is a closed line, remember?* she replies. Reacting on impulse, her finger finds the request button that enables hologram communication. Within moments, her father’s grinning face and bust illuminates the space before her. His advanced age is no hindrance on his charm.

“If* well, look at you,”* Lando beams. It’s been years since they’ve had a proper conversation and almost a decade since they’ve spoken face-to-face. He hasn’t spoken to his granddaughter in just as long. Whatever animosity between him and Naedie is shoved aside, evaporated now that he’s finally seen her face and heard her voice after so long. *“Is everything alright? How are you and little Lis?”*

Naedie summons a sad smile. “Not so little anymore. She’s out with our speeder dropping off a friend. But we’re both doing well.” She swallows. “Something’s come up.”

“What is it?”

She takes a breath. “Are you still in contact with General Organa?”

Lando raises his brows. *“I thought you decided to leave the fight.”* It was an honorable choice, one he’ll always respect.

She thinks of Marin, of Hux, of Han and Leia’s son, of the galaxy’s carefully coveted secrets. “Looks like the fight found me.”

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*Chapter End Notes*

Happy Father’s Day! to celebrate, I’ll be posting TWO chapters today! stay tuned for the next! Comments are appreciated :D!

Here is a link to the book Hux is reading, available online for free called ‘The Journey of the Noble Gnarble’ by Daniel Errico.
http://www.magickeys.com/books/noblegnarble/
Kylo Ren puts his thumb and his index finger between his lips, whistling sharply for Abie to return from her forest-side excursion. Dutifully, Abie comes to the call, a billow of white against the foamy greenery.

Ren bends to his knees. His favorite way of greeting her is with a little wrestling session. She pounces playfully and is never devoid of energy. They’re a ways away from the Resistance base, away from any unwanted eyes and ears.

“You ready to go back now, Abes?” Ren grins, palming her long jaw. “I feel like your snout gets longer every time I see ya.”

She laps at his nose, her way of telling him you’ve got a big snout, too.

Together, they stroll leisurely back to the compound. Ren sighs at his prospective dinner, an awkward shuffle through the cafeteria and to a lonesome table, dodging the harassment from the Resistance fighters. At least he’s got Marin’s dog to keep him company. He adjusts his pack on his shoulder, heavy with food, water, and one of his few worldly possessions—the datapad filled with the recordings of Hux nurturing their babies years ago on Mardromitan. Re-watching the videos are one of the few things that give him much needed peace.

There’s no warning to what happens next. A blaster bolt shoots from the tree line and hits Abie, sending her to her side. Not taking any time to assess the threat of his surroundings, Ren collapses to her side. Damn it all! Who shoots a dog?

By some miracle, Abie is largely unharmed. No scorching, no blood. She has a pulse. Ren glares to the trees. At least whoever did this had the decency to set their blaster on stun. He stands to his full height, grappling for the blaster on his belt. Before he can get his hand around it, a blaster bolt whips from the trees and spears into his chest, wracking his body into unconsciousness. Stun or no stun, it hurts like a bitch.

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Like two halves of a whole warrior, Finn and Rey spar and spar with their lightsabers until their palms sting with a work roughened redness.

A burst of white startles them out of their training. It’s Ren’s dog, unusually frazzled. “Abie, what is it girl?” Finn asks.

Abie whines and urges her friends to follow her. Sharing a look of trepidation, the pair of Jedi chase after Ren’s dog. She leads them to the Millennium Falcon, desperate to make them understand what’s amiss.

The Falcon’s empty, no sign of Ren. Rey makes use of her wrist comm to page General Organa. “Have you seen Ren? There’s no sign of him. We found his dog just scampering around.”
As always, she's quick to reply. “Maybe he's with Luke?”

Rey snorts. “He's not really a ‘hanging with Luke’ kind of person. Finn will search inside the base and I'll start outside.”

“He's not at home. Hold on, I'll ask around. Let me know as soon as you learn anything. Please,” General Organa says, fear tempering her voice. “Hell, he better be alright.”

He'll be alright soon.

But as of right now, Ren is bound with his back to a slight tree, gagged and blindfolded, groaning around every aching shoot of reeds under his fingernails. His hands claw around the brutal burn, wrists splitting against the wire binding him from behind.

“You're a fucking imposter, you know that?” is the first thing the men say to him. They spear his finger with another reed, twisting it viciously.

Another voice pipes up as the pulsating blood thuds in his ears. “I told myself I didn't need this. That I could be the honorable one and let you go unpunished for what you did. But the more often I checked in, I saw you lazing around, playing with that dog, having a happy retirement,” the man sneers, shooting the reed deeper into the sensitive nerve beds. “While I live on without my son and my daughter. Because you took them from me.”

Ren sobs, the pain in his hands of no comparison to the agony in his guilty heart. He tries to enunciate through his gag, but his torturers have no interest in what comes out of his mouth, other than his blood curdling screams.

Ren groans at the fist in his hair, the sputtering hiss of the man’s rage at his ear. “You've destroyed so many of our families. You're a monster, an animal, and if it weren't for General Organa we'd be dragging your body—”

Ren startles at the crackle of a blunt slam against his aggressor's skull. His ears strain to pick up the thwacks and grunts of a vicious brawl. After a dozen or so hits, everything stills, until impatient fingers tear off his blindfold.

Breaths labored from her sprinting and fight, Rey unties the strip between his teeth and then turns for his wrists. Ren can't stifle the whimper as Rey fumbles around the reeds splitting his skin to tackle the wire. There's nothing he can say, besides a pained, pathetic, “thank you.”

Rey takes his bludgeoned hands between hers, grimacing at the extent of his injury. It’s probably best to wait for a medic to remove the reeds imbedded under his fingernails, waning uncomfortably to the ground. “You should be thanking your dog. We wouldn't have found you without her.”

“She's Marin’s dog. I'm just…watching her until he comes back,” Ren says, gravelly from his screams. As if the relationship of the dog has any bearing on what just happened to him.

She can't help the bluing sympathy at his conviction. Gingerly letting go off Ren’s impaled fingers, she regards him with honesty. “We all lost him. He was never gonna adjust to this lifestyle. I knew it was only a matter of time before he made his decision to go where he wanted to. With who he wanted to.”

Ren nods. It's true. Marin didn't want to have anything to do with him, but above all he would rather be with Hux and his sisters than with the Jedi. The Resistance wouldn’t dare spare Hux if they ever got their hands on him.
“Why didn't you knock these goons out?” She hasn't seen Ren in combat since Starkiller but she knows how powerful he is with the Force. There were three armed men, sure, but Ren is a trained killer. He’s been killing since he was a boy.

He supports himself with an aching palm against the tree. It never even occurred to him to defend himself, only to scream. Even if he wanted to, the Force hasn't been with him in ages. His only ally is his will to push on, on some hope that he’d be with Hux and their family once more. Lurching on a timeless depression, Ren forgets about the state of his mutilated hands.

“Come on,” she tells him tonelessly. “Can you walk?”

Whatever he's about to say doesn't make it out of his mouth when Ren collapses to the ground with the rest of the goons. Rey swipes laboriously at her forehead. Not wasting any time calling for Finn’s assistance, she lugs Ren over her shoulders, calling to the Force to support all his span and mass as if he were just another boulder that needs lifting for Master Luke’s critique. The goons are left to be collected later.

Later, much later, when Ren’s assailants are confronted by General Organa and her warriors, they solemnly accept punishment for their crimes, professing martyrdom in the name of the lives and loves lost to them at Ren’s hand.

Later, not much later, General Organa is commed on her private line by an old friend with an urgent message, a scoundrel and a hero of the Rebellion who still refers to her as Princess Leia.

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Ren wakes in the Resistance medbay, in one of the lonely private rooms. His hands are sealed in bandages. Uncaring of his injury, Ren fumbles around the room for his belongings. He had his pack with him when he was taken and in his pack was his datapad and that’s all he has left of Hux and he can’t fucking do any of this without those recordings because they’re all he has left.

Ren sinks to his knees before the mess of his recovered pack lying in a heap in a chair by the door. The datapad sits inside, cleaved into shards. Deliberately, as if his assailants knew how coveted the files on the device were to him. In vain, Ren thumbs the controls. The datapad does not activate. Hux and the twins are lost.

Red blinds him. The recordings are lost. Now he has nothing.

By the time Ren comes to, the room is in disarray. The bed is overturned, the shelves shucked from the walls, the walls scuffed and streaked with splotches of blood from his pounding knuckles, the air around him stark with his labored breathing.

His mother waits in the doorway like his moon, patient for her son to come back to her. Guilt ridden from his outburst, her son returns. “I’m—I’m sorry. It’s just…the recordings. They’re destroyed,” he crumples, the heels of his gauzed hands gouging his eyes.

Cool, gentle fingers bracket Ren’s hands. They melt the tension enough to catch contact on his wet face.

“Ben, look at me,” his mother implores.
“I’m sorry,” he sobs, decades of calamity pouring out once more. “I’m so sorry for everything I’ve done to you. I’m so sorry.”

“Ben. Look at me,” she repeats. There isn’t any more time to waste.

Her son devolves into another fit of unkempt apologies, groveling miserably like a headless worm. But what she says next is enough to keep Ren from slipping past the point of no return.

“We found them,” she tells him, and there’s nothing she’s been happier to say in ages. “Lando called me. A contact of his told him that they’ve been living on the Rhiannon system all these years.”

Ren stills, gaping at his mother in shock. She takes his hands in hers, heedful of his extensive wounds even though they are partly healed. “I’m afraid the contact didn’t reveal much. But they’re safe,” she tells him. “They’re happy.”

Flooding relief rolls over him, elation and hope warming in its wake. He doesn’t bother asking how she knows, how Lando Calrissian’s informant can be so sure it’s them. Hope is all that matters. “I have to go. Right now. I’ve got to find them.”

General Organa smiles, lifting them to their feet with her projections of assurance. “I already told Rey, Luke, and Finn and Poe. Rey and Finn jumped on the chance to come along. Once you confront Marin and say what you have to say to him, the rest of us will follow.” She needs to be reunited with Marin, but this is Ben’s duty to make amends with his son. Rey and Finn will be moral support. And his handlers.

Ren recoils. All these years and he never properly prepared something to say to Marin, to beg for his forgiveness. The only option he’ll have is speak from the trapped depths of his heart. Gone is his need to behave selfishly. His happiness, his safety, his own mental and emotional wellbeing is the farthest from his concern.

He can’t help but ask his mother the most daunting, selfless question. “What are you going to do to Hux once you find him?” He can’t let them take him and tear him from his children.

Visibly, she wilts. Not for the life of the war criminal who destroyed so many lives, but for her son’s divided loyalties. Regardless, there’s always a compromise. Sacrifice. “Ben, the first priority is making sure you and your family are safe, got it? Once they are, then we take the next step. And whether you like it or not, Hux is one of the few people who might have a clue on defeating the new breed of Stormtroopers—”

Ren yanks away. Bile leaps in his throat. It’s been almost four years and he’s finally got a chance at finding them and his mother is already thinking of ways to use his family to her advantage like playing pieces on a dejarik board and why the fuck isn’t he already in hyperspace right now—

“You know how this goes. It was the same for you when you came back. I was—relieved, terrified to have you back. And I knew what had to be done. I knew you had the will and the means to fight alongside us,” she tells him. “Too many people have died for us not to take this chance, and you know it. But I promise you that I’ll do whatever it takes to keep them safe, you understand.”

Ren shakes his head, absorbing her confession. “You’re right. I’m sorry. It’s just been so hard.” He can’t bear to think about how his mother must felt after he vanished and left for the Order.

His guilt must be written all over his face, so his mother brings a hand to his cheek to soften his ailing grimace. “What are you still doing here?” she asks with a wily smirk.
Splitting into a grin, Ren cradles his mother’s skull with his gauzed hands and kisses her wetly on the cheek.

She laughs and laughs. “When things settle down, you better call me!” she calls as he sprints onward to the Falcon.

Alone, she breathes deep in her diaphragm, her brown eyes twinkling with mirth. When they slip shut, she can feel the phantom muscle-memory touch of Han’s arm encircling her shoulders. “I think we did alright,” she murmurs to the empty room. Han would definitely agree.

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“Papa, where are you going?” Seren complains. Grandma is here to watch them, Papa said. She loves her Grandma, but sometimes she just wants her Papa. She gapes desperately for Taran to agree with her. Of course, she does, because time with Papa is their favorite way to spend their time.

“Papa, can you read to us? Please,” Taran asks politely. Papa always smiles brightly when she asks the right way. Seren doesn’t seem to understand that asking the right way will get her what she wants. It’s so obvious! Sometimes Taran thinks her sister doesn’t realize this.

Hux groans in sympathy, bending on his hands and knees to kiss his baby girls on their foreheads. “When I come home, I’ll be sure to read to you both. For now, Grandma will watch over you and make you lunch. Doesn’t Grandma make the yummiest lunch?”

“Yes!” Seren nods. “And Gramma hugs me real warm.” When she remembers all the things she loves about Grandma, suddenly Papa leaving doesn’t sound so bad. Grandma will take care of them.

Taran is inclined to agree. “Yes, yes, and she can read from books, too.” Taran knows just the book she wants Grandma to read. She pictures it in her head.

“Sounds like you two will be just fine,” Hux says, indulging in one of their many, many group-hugs.

Something bumps the back of Hux’s head. He lets go of his daughters to investigate. He turns around in puzzlement. It’s a book.

It’s a floating book. Hovering as if it has its very own set of repulsorlifts.

Gaping at the strange, nonsensical phenomenon in their living room, Hux reaches to pluck it from the air. It comes down with no resistance.

“Oh, that’s the book I want Gramma to read. Please, let me have it,” Taran extends a tiny hand.

After inspecting it for threats, Hux hands Taran her book. “Alright. I think Grandmother is almost home from work,” he says, shaking off the strange feeling. Perhaps he was more exhausted than he thought, between work, chores, errands, and of course, the twins.

“Marin! Are you ready?” Hux calls in the direction of Marin’s room, is door firmly shut. With no answer, Hux pads up to the door. “You don’t want to be late for your appointment.”

Marin’s back is to the door. He’s gazing out the window, to the hills blocking the calm sea. The bright daylight silhouettes his son, bathing him with darkness, and combined with his wide shoulders and messy, shoulder-length hair, he looks like an entirely different, yet hauntingly familiar person.

“Are you ready?” Hux asks. Today is already far too peculiar for his liking.

Marin jumps. He hadn’t realized Hux was in the room. “I don’t think we should go out today.”

“Nonsense. Your counseling is important. You said Miss Naedie was helping you.”

“I feel sick, is all.”

Hux’s lip twitches. “I thought you said she didn’t have a problem with our history, that she wanted to keep us safe,” he says. Marin had assured him nights ago, that Lisbeth and Naedie knew of their past and knew of his powers, but would never dare turn them in. Hux had trusted his son’s judgement, and still does.

“I just feel sick.”

Accepting his son’s stubbornness, Hux backs out of his room. Marin still hasn’t turned around. “Fine. I still have to go to the credit depository and pick up groceries. I’ll be back in an hour.” Hux hears his mother come through the front door, greeting her granddaughters with happy cheers.

Swiftly, Marin turns. “You’re going alone?”

“You’ve got to be the most paranoid teenager in all of Greendole,” Hux snorts, teasing. When his son doesn’t share the sentiment, he sobers. “I’ll be fine.”

“Can’t it wait another day?” Marin exasperates.

“Marin,” Hux scoffs.

He knows he’s being irrational but he just can shake this sick, dark feeling in his gut. “Let me come with you. I feel fine. The errands will help me feel useful,” is his excuse.

Hux dares not point out that Marin was too sick to visit Miss Naedie for counseling. These past several years, Hux avoided places where he and Marin might be approached by unsavory characters, in an effort to not repeat any mishap that occurred with people in the past. Specifically handsome, available young men. Perhaps Marin truly needs to take a personal day, one away from school and responsibility, and what constantly burdens his son’s heart.

They come to an agreement. Together, they speed into town. Marin’s gut churns with a sickly dread.

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Abie hums excitedly at the striping of stars through the Falcon’s viewport. She stands on her hind legs to her long-nosed friend, clawing her paws on his knee.
Ren bends forward to kiss her head, rubbing his freshly unbandaged hands in her fur. His fingernail beds sting but they’ll complete their healing in time. For now, he takes his comfort in Abie’s warm fur.

Rey mans the pilot position while Poe—who decided he didn’t want to sit this mission out, given its sensitivity—operates the copilot position. Ren sits behind Poe, Finn sits behind Rey, and believe it or not but this is not the most awkward seating arrangement they’ve been in.

After hours and hours of travel, Rey thumbs on the primer for the Falcon’s sublight engines. “We’re approaching Rhiannon. It’s not occupied by any militarized government and it’s sparsely populated, so I’m gonna drop from hyperspace a bit of a ways in case there are any undocumented security measures.” The last thing they need is to pulverize themselves against a security shield they know nothing about.

Lando Calrissian never gave them the name of his contact, but from Rey’s memory of him as brought to life by Luke and Leia’s stories, he’s one of the few scoundrels who can be trusted.

The contact told them he could find Hux in the town of Greendole, ‘along with three children they’re probably looking for as well.’

When they dock, Rey takes charge of the mission. “We should split in pairs to cover more ground.” Instinctively, she wants to snag Finn, but everyone knows Ren can’t be left with just Poe and their blaster rifles. Ren is emotionally charged and will likely be clumsier than normal. “Finn, you should take Poe uptown and Ren and I will take downtown. We’ll meet in the middle. Somehow,” she mutters to herself, surveying the bustling spaceport. Abie will have to stay behind for now. They secure her in the Falcon’s living area. She obeys Ren’s command to guard the ship.

Finn and Poe are more than happy to oblige on splitting into their duo. Rey can definitely hold her own, especially against Ren, who’s already pressed on his personal agenda to even consider crossing his present allies.

Across the landing strip at her post where she’s worked part-time since her early youth, Lisbeth eyes the newcomers with curiosity. A gang of humans—one athletically built woman who appears to be their leader, two unfairly handsome men, and one scraggly looking man with wide, familiar shoulders and a distinct, bisecting scar across his face. They appear to be more driven than any of the other passing merchants, tourists, and undesirables. Hopefully they won’t bring trouble to her town.

When the two handsome men pass her booth, she offers them a wink, even though one of them is old enough to be her father. The taller, younger one replies with a flustered salute at her forwardness, and his older friend just laughs and tells him to move along, to keep focused on their mission. Lisbeth sighs, hopelessly curious. What kind of mission could take place on Rhiannon, the galaxy’s most peaceful, boring homestead?

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“Are you done?” Marin grumbles. The sickness churning had only intensified since they left home. Hux spent way too long perusing a pawn shop and their depository drop off had been pushed back by almost an hour. His tracker chirps on his wrist, indicating the setback.
“You and your damned schedules,” Hux scoffs, then smirks. “I taught you well.”

“You also taught me to trust my instincts, and my instinct tells us it’s time to go home,” Marin snaps.

“Are you really that bent about staying out too late?”

Marin feels something—something he thought he’s equated with visceral fear ever since he was a boy. It can only be fear that stains him. What other sensation burns as hotly as fear, starkly in his veins like wildfire?

“If you’re gonna be a stickler for time, hop on over to the depository while I look at the market for the produce your grandmother requested,” Hux says.

Damn, that would get things done faster and they could be home in double time. And the market is just around the corner from the depository. If he senses Hux is in danger, he can leap to his aid. Danger. Danger hasn’t been a factor in their daily lives. But he just feels so sick today. He cannot explain it. “Alright,” Marin agrees. “But no dawdling.”

Hux laughs. “I never dawdle!”

“Father. You dawdle.”

All but shoving his son in the other direction, Hux walks along the sidewalk, grinning against the afternoon cloud-speckled sky. Marin may have his issues, but Hux can always trust him to make the right call.

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Rey and Ren couldn’t be worse partners. When Rey instructs him to go left, he tells her he knows the way and goes right instead. If he weren’t on a hunt for his estranged family after four years of separation, she wouldn’t let him get away with his petulance.

The odds are extremely slim that they’d run into Hux on the street, but this lead is the first Ren’s had, ever. He’ll scour every building, every residence. But what he refuses to do is to publicize Hux’s image and name on the chance that Hux truly is here in this town, so Ren had advocated for pure observation. No photos or holos or descriptions of any kind, so as to not threaten the safety of Hux and their children. Their safety will always reign over Ren’s need to reunite with them.

Whatever his selfish wants and desires may be, he must put them second to the safety of his family. And if that means Ren never sees or hears from them again, if that means he’ll never live to see his children grow and thrive, to tell Marin he’s so, so sorry. To tell Hux he loves him, just one more time—

Rey’s elbow greets his gut, and Ren doesn’t have the chance to form a proper reprimand when he lays eyes on her amazed, hopeful smile. She’s never directed a smile in his direction before.

Strolling along a farmer’s market with a basket slung over his arm, stands the once-General Hux. Bright red hair tousled by the passing gust, form-fitting knit sweater accentuating his slightness. He plucks a few potatoes for his grocery basket. If Rey didn’t know any better, she’d have thought that fair, skinny man with a skip in his step was one of the most harmless lifeforms in the system.
In stunned, besotted shock, Ren gapes from his hiding place in plain sight. Four years, four long, lonesome years, and the love of his life is right in front of him. Feet frozen in place, Ren absorbs this new, grocery meandering Hux.

There aren’t words. Ren must have forgotten how truly beautiful Hux is, how brightly the sun follows him.

Ren shakes his head. He closes his eyes.

“What are you doing?” Rey snaps. “He’s right there.”

He’s shutting down the needs of his selfish heart. “It’s been years. He never bothered to call or to contact me in any way. I can only see one glaring reason for that.” Ren swallows around a surge of tears. “Because he doesn’t want anything to do with me.”

Rey wilts, throat closing around a heaving breath. It’s happened before. The wretched sort of sympathy she feels for Kylo Ren, given every sickness he infected in countless hearts, the lives and names he claimed as his own including the life of her mother. “You don’t know that. He could have been hiding away with your children and didn’t want to risk tipping the Resistance off by contacting you. And if he truly has left the First Order, he doesn’t know where our base is. He could have been searching for you all this time.”

Hope shines bright in Ren’s heart. “I-I don’t even know what I’d say,” is his excuse. Across the way, Hux inspects some orange and yellow fruits, snickering to himself as if a humorous memory surfaced, private in his carefree mind.

“Yes, you do. Look inside. The answers are there,” Rey says, and it’s all the affirmation Ren needs.

Taking a leap of faith, Ren moves toward Hux, whose back is turned. Although Ren’s Force-sensitivity has been compromised, Hux glows the same vibrant comfort that Ren’s soul pleaded for while they were apart. Heart in his throat, Ren approaches a cautious crawl.

When Hux doesn’t move or acknowledge his existence, Ren passes a desperate look to Rey from the other side of the path. She makes an exasperated hand gesture. So he gets on with it.

“Hux,” Ren grates. This works. Hux turns around.

As soon as Hux spins around, his carefree, easy fruit picking face stiffens into an incredulous terror. Someone addressed him by name.

Blinded by his desire to be with Hux again, Ren radiates pure elation and completely bypasses Hux’s fear. How had he forgotten the enchanting fire behind the greens of Hux’s eyes? The full bows of his lips, his cunning features? The patterns of freckles that bloom from exposure to the sun, flecks like wisps of a nebula’s cosmic dust?

Hux’s only response to them being reunited after all these years is a gruff glare and a tentative shift to his surroundings as if Ren’s toting the entire Resistance militia.

So Ren begins, because there is so much that needs saying. “You look…” Ren begs his broken acknowledgement. “Fuck, four years and I have no idea what to say. How have you been?” Ren adds stupidly.

Hux doesn’t answer, his incredulity shifting to fearful puzzlement. He sets his groceries aside—as if to make a run for it. Ren panics. He couldn’t have already fucked this up, not like this.
So Ren starts again, and Hux glares at him but allows him to speak. “I’m so sorry for everything that I’ve put you through,” Ren continues, despite Hux’s alarm and confusion. “I’m gonna do everything I can to be in your life and the kids’ lives. And just because I’m with them, please don’t fear that I’d ever do anything to compromise your safety, or Marin’s or—”

Hux shuts him up with a bruising, thin-fingered grip to his arm. “Listen here. Whatever you’ve been told about me, I’m sure it’s true. But you have no business bringing my children into your war. I left that part of myself behind a long time ago. And if you or anyone else wants to try and test that, there will be nothing but wrath and hellfire at the end of that path. Got it?” he punctuates, throttling Ren’s bicep.

Of all the things Ren expected Hux to say upon their reunion, a full-fledged threat isn’t one of them. Hux’s heart inflames protectively as he speaks of their children, but the only feelings he has towards Ren is glowering rage, a substantial fear—and something akin to unrecognition.

“Hux,” Ren pleads, mutilated fingernails abrading his palms. There's something in Hux’s tone, undeniably odd and misplaced given everything Ren knows about him. “I-I haven’t come here for that. I've never stopped thinking about you, not even for a moment. I want nothing more than to pick up where we'd left off. All of us. I want us to be together. I want to make amends with Marin. That’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

Instead of his usual incredulity for Ren’s antics, Hux bristles with unmasked disgust. “I don't know who the fuck you are or what sick game you're playing at, but if you plan on keeping your head, don't come anywhere near me or my son.”

What is he hearing? “Hux—”

Blood red stabbing engulfs his mind, all senses blinded with agonizing, shrill blades. Clawing at his scalp, Ren hunches over. There's no reason or any explanation to his pain other than pain, pain, pain—

“Marin,” Ren hears Hux demand. He can't make his eyes pry open against the knives, until he hears a familiar voice. A voice that's changed. Gotten older, matured, and hardened with hatred. Sharpened with fear.

“Get to the speeder, Father. I'll handle this,” growls an unmistakable order. Ren forces his eyes upward, bleary with tears.

Marin stands tall, broad, and daunting. He looks so grown and so angry and reminds Ren so much of himself from his large, imposing stature to his unmasked loathing, and most of all the fear stinging in his eyes. Ren is so incredibly overjoyed to see him after these long, lonely years that he forgets the haunting memory of Marin’s blade at his neck on the day they left, the forgets that Marin despises him, he forgets that Marin is the one that took Hux and the twins from him. He doesn't even realize that Marin’s the one tormenting his mind because he's just so unbelievably elated to see him again. Marin despises him, but all that matters is that he's with his son again.

“He knows our names. He knows who we are,” Hux hisses. “This is because of your friend—”


Ren groans as the knives persist. He braces against the agony as he wrenches his gaze to Rey, who's frozen at her spot, eyes glazed over. Marin must be in her head, too, though she's not in any
apparent pain. Marin has reserved the pain for Ren.

“Marin, we can't let them bring our location back to their people,” Ren hears Hux above. “We need to take care of him. Now. I won't let them come close to us or our family,” Hux sneers threateningly.

Ren can't believe what he's hearing. There's so much that he needs to say but the knives keep him at his knees in surrender. He expects Marin to agree, to feel the singe of Anakin Skywalker’s lightsaber at his neck. So much has left Ren, including his will to live. If Hux doesn't care if he lives or dies, he has no reason for being.

But Marin says nothing. The blow never comes.

“We need to. He may be insane but he knows us by name,” Hux says above. “And there was something about what he said. I don't know what to make of it but we can't take the chance that he's here to hurt you or the girls,” Hux argues, the impulse to protect his brood high above all else.

With thinly veiled petulance, Marin asks a dreaded question. “Have you ever seen this man before?”

“No, I’ve never met him,” comes Hux from above, his certainty causing Ren to groan over the blood pulsing in his ears. Ren forces his eyes upwards, pleading for Hux to look him in the eye. Confusion and disgust spits back at him.

Hux doesn't know him? How could that be? How could Hux forget him? Hux is the love of his life. Through the implanted deathswitch, their hearts are connected intimately, permanently. He's the father if his children. They're meant to be together as a family, a real family. The Force brought Ren back to life to give him another chance at happiness with him. At the end of all things, they are meant to be one.

How can Hux not even recognize him? The answer lies deep within him, a betrayal solidified like the stab of a lightsaber to his chest. Ren cannot face the truth behind Hux’s unrecognition, even as the cacophony of knives drive deep into his skull to punctuate the obvious.

_I would never hurt you or Hux or Seren and Taran, I swear to it. I will never hurt you again_, Ren pushes the words against the knives, as if Marin could receive them in this state of unhinged aggression.

“Go, now,” Marin tells Hux. “I'll take care of it.”

“Like hell I'm leaving you with this man. We need to finish him off together—”

Hux's mouth snaps shut when Marin interrupts Hux with a burst of dark energy, pushing and drowning Hux’s will. Marin hasn't done this to Hux in years, for he loathed how monstrous it made him feel. “Go,” he commands. Hux, like Ren and Rey, is nowhere near as mentally powerful as him. He complies as if it's the only imperative, leaving Ren to grovel in the dust of the secluded market aisle.

Marin gasps, composure waning like toppling bricks. Kylo Ren is finally here to finish what he started: to destroy his family, to turn Hux against him. Miraculously, Hux hadn't recognized Kylo Ren as the man he'd surrendered so much to throughout his life. Fortunately Marin’s mind wipe had withstood Ren’s presence and pleas.

He drops to his knees to wrench Kylo Ren up by his collar. Marin is stronger now. He's getting
closer and closer to achieving peak physical strength, and combined with his mental Force manipulation skills, Kylo Ren doesn't stand a chance. Regrettably, he'll have to scourge Rey’s mind of the entire encounter, but Ren is first. It's time to finish the job right.

Marin summons his hatred, the slimy dark monster fanning the flames of his firelight. The time has come. It ends now. “You should not have come here,” he snarls.

He was so wrong in letting Kylo Ren live. He should have cut his head off back on Ithor in the forest, despite Hux’s pleas and protests. And Grandmother—his other grandmother—would have hated him for taking her son from her, but he could have changed her mind with his powers. He could have changed everyone’s minds about him, the Resistance, the Jedi. He could have made everyone respect him and *fear* him and never dare come between Hux and his little sisters—

A shaky palm inspects Marin’s cheek. Careful and reverent, Ren’s blistered hand cradles his son as the hatred melts into shock. A self-driven realization.

The hilt of Finn’s spare blaster throttles the back of Marin’s skull, sending the overgrown teen into a sprawl atop one of Ren’s shoulders. Unconscious and no longer a threat, Marin’s control on both Ren’s and Rey’s minds slips away.

Finn grimaces, sorrowful. He never, ever wanted to hurt Marin, but the Force swam darkly around him. In that moment, no longer was he the little boy who once ran into his arms after a too-long mission, the boy who ran and played kicking-ball sports and sparred happily alongside with training staffs. Marin is large and certainly more powerful than he once was and though he’s still a boy, in that moment he was a creature with intent to harm, to *kill*, and had to be neutralized.

Blinking away the residual aggravation from Marin’s hold on his head, Ren nods up to Finn in gratitude. On the ground with his son unconscious in his arms, Ren closes his eyes and envelops him in a limp, nonreciprocal embrace.

Chapter End Notes

...................................... anyway happy father's day :D

all in all a pretty sucky father's day for Kylo ;( but at least he got to hold his unconscious bby boy ;(  

i hope you all enjoyed the 'reunion' scene. There will be plenty more convergences and interactions from here on out!
Marin wakes up to the distinct sensation of wet, incessant licking. His eyes flutter open. Two dopey eyes greet him hello. Blearily, he pets a large hand against the furry annoyance. Marin sits up. It’s not just any furry annoyance.

“Abie?” he croaks in bewildered joy.

Yes, it is me! Abie seems to say, lapping and nuzzling her old friend. It’s been so long since he’s coddled her with his warmth.

“Oh, Abie. I never thought I’d see you again,” Marin says, wrapping his leanly muscled arms around her neck. “You’ve gotten so big! Look how long your nose is. And your legs and your tail,” he gasps.

You’ve gotten big, too. We’ve both changed a bit but we’re still friends, she seems to concur with her petting and pouncing.

Marin was distracted by his heartwarming reunion with his best pal that he failed to recognize the familiar surroundings trapping him, the buttons and switches of the Millennium Falcon’s cockpit. Memories from earlier resurface: the slick, blackening fear of sensing Hux’s alarm at the farmer’s market and the last person he ever wanted to see again—Kylo Ren.

There’s movement by the door. Marin could curse himself for not sensing him sooner.

Ren allows himself a tentative smile. He managed to convince Rey and Finn that he needs to be the one to speak to Marin first. Cautiously, he steps forward.

“She really missed you. I know you missed her, too. Finn let me take care of her but I only said I would until I could return her to you. I managed to teach her several commands,” he tells his son’s impatient glare.

Marin stomps to his feet. Whoever knocked him unconscious had left behind a nasty bruise, but he powers through the discomfort. Squaring his shoulders and clawing his hands into fists, Marin looms in Kylo Ren’s space. “Leave. Do not return here.”

“Abie can retrieve just about anything you throw. She’s good about chasing birds just long enough to let them free,” he says, meeting Marin’s searing glare.

“Nobody wants you here. There’s no one here that gives a shit you’re here or that you’re even alive.”

“And she’s good about covering up her messes with soil, like a cat. It’s really something. I don’t even think I taught her that,” Ren continues. Choked up against his son’s hatred.
Persisting like a stubborn, shattered bullet in bone, Marin affronts Ren hotly, projecting every ounce of hatred and disgust he could muster. “Hux doesn’t even care about you. And pathetically so, he was the last person who ever had. Now you have no one. The twins don’t even know your name. You’re nothing but a sperm-donor to them. And to Hux, you’re nothing. Just a crazy man at the market that he all but begged me to kill—”

In a flash of red, Ren accosts Marin by his shoulders and slams him bodily into the wall. Shocked, petrified, Marin crumples. He feels like a little boy again, getting spat out of a freighter.

Ren gapes, eyes playing tricks as he sees his hands turn into monstrous, deformed claws. He snatches his hands away, just in time for the Rey, Finn, and Poe to slide open the cockpit door.

_You did this. You turned Marin into this. He was a dutiful, honorable boy and you twisted him into a monster_, Ren grovels, pushing himself outside the cockpit and onto a padded wall. _You twisted him into you._

_And now you have no one._

--

Hux pulls up to their homestead. No groceries, no depository receipts. No Marin. For the life of him, he can’t remember where Marin said he’d run off to in the middle of their errand run.

Marin was going to take care of the strange man who knew him and his son by name, who claimed to be sorry for something he did to him. That odd, mesmerizing man. Haunting in his fervency, Hux was hinged on every word he said. He’s never seen such open, heartbroken sincerity in a lifeform before.

Grimacing in confusion, Hux unsheathes his comm he uses to communicate to his son lest he stay out too late with his friend again. “Marin, where are you?” he sends. Within moments, Marin replies with: _Will be home later. Don’t wait up._

‘Don’t wait up,’ his arse. Hux groans, shuffling back inside through the garage. Seren and Taran are at his mother’s side, folding laundry.

“Look at my busy worker bees,” Hux grins. “You two are so helpful to your Grandmother.”

Seren and Taran beam from the praise, working as a team to fold one of Papa’s soft sweaters. They love helping Grandmother and making Papa smile.

“Where’s Marin?” Aems asks, concern piquing.

“Oh, we parted ways at the market,” Hux discloses. He doesn’t want to tell his mother about the compelling, tragic stranger. He doesn’t tell her why they parted because he doesn’t really know. All he knows is that he needed to leave Marin behind to his own devices. It was his decision to trust Marin with their threat. He’s certain.

“Armitage,” she says, down-turning her nose. “I know you’ll always have your secrets. But I just want to know Marin is safe.”

His mother is probably the only person who can make him feel like a child again, like little
Armitage, fidgeting in his too-big uniform. “Marin is capable. You know that. He could talk his way out of just about anything.”

Aems chuckles. “Telling people to ‘screw off’ hardly constitutes good diplomacy skills.”

“Right, you are. But he’s fine. I can’t mother over him forever.” It’s a sad ultimatum, but it’s the truth.

Aems simply hums. “I know you’re too proud to admit it. But I’m not afraid to say that I’ll never stop mothering. I’ll be in your craw ‘til I’m in my grave,” she shrugs, her smirk youthful and sly.

Hux laughs. How he made it this far without his mother will forever remain to be a mystery.

“Papa, can we make a big giant sand castle? Please?” Taran requests once her pile is stacked to the best of her premature abilities.

Seren gasps. Taran has really good ideas. “Yes, can we please? Please, please?” she concurs, following her sister’s politeness.

“Of course we can. Just let Papa grab our beach bag and we’ll go right away,” Hux says. How could he resist their impeccable manners?

Hux checks their beach activity bag containing their sunhats, sun-block spray, sand toys, while Seren and Taran help each other with their sandals, murmuring little confirmations and minor respites. Aems waves her busybody son and her granddaughters off, smile twinkling in the sun.

At the beach, Hux sets up their play area, instructing them to hydrate before they get too tired. Seren grabs the big pail to move her buckets of sand to her liking while Taran takes a much more micromanaged approach, organizing stones around neat carvings of sand. She definitely has the eye for detail.

Hux smiles up to the sun as his freckles darken under its rejuvenating radiation. His mind wanders to the market, to the impassioned man with the scar bisecting his soulful hazel eyes, who both terrified him and bewildered him.

“I’ve never stopped thinking about you, not even for a moment. I want nothing more than to pick up where we’d left off. All of us. I want us to be together. That’s all I’ve ever wanted,” Hux recalls, rolling the man’s maddened confession in his head.

“Papa, I think the man is hurt. His heart is hurt so bad,” Seren says remorsefully.

Hux’s heart flutters. “What man, dear?”

“The man with the scar,” Taran clarifies, for she too has something to say about this mysterious man.

Skin pimpling, Hux scans the horizon for any intruders. There’s not a lifeform nearby, save for the droves of migrating swooping birds. “There isn’t a man, Taran.” The man with the scar. How could Seren and Taran possibly know the man with the scar?

“Not here. Out there,” Taran clarifies, as if it’s obvious.

“But you put him here,” comes Seren. “When your heart was hurt, too,” continues Taran.

Deciding his girls might just be messing with him, Hux chugs the rest of his water canteen. “You
two just want to make me crazy, don’t you?”


Hux sighs. Well, they’re not wrong.

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Marin thumbs the usual response to Hux’s groveling into his wrist comm, slumped over on his knees in the Falcon’s cockpit. Abie gives him warm kisses. He really missed her kisses.

Across from him are Finn, Rey, and Poe Dameron, all of which he has yet to give a proper greeting to. He’s confident they sense his animosity. He’s also confident they suspect he’ll try and make a run for it.

Kylo Ren paces outside. Marin can feel the bruise along his back from where Kylo Ren shoved him into the wall.

Rey is the first to speak. “We were just discussing how happy we are to see you alive and well. I’ve thought about you greatly. And so have Master Luke, and Grandmother. They miss you,” she implores, every ounce of her training keeping her voice unwavering.

Marin says nothing, focusing on Abie’s soft fur. Abie nuzzles him, adoring her friend with her sniffs and licks.

“You’ve gotten tall,” Rey adds. “You look so grown up.” Marin’s now taller than all three of them, nearly taller than Rey by a head. Marin’s tall because his parents are tall. Unfortunately, Marin shares a great many characteristics with his parents.

“Please talk to us,” Finn says, begging with his eyes. “I know you didn’t intend to leave like you did, and that you were trying to protect Hux and your baby sisters. We’re your family, too.”

Rey nods, encouraging Marin to make any comment at all. “We’ll always be there for you. We’ve always had your best interests at heart. You know that.”

“Yeah,” Poe interjects, surprising them all by speaking up. Poe never had the chance to become close to Marin, but he’s long since forgiven the boy for what he did to his mind, and accepted him as kin. “We’re always gonna have your back. I know why you left, and it was brave of you to do so, in the middle of a battle, no less.”

Shifting on his feet, Marin meets their eye level. He could do whatever he wanted. Make the trio pass out, infect their minds with a lie and make them think they never found him. He could make them beat Kylo Ren to a bloody pulp and throw him down a cliff face.

But he’s still here. After years of parting from the Resistance, from his family, he can’t help but welcome their presences. Marin shifts his spine straight, barely registering the bruise on his back.

“Why have you come here?”

Rey kneels on the floor with him and joins his petting of Abie. “We wanted to see you. I needed to know you were safe.”
There is another motive adjacent to this personal one. Gather Hux for any and all information on how to defeat the rising breed of mental-space cohabiting Stormtroopers. Information, nothing more. She may despise what Hux has done to so, so many lifeforms, but there's no changing it. What matters is Marin’s happiness, and even Ren’s. Another self-sacrifice made in the name of the greater good.

Marin’s throat works over his guilt. “You know why I had to break away completely. I trust you, all of you. But I couldn't bear to return to the Resistance if it meant he was there. And Hux needed me. Seren and Taran needed me.”

The ‘he’ is clearly Ren, who's slumped in the hallway catching his breath. Finn and Poe step forward. “We wanna reconnect. Somehow, even if it means occasionally, but we wanna be in your life. Especially Master Luke and your grandmother. They keep calling us for updates. We want you to talk to them, but we want you to want to talk to them,” says Finn.

Marin considers Finn’s words. “But I disgraced them. The last thing I did to Master Luke was cut off his arm.” He remembers the rage, the Vader-like torment. He remembers the shame when he realized his sin.

“That you did,” Rey says. “But like most things, it was never unforgivable. Master Luke has forgiven you. Have you begun to forgive yourself?”

Waning like a dying bloom, Marin hunches over. He feels too big, too clumsy, too out of place. “Rey,” he begins. “I've done something.”

“What?” she asks, heart rate spiking.

“You say most things are forgivable. But I know you wouldn't think that about what I've done. What I've been doing since I left,” he grates, tears clouding his green-blue eyes.

She places her warm, healing hand on his scarred one. “Whatever it is, we'll face it together. All of us,” she cocks her head towards Finn and Poe, and allows her eyes to drift to Ren on the other side of the threshold.

Marin crumples, because no she won't. None of them will.

Perhaps this is the best way. They can finally show him they truly have given up on him, and he'll have no issue with twisting their minds like how he twisted Hux’s into murdering the taint of Kylo Ren.

Mourning the loss of his family, Marin succumbs to his prediction. It's time to let go.

“When we initially left Ithor, I had to beg Hux to come along with me without Kylo Ren. And when he didn't, I meddled with his mind to make him do as I pleased,” he sniffs, not meeting Rey’s patient eye. “And that didn't work. All Hux wanted was to be with Kylo Ren again. So using my powers, I told him Kylo Ren had died. And he believed me.”

He falters as Rey flashes with scorn, confusion, and a weary, cautious fear. Pushing on, Marin continues. “I've never felt heartache like that. Hux was—lost. He couldn't have taken care of the twins in that state. So I amended what I forced his mind into believing. I told him there was no such person. I wiped away every shred of memory that had anything to do with him. Until Hux didn't feel anything like what he felt for Kylo Ren. All he cared about was his children. We were finally the most important things to him.”

Luke Skywalker had wiped his daughter's memories of her life before Jakku, her precious
memories of her mother, but ultimately it divided them and led her to suffer. He said it was to ensure her safety and it was, but not solely. He knew no one would find her and kill her, thus leaving him alone in the galaxy. He'd nearly destroyed her for that selfish endeavor. He'd nearly cut out his own heart.

Rey stifles the resentment. Her father is a flawed man and has paid the price just as they all have. What Marin’s done was for a greater, selfish purpose. Like Luke, Marin is hindered by the damming fear of being alone.

“Is he happy?” she asks, needing to know if Marin can be honest.

“He is. He has Seren and Taran and—” Marin’s throat swallows his final confession, in fear the Jedi will attempt to use Hux's mother as some sort of tool for their agenda. Perhaps he doesn’t quite trust them entirely.

Nearly silent, Kylo Ren finally comes into Marin’s line of sight. He looms over the threshold, eyes red-rimmed and doleful. The trio across from Marin force themselves not to react.

“He is happy,” Marin continues, with more conviction. “We've become a real family. He's got the twins, and he's got a job. I go to school and do tons of activities with my friend Lis,” he adds. “Hux smiles all the time.”

Ren divulges very little besides his usual brand of depression. Brow furrowing, Marin is determined not to be fazed.

“Hux spends so much time with the twins. He also goes on dates,” he embellishes, just to see the hurt in Kylo Ren’s features. He’s careful not to mention he foiled just about every chance Hux took at finding unnecessary romance, but Marin finds a sick glee in seeing the hope fizzle from Ren’s eyes. That Hux has moved on and has no need for him. That Marin, Hux and the twins are better off without him.

Rey doesn't have to tell Marin what she thinks of what he's done, even if it is to the wretched General Hux. Memory alteration is a heinous violation. Her contempt stings, but it cannot outshine her love for her little cousin.

“He's happy?” Ren speaks up from behind the trio.

“Yes,” Marin snaps.

Ren steps closer, Han Solo’s boots that bind his feet helping guide his footfalls. “Would he still be if you told him the truth?”

Affronted, Marin gets to his feet. Rey follows in suit, forming a human barrier between Ren and his son.

“Yes. I know he would see how his sacrifice has benefited his children. There are more important things than self-interest, Ren.” Marin spits, the use of his name a pure act of defiance and disrespect.

Ren holds his son’s glare for a heavy moment. He used to think Marin was the spitting image of Hux. And he still is—his high cheekbones, his full sneering lips, his striking, symmetrical green-blue glare, the nebulous freckles a permanent fixture on his fair skin. But the hatred in his aura, the terror that crawls beneath his skin—these are instantly recognizable within Ren’s self.

Adjusting his footing, Ren passes a meaningful look to Rey. “We’re not only here for a reunion.
The Resistance believes Hux has answers to some of their great questions regarding the growing genetically enhanced Stormtrooper threat. It's bigger than you and me,” Ren says determinedly.

Rey flattens into condemnation. Could he have picked a worse time to propose their ulterior motives?

Desperately, Marin implores to Rey and Finn and Poe. Before he gets the chance to explode in a very Ren-like fashion, Rey holds out a patient hand. “We just wanted to talk with him,” she says. “It doesn't have to be right away. But we were hoping for Ren to use their history to appeal to him.”

“My family isn't a tool for your agenda,” Marin growls.

“It's not about you,” Ren says, standing his ground. “It's about the people and worlds that will be destroyed if the First Order isn't stopped. Hux is the most qualified person to help. He’s the only person. It's not about you or him or me or any of us. Understand?” He looms in his son’s space, authoritative. He's got about an inch of height on him, if that, now that he's standing upright.

His father’s words appear to get through to him. “He won't help you. He'll have no reason to,” Marin counters.

“Only if you give him one,” Ren says.

Boldly, Rey holds up a palm to Marin’s bicep. Thankfully the boy doesn't twitch away. “Marin, you know how important the fight is. It's the only fight. We're not asking you to risk your family. Just talk to Hux on our behalf. We won't go near him.”

After all these years, Marin has never had a reason to truly distrust the Jedi. He's always trusted Rey’s heart. But can he trust she'll reciprocate, with the weight of the galaxy on her shoulders? “If I can't convince him to help, what will you do?”

Finn steps forward. “We believe in you,” he says, a salute to build hope.

Marin nods, then backtracks. “But...you said you came here to get Kylo Ren to convince him to help. You know why you can't do that, right? I—” Marin swallows, panic rising. “He almost murdered my baby sisters. He's hurt me and my family every chance he got. I don't want him involved.”

Rey can see the guilt festering in Marin’s heart, clear as a polished crystal. His fear for his family’s safety is a real, substantiated fear, but his judgement is shrouded by a different kind of all-encompassing fear. The fear that Hux will never forgive him for what he's done to his memory of Kylo Ren. Rey wilts, understanding.

“We won't have to. It's not our place.” Rey can feel her cousin shifting in her peripheral.

Marin notices Ren, too. “I want to speak with him alone,” he says, jutting his chin to Ren. “Please,” he adds.

Poe and the Jedi exchange unsure looks. Ren regards his son with surprise, and a bit of tentative hope. Efficiently, the trio escort themselves out. Finn motions for Abie to follow and she complies. But not without giving Marin a nuzzle goodbye. She can never be too sure when she'll see her friend again.

When Ren and Marin are alone, Marin crosses his arms, giving his father some space. “Why did you come here?” Marin demands, glaring out the Falcon’s viewport. “Don’t give me any shit about the greater good.”
Ren can’t lie to him. “So we could be together,” Ren says. “You know it.”

His son isn't having anything he's offering. “Hux doesn't need you anymore. He's been happy for years. There isn't anything for you to come back to.”

Heartbreak flickers in Ren’s eyes. He schools himself into stern resilience. “Why?” he grates, knowing the answer. Hux and their children are everything to him. They're supposed to be a family.

“Because you're not a part of him anymore. Did you ever consider that? He's truly happy for the first time on his life, and it's because I got him away from you. Isn’t that what you wanted? For him to be safe and happy?”

Unable to face the truth behind Marin’s rebuttal, Ren steps forward to his determined son. “I need to tell him.”

Marin’s fingernails pierce his palm bed. “Like hell you will. I'll make you shoot yourself in the head before I let that happen,” he threatens, sneering and looking entirely too much like Hux.

“I’ll tell him. And if he chooses to live his life without me, I'll leave,” Ren continues. “Will that satisfy you?”

Barreling toward him, Marin stifles the wobble from his fervent plea. “You can't tell him. No matter what, you can't tell him.”

“If he truly doesn't want to have anything to do with me, then he has to know—”

“You can't tell him what I did to him!” Marin barks, shattering like glass. Tears sting in his eyes. There's so much pain, so much guilt.

Ren gasps, taken back. It's like he's looking in a mirror.

“You can't,” Marin grates. He knew what he'd done to Hux's mind was wrong and he did it anyway. He did it for the greater good, for Hux's safety. for Seren and Taran’s safety. How can something so absolute, something that ensures his family's wellness, feel so wrong? And now he's begging Kylo Ren to keep his betrayal under wraps.

Ren understands. How could he not? He too committed countless heinous acts of betrayal to the people he loved, whether he meant to or not, his sins were his own.

He comes to a selfless conclusion. “I won't,” Ren says. “I won't tell him.” He knows Marin’s fear. It's the fear of being resented by the people he'd move worlds to protect. For years his son's fear has been consuming him, his heart blackened with its oily taint.

Enormous frame sagging, Marin claws at his elbows. “You can't tell him,” Marin repeats.

“I won't.”

“Promise me.”

“I promise,” Ren vows, earnest.

“And you have to promise me you'll leave and never come back. I'll get Hux to help the Resistance but after that, we're done, understand?”

Leave now? After he's only just gotten here? Ren’s in no place to be bargaining, but his heart has
called for his other half for so, so long. He can't fathom leaving, ever again.

“I wish to see them,” Ren blurts. “I won't tell Hux about—about me. I won't even use my real name. I just want to see them.”

Marin’s face twists into a sneer. “Why? What good will that do?”

What good will it do? “You all are all I have. I need to know they're alright. It's been so hard without any of you.”

Shaking his head, Marin turns toward the viewport. They're parked against a grey cliff face, moss obstructing the grainy patterns embedded in the stone. Gods, Ren makes him physically ill. “I don't trust you.”

Han Solo’s boots creak along the floor of the Falcon. “You don't have to trust me,” Ren says to his son’s tense shoulders. “Just trust that I love you, and I love our family, and above all, I want you all to be happy. That's all I've ever wanted.”

Glaring towards his rear enough that Ren can catch it, Marin takes a wearisome breath. “If I take you to him,” Marin begins carefully, “and you see how happy he is, will you stop? Will you leave us in peace?”

“I will,” Ren says. It's a belief he has for his present self. He cannot guarantee that he'll feel the same of he sees Hux with their daughters, smiling and laughing and living. Without him.

Marin studies the viewport for a heavy, indefinite moment. Maybe if Kylo Ren sees just how well Hux and the twins are doing without him, he'll finally realize how much they've grown since he's been apart from them. To see the final shred of hope dim to nothing, will fill Marin with the most fulfilling of achievements.

Together they brief the Resistance trio on their compromise. Rey, Finn, and Poe couldn't be more surprised. Rey turns to her cousin. “Are you sure about this?”

Hell, no, he isn't sure. But it has to be done. He was lucky enough to settle on such a volatile agreement with his son. Ren levels with Marin, who sneers an indefinite scornful grimace in opposition.

“It's the only way to get the help the Resistance needs. I'm prepared to make every sacrifice for it,” Ren says gravely.

The unit breaks off, leaving Poe and the Jedi with the Falcon. “He knows we’re tracking him, right? We should've just given them the Falcon,” Poe murmurs to Finn as Ren and his son retreat from the landing pad.

“Probably not, but the plan is to give them their space,” Finn replies. “Maybe a walk will do some good.”

“I don't like this,” Rey grumbles, hands on her hips. “The minute he sees Hux again, he'll crack.”

Finn shrugs, considering. “Maybe he needs to crack.”

They're both wrong. Poe shakes his head. “I don't think he will. You saw him with Marin. He can hold his own of it means the kid will be happy.”

“I hope you're right,” Rey sighs. Naturally, Abie chases after Ren and Marin, startling their distant
forms with cheer.

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Marin cracks his knuckles. Everything about Kylo Ren is irritating. The way he walks, the way he breathes when overexerting, and especially the way Kylo Ren’s eyes stab into his back as he leads the way.

“Stop staring at me,” Marin snaps. They're about an hour from home. After insisting they meet Hux at a public place, Ren had to of course disagree. His excuse was that there was no way he could know for sure Hux was living in comfort and contentment.

“I haven't seen you in years. You look a lot different,” Ren mutters.

Marin doesn't bother containing his malice. “That's what happens when you get left behind. People change. They move on.”

Abie whines at Ren’s side. She wants to take a break. They've been walking for over an hour and her paws are getting a bit sore. Ren finds a dry place on the field to plant himself, much to Marin’s dismay. He takes out a canteen and lets Abie slurp from the spout.

The Rhiannonian sun flickers from high above the passing cloud formations, gusts of cool winds crossing Ren’s too-long hair over his eyes. He's let it grow past his shoulders, much longer than Rey's, but not nearly as long as his mother's. The other night he found a small collection of greys just under his part. His father had a full head of greys, the last time they spoke.

“My father used to say that people don't change. They can grow, but they don't ever change,” Ren tells Marin, who’s chosen to glower at the distant mountain forms, slated in white stone and evergreens.

“I wonder if he always knew you were a murderer,” Marin says downwind.

Ren’s long since accepted his sins. “I didn't say I felt the same. My heart tells me people can change, for the good or bad of it.”

When Marin finally looks at him, a grimace-like smile twists his lips. “Is that what you think has happened to you? I see right through your shit. You'll always be self-interested. You don't want to see if Hux is happy. You want him to see you so you can take him back. You don't care for his happiness one bit.”

Ren shakes his head, sure of his reasoning. But his son won't allow it.

“Prove me wrong. Go back to where you came from,” Marin goads.

“If you truly believed that's all I wanted, you'd have made me turn back. You'd have changed my mind for me before I'd even made it up. The reason you haven't is because you know I'm operating on behalf of the Resistance, the galaxy,” Ren says confidently.

Fuming from Ren's trickery, Marin covers up his defeat with a haphazard scoff. “Whatever makes you feel important, Ren.”
There it is, that name. Ren can tell he's using it to portray disrespect, but it only reminds him of how Hux would complain to him, get him riled up. “I got plenty of reasons to, kid,” Ren counters, embracing his Solo blood.

Marin flinches. Ugh, everything, even his words are irritating! He stomps off, a bit too satisfied when Ren scrambles to follow.

After another hour of miserable silence, Marin leads them to the dusted path leading back to his home. Hux will be there, with Grandmother and Seren and Taran. Stricken with a refreshed dread, he swivels on his heel.

“We’re approaching the house. I’m gonna go in first to tell Hux the crazy man from the market is back.” Marin narrows his eyes when Kylo Ren’s excited hopefulness brushes him in his projection. “I'm in charge here, understand? You do anything that I don't like, you'll live to regret it.”

Ren can't break his focus from the roof peeking over the hill. It's a beautiful property. It's something he would have imagined coming home to in one of his self-indulgent fantasies. Hux would be waiting for him, lounging on a couch with a book. He'd welcome him with open arms and permit him to burrow atop his chest and count his heartbeats.

When Kylo Ren doesn't react to his threat, Marin shoves at his shoulder. That gets his attention. “You better not fuck this up. I'm in your head. One thought and I'll have your brain tell your lungs to collapse.” He's never tried it but he'd be more than happy to use Kylo Ren as his lab rat.

Despite knowing that if his son wanted to kill him he would have done so by now, Ren glares, chill pimpling his covered skin. “We gonna get on with it or do you wanna trade more insults?”

Marin resists the urge to push back. He knows he's the one in charge, here. Kylo Ren just gets under his skin. He has all his life. Telling Kylo Ren one more time to stay put, Marin trudges for the door.

It flings open just as his hand brushes the panel. Aems greets her grandson with a concerned hum. “Just where have you been all day? It’s unlike you to keep us out of the loop.”

“Where's Hux?” Marin demands. He never uses Hux’s name, and certainly not when addressing Grandmother.

Aems raises her fine brows. It's rare her grandson behaves with disrespect. “He's at the beach with the girls.”

Throat tightening, Marin glowers to the porch. He'd prefer it if Kylo Ren never saw his sisters. But perhaps this is the only way he'll be satisfied. After all, Hux always smiles around his two enigmatic daughters.

“Who's that man?” Aems bristles, eying the figure pockmarking the peaceful pastures of her surrounding property. “And the dog?”


She takes a long gander at the mysterious man. “Is he dangerous?”

Marin meets her eye. “No,” he lies. “He just has to speak with Father. It's important. I'd never allow anyone to come close to hurting us.”

“You're quite grown,” Aems commends, then smirks. “But not that grown.”
Ren adjusts his boots in the soft grass when his son approaches. “Who’s she?”

“She's my grandmother.”

He hadn't expected that. “She's—?”

“Shut up and follow me,” Marin snaps impatiently. He's got this under control. He's got this. “If I get any indication you're blowing this, I'll—”

“You'll make me swallow my tongue, got it,” Ren quips, without any heat. His son is supremely unimpressed, but the pull of a pair of unmistakable firelights shine brightly in the distance. He knows he's closer than he's ever been. Hux’s firelight shines too, a beacon at the end of his fumbling path. But he hasn't felt the twins since that fateful day on Ithor when Marin kept him from following them, begging and pleading in the dirt. Headstrong, he pushes towards the rest of their unit.

On the beach, Hux warms a bit of hypoallergenic sunblock for his daughters’ noses and cheeks, lathering the lotion between his palms. They're protected with their matching sun hats but they have a bad habit of flinging them off when they have the urge to watch them soar. Seren complains about the restriction as he’s come to expect, and Taran just wants Marin’s beanie, no matter how warm Hux tells her she'll be.

“Try not to lose these hats, dearests,” Hux chides. Seren is already trying to adjust it to her liking—off and in the sand—but Taran manages to knock some sense into her. She orders her sister to behave. Reluctantly, Seren tugs the hat back on her curly head.

Hux grins at Taran’s dutifulness. The peaceful expression slips off his face at the floating, corporeal stones around their bottoms, hovering like a halo of asteroids. The twins peer inquisitively at the hilly dune separating the view of their grandmother’s property and their leisurely beach day.

“What are you doing?” Hux asks, unable to hold himself off.

“Just waiting,” explains Seren. Taran, who’s normally on her Papa’s wavelength, agrees with her sister with a compulsory nod.

“Do you see the stones? Look,” he presses. “I don't understand.”

Taran smiles down at the stones. Things often do what the stones are doing. Doesn't Papa know? “They're just stones,” she snorts. Sometimes Papa is too funny.

Her Papa appears to be unsatisfied with her response. But a disruption from the hills tears their eyes from the two familiar faces. The first is his son, stern and resilient. The second is the man from the market, who shouted and pleaded to him, who knew who he was and knew of his son. Additionally, there’s a giant white dog trailing after them.

The man from the market is atop the dune, a pace from Marin, gaping in shock in his direction. Hux glares. The threat has found him. And that Marin appears to have led said threat here.

Ren's throat works around a thick clog of hope, awe, guilt as he grapples with the two perfect, beautiful little girls. They've grown so much. In unison, they lock eyes on him, the unfamiliar man invading their space. Ren never expected to ever come this close to them again.

The surreality of it all only worsens when he steps closer to them. Hair so dark from under their hats, it could only come from him. Eyes so richly brown, they look like his mother's. Firelights so
striking they could only be one of the few, precious descendants of Anakin Skywalker, the Chosen One.

Ren may have his Force-sensitivity depleted, but he doesn't sense a shred of darkness in them. He'd sensed it in Marin, in the past and present. In his future, whatever that may entail. Ren’s sensed darkness in Rey, back on Starkiller when her blood boiled and urged her on to strike a killing blow. He's sensed it in Luke when he discovered his wife's body among his other slain Padawan.

But the darkness is like oil to their freshwater. As all things do, they sit inside an imperfect galaxy, with an imperfect family, an imperfect existence. Yet their hearts retract the darkness as if it was afraid it would flicker away if the twins laid a single little finger on it.

Ren is so caught up with honing in on the twins—his daughters—that he fails to catch Hux inches away from him, sneering vehemently enough to cause him to falter.

“How did you find me? Marin, are you under duress?” Hux demands, not breaking eye contact with the mysterious, scarred man.

The girls watch their parents in wide-eyed concern. Of course, they know not of Ren’s relation to them, his blood that gives them the ability to float books and stones like windswept feathers. Regardless, the scarred man enraptures them, as if they were face to face with a mythical figure from one of their papa’s books.

Ren shudders under Hux's fierce protectiveness. This is the second time they've all been together as a family. Ren smiles as he realizes this. Hux falters at the man’s unnerving reaction. Stricken with an unnamable feeling.

Righting himself, Hux squares his thin shoulders. His weight loss is more evident, before his broad shouldered son and this even broader man. “Who the hell are you?”

“Go on, tell him,” Marin pushes. Testing.

Ren breaks his teary gaze from the two inquisitive little girls on the beach. “My name is Ben. I’m captain of the Millennium Falcon.”

Marin gapes, burning a hole in Ren’s skull. Why did he think Kylo Ren would be able to control himself?

By sheer luck, Hux seems to not recognize the name with the face. “Is that supposed to mean something to me?” Hux hisses, his only concern for the wellbeing of his children. He feels no fear, only fierce protectiveness.

“I’m not here to hurt you. I’m here for your help,” Ren implores. At his heel, Abie sits up straight, attentive and alert.

Hux isn't convinced. He knows a villain when he sees one. He’s the most villainous of them all. “You're Resistance, aren't you?”

“Yes,” he admits. For the time being, he is. Their son’s knuckles pop from his nervous fists.

“How did you find me? Did you follow me?” Hux barks, impatient. The twins squint at the quarreling pair, situating their stones to their liking. They grin at Abie, who whines with the urge to approach the two tiny humans.

“I brought him here. Ben here didn't give me much of a choice,” Marin answers.
“Did he threaten you?” Hux asks his son, dread piling up and heaving.

Straightening, Marin puts a foot between him and his fathers. “Not in so many words. He said a lot of people will die if I didn’t.”

“And you believed him?” Hux scoffs. Honestly, this man could be anyone! What was Marin thinking?

“It’s of no consequence if I do or not. It was either him or his Jedi warriors. This man is harmless.”

Hux glares skeptically at Ben—Captain Ben?—his shoulders drawn together as if that could make him less menacing. He trusts his son’s judgement, as well as his Force powers. Surely his special gift will best this man if he decides to cross him.

But this whole situation is heightening too quickly, the risk racking up too greatly. Hux lowers his voice, strangely wishing for privacy with his next nagging question. “Why did you approach me the way you did?” Hux asks, unease quickening his voice.

When Ben responds with a brow pinch of perplexity, Hux looms close. “You spoke to me like you were sorry for something. You looked at me like—” Hux’s tongue fumbles, unable to render a conclusion.

Ren wilts, tired eyes softening. His body screams to take Hux in his arms, to feel his weaponized heart thud against his own. “I was—confused. I thought you were someone I once knew,” Ren lies, bulbous bottom lip twitching from restraint.

It’s not the man’s words, but his eyes, that push Hux into accepting the vague answer.

Hux’s pant leg snags on an incessant prod. It's Seren. She's tired of being ignored. Hux trembles with the impulse to grab his daughters and stow them away from the scarred man’s earnest eyes. “Dear, go back with your sister.”

“Why?” Seren complains. She makes a grabby-hand at the big white dog, grinning at her long snout. When her Papa restricts her from petting the dog, she leers at the tall, teary-eyed man. Seren hasn’t met a lot of people but she feels as if she’s met this man once before. It’s very strange. Papa has to know she feels this way, so she tugs him down and cups the space by her mouth to show she wants to whisper him a secret.

Ren’s cracked lips tug into an astonished smile at the incredible exchange: Hux kneeling down patiently to hear what his daughter has to say. Hux’s attention is away from him and Marin momentarily, so Marin uses this opportunity to shove a sharp elbow into his gut. Not too hard, but just enough to warn him to keep his distance.

“At’s the man,” she hisses in Hux’s ear. “The man with the broken heart.”

Taran saunters over, little sandals kicking up the bright white sand. She knows her sister is getting into trouble, as usual, so she grabs her by the arm and escorts her back to the beach. Beach day isn't over.

Sparing a long, calculative glare towards the man who doesn’t belong, the man she may recognize from the picture-flashes she and Seren get in their heads, but has no interest in speaking to, Taran leads her sister in a safer direction. She doesn't leave without ogling the large dog, cautious of her impeccable size and strength but curious towards its beautiful fur and wide eyes.

A lump bubbles up from Ren’s throat as he watches the twins bicker in earnest, then come to a
truce with a warm, reciprocal hug. From the beach their hug devolves into horseplay, Seren shouting “chase!” and egging her sister on to chase her around their picnic site.

*The man with the broken heart.* Hux shakes off Seren’s mysterious secret message. “I have no personal or political interest in helping you or your people. Marin, get your sisters back inside,” Hux orders, the twins’ laughter ringing from their short distance. This Ben doesn't appear to catch his animosity. He can't take his eyes off his lively girls.

Marin doesn't move, not even when Hux glares his signature *do not argue with me.* “This will be the last time we meet,” Hux says to Ren.

If Marin and Kylo Ren can't get Hux to give them information, then Rey and Finn and Poe will take matters into their hands. Or worse, a swath of Resistance fighters will take him from their home to do their bidding. “It's either him or their army,” Marin warns Hux. “There's no getting around it.”

“Let them come. We'll see how far they get,” Hux scoffs glaring at Ben, who's ogling him with that hapless, penetrable gaze.

“You won't want that,” Ren says, eyes flicking over to the giggling pair by the shores. “All we need is information. It's about your Stormtroopers. You're the only person—”

“Listen, Ben. I have no interest in helping you or betraying my former people,” Hux jabs. “If I ever see you here again, you'll regret it.”

Taking control of his own personal pleasure from seeing Kylo Ren’s anguish, Marin focuses on the objective. Whether he likes it or not, Kylo Ren is right. Gently but sternly, he tugs Hux aside to converse in simulated privacy. Ren—Ben, he should refer to him as—will probably be able to read their lips. He's that desperate.

Thankfully his father doesn't protest much. “All we have to do is keep our heads down and give this man information, and he'll be gone,” Marin says. “You won't even have to do anything.”


“It's different now. You know that. Do you truly believe you're still loyal to the First Order? It's not about them. It's about us, our future,” Marin implores.

Ren permits Marin and Hux their conversation. He's just fortunate Marin is operating with the Resistance, not against them. Countless lifeforms will be saved through his sacrifice. Even if the main reason Marin's pushing and pushing is to force Ren into keeping his end of the bargain by leaving forever.

Seren and Taran have settled, and they lie on their backs pointing to the cloud formations. Rich, full adoration blooms in Ren’s heart. He wants to cook them their favorite meals, play with them in their yard, tell them tales of adventure from his youth with his rebel parents. He wants to take them for joyrides on the Falcon, introduce them to his mother, have his uncle and cousin teach them the ways of the Force.

“Tomorrow. I have other duties tonight and I'll give you an answer tomorrow,” Hux says, interrupting Ren’s fantasy.

At the promise of a fresh start, Ren splits into a grin. “Alright. I'll take it.”
Hux’s pointed grimace softens, foundations shaken from Ben’s elation. It’s a good look for this odd man, regardless of his troublesome political affiliations.

“Only tomorrow. I'll tell you everything you wish to know,” Hux says curtly. “But only tomorrow. Afterwards, you and your army, you leave us.”

The grin weakens on Ren’s face, but he forces himself to nod. Satisfaction rolls off Marin in waves. Ren mustn't allow this setback to depress him. Before today, he's never expected to even see Hux or the kids again.

However he knows one day will not be enough. The taste of the life he's wanted ever since he first realized just how much he truly lost. “I'll see you tomorrow. Hux,” says Ren, extending a hand to shake.

Other than Hux's affronted sneer, he doesn't appear too perturbed of Ren’s forwardness. Ren takes a breath when their fingers touch, a spark, a tremendous shift as Ren revisits the softness of Hux’s palm with his own calloused one. Even his years in exile after Starkiller weren't enough to harden him.

After a dangerously long exchange, Ren excuses himself, stealing a soulful look to the giggling twins.

With a final salute, he retreats back to where he came with Abie in tow. Marin’s glare sears the back of Ren’s neck.

Chapter End Notes

kylo sucks at aliases!!!!!! Thanks so much for reading:D
Chapter 24

Lisbeth adjusts the goggles squeezing her skull, preparing for her speeder ride home. She's spent most of her weekend working and all she wants is a nap, and maybe a quick call to Marin to see how he's faring. Given his history he's probably not all that spectacular.

She's just about to peel out when a familiar furry flash catches her eye, bringing a delighted smile to her lips. It's the white dog from the morning, scampering alongside the tall, broad, grumpy man that accompanied it planetside. The man turns his nose, revealing his regal profile, marred by a single gnarled scar over his eye. There appears to be an odd sort of pleasantness about him, as if he just received an unwarranted compliment about his appearance. Which is unlikely, by the look of him.

The man turns down an alleyway, and Lisbeth resists her childish curiosity to follow. Only for a second. What’s the worst that could happen?

Enticed by the mystery, Lisbeth covers the man and the dog’s footsteps, keeping a safe enough distance from them so as to not give herself away. As expected, the man leads her to the landing pads just on the other side of this row of stone buildings to a vessel. Lis gapes, as the vessel is one she’s undoubtedly seen before, but only in recordings and stories, a vessel as timeless as the tales of heroes.

Her eyes boggle at the spectacle before her. The Millennium Falcon! It has to be. She's studied every hologram, every photograph, every recording of her grandfather's ship. The ship he lost to Han Solo, which he eventually had it in his possession after they reunited during the Galactic Civil War when Solo was taken by the bounty hunter. Her grandfather had flown the ship in the Battle of Endor and lead the offence against the second Death Star.

This is the ship of legends. Of heroes, of scoundrels, of adventures that rush by faster than the speed of light. And here it is on Rhiannon, just outside her spaceport. In the hands of the four newcomers who caught her attention.

Overcome with curiosity, Lisbeth comms her mother to tell her she won't be home for another few hours. She's tempted to comm Marin so he can get in on the adventure, but she knows that boy has his head in the clouds since he came clean about his father's past as an ex-general for the First Order.

How the hell is she gonna get on board if there are four combatants standing guard? What if they're all criminals, who would stomp on any shy, eager teen desperate to discover her namesake? She may not be close with her grandfather, but she can come close to admiring his heroism and bravery when she ignores that those very strengths had nearly destroyed their family.

“Can I help you?” barks a voice behind her, accompanied by a distinctly canine bark.

Lisbeth spins on her heel, throat clenching around a gasp. It's the scarred man and his dog. He's quite menacing at first glance but once her shock fizzles, he just looks puzzled. “Nope. I'm just—”

Ren glares down to the petite teen aside the brush surrounding the landing pad. “You think I can't tell when someone's following me?”
Swallowing, Lisbeth gapes around a pang of fear. In a heartbeat, she narrows her eyes in accusation. “If you knew I was following, why did you lead me to your freighter?”

Good point. So it took him until he already got here to catch her. Not his proudest moment, but he's been consumed with the sound of Hux’s stern reprimand, Marin’s curled disgust, Seren and Taran’s giggling and play. “Because I have nothing to hide,” Ren counters, though that couldn’t be farthest from the truth.

The girl regards him, sizing him up. “Who are you guys? You and the other three.”

Ren keeps up his charade, for Marin’s sake. His son may despise him, but he can do the one thing he requested, to maintain his alias. “I'm Ben. We’re all here on a mission.”

Lisbeth already knew that. She overheard the two handsome ones bickering back in town. “What kind of mission?”

“Information extraction,” Ren says vaguely.

“You're Resistance,” she declares after a thoughtful pause.

Ren hesitates. “Yes.”

Interesting. Lisbeth ganders to the Millennium Falcon. The Resistance must have acquired the freighter through General Organa or possibly Solo. As far as she knows, those are the only two people who'd appreciate the Falcon’s glory. Save for her grandfather, of course. “That's the Millennium Falcon,” she says, needing to confirm her suspicions.

Something akin to fear flashes in Ben’s eyes. Lisbeth waits for his explanation. “It is,” Ben says, like it's a shameful secret.

“I knew it!” Lisbeth shouts, overjoyed. She can't wait to tell Marin about this! “Are you the captain? How did the Resistance reacquire it? Last I heard, Han Solo got it stolen by one of the countless gangs he pissed off. Did he get it back? Or did you steal it from him? I wonder if he knew that it ended up here, of all places—”

“He gave it to me!” Ren shouts, startling the surrounding wood. The teen recoils, taken back. “I didn't steal it. He gave it to me,” he repeats, trying to cool down.

“Alright then,” Lisbeth laughs, raising her brows. What's with this guy? “Touchy-touchy.”

“Why do you care so much about this ship?” Ren grates. “How do you know about this ship and about—about Han Solo?” Who the hell is this girl?

“I know about it because it used to be my birthright,” Lisbeth explains.

Ren glowers. “Your birthright,” he says warily, not even knowing where to begin.

“Yeah, my damned birthright. Do you even know who this ship’s original owner is?” Sheesh, this guy is really easy to rile up.

“Han Solo?” he asks the surreal, insane question, as if this were some pop-quiz.

“Before him.”

Ren sputters. Preposterously, he scours the Falcon for any details that might appease this miniature tormentor.
“Does the name *Lando Calrissian* ring any bells? He's only one of the most important heroes of the New Republic, second probably only to General Leia Organa herself.” She mistakes Ren’s astonishment for confusion. “Ben, if you're gonna fly this ship, you gotta know the history,” Lisbeth scoffs. Amazing what jokesters they allow in piloting academies these days.

Before Ren can fabricate a response, the ramp to the Falcon descends, and the Jedi rush out to see what the ruckus is. “Everything okay here?” Rey asks Ren, wary of the new face.

“It's fine. She was just leaving,” Ren says gruffly.

“And he was just lying,” Lisbeth glares. “My name is Lisbeth Calrissian. I was just asking about the freighter. Ben here was just about to invite me aboard for a tour,” she grins triumphantly.

“A tour?” Finn asks, simultaneous with Rey’s far off, “Calrissian?”

“Yes. You're all Resistance. Calrissian must be a household name to you people.”

“You're related to Lando Calrissian?” Rey questions.

“I'm his only granddaughter. And I know the Millennium Falcon by reputation, the most important part of it being the fact it was my *grandfather's* until he lost it on a bet with Han Solo.”

Lisbeth could continue, but she's interrupted by the handsome man behind the two younger ones.

“I'll take you on a tour. C’mon,” Poe smiles invitingly. No one objects, so the girl is led aboard the freighter.

“What happened?” Rey asks, once the girl is out of ear range.

Ren remembers his purpose here, after momentarily being thrown off by the adamancy of Lando Calrissian’s grandchild. “Marin took me to him. They've all been living in comfort and quiet at a private property by the sea. The twins, Marin, Hux, and even his mom,” he says, astonished.

The Jedi offer their shock. Because come on, General Hux, a homemaker? With his mom? This is definitely one of the galaxy's many conundrums.

“I told him my name is Ben, but other than that, I laid everything out. At first he told me to get lost. But then Marin got through to him and he told me to come back tomorrow. I think—I think its best that I go back by myself again. More new faces might make him hostile.” It was hard to accept Hux wouldn’t recognize him, but sadly not as shocking to be on the other end of Hux’s hostility. Ren’s accustomed to Hux’s opposition, only this time it wasn’t because of his pride, but his determination to defend his children and home against him and the Resistance and anyone that would dare destroy the life he crafted.

“That's good,” Finn commends. Honestly, he had no idea what to expect from all of this. “What about the twins?”

Ren stiffens. “What about them?”

Finn doesn't really know why he asked. Maybe the promise of a family getting reunited entices him. He's made a new family for himself, but the question of his birth parents, his homeworld, will always niggle at his brain.

“They're good,” Ren nods, believing it. In the end, that's what is most important. Self-sacrifice and love. They're the reasons why he chooses to lie to Hux for Marin’s sake, the reasons why the twins
will always remember him as he strange man with the ugly scar.

The three wait for Poe and the girl to saunter out from the Falcon, their conversation lively and friendly.

“Thanks, Poe,” Lisbeth beams, lost in the older man’s eyes. Commander Poe Dameron is his name, and he’s a much better conversationalist than Ben. He's a Resistance hero, in the fight since he was a boy, when the Empire fell and hopes were high for an unencumbered future.

“Not a problem, Lisbeth,” Poe smiles with his eyes to the others to show them how their tour was a harmless, fun distraction.

“So how long are you guys staying for? I don't mean to impose, but my best friend Marin will just die if I told him I didn't ask to invite him to see the Falcon,” she says, eyes hopeful and bright.

“Excuse me,” Ren brushes past them, tears stinging. He managed to hold in nearly everything, but this girl—Lisbeth—has managed to crack through his exterior.

“That man is a bonafide punk,” Lisbeth sighs when Ben scurries off, his fluffy dog in tow.

“That's putting it lightly,” Finn mutters. His comment brings out a wry smile to Lisbeth’s lips, and she gets Rey and Finn to cough up their names. Unfortunately, they both shut her down about her friend Marin coming to see the ship, their tones withdrawn and stern. Lis sighs. Some things are just too good to be true.

Ren last saw Lando Calrissian on the ship that rescued him and heavily pregnant Hux, where they had delivered Marin and escaped with one of the Resistance’s shuttles. He nearly took Lando’s head off, and if it weren't for the risk of Hux and their newborn, he truly believes he would have.

Lando and his father were close after the war. As a child, Ren knew him as the man his father often left one of their rare nights together at home to go off and gamble or do something scoundrel-like, reliving their youth of piracy and adventure. They never invited little Ben along, for he would just get in the way.

Now, Ren understands it was to keep him safe and not piss off his mother, but at least Ren’s memories of Lando aren’t limited to him wanting to cleave the man’s head off.

It makes an odd sort of sense that Marin would reconnect their families, whether he knew so or not. If only his father, who knew Lando’s daughter since she was a baby, could see them now, each generation connected to the next.

Ren hugs his torso, falling asleep to Abie’s faint snores.

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At the clinic, Naedie is in the middle of one of her sessions with a young girl with far too many anger issues for her tremendous age of seven. While the girl is completing her drawing used for therapeutic, artistic expression, Naedie glances at her comm. She skims over Lis’s message. Hopefully when they meet at home tonight, Lis will have a far more detailed account of her workday than ‘mom the craziest thing happened. Crazy epic. I mean EPIC,’ and ‘can you pick up a tub of my favorite crab soup?? I’m too tired to. please please pleeaaaassee.’
She’s about to thumb a brief reply when she hears her receptionist shouting ‘you can’t go in there!’ right before her door swings open and slams in its time-pressured hinges. It’s Marin, white-knuckled and breathing fire.

Her receptionist scurries in after him. “I’m so sorry, Naedie. He just barged right in.”

Something in the Marin’s unhinged hostility is enough to pardon her hapless assistant. “It’s alright. Marin, here, was just running a little late for our session.” She turns to her blank eyed patient. “Ida, sweetheart. Will you please finish your drawing in the hall at a waiting table? I’m very excited to see how it turns out.” From the caricatured torment in the drawn figure’s expression, Ida might be one of her most frequent patients.

When they’re alone, Naedie waves a hand. “Have a seat.”

“You know why I’m here,” he growls. It took everything for Marin to allow himself to leave their house, Hux, his grandmother, and the twins unguarded and vulnerable. But he had to confront Naedie for betraying him.

“You missed your appointment,” she says, not bothering to stand from her chair.

“You said we could trust you, that you would protect our secrets as if we were family. But you told the Resistance exactly where to find us.”

“I commed the only person I could trust.”

Marin sneers. Why is she denying it? “Lando? He’s their ally. What did you think was gonna happen? Why did you need to even tell him in the first place?”

“I was there the day you were born.”

Incredulous, confused, Marin finds his balance. “What?”

“What I’m trying to tell you, Marin, is that I know who you really are. I know who your family is. I know your father, your grandmother, knew your grandfather since I was a child.”

Marin clings to his rationalism. “I have no idea what you’re talking about. Hux is my family.”

So Naedie tells him everything, from the rescue of the refugees who turned out to be lying First Order officers. How one of them was an obscenely pregnant young man in the care of the other man, who was even younger than him. She tells Marin about their cruelty and offense, so strange against the obvious compassion they shared for one another, especially their brand new little baby. Marin wilts, eyes darting about the room as if trying to paint a picture from her memory.

“So then I began to think: what’s the grandson of Leia Organa doing parsecs away from her, in a time like this? I sought answers. I was completely unsurprised to find that you were the one who kept yourselves hidden. I made my father promise to go through Leia before taking any other steps.”

Marin takes the chair in front of hers, glaring at the carpet. Seriously, how the fuck was he supposed to know Naedie was there the day he was born? Short of wiping her mind, there’s no talking his way out of this. And there’s no way in all hells he’ll ever inflict another memory wipe again. Not if he can help it. Violations such as those are committed by monsters, not him.

“The girls, they’re Kylo Ren’s, too. Aren’t they? They look like two mini Leias. Has she met them?”
Marin’s silence is more than an answer.

“You don’t have to tell me why you’ve erased that side of yourself, but please tell me you plan on explaining this to your sisters when they’re of age. You should not take that choice from them,” she says.

It’s done. There’s no taking it back. Marin finds the courage to live with what he’s done to that side of his bloodline. He does so every day. “Kylo Ren. You know him?”

“Briefly in my youth, more so in reputation as I grew older. I know Hux in reputation, too.” Aside from that one instance they crossed paths when Marin was a squishy miracle of a newborn.

“They’re both killers.”

Naedie raises her brows, and waits for Marin to continue.

“I know they’ve killed. But Ren. He’s everything that could be wrong in a lifeform. He kills without meaning, without honor. Because he thinks it’s fun. He’s had ample chances to show me he cared about me and he stomped on every last one. He’s the reason I haven’t seen my grandmother or Master Luke in years.” Marin buries his face in his hands. “You have…no idea what it’s like to live knowing the only reason you’re alive is because of a medical rape. By just breathing, I’m a reminder of Ren’s lust for power; how he’d do anything, violate anyone to get what he wanted. Some apprentice trained from birth and shit,” he growls, cursing Supreme Leader Snoke’s words. “All that torment he inflicted on Hux, and he didn’t even want me.”

Supreme Leader Snoke was the first voice he ever heard. Sometimes, he swears he still thinks in that gravelly, devilish voice.

He hates feeling pitiful, but what shines in Naedie’s eyes isn’t pity, but understanding, perhaps remorse. But he has yet to tell her why everything is under wraps, from his name, to his pedigree, to Ren as a concept itself. “It got to the point where Ren’s manipulation of Hux went too far. He was a danger to my sisters, and because Hux was willing to let him in our lives, I used my powers to banish all memory and feeling of Ren in his. To Hux, Ren is nothing. He doesn’t know his name or face. So if you tell anyone—even Lis—about Ren and who he is to me, you’ll never see or hear from us again.”

Naedie’s expression shifts from understanding to something calculative, but largely unreadable. “You do realize this is the most you’ve shared in all of our weeks of counselling? And it’s only been a few minutes.”

He hates being caught off guard. “Did you hear a word I just said?”

“Please believe me when I tell you this, but I’m not here to weasel into your life. I’m far from the pinnacle of morality and honesty, but I know people. I know them. Like with you. I’ve known you were behind a mask for years, and you may still be. But that never made me think I couldn’t trust you enough to spend time with my daughter or earn my loyalty.”

Threats rise up on his tongue, but Naedie continues with a reassuring vow. “I’m gonna leave your secret with the others. But secrets like these, Marin, they always unravel. I just want you to be careful when it does.”

Marin turns for the door. He’s already been gone from Hux too long.

“And Marin,” she calls after him. “If you need anything, if things get too hot, don’t hesitate to ask for help. I mean it.”
He spares her one last solemn nod before barreling outside. This will be his last session.

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The family arranges their dining table, Seren and Taran adjusting the silver cutlery just how their Papa showed them. It’s only breakfast, but a proper start to their day is a must in the Hux household. Papa fries their miniature cheese sandwiches and slices some unshelled boiled eggs, topped off with a mixed fruit cup. Marin takes care of his own meal, which mainly consists of a ration bar from the cabinet.

“I don’t think I should go to school today,” Marin says, instead of a good-morning. “Because of that man. I should be here when he comes back.”

Hux flips the cheese sandwiches, serving them onto two little plates to cool. The girls have already found their places, still in their pajamas but eager to get a meal in their bellies. “You know my military designation, right? I survived decades on my own,” Hux says wryly. “Don't let the spatula fool you.”

“I’m just concerned. I loathe unforeseen variables,” Marin groans. “Just for today. Let me. I need to know you and Taran and Seren are safe.” Ren cannot be trusted with Hux, especially now that grandmother’s left for work extra early. Hux and the girls will be all alone, and Ren could tell them anything, do anything he wants to them.

“Just today, then. Only because of your variables,” Hux snorts. He really doesn't know why Marin is so concerned with Ben. The man had already countless chances to threaten and harm them. All he wants is information. Hux will just have to think of something satisfactory enough for him.

“Good,” Marin nods, grateful Hux isn't putting up much of a fight.

An even rap at the door disturbs their peace. Marin stiffens, hand forming a fist. “I'll get it.”

When Marin unlatches the door, he scowls to find ‘Ben’ on their porch, his own contrasting smile not even faltering.

“Good morning,” Kylo Ren greets with a salute.


His son’s threats hardly lessen his mood. Although Marin hadn’t invited him inside—understandably—Ren’s just happy to be back among the family he's been chasing since he decided to stop running from it. “Thank you,” he says, grateful to have planned well enough on this journey to have packed fresh clothing and ample bottles of shampoo and body wash. He’d like another round at his first impression. Donning a snug charcoal henley, fitted cargo pants, and his father’s freshly shined boots, Ren paces in front of the closed door, gazing at the open surroundings.

The door cracks open enough for Hux’s green glare to peer through. Hux is wearing house clothes, a loose sweater that dwarfs his already slim stature. Patches of dampness from a sink speckle his belly, and Ren longs to find out what other minute domestic side effects have altered Hux’s once-prim appearance.
“Have you got something to write with?” Hux asks, shuffling onto the porch. He guides Ren to the only seat available, a large porch swing. Easily, Ren imagines Hux cuddling up to his side as they sip their morning cafés, his breath warm on his neck as they laugh about something inane.

Ren only realizes what Hux asked him after they’ve already found their seats, as far apart as comfort allows. “Um. I’ve got my comm,” Ren says dumbly.

“That won’t work. Hold on,” Hux excuses himself back inside, rejoining him after a moment with a notebook and an ink pen. Ren can’t help but inch closer when Hux finds his seat next to him. The bench sways with the shift in weight enough so if Ren were delusional, he could imagine they were truly together again.

“What’s changed?” Hux asks, setting the paper in his lap.

Ren frowns. Nothing’s changed, really. They’ve never had a life together. They never tried to, blinded by their selfish longings to climb and conquer, damning anyone who stands in their way. “What do you mean?” Ren asks, because he knows that’s not what Hux was asking.

“It’s been ages since I was of any relevance to anyone,” Hux says. “What made you come all this way? I have no relationship with the First Order. I haven’t truly had one since my life’s work failed at your hand.” Ben, the Resistance, all of them had compounded the effort of destroying his weapon. But if it weren’t for them, he and his children would be living spaceside, confined to rules and order, and he would have never met his birthmother. He can’t even imagine what his life would be like without Aems, how much of his spirit and vivacity for life would never have had the chance to be reborn again, as it had since meeting her.

Starkiller’s defeat was Ren’s fault, his personal fault, and this conversation is treading too close to the truth of their intertwining lives that Ren vowed to keep secret for Marin’s sake, in order to be permitted such intimate access into their lives. “The Stormtrooper program has taken an uncertain turn, and threatens our plight against the First Order. All I need is some kind of weakness, something we wouldn’t be able to get through hacking their networks and security complexes. Just something to give my people hope,” Ren implores. If someone in this damned galaxy will be given what hope Ren’s lost over the ages, then that would be enough.

“An unexpected turn? How so?”

“Our spies have proof Phasma has developed a new breed of troopers by using her conditioning to connect them psychically, then to the other officers, a very precious few of which are spies of ours. Soon it will be impossible for new intel to surface. All of our spies will have their minds probed daily as if they were computer chips,” Ren explains. “There’s got to be something you can give us that will cut their numbers enough that the reconditioning cannot be completed.”

Hux regards him as if he were a transparent crystal, scouring Captain Ben’s micro-expressions for any hint of deception. Such an elaborate deception would be unlikely, since from what Ben describes, the Stormtrooper program is evolving naturally. “Even if I were to have something, what good will it do for me to help you?” Hux asks, pen idling in his fingertips.

“Your son. He wants to save lives. The First Order has no interest in doing so,” Ren says. When Hux doesn’t give, Ren leans in closer, arm perched behind Hux’s back atop the drifting bench. “Families. Children. Innocents whose lives don’t need to be destroyed.”

Flinching, Hux edges away from him, repulsed by the truth behind his words. He works his pen over the unlined pages of the notebook, lines of uniformed text. Coordinates, instructions for the execution of the most viable weapons against the First Order.
Hux tears off the sheet, passing it to Ren. Eyes blurring over, Ren dares not to look. He hadn’t realized that in taking the information, he’d willingly have to part from Hux, to let them live their lives in peace. Maintaining the illusion, Ren tucks the paper carefully in his breast pocket.

“All this, and you’re not even gonna read what I wrote?” Hux scoffs.

“If there’s a problem, I’ll know where to find you. What did you give me?” He’ll know precisely what system, what hemisphere, just how many steps he has to take against the wind to end up right on this porch.

Hux rolls his eyes. This man is far too obnoxious. Which is a pity. He’s got an interesting face and shoulders that scream ‘I can pick you up and hold you there.’ When Hux realizes he’s staring at the man’s pout, he finally decides to answer his question. “There’s a kill switch protocol. A safety, lest anything happen to a Stormtrooper’s loyalty. Every trooper has an implant in their brain that’ll rupture with the right command. I just gave you instructions on how to topple the top tiers of troopers. That’ll buy you people some time. It’s all I have to offer.”

“Who else knows about this?” Ren asks, tugging the paper back out of his shirt to actually read it. Coordinates, code, even a pictogram on which switches to flip.

“Just me.” And his father, but he never lived long enough to see his Stormtroopers used against him, nor see his only son thrive in humble domesticity. “The coordinates are of a space station in an asteroid field. I doubt you’ll run into any opposition out there.”

“And it’ll work?”

“Of course it’ll work.”

“Why not give me the codes to offing the entirety of troopers if you’re sure it’ll work?” Ren demands. His own desires aside, Ren still needs something to give to the Resistance. He prays this is enough.

“Because, Ben, I’m giving you a priceless weapon that you’d otherwise be hopeless without, for absolutely no gain on my part,” Hux says, incredulity bleeding. “That's all I can offer. You must understand that this is difficult for me. If it weren't for my son, I would have shot you where you stood.”

The threat doesn't give Hux the reaction he'd hoped. Captain Ben just might be smiling. Not smirking in amusement, nor sneering in grim reluctance, but a pleasant smile, as if Hux told him some sort of pleasant surprise.

Abrupt, Hux gets to his feet, one hand behind his back in a mock militaristic seriousness. “You have what you came here for. I hope this is the last we'll see of each other,” Hux says.

Ren lets the bench sway at the shift in weight, indulging in a long gander at the property. Their life here is a good one. More than enough space, a father who cherishes and covets them, neither strict nor doting. He imagines Hux’s mother has a similar method about her. Their children are lucky to have such unconditional support, away from the war, from the Resistance’s chaos, from Ren.

Hux and their children are thriving. This is more than what Ren could have hoped for or even hoped to give them on his own. Since parting from each other, Hux has built a sustainable, humble life, something he never would have expected from his counterpart, even after the birth of the twins.

Being away from his family is the best thing that's ever happened to them. Staying away is the
final gift he can grant Marin, a way to atone for the ills in the boy's life. Staying away from the twins is the only way to keep them safe.

Ren stands, and extends a hand. Before the words leave his lips, he's sure he's making the absolute worst decision of his life. “Even if this plan fails, I won't return. I've caused you and—your family enough pain and suffering,” Ren chokes out, trying to stifle the wrongness of leaving.

Hesitating, Hux places his slender hand in Captain Ben’s proportionately larger one. Ben’s fingers span wide and warm. They fit around his ones nicely like congruent puzzle pieces. Hux hasn't truly felt the touch of another, not like how he's craved his whole life. So when Ben kneels low to place a kiss on his knuckles, a hot blush floods his cheeks. He doesn't dare withdraw his hand, mesmerized by Ben’s soft, reverent kiss. The pained pinch of his brow, the flash of sorrow crumpling his features just as he pulls away.

Ren heaves a deep breath through his nostrils, quelling his tears. “Take care of your children. You have no idea how lucky you are to have been given a second chance,” Ren says, straightening.

Coiling the hand Ren kissed to his chest, Hux’s eyes narrow their characteristic calculative scrutiny. He says nothing, not even a nod.

It’s finally over. His chance has been spent. Ren implores one final look to Hux on his homestead porch, cataloguing his beatific sun-stained coloring, his full, ever-youthful features, the glow of the sunlight brought to life in his hair. His calming, welcoming aura, the soul Ren’s heart will eternally be tied to, even if Hux will never know his true name. Ren turns from his family, back to the Resistance, back to the fight.

Hux runs a thumb over the skin Ben had kissed. He knows not what came over the man to do something so uncalled for, so inappropriate. But he knows it will take him forever to forget just how it felt to be on the end of such an intimate touch by a stranger, or how starkly the grief marred the man’s countenance. Or how Hux could nearly feel the man’s fret and dolefulness as if they were his own feelings, through some unnamable, inexplicable connecting force.

A small tap behind him startles him out of his reverie. From inside the house twin pairs of brown eyes ogle him from above a window pane. Taran holds back the curtain for Seren to get an up-close ogle. His daughters are truly inquisitive. ‘Nosey’ would also be a proper word.

Hux hadn’t realized the door had been opened. Marin glares into the distance, to Ben’s disappearing form. “Is he coming back?” Marin asks, not taking his eyes off Ben.

“No. I gave him what he came here for.”

Marin finds that impossible to believe. But if there’s any ounce of good left in Ren, he’ll keep his distance, now that he sees just how happy Hux and the girls are since he’s been out of the picture.

“So there’s no reason you need to miss school,” Hux turns, smirking knowingly. “I’ll give you one tardy, but on you go.” In a year or so, Seren and Taran will have their first day at school. And from then on out, Hux will spend his days alone.

To lessen any chance of a stress response, Marin agrees, heading off to school on one of Grandmother’s speeders. At school, he runs into Lisbeth at the school’s student docking.

“You’ve been ignoring my messages,” Lisbeth says instead of a greeting.

“I broke my comm.”
Yeah, right. “How’d you manage that?”

“Seren threw it in the toilet,” he lies.

Not those little girls. Marin’s cute dad taught them better. Lisbeth lets it go. Let Marin have his secrets. “Well I hope that was after the toilet had flushed. Too bad, because I found something in the spaceport. Something amazing.”

“Yeah? What?”

Lisbeth slings their arms together as if they were boyfriend and girlfriend. “You remember my grandfather?”

How could he forget? “Yeah.”

“Well, his ship turned up here, at our spaceport. The Millennium Falcon. It’s the ship that my grandfather flew when he helped take down the Empire.”

Marin’s step falters, but Lisbeth tugs on his arm to their first class. “Relax. I wasn’t in any danger.”

“Did you—see anything?” Marin demands, trying and failing to not sound desperate.

“I met the captain. He was a character. Kinda ugly, too. Had this nasty scar, and didn’t stop frowning for a second. But the rest of the crew was chill. The handsome one even took me on a tour. I wish you could’ve been there,” Lisbeth says wistfully, her encounter with the Resistance already a treasured memory.

Throat bobbing, Marin stifles his crossness. Lisbeth meeting Kylo Ren and Rey, Finn, and Poe is of hardly any consequence. Clearly they gave away nothing of their shared history with Marin. And soon they’ll be gone, if they haven’t left the planet already. Including Kylo Ren, and he and his family can spend their lives in peace.

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Finn had always believed that the First Order had some kind of failsafe for disobedience. But what he doesn't understand is that if they had the power to execute Stormtroopers with the computer command, how come his brain hadn’t exploded the minute he busted Poe out of interrogation?

“Hux must not have wanted to expose the secret for one rogue Stormtrooper,” Ren explains when he senses the visible weariness in Finn’s frame. “It wouldn't make sense for these codes to affect you, given your previous rank. You’d only been on one battle.” Hux had always tried to have every contingency plan. This could have been his leverage if Phasma or anyone had ever turned the tables on him. Of course, she eventually had, but destroying the entirety of his life's work after Starkiller probably wasn't his best option for reclaiming his power after Snoke had banished him.

“Yeah, but you're not the one who's taking that chance,” Finn mutters.

“We won't go through with this unless you're willing, Finn. We do this together or not at all,” Rey says, palming Finn’s arm.

Finn straightens. He feels the numb, nerveless scar tingle down his back, the one from Ren’s
lightsaber. “No, it's the only play we've got. We need to look into it, at least.”

Ren nods as the Jedi efficiently funnel to the cockpit, ignoring the lump in his throat. He never truly expected to see Hux and their family again. He never expected to see them living in such peace, Hux and Marin both happier than he's ever known them to be.

“Hold on,” Poe interjects. “Job’s not finished. We need a man on the ground to make sure Hux doesn't make a run for it. What do you say, ‘Ben?’” he eyes Ren meaningfully, cocking his head to the exit.

Immediately, Finn and Rey understand what Poe is extending to Ren. Ren, the unfortunate bastard, must have gotten the idea that he can't take the final forward steps toward what he's tirelessly searched for—his partner and their children. It's his choice. He could run and abandon them, or stay and mend the unhealed wounds.

“There's no reason for me to stay,” Ren croaks, knowing full well the opposite is true.

Rey steps forward. “You're joking, right?” she asks, not unkindly. After everything, can Ren really say he wants to leave?

“You don't understand,” he swallows. “You didn't see what I saw.”

“The only thing I understand is that if I were you, I wouldn't let go of the only thing in the universe I ever cared about. Especially if it was just out there, waiting for me with nothing standing in front of it.” Since she lost her mother and her family fell apart, she’s crafted and coveted a new one. One that truly gives her purpose that’s greater than the fight, and gives her a home that’s more than shelter. “You’ve got a second chance. You can’t just sit here and let it waste.”

It's not the same; it’s not that simple. But how can he make her understand? His family is safe and happy. It's more than he could have ever given them. “They're better off—”

“Is that what you truly believe? You can live with that for the rest of your life?”

The truth congeals on the insides of Ren’s throat, and the decision is made. He cannot take it back. How could he have ever fucking considered abandoning his very purpose?

“We'll be in contact,” Rey says, passing him a slip of credits for his time here for sustenance and shelter. “Don’t lose your comm but if you do, I trust you can improvise.”

Abie wags her tail at Ren’s feet, sensing her friend’s harrowing unease. She deserves to be returned to her rightful owner.

“What am I supposed to do?” Ren chokes out. He's at a stalemate with Marin and telling Hux who he truly is and what Marin has been doing to his mind for years will be an act of betrayal against his son. It'll cause an unprecedented rift between Hux and Marin. Ren simply can't enter their peaceful lives without ruining them.

“Just keep an eye on them for now,” Rey says, assuring. “And we'll be back, when the First Order is crippled and the Resistance has time to spend on fortifying their next strike. We'll come back and help you clean up this mess.” To Rey, reuniting Ren and his family reigns highly in her priority as if his family were her own. She supposes they are, Marin, the twins who she’d be delighted to meet in time, even that dreaded Hux.

Ren’s lip wobbles, strengthened with a newfound hope. He doesn't think, just reacts to the enlivening in his heart. He moves forward to wrap his large arms around Rey’s shoulders in
possibly the first embrace they've ever had since Rey was a toddler, chasing after her too-tall, angry cousin with grabbing hands and a cheery smile, begging, 'play with me, Ben! Playtime now, playtime now!'

Now, Rey’s too shocked to fully reciprocate. Her arms angle splayed and stiff at her side, shock that isn't quite distaste widening her eyes.

Rigidly, Ren removes himself to awkwardly shake Finn’s hand, then Poe’s. He smiles, thanks them for their help, and packs his meager bundle of belongings. Vader’s helmet and his trunk of lightsabers, his coveted possessions for so long, sit untouched in the storage deep below the decks of the Falcon. Entombed as relics. Ren no longer needs them.

He and Abie exit with a parting salute, and they stick around to bear witness to the Falcon’s glory one last time. Abie whines as the Falcon departs without them. “Don't worry, Abes,” Ren consoles. “We'll see them again. We're on a different path, now.”

This time, Ren’s heart sings with the truth that it's the right one.
Seren smiles in delight at the little slithering rodent on the porch. Its whiskers are long and bouncy like its tail. Its fur is wet from the sea, its primary place of residence. Papa told her once that these critters swim from shore to shore to visit their friends, catching fish along the way.

“It's doing it again!” she laughs to Taran. The critter is scratching its ear with its foot, its teeth drawn back in concentration. It's a funny face for such a little critter.

“We could name it. What would we name it?” asks her sister.

Seren hums thoughtfully. “How about...Marie!”

Taran chuckles and chuckles, clutching her belly and doubling over. “Perfect!” Marie makes that face when he sneezes, even sometimes when gets mad. Especially when he and Papa argue.

Seren hops back inside to fetch her and her sister’s favorite tech toy, the earpieces that plays long, recorded books that Papa put inside their tiny computer memories. She positions each of the four earpieces around the critter and plays their current favorite book about a farmer with dreams to become a dancer in the Calamari ballet. Maybe this critter has dreams of doing something greater than bouncing its whiskers.

Marin comes out on the porch to distribute his little sisters’ juice packs. Berries for Taran and citrus for Seren. He's sipping on his caf like how Hux drinks daily, but his is always thickened with cream and a scoop of protein from one of his many dietary supplements. ‘Even in your caf?’ Hux would ask. But what Hux doesn't understand is that he has to maintain physical strength if he’s to protect their family.

“Don't get too close to that thing,” Marin chides, grimacing in distaste.

“Why not? He's a friend. Want to know his name? It's—” Seren’s blabbing is halted by Taran’s two palms over her mouth. Soon, they’re caught up in a bout of playful wrestling and laughing like month-old puppies. Marin sighs, reluctant to watch his sisters on one of his rare activity-less weekend days. It's his duty. But that doesn't mean he has to be as enthusiastic to watch the two of them as Hux always is.

It's too early for their endless playtime to begin, but the twins were adamant about their Papa letting them play outside in the morning to greet the sun and all the little animals. If it were up to Marin—which it should have been, in theory—he'd be in bed, sleeping off his anxiety.

“Well, Papa is at work so I'm in charge. Keep away from that thing. It could have a disease,” he argues, careful not to sound too harsh.

“Fine,” Seren complains. She bends to pick up the earpieces and pockets them, and takes a dramatically large hop away from the perched critter. “How about this?”

Taran laughs, hopping three times away from the critter, farther than Marin is even standing from it. “How's this?”

“You know that's not what I meant,” Marin tries, but his sisters are already enthralled with their
newest round of playfulness. They scamper down the stairs to the yard, curling their fingers around
their eyes to mimic quadnocs. “This?!” come his sisters’ singsong shout.

“You're both hilarious.” Marin plants himself on the porch swing. “I guess these juices are all
mine, then.”

In tandem, the girls make a mad dash for the swing, plopping down on either side of their too-big
brother, claiming their juice pouches before he can.

Somehow, Marin’s few sips of his protein infused caf wasn't enough to keep him awake for more
than another fifteen minutes. He naps leisurely, with only a regard for his own well-being. When
he wakes, he makes no chore of it. From the tilt of Rhiannon’s sun, not that much time has passed.

Unfortunately enough time had lapsed for Marin to lose sight of his troublesome sisters. Sighing
exasperatedly, Marin picks up his cup he set on the floorboards and downs the rest of his
lukewarm caf. He grimaces to the front yard. No sign of them.

“Seren? Taran?” he calls around the outside of the house. Nothing. He tries inside, every room,
every hiding place. “This isn't funny!” he bellows, annoyance piquing. He's on the verge of panic.

Marin sprints outside looking for any sign of them. But there's nothing that indicates they were
ever outside in the first place. Clawing at his scalp, Marin rounds the house, shouting and pleading
for them to come from their hiding place.

A noise startles him. It's the whiskered critter from the porch, scurrying down the flank of the tall
house and to the grass, leaving and trail of sopping streaks in the patches of dirt. Marin’s blood
runs cold, and he sprints towards the sea.

The waves crash violently with the change of tide, uprooting shells and kelp from the uneven sea
floor. Heart racing, Marin scours the sand for clues.

Two deflated juice pouches lay in the sand. Right at the edge of the rough sea. “Seren! Taran!” he
panics, frantically kicking off his sneakers. If anything ever happened to them, he would kill
himself. Marin’s vision tunnels when his body hits the water, it's iciness a paralyzing chill. The air
might be warm but this time of year, the sea is a crazed, bleaching brine.

Marin ducks his head underwater for any sign of them. He sees nothing but hazy shapes, tugging
and swaying with the undertow. He scourges deeper, muscled arms moving the water around him.

He's under for just long enough to remember that he has no idea how to swim.

Marin spasms, propelling himself to the surface. He manages to break for air, but the success is
short-lived when he can’t sustain himself afloat.

There's no mind to perforate, no will to bend that will stop him from certain death. Only dark
shapes, icy suffocation, feral fear. It's just him, the unforgiving sea that plays no assistance in his
frantic splashes, his pleas for mercy, and the possibility that his negligence lead to his baby sisters’
demise.

The thought alone makes his legs stop kicking, his lungs stop fighting the burn. In another
heartbeat, the tide shifts and a mass collides with his side and wrenches him upward to safety.

A large, binding arm secures him to the surface and he gasps for air, oblivious to the identity of his
rescuer. Until—

Kylo Ren. He was supposed to be gone for good! Visceral, Marin blanches, coughing and sputtering in his arms. He shoves him away only to slip into the torrential sea again. A completely idiotic, selfish move. Getting a hold on himself, Marin wrenches out a growl as he allows Ren to support him. “The girls! Did you—did you see them?”

“What?”

“They ran off. They’re out here in the water,” Marin wheezes.

Ren struggles against the waves but persists, despite his son’s shoves of frustration when their feet hit the give of the seabed. Abie barks distantly from the shore. “You're the only one who ran towards the sea.”

“But—”

“I've been watching the backyard for hours. You're the only one out here.”

Together they trudge onto the beach. Marin wrenches out of Kylo Ren’s grip with a shove powerful enough to knock someone lesser to the ground. But Ren maintains his balance with a tiresome stumble.

“You've been watching us?” Marin hisses, chest heaving with his breaths of exhaustion, panic. How could he have trusted Ren would keep up his end of their deal? “You were supposed to be gone! You said you would leave us!”

“Good thing I hadn’t left with the Jedi or you'd be fish food,” Ren counters, not entirely jovial. It's true. He's been spying on the house for the better part of last night and this morning, tucked away in a hidden divot between two sand dunes. All he saw was two speeders departing at dawn, and much later Marin circling the house to scream and bellow. Ren hadn't understood why until Marin took off in a frenzy for the battering waves.

“Oh, you expect a thank-you? For all I know, you were the one who took them. You've done it before, you sick fuck!” his son roars, driving his fist in Ren’s nose with a satisfying crunch.

Gasping, Ren lurches on his feet, cradling his blinding injury. Abie hovers in concern, unprepared for such a situation between her two friends.

Ren holds up a hand in surrender, groveling around his muffling injury. Blood spills down his face, striping his damp skin. “This isn't going to solve anything.”

Kylo Ren was supposed to be gone, ancient history, never to be seen again. Impulsively, Marin lunges to attack him, beat his stupid face to an unrecognizable pulp. But before he can land a hit, in one fluid movement Ren grips his offending wrist, twisting his arm in its socket until he growls down towards the sand. Effectively neutralized.

“This is pointless,” Ren groans, his nose oozing out more blood. Hopefully it's a clean break. “I'm trying to help you.”

Marin regains his bearings, zeroing in on Kylo Ren’s vulnerable mind. “Let go of me,” he Commands through bared teeth. His powers compel Ren to waver and clutch at his skull. No longer will he be at this man's mercy.

“Four years and they've never run off or been in an inkling of danger. And when you show up,
they've disappeared? You really expect me to believe you had nothing to do with it?!” he shouts over the crashing waves.

Ren had been lying in the dunes for hours, just watching, out of sight and nearly a click away. He didn't want to position himself in such a way he'd ever be spotted, so he faced the house's rear. He didn't even see the twins get so far as outside, at all. But Marin, who bombards him with pulses of searing, agonizing mental energy, has no reason to believe him. No reason to trust a word he says. Trust is precarious. He lost it the day he handed his swaddled, whimpering baby boy to Snoke’s caretaker droids.

“I didn't—” Ren tries, stammering. “I couldn't—”

“You said you would leave, and you're still here! You're a liar and a pest,” Marin spits, driving the daggers into Ren's brain, twisting every blade. He thrums with power, with black, bubbling oil, as Ren thrashes in the sand. Finally helpless, spasming like a beetle overturned on its shell.

He could compel Ren to dig in the sand as deep as the bedrock. And he would push the sand over his head and suffocate in his handmade tomb. Marin would kneel atop his grave as Ren’s life dwindles, his final heartbeats thumping in terror until he succumbs to the dark suffocation. Hux and his baby sisters would have picnics every day above his unmarked grave. Marin’s sure to punctuate his knife driving with a projection of this fantasy so Kylo Ren knows just how much he is loathed.

Miraculously, his son’s knives falter and Ren can breathe air into his lungs. He coughs, Abie’s squealing replacing the ringing of his eardrums. His son’s rage, all his hatred, all solely for him—there aren't words. How could he have ever hoped to change things?

“Marie! Marie!” comes the unmistakable urgent cries of his daughters.

Bathed in relief, Marin pulls from Ren to meet his sisters at the top of the dune, their cheeks flushed from the wind and sun, chestnut eyes boggled in terror.

Marin lands on his knees, gripping their tiny shoulders. “Are you alright? Are you hurt?”

“My heart was beating so fast. Something scary was around you. Like a scary storm cloud,” Taran whimpers.

Marin ignores her concern. “Where we're you? Did he take you?”

Taran switches gears, her terror melting to annoyance. Focused only on Seren. “I told you he would be mad. I told you fifty times!”

“Taran,” Seren sighs her name like an exasperated complaint. “Okay. Stop. We did it together. So stop getting mad.”

“I'm not mad. I said Marie would be mad and look. He's mad.”

“No, no, no. We did it together so if he's mad, it's at you, too,” Seren jabs a little finger, their bickering far too complex for two four year olds.

Marin doesn't understand what in the galaxy they're talking about. “Listen,” he palms their cheeks. Thankfully, they stop their arguing to pay attention. “I'm not mad. Just tell me. Did a man take you? That man?” Marin cocks his head to Ren, who's slumped in the sand, absorbing the whole spectacle.

“Oh, he's bleeding! He's got blood all over his face!” Seren gasps. She's never seen so much blood
in her whole life. And the man’s not even crying like how she does when she skins her knee at the park. He must be so tough. His big puppy looks sad, though. Seren wants to comfort it, even though it’s bigger than her.

Taran puckers her brow, wide eyes meeting her fretting brother’s. “You hit him in the face,” she accuses, hushed so as to not let the man know their business. She can’t imagine why Marie would ever do that to someone.

Absurdity makes Marin lie. “It was an accident.”

“Really?” Taran asks. This makes her feel better. If Marie hit him on accident, then her tummy has no reason to twist and bubble uncomfortably. Accidents happen.

Unable to face his lie, Marin presses his concerns. “Did he take you?”

They shake their heads. “No. No one took us.”

Relieved, confused, and sinking with something akin to guilt, Marin urges his sisters to confess. “Then where were you? Didn't you hear me shouting for you?”

“You tell him,” Taran asserts, crossing her arms.

“Fine. Sheesh. Okay, so you fell asleep with your mouth open, and Taran poked a straw in it and you were still sleeping. But then we got bored and we chased the critter and it climbed high, and we jumped on the roof to find it. And the critter took our juice packs when we threw it at him. And then I think Taran say, ‘we're not allowed to be on the roof,’” she recollects, embellishing her sister’s voice to make her sound whiny, even though they have the same voice. “I say, ‘no one said we couldn't be on the roof.’ Because it's true!”

Marin doesn't believe what he's hearing. “How did you get on the roof?!”

“We jumped together! Okay and so Taran thinks it's pretty up there so we listened to our books up there. Then we forgot about the critter ‘cause it ran away. And then we felt a scary cloud. Like fog. It was down by the beach. And we saw you.”

There's one detail Marin just can't get past. “You jumped. On the roof.”

“And you never said we couldn't go on the roof,” Seren argues.

“Would you jump off a bridge?” Taran counters, her comparison just barely making sense to Marin’s ears.

Seren grabs her sister’s hand. “Yeah, so Taran was there too. Right, Taran?”

Surrendering, Taran slaps her forehead with her palm. “I did. I was there,” she begrudgingly admits.

Given everything that's just happened, Marin’s main concern is their safety. “I'm not mad. I was scared. How do you think Papa would feel if he found you playing on the roof?” Two pint sized little girls jumping up to the roof. The only explanation for such a feat is their Skywalker blood.

“So you're not mad?” Taran frets. She did something wrong but she needs her big brother to not be mad at her for it.

“No. I'm not. But you have to promise me you'll never jump like that again, and never, ever onto
the roof. Promise?"

“Promise!” they nod unanimously. Marin exhales and tugs them into an embrace.

“Marie,” Taran says in his ear. “Why are you all wet?”

“I went in the ocean looking for you two. I thought you got swept away.”

“Oh no!” she laments. Marie got all cold and wet because of them. That's the last time she ever listens to Seren’s ideas! “I'm sorry.”

“Don't worry about it. Just don't ever do that again. Please.” He couldn't live with himself if anything ever happened to them.

“So so sorry, Marie,” Taran and Seren whimper, hugging their cold, wet brother. Hugging is the least they could do for how they made their brother worry.

“What about that man? We should get a bandage. Marie, you should go get one,” Seren says, eyes locked on the bleeding man.

“He's fine. He was just leaving,” Marin glares behind him. Ren offers a smile to his children. He wants to say something to them, but he knows not what. Even if he hadn't promised Marin he wouldn't tell Hux his true identity and Hux told the girls that he was their other father, he still wouldn't know what to say or do.

Whatever, Marie. Seren and Taran exchange conclusive nods. “We'll be right back.” In tandem, they run towards the house for Papa’s first aid kit.

Marin calls after them, but they're too driven to listen. Typical. He watches them make it inside the house safely in case they try to take any shortcuts, like the fucking roof. All but growling, Marin marches back to the shore. “Get out of here. Get off this this planet and don't come back.”

Ren gets to his feet. “You can't swim.”

“So?”

“What if I wasn't here? If I leave, I'll do so only knowing you all are safe. You jumping into the ocean recklessly endangering yourself doesn't bode well for your case.” As long as Ren is able to make his own decisions, without Marin bending and twisting his will—which Ren is unbelievably surprised he has yet to do so, instead simply resorting to turning his brain into goo—Ren will not leave. Even if he has to live in the dunes like a snake, he'll stay.

Marin seethes. He's got to be joking. How, after time and time of Ren deceiving him, has Marin allowed him to get away with it? “Today was a fluke. Hux, Grandmother, and I have been watching over them for years. That's more than you've ever done for them.”

Ignoring the obvious, that Marin was the one who ensured that he play no part in their upbringing, Ren brings up another point. “I have to stay here and make sure none of the war ever gets back to Hux. He is the one betraying the First Order, after all.”

“You brought the war. You've always brought it,” Marin growls.

“It’s in the Resistance’s interests that I’m here to watch over him. In case there are any unforeseen variables to the plans he gave us. You do want the Resistance to win, don’t you?”
“I’m not stupid. You can’t fool someone like me.”

Ren regards him, his son’s offensive stance, his wild hair. It’s like he’s the strangest combination of both his parents—Hux’s coloring and facial features with Ren’s bone structure, height, and build. He’s inherited their fear and their selfish anger, which is a terrible, terrible tragedy that Ren has himself to blame. Hatred isn’t born. It’s learned.

“I could teach you,” Ren says, starting out small.

“What?”

“I could teach you how to swim.”

If Ren is anything, it's unpredictable. “You're ridiculous.”

“How ridiculous would it be when the day comes that one of them actually needs rescuing?” Ren argues.

He's had enough conversation. “Hold still. I don't think I did a good enough job breaking your nose.”

“We got it!” shouts one of the girls just as they come into view atop the dune. Marin backs away from Ren. He hadn't actually expected them to return so quickly.

“He's good. Get back inside,” Marin orders, but the girls are on their mission. They set the case down in the sand and begin disinfecting their little hands as meticulously as surgeons.

Ren’s smiling in amusement, and Marin decides they've had enough fun. Focusing on Ren’s firelight, he bypasses his own raw, scorching anger to channel the bright white that surrounds, binds, and comprises all living things. He doesn't have to touch Ren, thankfully, to send the waves of healing to his wound.

Split skin and cartilage regenerating, Ren groans, but his body graciously accepts the healing.

“Look, his blood is from his insides. There's nothing you can do. Put that away, and get back in the house,” Marin tells the girls once Ren’s wound is mended, cartilage unbruised, skin unabraded.

Clumsily, Taran snaps on a pair of latex gloves. “He gotta clean his blood. It's not safe.” People get sick from other people's blood. That's why she has to put in gloves. Papa taught them how to be safe. It's funny, she thinks, that right now she's trying to be safe when one second ago she was laying on the roof.

She and Seren prepare their gloves and sanitary wipes. “Hello. Please sit down,” Seren tells the tall, scarred man. He sits, ignoring Marie and his complaining. Marie really shouldn't be acting like this. He's the one who hit him!

Ren’s heart runs erratic when the twins approach him carefully. They don't hold in their disgust as they dab his bloodied nose and lips. The stench of antiseptic pricks his nostrils but it does little to distract from the twins. Their wide brown eyes narrowed in concentration, their tiny teeth showing as they grimace, the little noises only they can understand as they work together to clean up his face.

“Oh. No cuts, I guess,” Taran mumbles when the scarred man’s face is clear. She better put a healing patch on to be safe. Seren agrees, and they stick one on his big nose, stuck on unevenly but symmetrical enough to their eyes. “Okay, finished.”
Ren smiles warmly. “Thank you. I feel much better,” he tells the girls.

“Alright, that’s enough. Time to get back inside,” Marin orders, steering them from Ren. He would have snatched them in each arm before they could get their helpful hands to work, but he knows they would have put up a fit if they didn't get to complete an activity.

“Marie is sorry for hitting you. Even if he didn't say sorry, he's sorry. Don't be mad,” Taran explains as Marie pulls her from the man she's trying to talk to. Sometimes Papa and Marie have a hard time saying their true feelings. It's best for one of them to ease the way and saying what Marie can't.

“I know. It's okay. I'm not mad,” Ren says. He's at a loss for what else to say, and comes up with, “Just. Be careful. Be sure to look out for each other.”

“We will! Bye-bye! Bye, big puppy,” Seren says, far more interested in Abie’s wagging tail, thinking little of Ren’s words. She and Taran smile to Ren as Marin escorts them home, medical kit under his arm.

Ren gingerly touches the patch on his nose, sighing deeply, contentedly. Ren’s heart feels as if it might burst. He loves them. He loves them so unequivocally, so unconditionally. While he mourns the time lost that he could have spent in his children's lives, hope sings highly at the prospect of more moments like this one.

Maybe next time Marin’s blade won't be at his neck.

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Late that night, Ren comms his mother from the seclusion of his dune. After the incident at the beach, he managed to wander into town to replenish his and Abie’s sustenance. Abie lounges beneath the stars, belly in the sand.

The comm makes its connection. His mother’s holographic face illuminates the barren sandscape. “Good to hear from you. I have an update on Rey and Finn at Hux’s secret base.”

Ren inquires out of politeness. It’s clear his mother can tell he cares far more about other things than the state of one of the Resistance’s many missions.

“There wasn’t much to see. The asteroid was blown out by laser cannons and the damage was years old. We harvested the terminals for information extraction but we doubt there will be much if anything of use. Either Hux led us to a dead end, or his enemies had taken out his weapon in fear they’d be used against them. Internal triggers like that can’t exactly be undetectable…and you don’t care about any of this, do you?”

Ren smirks, stifling a laugh. “I do care. I just had an eventful day, is all.”

“Well, are you gonna tell me or what?” She knows the terms that have been set for her son, how he’s forced into living a lie because of Marin’s mind wipe. Her heart aches for the crushing defeat her son must be feeling.

“I finally spoke to the girls today,” he grins. “They’re incredible. So smart and so lively. They’re just—the brightest, most luminous stars. I can’t wait for you to meet them.” He can’t wait for his
mother and the rest of his family to unite.

He’s constantly plagued with vivid, hopeful fantasies of all facets of his family as one. Some fantasies feature his late father, who Ren knows would enjoy playing games with the twins, teaching Marin about space travel and survival skills, and even Hux curling his lip in morbid fascination as he discusses the intricacies of the Falcon to Hux against his keen, professional engineering background. Those are the most impossible fantasies, the ones he longs for the most.

General Organa’s holographic eyes twinkle in joy for her son’s ardent love for his daughters. “I’m very much looking forward to that day.” She fades in and out and speaks again when the connection is clear. “How’s Marin?”

Ren bows his head, unsure of where to begin. “He’s grown. I’m sure Rey and them told you, but he already looks like a man, now. Ma, I—” Ren chokes up, forcing himself to face his reality. “I really think I missed it.”

“Missed what?”

“Marin, his life, growing up. Everything. There isn’t any room for me in his life, even if he wanted me there. I really blew it this time.” He’s sick to his stomach just thinking about the gravity of it all. Yes, the twins are young, innocent, unsullied by the bitterness and trouble of reality. Marin is already formed and set in his ways. It’s not that Ren believes the very tragedy of this all is that he had nothing to do with Marin’s life. The tragedy is that he had everything to do with it, and that is why he’s failed him.

“If that were true, Ben, you wouldn’t be there. There’s a plan for us all, and I know yours doesn’t end at a distance with the ones you love. You fit right at the center of them. I know it.” Her hologram quivers but her stern reassurance is no less believable. “If I allowed myself to give up on you, it would have been the end of...everything. Marin may have grown, he may swear that he hates your guts—but you’re still his father. You always will be.”

Carefully, he cradles his mother’s words to his heart. “They’ve really made a life here. The last thing I wanna do is come close to wrecking it.”

“I know that. That’s what makes you good.”

“Good?”

“Yeah, you heard that right,” she laughs. “You’re good. I’ve always known it.”

He’s not. The very concept of ‘good’ is so far beyond how he would describe himself. But his mother thinks so, and that alone makes him feel the truth in her words. “I promise to try and get some more info but it’s possible there isn’t any. It’s been so long since he’s commanded a ship.”

“We appreciate anything you have. And Ben? Please take care of yourself,” she says. “I love you. May the Force be with you.”

These past few years, he would have been lost if not for his mother. He’d be nothing without her, and could die of shame for the memories of contempt and hatred he once harbored for her. “I love you, too, Ma.”
Hux parks his speeder alongside his mother's, gracious to return home after a day of work. Work is routine. He sees the same types of texts, aligns the same shelves, nods to the same array of students. It's good work, something that helps him pull his weight. In a few years, Marin will have to move onto life post-schooling. Whether its college or a trade institute, off-world or on, he'll need to have a sum saved up to help his son on his next steps in life.

Whenever he thinks of his son ever wanting to leave town, let alone the planet, his gut ties into knots of dread. Even though he knows his son's life is his own, it would kill him to say goodbye. He remembers years of being apart from him ever since he was a baby. That will always be the greatest regret of his lifetime.

Hux greets his eldest in the kitchen. Ever the dutiful son, preparing dinner without being asked. Aems should be home soon, but Marin took it upon himself. The pan sizzles with red meats and veggies, the slow cooker opened with fresh brown rice.

“Very health conscious of you. Thank you. I know Grandmother appreciates when you help,” Hux greets him, palm on his shoulder. He thumbs off a bit of sand on Marin’s neck. “Busy day?”

“Not really,” Marin lies. After begging the twins to stay inside, Marin sent Ren off with threats and angry looks. Ren told him that he'll keep his distance until the Resistance has no need for him to stay. Marin doesn't believe him for a second, so he's forced to take another approach.

“But that man came back. Ben, from the Resistance. He was staring at Seren and Taran. I didn't know what to make of it.”

Hux hadn't expected that. He has few memories of Ben—their encounter in the market, their exchange on the beach, and a final parting on their porch. He remembers Ben’s earnestness, his passion. The reverent kiss he bestowed on his hand. “Why didn't he leave?”

Mildly irritated that Hux hadn't asked about the girls first, Marin shrugs, playing dumb. “It was odd. All he did was stare. He might have been taking pictures.”

“Pictures?!”

That's better. “Yeah, it was disturbing.” Marin makes a face for emphasis, in hopes Hux’s fears will fuel his imagination.

Hux grimaces. Something isn't adding up. “You're a skilled liar, Marin. But not as good as me. So what really happened?”

“I'm not lying,” Marin bristles.

“If that man really did what you said he had, you'd have made sure he left this planet for good. Why is he really still here?”

Sighing in defeat, Marin turns the stove top on low. The best lies are built on the truth. “He's not done with his mission. He’s here in case his people fail. That's it. That's all he told me.”

Hux has experienced this before. Anytime someone comes close to them, with the exception of Lisbeth and her mother, Marin would manipulate any way he could to keep Hux in line with what he wants. So for Marin to conflate such a heinous threat to Seren and Taran’s safety, there is a lot to be said for just how much Marin dislikes Ben.
“Well, we'll just have to see exactly what else his mission entails,” Hux hums, spearing a chunk of meat to sample. It's embarrassing how enticing these turn of events are to his bored heart. He's beguiled at the prospect of furthering a personal relationship with a member of the dreaded Resistance.

Hux studies his son’s profile. He's looking more and more like him as his face matures. But there's a sharpness that exaggerates his cheekbones and elongates his chin, in contrast to Hux's and his mother's own even, symmetrical features.

The twins, on the other hand, look absolutely nothing like him. If he hadn't been the one to carry them to term, he might question his biological paternity. It begs the question of whether or not the twins truly are biologically related to him, for he has no memory of getting impregnated with any of his children. More memories severed from his trauma escaping the First Order. If they were heinous enough that his mind blocked them for so many years, perhaps they are better left unremembered.

“Why would you make something like that up?” Hux asks patiently. “That Ben is some kind of predator.”

His son vehemently disagrees with his quest for the truth. He balls up a dirty kitchen rag within his large fists. “You know nothing about this man. He could be anyone, do anything to us. Why should we trust anything he has to say?”

Hux frown softens. Marin is just being protective. Albeit overly protective, and passionate enough about it to suggest and entice lies in Hux's mind as if he were some suggestible waif, but his heart is in the right place. “Please refrain from lying to me. You know it never works out the way you want, no matter how hard you try and push and shove it around.”

Marin’s eyes darken when Hux punctuates with a kiss to his temple. If only Hux knew how wrong he was.

Later that night, Hux can no longer stifle his curiosity. It niggles incessantly as he scours the garage for Marin’s quadnocs. He finds the dusted tool and activates its night vision.

Outside, Hux scans the starlit horizon for any sign of disturbance. From the flatness of the road side, down eastern towards the coast, until he stops on an unnatural shape in the far northern dunes facing the back of the house.

It appears to be a white, napping dog, lounged on the top most flat of the dune. Its nose sticks out oblong and narrow, head bowed in rest. The dog brings its partner into view, which Hux would not have seen if it weren't for the stark white of the dog.

Ben’s chin is tucked into his elbow, his scarred features peaceful with rest. The quadnocs’ scope focuses on Ben’s wind-whipping hair. There's no indication when he's fallen asleep, only that he's done so with an arm over his dog’s little skull.

Hux’s throat bobs, electrified by a thrill from watching his family's stalker without his consent. He should march right towards him, kick him in the groin, and tell him he has no interest in helping him anymore. He should warn Ben to keep his distance and banish him with riled threats until he leaves this system for good.

Instead, he stares for a little longer. He nearly loses his grip on his quadnocs when Ben surprises him with movement. But he regains composure to see Ben adjust his chin on his arm and blink awake. It's ridiculous really, how fearful he is of getting caught stalking the stalker. If Ben pulled
out a pair of specs of his own, he would no doubt see Hux eyeing him from the shadows.

But Ben only lolls his head in what can only be described as doleful, surrendered. Ben sits up on his elbows, simply staring. Was that a tear the man swept off his cheek? Or was it merely a fleck of sand? Hux would have no way of knowing. So he settles on gathering what information he can about the man while he remains unnoticed.

Ben sits alone. There's no indication of a ship or any type of shelter. Ben drinks from a canteen that could possibly be a meal replacement, from the way he sloshes the mixture to reintegrate its contents, and the ferocity in which he chugs it down.

“What are you doing?” Marin demands, causing Hux to lose sight of Ben when he spasms from surprise.

“What the hell? Don't startle me like that,” Hux stiffens like he’s been caught doing something forbidden.

Marin uncoils like taut wire. “Well. Seren and Taran want you to kiss them goodnight.” He knows what Hux was doing. He knows what Ren’s doing, too, and it's got nothing to do with ‘continuing his mission’ or making sure that they're all ‘safe.’ As long as Ren isn't in their lives, they're as safe as they can be.

“I'll be inside soon,” Hux replies, not bothering to conceal the device in his hands. “Don't wait up.”

“What were you doing?” Marin asks.

“None of your business.”

“How is that fair? We just had that long talk about honesty.”

Hux laughs, because if his children are anything, they're too clever for their own good. “I gave birth to you. I don't have to tell you anything.” He gave birth to all of them, though he knows not why, or who was there, if anyone told him it would be alright while he panicked.

Thankfully, Marin yields to his go-to counter argument and goes inside. That line always gets him. Hux waits for Marin to reenter the house, his mother's muffled, musical voice telling them that Marin’s attention has moved. A bit too eagerly, Hux refocuses the quadnocs back on Ben.

His jaw drops at the sight of Ben’s enormous, naked back presented to him. The quadnocs are just sensitive enough to show him the divots and curves comprising Ben’s immaculate musculature, enhanced by the suggestion of scars and body marks, particularly the one twisting the skin of his shoulder. Strangely, much like Ben’s facial scar, it doesn't seem like an odd scar, like he's seen it on someone else before and grown so used to it on their body. But he knows one thing for sure. If Ben looks this good from behind, Hux can just imagine how delectable he'll look full-frontal.

It doesn't take Ben long to relocate another shirt, lighter than the one he'd just changed out of. Ben sits down again and Hux stifles the urge to hide when Ben seemingly looks right at him. Gazing with an exhausted sullenness off into the starlit sea, his wild hair scattering around his regal profile.

Regaining his composure, Hux decides he's had enough fun for one night and heads inside. He's hopelessly haunted by the sadness in Ben’s eyes enough for him to dream that night of those eyes locking onto his. Capturing him down to his heart, undeniably meaningful and sincere.

His dream breathes into him so sharply and so vividly enough that he experiences it like he would a treasured memory.
But he's certain, so certain, that would be impossible.

Chapter End Notes

i hope you guys enjoyed the bit at the end, which i like to call 'Redheaded Milf peeps on Sad Homeless Man'... looks like Hux has gotten a teeny tad bit of a crush~! More kylux interactions to come :D
Chapter 26

Ren’s chin itches in want of a shave. He longs for a razor or at least some kind of aloe to soothe the skin, but he left the Falcon in enough of a hurry, that long week ago. The past days he's spent on the dunes have been quiet. Other than his scuffle with Marin—saving him from drowning—Ren has little to do but watch.

He sees Hux leave on his speeder twice in two days, returning after the same five hour interval. He sees Marin leave, presumably for school, on his own speeder for four consecutive days. Hux’s mother leaves when Hux is home, and even took the girls for a ride into town once while Hux was gone. They're schedule is built around caring for the twins.

On the seventh day, Ren hikes to the outskirts of town in hopes to see Hux thrum by on his speeder on the connecting unmarked path. Ren waits in the shadow of a small building, Abie patient at his side.

“Just a little while, Abes. I'll get you something to eat.” He's got enough credits for another few weeks of sustenance, but Ren has ample experience living off nothing. He's a hunter, a gatherer, a survivor by nature.

When Hux hums by on his speeder, he plasters his back to a wall, tucked behind stacks of empty crates. The speeder slows to a safe speed for street land traffic. Thankfully Hux goes slow enough for Ren to see what street he turns onto. To his luck, Hux’s stop is just around the corner. Ren catches a glimpse of him docking his speeder outside a tall building, securing it in an inlet hollowed in the side for parking.

Ren watches at Hux combs his titian hair from his face, completing his professional ensemble of his pale green dress shirt, form-fitting brown pants, and a pair of leather ankle boots. Ren runs his hands over the hairs on his chin he wishes he'd shaved, as if in some bizarre way, Hux will spot him from a crowd or a dark corner to critique his dishevelment.

“Okay, Abes, stay here until I get back, ‘kay?” Ren says, petting Abie reassuringly and offering her a sliver of hide from his pack. She obeys with ease and finds a spot in an alley to stand guard.

Ren approaches the building. He tells himself he's just gonna see what it is, where Hux spends his weekend days and why he dresses so nicely. But when Ren sees the building plaque, *Greendole Institute of Science and Technology*, he can't stifle his curiosity. What if Hux is a student? What if he’s an instructor? Ren could imagine him dictating a classroom of bored youths about the scientific principles of the universe.

Against his better judgement, Ren slides inside, not for the first time wishing he didn't look so distinctive, tall and large with an already strange face marred with a grizzly scar. At least his clothes are clean. Relatively.

The automatic doors give to his presence. Thankfully, Hux isn't on the other side. Ren's keener to watch him from afar these days, lest Hux retaliate somehow. He approaches the young woman at the reception desk, and politely requests to see a catalogue of their courses. The instructors, more specifically. The receptionist doesn't bother concealing her alarm at his appearance, but passes him a programmed datapad without any further hesitation.
“Thank you. I’ll be just over here,” he says, in case she thinks he'll try and run off with it. He thumbs through the pages. None of the names jump out to him. It's likely Hux uses an alias, so he may be one of these identities. The only way Ren will know for sure is if he asks around. But there's no doubt that will raise some brows.

“Mind if I take a look around?” Ren asks once he turns in the datapad. The receptionist has warmed to him and allows him the privilege, directing him to an area map.

According to the holographic map, the school is much larger than its front face assumes. Floors reaching high and wide around a courtyard, the top most floor consisting of a student accessible archives. He decides that in order to maintain some sort of semblance of subtlety, he'll browse the public areas first, and if he hasn't been flagged for trespassing, he'll pace the classroom halls.

He doesn't know if he'll confront him if he sees him. He doesn't know what he's truly doing besides satisfying his own curiosity. Maybe he just wants Hux to look at him with recognition—disdain, shock, anything but indifference—having a few of their personal encounters logged in his tampered memory, even if it's with ‘Ben’ instead of Ren.

The cafe has no sign of him, and neither do the quiet study halls or the few windowed classrooms of students and instructors bartering knowledge and debate. Null are the computer rooms, null are the lounges. The final floor is one of the largest areas, and Ren hopes he has more luck spotting that otherworldly head of red.

The archives consists of even rows of shelves, tabs indicating whether the text is a hard copy, a holorecording, or both. The shelves of books stretch deep into the building until the walls give to high windows and skylights. They sit parallel to the several sets of computer terminals for the strictly digital texts, and a few are occupied by busy students. None of which are Hux.

A familiar voice sparks panic in his chest and Ren shuffles to the closest dark corner. He hadn't thought this all the way through, but after years of isolation, Ren's brashness couldn't be quelled. He's drawn to Hux like a ferrous stone, hopelessly wired in his orbit.

Hux sits behind a desk in front of a stack of paper books, hands posed elegantly over his work. Hux. A librarian! Ren can't believe where life has taken them. His lips tug into a smile at the titillated thrill. All Hux needs is a pair of glasses and an eraser to nibble on.

But Hux’s attention isn't on his work. It's focused on the broad, admittedly handsome man with sleeves of intricate tattoos, and even, unmarked features. The man is nearly ten or more years his junior by the look of it, but that doesn't stop him from hunching over the counter top barrier and flaunting the artwork comprising his skin.

Hux converses with him politely, offering pleased smiles at whatever tale the man is spinning. Most of Hux’s beautiful smiles are genuine, and Ren considers bolting for the door in a childish spell of jealous heartbreak. Even though he knows Hux would want him in his life the way Ren does, if only he knew who Ren was to him.

Flagellating himself, Ren can't look away as the man scribbles something on one of Hux's work papers and excuses himself, heading for the door. To Ren’s dismay, Hux stares at the man’s retreat with a soft, gratified smile.

Ren slides into the closest concealed enclave, a study nook with a cozy set of chairs. Would Hux truly want him in his life, even if he knew everything about him? Everything they shared? Everything Ren stole from him? He shudders.
But how much had they truly shared? Ren could count the times they were intimate on one hand. They've spent more years hating each other, more years separated by circumstance than they've spent together, just being with one another. They never had anything resembling a relationship. For all Ren knows, if Hux could make the choice, Ren wouldn't be it.

Ren slumps in the chair, completely out of Hux’s view. A few passing patrons spare him fleeting looks of concern, but largely, Ren is left alone. He listens to Hux's soft melodic greeting to the other students, maybe a conversation or two. But he doesn't look to him or do anything but sit and listen.

Trapped in daydreams of Hux bedding and wedding another man, a better man that he’s raise their children with, Ren loses track of time. But time keeps on, as is its nature. The only fact of time is that it's unrecoverable, impossible to reverse. Like a ship under siege, its blast door hissing shut to protect half a ship's crew and damning the rest.

It's been hours. Ren's ears pick up on Hux’s tiny movements. The way he clears his throat or advises something to a student. There is a noise unlike the rest, a scrape and footsteps in retreat. Ren perks up to peer over the enclave’s wall. Hux is gone. Breathing a tired sigh, Ren counts a full five minutes before deciding to make for the door.

As soon as he leaps to his feet, Ren’s side is bombarded with the blunt edges of a large stack of books. Ren grunts an apology when the books slide from its carrier’s arms.

“It's fine,” barks the carrier. Ren pales and ducks his head. Of course, this is how he'd run into Hux after stalking him all week. Literally running into him.

“You,” Hux accuses. “Ben. What are you doing here?” Had Ben followed him from home? Watching someone from their work is objectively better than from their own house, but this seems premeditated. Excessive.

Ren fumbles with his lie. “I'm protecting you.”

“You mean stalking me,” Hux deadpans. Though oddly titillated confer with Ben again.

“I'm protecting you from afar.”

Glaring around the quiet archives, Hux sets his books down on the table in the enclave, and looms in Ren’s space. “Why? Why me? I'm just another criminal,” Hux spits. He's a criminal in the Resistance’s eyes and a deserter or possibly a traitor in the Order’s. In his own eyes, he’s not sure.

Ren slumps to the wall. Why? How could he not? “I'm the one who dragged you back in this mess. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if it was my fault anything happened to you. Or your family.”

Our family.

“So. You think I’ll be attacked? At a library?”

Ren holds his ground. “Maybe.”

Laughing sinisterly, Hux regards Ben’s determined patience. “I guess you do have a point. My guard’s been down that I didn’t see the threat spying on me between these bookshelves. How long have you been here?”

“Not long.”

It’s a lie, an obvious one. The only way Ben would have tracked him here is from home, and he
left home hours ago. His shift is about to finish. Not much happens here in Greendole. So he sparks an idea, one that once it gets rolling, it’s impossible to ignore. “Do you have your wallet on you?”

Ben frowns, like he has to think about it. “Yeah.”

“I’m off in twenty minutes. Meet me outside then.”

Heart beating out of his chest, Ren complies and heads for the exit, because of all the ways he expected an untimely encounter to go, this certainly wasn’t it.

Hux straightens, thrumming giddily with the prospect of his plan with Ben. He rarely gets to scheme, and has never gotten the chance to scheme with mysterious, driven Resistance fighters. Tall, built, admittedly handsome Resistance fighters. Hopefully Marin won’t be alarmed if he’s an hour or so late from his normal homecoming time.

One by one, Hux reshelves the books, resets the computer terminals, and bids the next worker good-day and a pleasant evening. Hopefully Ben is downstairs waiting for him. The man’s spent the past week camped outside their property line. The least he could do is follow a simple request.

When Hux steps outside, Ben shoots to his feet from his sidewalk crouch. His big dog is at his side, perched curiously at the new face. Wordless, to maintain the veil of mystery, Hux pulls out his reusable grocery bag from his speeder and slings it around his arm. “Follow me.”

Without hesitation, Ren does as he’s told. “Where are we going?”

Hux curls his lip in something resembling a friendly smile. “When you cornered me in the market last week, I didn’t get to finish my errand. You owe me a bag of groceries.”

A bag of groceries? Ren can hardly afford his next weeks’ worth of meals. But without arguing, he jumps on the chance of helping Hux. Even if it’s just a bag of groceries. “Sounds fair,” he says.

Lips pinching around a chuckle, Hux’s step springs with anticipation. Ben’s actually going through with this! Without as much as a fight or even an objection. It's hardly as if Hux is pressed for credits, but Ben’s cooperation begs his curiosity. He might just choose the most garish items the market has to offer, just to see the look on Ben’s face.

At the market, Hux browses the fruit and vegetable preserves section. Ben fiddles with the grocery bag, keeping his eyes to himself and seemingly trapped in his own head. He chooses a can of some decadent local fruit that’s almost fourteen credits, one that he’s always been meaning to try but never summoned the courage to shell out the money. He presents it to Ren and tells him to bag it.

At Ben’s fleeting concern at the price tag, Hux offers him a nonchalant shrug, though there's no mistaking he's behaving deliberately to make Ben squirm. Hux drifts over to the next cart of supplements and energy rations. Vaguely he recalls the label of one of Marin’s many protein powders and locates the biggest container. He turns it in his hand to investigate the price, Ben coiled at his side, awkwardly quiet. Hux raises his brows. It's almost forty credits.

“And this.”

Ren frowns at the tub of expensive powder, the thirty-nine credit label on its side. It's not that he's stingy. Initially Ren had feared Hux’s impromptu shopping trip would leave him close to nothing for his own sustenance in this system, but now he's genuinely concerned that he doesn't have enough to even pay for these two frivolous items. “What's this for?” Ren asks, trying not to sound too perturbed.
“My son. He adds this to everything. Why do you ask?” Hux hums innocently, perusing the next case over. These brand new, laser cut meat shears would be nice. Maybe even the whole set.

So that accounts for Marin’s impeccable growth, both in height and musculature. “Just curious.” He definitely doesn't have enough credits for any of those kitchen knife sets Hux is eying. “Is this something you do often?”

There it is. Hux revels in getting a rise out of Ben. “Not too often” Hux says. “It's a bit of an indulgence of mine.”

“I see.” He doesn't want Hux to think he can't afford these indulgent shopping trips for ‘groceries.’ When Ren had first seen Hux in this market, he recalls that Hux was inspecting bushels of vegetables and other reasonably priced necessities. He concludes, then, that Hux is probably messing with him.

Hux stops in the main aisle of produce, and Ren loosens up a bit. He figures since he's the one paying for everything, and now they're finally at an aisle that has food he could actually see himself using, he could get a bit of his own shopping done, too. Abie trots to his side to see what kinds of foods he chooses, eager to lend her own opinion.

When Ben chooses some of the easy to eat fruits for himself, all for a low price, Hux full-on smirks. “You know, if you don't have the money for this, just let me know. I'll take an I-owe-you.”

The challenge is evident, and Ren doesn't back down. Gone is his concern. He allows himself to enjoy the fact that he and Hux are doing something as mundane as shopping together. Maybe the twins will try the decadent preserves and love it so much, they'll eat it for breakfast every morning. Maybe Marin will use the protein powder in his school lunches or after a long jog.

“No need for that. I'm happy to help you in any way I can,” Ren smiles. His dinners for the indefinite future will all consist of foraged nuts and whatever strange animal he can skin, probably rodents. But it'll be worth it if it means he can provide just a few things for his family.

Hux nods, pleasantly surprised at Ben’s forthcoming attitude. “I appreciate when a man carries through with an agreement,” he says, sounding a bit too suggestive.

Ren doesn't know what to say to that. He ducks his chin, warmth settling in his core. Hux pulls away with his normal selection of foods, all things he's cooked with before. At the cashier, the total comes to almost eighty credits, and without hesitation Ren brandishes his wallet and completes the transaction.

The balance short to zero on all but one of his credit chips, and the cashier asks if he wants them tossed. Ren doesn't feel a shred of regret when he tells the cashier to dispose of them safely, and thanks him for his assistance. With a smile teasing his lips, Ren leads the way back to Hux’s speeder around the block. Hugging the overstuffed bag of groceries, full and light on his feet.

“I saw that,” Hux pipes up behind him.

“Hm?”

“Your credits,” Hux accuses. “Is that all the money you have?” He prickles with the beginnings of guilt. If he had known this man wasn't cheap, but he is actually scraping by, he would have rethought his devious plan.

At Hux’s concern, his stomach flips. “I'll be alright for a while,” Ren says, taking initiative to separate their groceries once he's at the speeder. The fruits are small enough to fit in his leg
pockets.

Hux fidgets. He just swindled a man who stores his food in his pockets. “Why did you let me do that?”

“Let you do that?” Ren parrots.

Already settling how he’s going to handle this, Hux rifles through his own wallet for enough credits to compensate for what he stole from Ben. But when Ben realizes what he's trying to do, he holds up his hands in protest. “I said, don't worry about it. I don’t mind, I promise.”

“But—”

“Please. Save that for the kitchen knife set,” Ben smirks, and even through Hux’s discomforting guilt, his heart flutters at Ben’s charm. Gods, he's been so lonely. He hadn't realized how much until Ben arrived.

“Let me at least buy you lunch,” Hux tries. It's only fair. And Ben isn't the worst company.

It isn't about the money, obviously, but Ren maintains his coolness when he nods in agreement. He hadn't anticipated this. He almost doesn't know what to say, his throat welling up with a surging, unnamable feeling. He tries so hard to regain his composure. “I suppose that would work for me. But I should warn you. I've got a voracious appetite.”

Hux breaks into a toothy smile, the kind that lights up his eyes and makes Ren sway on his feet. Ren can't remember the last time Hux looked at him like that. It was probably never. “Don't you dare go easy on me,” Hux laughs, leading the way. “I was a total ass.”

“Wouldn't dream of it,” Ren says.

Together they walk on the street side, speeders humming around the thickening crowd. Hux has just the place in mind, a food walk up window that serves all kinds of fish and crustaceans from the sea. He and Marin often stop by for lunch after an errand run or an appointment. Marin loves the battered clams. It sparks something satisfying when Ben chooses the same dish his son likes, like two puzzle pieces linking, regardless how inane this coincidence is.

Hux orders himself a fish wrap with lots of vegetables and when their lunches are ready, they find a picnic table shaded by a large blue umbrella.

“So, how does one get into…resisting?” Hux inquires once they're seated. At Ben’s confusion, Hux clarifies. “Resistance? You resist.”

Ren frowns. It's not like he can part with the truth. Not in the way that matters. “I guess you could say I was born into it.”

Hux nods, taking a bite from his wrap. “So it's a whole family of Resistance fighters, then.”

Not quite. “It's mostly just my mother, her twin brother, and his daughter.”

“So is this a thing you do often?”

“You mean getting interrogated while eating fried clams?” Ren smiles. Though he doesn't mind in the least.

“I mean solo missions like this. Giving unwanted 'round the clock protection to a man you've
never met.” Not like Ben is completely unwanted.

Ren skates a stolen gaze to the features he's dreamt about every night they've been apart. “It's not something I normally do, but I've been given similar missions,” he fibs. “I do what's requested of me.”

“I see. Have you got a wife?” Hux asks, mischief glinting. At Ben’s laugh and pointed ‘no,’ Hux would like to think he's concealing another meaning.

“What about you?” Ben asks, because surely Ben wonders where his gaggle of children came from. If only he knew. Maybe there's time to discuss the gritty details another day. Hux’s stomach twists with the fear that Ben would find him repulsive for how he came to give his children life, but something tells him Ben wouldn't be so superficial.

“Nope. Not really my area,” Hux says vaguely. That'll keep him on his toes. “Have you got any kids?”

Sadness flickers in Ben’s eyes. “No. I don’t.” The meaningfulness in Ben’s answer makes Hux wonder if he once had a child, lost in his war.

It's been a week since Hux gave him the information on how to crippling the First Order. He'd have thought a week would be enough time to figure out if their plan had worked. “How long will you be staying here?”

Ren shrugs, because he really doesn't know. Hopefully forever. “Until I get another call.” He had gotten another call, of course. That Hux’s information was a dead end. If he tells him, then he will have no excuse to monitor them so intimately.

“How long will that be?”

“Can't say.”

Snorting softly, Hux makes a face. “Is it rewarding, ready to heel at the feet of another?” he asks, not meaning to sound too judgmental.

“It’s for the cause. It's all I've known. Besides, I get to travel all over. Meet all kinds of interesting people and get them to buy me lunch,” Ren tells him, egging for a reaction. To his pleasure, he gets Hux smiling around his wrap and humming in acknowledgement.

“Noble. Your mother must think you're quite the hero,” Hux says.

“Um. Debatable.”

“Anti-hero, then. A feat in itself.”

Ren shrugs. It's strange to talk about himself without having to apologize for anything and everything he's ever done. “You've made quite the shift in lifestyle. From what I know about your reputation, shelving books at a student library would seem to bore someone like you.”

Hux doesn't take Ben’s words as an insult. “You should try boring. It's not as bad as it sounds.”

“Are you happy?” Ren asks, not knowing what answer would be best.

Hux straightens, rolling his mind around Ben’s intriguing question. Is he happy? “I'm happy that my children are safe. It took a lot out of me when the girls were born. Everything else just seemed
so insignificant compared to them,” Hux says.

Already, he's glad Ben’s stalking turned into a polite, friendly lunch. Ben’s not so bad when he isn't rattling on about the greater good. Sometimes the greatest good is gotten from the ones around you, his children and his mother. A man like Ben, who's been fighting his whole life, likely wouldn't be able to see the contentment in moving away from all the chaos, and, to put it bluntly, fucking off.

Ren can relate to this shift. After Starkiller, and after being reunited with Hux when he was exiled, he may not have known it then, but things became clear to him. Life became less about taking, and more about mending to keep the things he cared for close to him.

Tragically, though surprising no one, he was shortsighted enough to lose everything. But somehow, some way, the galaxy has at least allows him to sit at a picnic table and have lunch across Hux, who smiles at him brightly like the warm sun, after he just bought groceries for their children to share.

“And I like shelving books. It's not as glamorous as one manned bodyguard missions, but I cope,” Hux shrugs.

“It looks good on you. The desk and the swivel chair,” Ren says like they're just bantering again, without a care in the galaxy. He's forward in that way, and this new, cleaner, warmer Hux has responded well to his comments.

Hux grins, because he can't help it. Because Ben is far too sincere and aggravatingly charming that it doesn't matter if he's flirting or not, because that's just how he speaks. It's a wonder he doesn't have a lovechild in every system he crosses. “Well, I can't say the same for your nomadic lifestyle. Some structure would do you good. Like your own job, for starters.”

“I have a job,” Ren defends.

“Is your Resistance gonna deliver you a paycheck all the way out to your sand dune?” Hux asks, playful.

“I don't need a paycheck to survive. I can take care of things that I need on my own.”

“What, like looting?”

Ren smirks. “Maybe.” He's just being cheeky to get more laughs out of Hux.

“Some survivalist. You let me rob you blind.”

“We traded.”

“Hardly a fair trade. This meal was barely fifteen credits.”

Ren shakes his head, feeling full in his chest. “No, that's where you're wrong. I got your attention. That's more than worth the difference.”

There's so much more to Ben than he's letting on. Hux snorts to conceal a blush, letting Ben mold him like putty. “My mother owns a restaurant. Maybe—maybe I could talk to her about some work you could do,” Hux asks. It's more of a test than anything. If Ben accepts, he's planning on staying a while. Maybe Hux could plan for that.

“Really?” Ren sputters, because really? What has he done to warrant such a reward? It's not about
the money *obviously*, but it's about being close to Hux without intruding. And Hux brought this up on his own accord.

“Yes, really. Unless you think that would be beneath you,” Hux says. Hope holds him high, as if a great many things hang on his yes or no answer.

“Yes. I would be more than grateful,” Ren accepts, thrill enlivening his heart at Hux’s satisfied smile.

“It might not be anything more than dishwashing, but it's a start.” When Ben cornered him in the market last week, the last thing he expected to happen was an eager job proposal, and for Ben to accept it, Hux knows not what that means. Maybe Ben’s thinking about what lies ahead on their crossed paths, too.

“I could work my way up,” Ren smiles. He doesn't remember the last time he ate a meal this slowly, this indulgently. Probably never.

They finish their meal in companionable silence, until Hux instructs Ren to follow him. “She's just down the road,” Hux says. All the spots worth visiting in Greendole are within walking distance.

“Ben,” Hux starts. Ren flinches at the name. It reminds him of what has happened to put Hux here at his side. A lie formed and sustained around his love for his son, whom he owes everything to. “I have to know. How'd you get your scar?”

He should have expected it. Hardly anyone has ever asked him, because most of the people he's spent his time with were either there to participate in his disfigurement, or reveled in the tale as an act of triumph against the heinous First Order.

In battle, he should say. An egregious dual between two warriors fighting over their shared bloodline. “My little cousin gave it to me,” Ren says instead.

“How?”

“I wasn't always...an anti-hero, as you put it. There was a time when I'd surrendered my humanity. I did things that I regret. Irreversible acts against the people I cared about. It took her, along with—others. To bring me back from where I was headed.”

Hux is quiet for a moment, digesting Ben’s confession. “That was...incredibly vague.”

Ren laughs. He longs to pull Hux in his arms, remind him of what they everyone shared together, including the aftermath of that fateful battle on Starkiller. Hux saved him from certain death. He would have died in vain, never given the chances that he took, and the chances he blew.

“But I appreciate the honesty,” Hux says. “It's more than I expected.”

Ren keeps his frown from his lips at the innocuous comment. It's not his place to tell Hux who he truly is. If he ever wants Marin to forgive him, he'll bite his tongue, even if it takes a lifetime. It's no doubt this deception is unfair to Hux, but that just makes it all the more imperative that the truth comes from their son. Marin’s hatred for him will prevent his soul from being at peace, and they have to think about their son and place his well-being over theirs.

“After you,” Hux says once they're in front of a large, wood trimmed glass window that gives to a door. After telling Abie to guard the door, Ren opens it, and is told to wait at a table while Hux goes in to talk things over with his mother.
Obliging, Ren takes in the wholesome fixtures of the interior. The deep wood, the polished tables, the attractive artworks and light installations. The mellow atmosphere of late lunchtime, patrons both old and young filling the booths from corner to corner, all in their own worlds.

In the kitchen, Aems greets her Armitage with a one-armed, flour-dusted hug. “To what do I owe this visit? Everything alright?”

“Nothing’s fine, Mother. I have a small favor to ask,” Hux says hopefully.

“I’m all ears.” She’s always more than willing to help her son.

“Is there any way you could give a—friend of mine a job?”


As if he’s about to admit something embarrassing, Hux ducks his head, even though this was his idea. “Ben. The Resistance. He’s here for the indefinite future. Because of me. And I thought we might...help him out a bit.”

Raising her fine brows, Aems takes a peek outside the kitchen. “What’s he still doing here? I thought you said he was just here for information,” she says. She knows her son, having spent every day over the past four years with him. He referred to this man, Captain Ben of the Resistance, as his ‘friend.’ Not only that, but he’s friend enough to warrant a favor.

It’s clear her Armitage is smitten.

She couldn’t be more enthralled by this development. No matter how much he denies or conceals it, he’s been so lonely these past few years, spending what time he had to himself alone. Armitage has no friends his age, not even at work, which he already spends a handful of hours at despite her adamancy that he spend less time alone or catering to the children.

Since this man is Resistance, it’s possible he and her son share an inherent, fundamental disagreement. But her son has changed, no longer confined by the First Order’s ideological manacles, and is wise enough to make his own decisions on who he spends his time with.

“How does he feel about bussing? One of my bussers is on maternity leave. If he doesn’t mind getting his hands dirty,” Aems says, more than happy to help her son.

“Thank you,” Hux says. “I’ll give him the good news.”

Outside, Ren warms at Hux’s satisfied smile. “It’s bussing, but at least you won’t have to wear a hairnet.”

“Perfect. Thank you,” Ren says, extending a hand for Hux to shake.

Hux’s heart rate spikes, a small part of him hoping Ben will kiss his hand like he had the first time. But Ben merely shakes, and though he holds on just a bit too long, Hux will have to rely on memory to feel the brush of Ben’s lips on his skin.

“Should I at least introduce myself?” Ren asks, because not only is it only proper, but he knows he’d be delighted to meet Hux’s mother, job or not.

Hux all but tugs Ren by his arm like an eager schoolkid. “Mother, this is Ben. He’s here on a mission and really appreciates the help.”
Ren witnesses a silent conversation between mother and son, and take this opportunity to appreciate their impeccable likeness. Same green eyes, even features, same slightness, and though his mother’s red hair is faded with age and Hux is a good half-head taller than her, there’s no mistaking he's her son. Ren had never known Hux to be close to his mother. There is a possibility they had only just formed a relationship in recent years.

“Hello, Ben. My name’s Marin Aems, but I mostly go by Aems.”

It's something Ren could not have predicted. Hux had named their firstborn after his mother, before he'd even left the First Order. It's a testament to his level of loyalty and sentiment, and makes Ren bloom with veneration for Hux, the man who owns every beat and swell of his aching heart. “A pleasure to meet you. I can't thank you enough for this opportunity, Aems.”

“Anything for my Armitage,” she smiles, so her son knows full well her intentions. “When can you start?”

“Right away,” Ren says. His smile grows at the mirth in Hux’s eyes.

Hux couldn't be happier. It feels right to have Ben working with his mother. Comfortable. How strange this has all been, how fast he's pushed things with this man who is nothing more than a stranger. Hux moves to leave Ben and his mother to get acquainted, until he's stopped with a gentle touch to his arm.

“Thank you,” Ben tells him, and Hux can't ignore the sincerity emboldening his words. Hux leans into the touch. He'd very much like to see Ben again, and soon.

Hux leaves them to it, heading for the door. He doesn’t realize how hard he’s smiling until his cheeks begin to ache. As he rounds the corner of the block, he nearly runs into the tall, hulking form of his son. Marin looms in his space, frowning in malcontent.

“Where have you been?” Marin accuses, at the same time as Hux demands, “What are you doing here?” like he’s been caught doing something forbidden.

“I went out looking for you when you hadn’t come home on time. I thought I’d ask Grandmother if she’s seen you. She wasn’t answering her comm, and neither were you.”

Hux left his comm in the seat compartment of his speeder, ten or so minutes away on foot. “It’s been what? An hour? If that?” Hux asks incredulously. “And where are the girls? Did you leave them alone?”

“Lis is watching them. They’re fine. They were worried about you. We all were.”

Hux flinches, bizarrely guilty for doing something as staying out later than his normal time of arrival. “Well, here I am. You can go now.”

Marin glares at the space behind Hux like he’s looking for something to bash in. “What brought you here?”

“Go home. It’s not your place to be demanding things from me,” Hux asserts. He knows his son better than anyone. He knows Marin knows he’s getting close to someone that isn’t part of their family. Marin has always been protective of him, but every friendship—every male friendship—that Hux has tried to make with tentative, small hopes of that friendship developing into something more, Marin has meddled and pushed the man out of Hux’s life, until Hux has nowhere to go but back home to his den, trapped like a widower that no man wants a part of.
To his surprise, Marin gives, and stalks in the other direction. Hux sighs and breaks his resilient composure. He has a very bad feeling about this.

Marin tucks himself away in a dark corner around the next block. He reaches out with his senses, the air around Hux giving to his retreat.

There's another familiar, threatening presence that summons a tide of dread. One he associates with hatred and fear, that he almost thinks it's just those feelings themselves coursing through him. Marin heads toward where he ran into Hux, who is thankfully long gone.

The door to his grandmother's restaurant eases open. Hatred and fear heightens at his proximity to *him*, the man of his nightmares, who he loathes more than he could ever articulate, simply because there aren't enough words in his vernacular to express the enormity of his hatred.

Marin glowers to the unmistakable span of Kylo Ren’s shoulders and back. Ren’s convening with Grandmother. What in the galaxy could he possibly be talking with her about?

“Marin!” Grandmother greets him, surprised. Ren spins around, shock widening his eyes. He looks a bit guilty. “What are you doing here, dear?” she asks. A visit from both Marin and Armitage?

“I ran into Father outside. He seemed...happy,” Marin says, eyes flicking to Ren but exposing none of his poisonous thoughts.

“You say that like it's a bad thing,” Aems says, mostly jibing.

“I was worried about him. He was gone far longer than he should have been.” Marin’s lids narrow to Ren’s display of shame, like he broke some sort of rule. Strange. He never thought the man to be capable of shame.

Aems can't help but laugh. “That's my grandson. Always forgetting who the parent is and who the child is,” she says to Ren, who smiles good-naturedly.

“He's a very dutiful son. You should be proud,” Ren says, offering an outright scowling Marin a contrasting smile.

“Oh, it’s good you're here. I was just about to leave Ben alone so I could tend to a preferred customer. Would you mind escorting Ben to the back and show him the trash compactor?” she asks Marin, oblivious to the fact that ‘Ben’ just might end up getting thrown inside said trash compactor.

An opportunity presents itself. Marin smiles in false enthusiasm to his grandmother, and in that moment he looks so much like Hux, Ren doesn't object as Marin slaps an enormous hand on his shoulder, fingers digging into a cluster of nerves. “Not a problem. Follow me, Ben.”

When Aems leaves them to their own devices, Marin guides Ren by the back of his neck, agitating the pressure points. Halfway through the kitchen, they catch worried stares of the cooks and cleaners, and Marin then notices the scarring on the base of his neck and scalp.

It's a mark Marin gave to him on the day they left. Sickness riles high in his gut. He couldn't summon the courage to murder Ren. If he had, he wouldn't be shoving him out the back door and into the adjacent wall with a hard, face-first smack.

“Who the hell do you think you are?!?” Marin hisses, preparing for a fight.

Ren groans and turns around, jaw pinching with a fresh bruise. “I haven't told him anything. I was
watching him from afar and he noticed. He came to me.”

“Oh, don't give me that! I told you to stay away from him.”

“I haven't told him anything,” Ren tries, squaring his shoulders. “You don't control him. He's not your ward. He can make his own decisions—”

Marin snaps, lunging for Ren's shirt collar and shoving him against the wall. “You come here, claiming to operate in the interests of the Resistance. That you being here is your mission. But I know you, Kylo Ren. You're a liar and an imposter and I'm not just gonna let you get away with hurting my family.”

Flinching at his son’s judgement, Ren pushes himself into telling Marin what he needs to hear. “Oh, I'm the liar? The imposter?” he demands, without avarice. “Hux may not know my real name but does he even know who you are? Does he have any idea what you're capable of?”

It takes all his control to not snap and drive his thumbs into Ren’s trachea. He's not a bloodthirsty animal like Ren. To stoop to his level would be a worse fate than death. “It's sad, you know. Seeing you try so hard to be something you're not.”

Ren would have thought Marin would surely bash his head into the wall, even anticipated it. But all Marin does is smirk, dark and sinister. Father and son, a reflection clearer than a mirror.

“Hux may not remember what you did to him, but I know you. You're barely holding on. And when you fail, when you show your true nature and Hux doesn't have his emotional dependence to you to secure your possession of him? I'll be there. I look forward to watching you burn.”

Marin holds Ren’s resigned glower along their heavy heartbeats. He moves away, leaving Ren alone in the alley to gather what's left of his eviscerated hope.

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Chapter End Notes

being a part of the kylux fam means being read for filth constantly!! its how they bond, i promise :D LOL. i hope you guys liked the update!!! :)}) seems like the story is flying by.
Ren’s first full day of work consists of learning the ins and outs of bussing, which isn’t too difficult, as long as he uses his time wisely. He’s come to enjoy menial tasks. He sees why Hux appreciates the low level of stress.

Since both Hux and Aems work, Aems had told him that they coordinate their off days with one another so the girls aren’t left alone and it isn’t always left on Marin to watch them. Aems stresses that she and her son try their best to ensure the grandkids have the most enriching days possible, especially Marin. Ren can tell Aems sees something in that boy, but she’s careful not to divulge her concern. Ren is a stranger, after all.

A stranger to everyone except Hux, who paid him a visit on his first day of work after his own workday. Hux has done this every one of his workdays, all three so far. Hux is, by far, the best part of his day. The first two visits Hux simply said hello and asked him if he’s enjoying his time. The third, however, is different. Hux has found a table in his mother’s restaurant, and brought a book. One would think after spending all day in the student archives, Hux wouldn’t be keen to read right after his shift. Ren is washing dishes when he sees him. It would appear he’s already been served his caf. In too good of a mood to squander the impulse, Ren washes his hands and grabs a freshly brewed pot to refill Hux’s cup.

Ren approaches from behind. He takes a moment to appreciate Hux’s prim posture, the ruddiness of the tips of his ears, the noncommittal part of his gelled hair. It’s astonishing how much Hux has evolved—like his smile and his softness and his laughing heart, and what parts remain permanent—his calculative nature and proper appearance. But even that has morphed somewhat. He wonders if Hux misses his life before this place. If he often finds himself yearning for the tomb-cold halls of their Star Destroyer, their lonely beds on different levels of which they never shared each other’s warmth.

As if Hux has eyes on the back of his head—it’s not out of the realm of possibility—he turns to investigate Ren’s pause. Sheepishly, Ren holds out his pot of caf.

“Refill?” Ren asks, too pitchy and eager. Though he hardly cares. He could spend every day embarrassing himself in front of Hux. Nothing compares to the lonely days on Meris III, lying on his back and begging the stars to fall and burn him into ash.

Hux can’t seem to stop smiling in front of Ben. It’s like Ben has the upper hand. “Please.”

Ren obliges. “So what are you reading?” Has he always been this awkward? Or is it just the taunt of getting to spend time with Hux again lighting a fire under his feet.

“It’s one of my favorites. Applied Quantum Mechanics.”

Interesting. “Why not read in a compressed form? I’m sure it’s much easier to transport.”

“I prefer to read a hardcopy.” Reading from screens make him feel like his reading is work.

“Sounds like homework.”
“It is nonfiction, if that’s what you mean.”

“So, it’s a text book,” Ren smirks.

Must Ben try and charm him every second of their conversation? “You’re not wrong.” Hux swallows and is grateful Ben is standing so he can’t see his throat quiver. “Take a seat. I’ll give you a crash course.”

“I’d love to,” Ren flushes, “but I’m on duty.” He punctuates himself with a jerk of the pot in his hand.

“Boss is at home today. I won’t tell if you won’t.”

Laughing, Ren takes the seat across from him. He ogles the alarm flashing across Hux’s face when their knees accidentally brush. Gods, Ren longs for the sweet scent of his skin.

“The beauty of this text is that it doesn’t leave anything out. No shortcuts, no excuses. Just pages and pages of overly complicated mathematics,” Hux smirks. He’s obviously posturing for Ben as if he could woo him by his fierce intellect. Somehow he feels Ben would respond well.

Ren flips through the pages. He’s no layman to this branch of mathematics but his eyes are starting to cross, even more so when Hux activates the holoprojector of multidimensional corresponding graphs and plots. “Neat. But not my idea of recreation.”

Rather than being insulted, Hux leans in close, elbows propped in interest. “What would you rather read?”

“Um. Something with more story. Some action. More pictures. Maybe a crossword puzzle or two.”

“You’re making fun of me,” Hux accuses.

“Why would I do that?” Ren grins. “Well, I’m only half telling the truth. I haven’t picked up a book in years, so my point of reference may be a bit juvenile.”

“So what do you do when you aren’t working?” Hux asks. He absorbs every last bit of information Ben divulges like Ben is the most interesting thing to come across his plate. He supposes he is.

Ren ponders this for a moment. “I like making things.”

Could Ben be any more adorable? “Things?”

“Yeah, anything mechanical. But I really find handicraft to be more enjoyable. It’s not about the end product, but the process. If that makes sense.”

Hux can’t relate. In his experience, the process of engineering always was the dullest part about it. The production was where mistakes were trialed, where time was lost, where frustrations threatened to end a project. The end product was the prime reason that made the process worthwhile.

Unfortunately, Ben must return to his duties before Hux can get a chance to continue his interrogation. He wishes him a good afternoon and Hux watches him retreat back into the kitchen. He takes this time to indulge in Ben’s form, from his towering height, his wide frame, and the confident sway of his narrow hips and the gorgeous rump attached to them.

That night, when Hux has been home for several hours, after dodging question after question from
Marin, Hux finds himself looking out the window for Ben’s speck of a campsite. There it is: a small flicker of light from a fire. He quells the urge to pay Ben an unannounced visit after hours. He doesn’t want to badger the man. Ben is on the job.

Later, as Hux showers, he panders to another urge that hasn’t risen in years. He touches himself. He can’t stop thinking about Ben’s shoulders, his smirk, how his large, capable hands look wrapped around a set of tools. That laugh, those earnest eyes. That delectable span of skin he witnessed through his quadnocs the other night as Ben changed, oblivious to the fact he was being peeped on.

He pictures what a kiss from Ben would be like, if he’d be gentle or demanding. Or perhaps gentle at first to break him in, then he’d take what he could, moving him around in his massive arms like dough. He imagines Ben would play him like an instrument and be the most giving lover, manipulating his mouth and tongue to awaken nerves Hux didn’t know he had. Using his hands around him, his fingers inside him—

Hux comes in a trembling hand, throat spasming around a groan. He sleeps that night longing for a phantom’s touch.

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Ren spends his days cleaning tables, washing and polishing dishes and cutlery, disposing kitchen wastes in their proper compactor, and maintaining the utilities and order of the dining area. He's even repaired some of Aems’ most daunting projects, like the kinks in the kitchen’s ventilation. His nights, however, are reserved for camping at Hux’s property line, eager to catch a flash of him or the girls.

“You're really quite handy. We're you a mechanic in a past life?” Aems inquires.

“Just the son of one,” Ren replies, echoing from inside the brassy vent shaft. “My father owned and operated an old Corellian freighter well past its lifespan. He probably kept it alive by sheer force of will.” It’s one of the few things Ren shares of his identity with Ben, and takes pride in it. He has few things in life left to aid his pride, undoubtedly for the better.

“Well, good thing for us both you hadn't fallen far from the tree,” she says. Aems is grateful Ben has proven to be an asset, both professionally and personally.

Ren laughs, because she's so painfully on the mark. “In more ways than one. I even managed to inherit all of his many mistakes.” He bolts up the vent, setting aside the strips of the broken air filter between his smudged fingers. “I'm lucky to have had him as long as I did,” he says remorsefully.

Aems softens, lending Ben a rag. “I'm sure he felt the same.”

Thankfully, Aems doesn't catch Ren’s withered, timeless guilt, when she pulls away to peek out the food window that displays the dining area. Her heart pulls at the familiar presences of her granddaughters. Hand in hand with her son, whom of which only just paid her a visit just a few days ago. She smirks knowingly. Her Armitage isn't here to see her.

“Looks like our number one customer is in today,” Aems tells Ben, reveling at the awe brightening
his features when he lays eyes on the trio—her son in one of his more garish outfits consisting of denim pants and a loose fitting blouse, hair styled into a neat, vibrant coif, and his two laughing, talkative daughters in iron-pressed overalls and coordinating pastel sweaters. They’re a beautiful family. She can see why Ben’s so enthralled.

“Why don't you take their order,” Aems suggests. “Develop your table-waiting skills.”

Ren blanches. He hadn't prepared for such an encounter with both Hux and the girls, least of all with an expectation of a service he’s never performed.

But this is Hux, and he'd do anything to get his attention, even if it means making an utter fool of himself. “How hard can it be?” he says with ease.

“That's the spirit,” Aems says, slapping Ren’s back with far more strength than her stature should warrant. Breathing once to expand his chest to something resembling confidence, Ren shuffles out into the dining area.

Hux’s smile blooms at Ben’s collected, aproned gait, his stomach tightening as Ben smiles back. There’s something remarkable about how fondly Ben regards his daughters. It makes him fly high on the hope that maybe he won't spend the rest of his days as a lonesome housewife.

A hot shame prickles when he remembers how he used Ben to fuel a sexual fantasy the other night. He supposes what Ben doesn't know won't hurt him, but Ben is trying to be his friend, not anything more. All the perceived flirting on Ben's part could just be Hux's lonely heart, his wishful thinking.

“How's the job treating you?” Hux asks, clearing his fretting mind. He’s asked before but he needs to hear that his mother has made her kitchen a place he'll not want to escape anytime soon. Seren and Taran don't look up from their heated argument about what story they're gonna program in their earpieces next, always wrapped up in their own realm.

“I couldn't be happier. I never imagined that I'd fit so well here,” Ren says. At the sound of his voice, the twins perk up.

“That's the guy,” Taran whispers to her sister, who counters with a cross, “I know.”

Hux is a bit surprised that the girls remember Ben. They'd only seen him once. “This is Ben, Papa’s friend. Ben works here with Grandmother.”

“Is your face better?” Seren asks, looking up wide-eyed to Ren’s height.

“My face is fine,” Ren smiles. “Thank you for asking.”

“What about his face?” Hux asks his girls, because he genuinely has no idea what they're talking about.

“Marie hit this guy and blood went all down his face,” Taran explains.

“What?” Hux frowns.

“He hit him in his nose! And we made it better with the first aid kit,” Seren says, pointing between herself and her sister in pride.

Hux withers with something akin to betrayal. “Is this true?” he asks Ben, who looks like he wants to jump out of his skin.
“It was an accident,” Ren says, because there's no other way to explain what happened on the beach the other day without giving up Marin's secret. “He got himself caught in the undertow and he elbowed me when I was saving him from drowning. It's no big deal.”

Hux doesn't know where to begin. What was Marin doing swimming? He's never swam or taken a liking to it a day in his life. Why hadn't Ben told him he almost drowned? Why hadn't Marin?

But what sticks out to him the most is Ben’s heroism. He saved his son’s life and hadn't so much as sought out a thank-you.

“I'm surprised he didn't say anything,” Hux says, seeing Ben in a brighter light. He'd spent time with him on his own volition before he truly understood just how much he already is indebted to him.

“He was probably embarrassed,” Ren tries. “I don't think he meant to go out as far as he did.”

“Embarrassed he almost drowned? That's my son, alright,” Hux snorts. “He really doesn't swim.”

“Marie thought we jumped in the water so he looked for us,” Taran explains. “Seren made us hide from him.”

“No!” Seren defends, “No, no, you were with me. Stop lying.”

“Okay, fine.” Taran holds a hand up, exasperated from her sister’s behavior.

“Your son was trying to help them,” Ren says to Hux’s frown. “It wasn't his fault. I offered to teach him how to swim properly, but he wouldn't have it.”

That sounds exactly like Marin. Never willing to take up an offer of assistance, least of all from a stranger. But Ben is no longer a stranger. He's the man who saved his son’s life. “I think that's an excellent idea,” Hux smiles, already consumed by this train of thought.

“What is?” Ren deadpans. He really should have kept his mouth shut.

“If your offer still stands, I know of a place where the water is choice for swimming lessons. There’s a park just south of here. We could all go and make a day of it,” Hux proposes enthusiastically. He grins down to his girls and they vehemently agree. The bay park is so much fun.

Ren pales. “Um—”

Like a douse of water, Ben’s immediate withdrawal stings Hux's pride. “I just thought it might appeal to you, but I understand if you may not be interested.” What was he thinking? Inviting a man entrusted with protecting him to a frivolous outing with his brood.

“No, please. I would love to,” Ren urges. “But. Marin, your son, didn't seem to take a liking to me helping him, and wasn't too thrilled about my proposition.” That, among a litany of additional offences, both his fault and otherwise.

Ren’s heart pounds at Hux’s evident relief. “He shouldn’t have lied to me,” Hux shrugs. “Besides, he'll get over it when I appeal to his enormous guilt complex.”

“Maybe this isn't such a good idea,” Ren tries, but Hux is having none of it.

“It's only fair. You save him from drowning and he repays you by bloodying your nose and refuses
an offer to learn an important survival skill? He really shouldn't get away with it.” What kind of father would he be if he allowed Marin to go unchecked like that? “I bet he didn't even thank you.”

“I'm sure he'd be happier learning how to swim from someone else,” Ren says. Literally anyone else. A Hutt. The Emperor's ghost. Someone who can't swim.

“Not after I get through to him.” Hux’s mind is made.

Ren offers a wide smile that doesn't reach his eyes. He fully expects Hux's plan to fall through, seeing that Marin detests him and would go as far as wiping his existence completely. “I'm sure you will.”

“Be ready to teach. How's this weekend sound?” Hux asks.

“I dunno,” Ben puckers his chin in dramatized thoughtfulness. “I think I've got a double shift that day.”

“Say you're sick!” Seren shouts. She's very excited about the plans her Papa is making. And Ben is nice and makes Papa laugh.

“I'm sure my lie would come around to bite me in the butt,” Ren laughs, playful.

The twins giggle at the colorful mental image. Their response to Ben does not go unnoticed by Hux, who smiles softly, filing away their joviality. Ben can make his children laugh and save their lives, and appears to enjoy doing so for no other reason than because he wants to. “My mother will understand, now just say yes already,” he says, heart in his throat.

“Yes. Yes, I would love to,” Ben says, already regretting it, but it's all the confirmation Hux needs.

“Excellent. Now get your pad and paper out. I promised my daughters that I'd let them build their own sandwiches.”

Ren complies, scribbling down every last detail of the twins’ enthusiastic, impossibly complex orders.

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“No, no. Are you out of your mind?” Marin spits, on the verge of tears. Everything is disintegrating like ripped bits of tattered cloth. He must get control of the situation before Ren comes up with something more devious than swimming lessons.

“Am I? You almost drown in our backyard and I have to hear about it from the girls? Why would you keep something like that from me?”

“Because. I handled it.” He’s got everything under control. There's no way he’s gonna let Kylo Ren get away with this. “Why are you doing this? I told you I don't want to have anything to do with that man.”

“Need I remind you that you are the one who brought him here. You got me to help him when I refused to,” Hux asserts. “I'm doing this for your own good.”

Jaw grinding his teeth together, Marin tempers his rage. He can't let Hux know how much this is
truly affecting him. It's taking every iota of his restraint not to slam his fist into the kitchen wall. “Anyone could teach me how to swim. There are probably classes at the community center. I'll take lessons with six year olds. I don't care.”

Hux crosses his arms. He'd expected this uphill battle, but the bartering is new. “You're going to let Ben teach you because he offered, and because you punched him in the face after he saved you.”

“I didn't punch him. It was an accident,” he lies.

“I guess I'll have to take your word for it. We both know what that's worth.”

“Why? Why, of all people, him?” Marin exasperates, ignoring Hux’s slight. He's trapped in an endless loop.

“Because he offered. He's done nothing but help you and the cause you care about. And you hit him and made Seren and Taran see all the blood and traumatized them.”

“They seemed fine,” Marin shrugs.

Hux scoffs in disbelief. “And you lied to me—”

“I didn’t lie—”

“You withheld the truth from me about what happened on the beach, and I had to hear it from Ben, who, by the way, offered to teach you a valuable skill, even after you punched him.”

Marin presents his hunched, tense back, weighing his options. Scouring for anything to get the upper hand.

“If Ben wasn't there to save you, what would you have done? What if something happened to you?” Hux asks softly, unable to imagine what losing Marin would do to him. “You know better than to hide something like that from me. How could you keep me in the dark?”

His son makes a small noise of distress. Concerned, Hux peers at Marin’s face for any indication of deceit. All he sees is grief like he's never seen in his boy, mangling his features with pain. It's gone so fast that Hux has the fleeting concern that he imagined it.

“Just this one time,” Marin grates. Because he owes Hux so much. His father has done so much for him and his baby sisters. And all Marin has done is lie.

Hux grins, bubbling with joy. “Yes. Just this one.” He knew his son would be appeased. He slings an arm over Marin’s shoulders, stealing a kiss to his wavy blond head.

“I can't promise I'll be pleasant,” Marin says. Now that the idea is in his head, he can wrap himself around it. This isn't about him, his grievances or troubles. He has to be strong for Hux and do what's requested of him, so Hux will never suspect there's more to his and ‘Ben’s’ story.

“Please. I don't expect the impossible from you,” Hux jokes.

Marin’s smile is genuine. This will also give him a chance to see ‘Ben’ fail, right when he thinks he has Hux around his finger. It's an opportunity to nip in the bud whatever relationship Ren is fostering with Hux. Marin will take great pleasure in watching Ren fall from the height he's tried so hard to climb.
By the time the school week comes to an end and the weekend approaches, Marin finds himself clothes shopping with the person who he trusts to find him a swimsuit, his best friend Lis.

“I can't believe your dad is trying to get with that Captain Ben dud. His other two friends were much better looking,” Lis sighs, shuffling through the men’s section.

“He's not. He's just. I don't know. He thinks if I do this, it'll make up for how I kept the...drowning thing from him.”

“And from me,” Lis glares. “You could have told me that you couldn't swim. I could have taught you. I still can. But now I refuse to. I don't want to get on your father's bad side. Even though I bet he looks adorable when angry.”

“Keep it in your pants, Lis.”

Triumphantly Lis holds up a pair of the tiniest swim trunks she's ever seen. They're an obnoxious shade of yellow. “You think you can keep yours in these?”

Marin all but rolls his eyes. “Next.”

She tosses him an even slimmer pair, this time in jet black. “These?”

“This is unbearable.”

“This!” Lis shouts, holding up a blue pair in one hand that has a bit more room for his privates, though barely, and a coordinating two-piece in her other hand. “We could match.”

He holds up a hand. “No, no. You're not coming. This is strictly a—business transaction. You'll be too distracting.”

“You're right. I would look good in this,” she says wistfully to the two-piece.

Marin can't even dignify that with a response. He settles on a knee length pair of swim shorts, to which Lis complains about being too baggy. His succinct, ‘it’s a swimming lesson, not a runway show’ appeases her.

“Well, maybe for you. Some of us want to actually show off our physical attributes. I’m buying this for me for when you decide to invite me on family beach day,” Lis hums, sauntering to the changing room with her prize.

“It’s not family beach day. My father is just tormenting me. It’s ‘Hux’s revenge day’ more appropriately,” Marin defends, unease surfacing. He’ll have to be his most vigilant tomorrow lest Ren get any ridiculous ideas.

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Seren and Taran dress themselves in their bathing suits and lather each other with the sunblock to protect their skin. Papa always taught them to work together to achieve a goal, and now they are
old enough to do everything! Well, maybe not everything. Still, with their teamwork, they got ready before Papa, who is still in the bathroom. Since they share a room, and always have since they were little babies, Papa insists on changing in their bathroom to preserve his modesty.

“Papa, are you pooping or something?” Seren demands, excited to go to the bay.

“What is wrong with you?” Taran sighs to her sister, who just shrugs ‘what.’ “Let’s go out and eat a snack. We can wait in the kitchen.” Her sister is so impatient.

Hux frowns at his shirtless reflection, palming the span of his uneven surgical scar. It’s so stupid how he’s worried about the scar now. It’s been a part of him for ages. But a part of him knows how strange it’ll appear to others. Like Ben, who he’ll be seeing today.

Not that he plans on disrobing in front of Ben. Not anytime soon. Or ever. What if it’s hot and he wants to take his shirt off? Will Ben remark on his ribbed torso, pale, bluing veins in the insides of his too-lean arms, or his gnarled scar? If Ben does ask about his scar, it would only be fair. Hux asked Ben about his scar.

Hux swallows around his superficially driven anxiety. This day isn’t even for him. It’s for Marin, who needs to be taught a life lesson on respect and debts. Hux tugs around a white tank top that’s snug enough to cling to his abdomen. Combined with his formless shoulders, he feels and looks feminine, especially in his tight exercise pants that cut off at his upper-calves. His body, like his mind, his heart, has changed into this soft, complacent thing. His stomach even swells slightly over the waistband of his pants. He fusses over his hair with some gel in a nostalgic combed part, each strand set for now but will no doubt be sullied in the bay winds. There’s never been any animosity or shame in his regression. Only acceptance, as this is the path he’s carved for himself.

“Ready?” Hux greets his snacking daughters, who eagerly suck their fruit blends through straws. Hux stores the premade fruit blends on the bottom shelf in the refrigerator so his daughters will never be in want of a quick, delicious, nutritious snack.

“Yes. Marie is dawdling. Of course,” Taran says, finishing off the snack. “I’ll get him.”

“Thank you, dear,” Hux smiles, kissing her head.

Taran sprints over to Marie’s room, and pushes in the door, sleuth-like to not give away her position. She wants to be sneaky because sometimes being sneaky is fun. Her brother stands tall with his side to the door, long fingers fiddling with something silver and sharp. It looks like a weapon.

“What’s that?” Taran whispers to make her voice match the quiet. Marie jumps anyway, and she smiles wickedly at his jumpiness.

Marin stashes his knife in his swimming trunks, a side pocket sealed by a waterproof clasp.

“You’re nosey.”

“You’re shady,” Taran accuses, narrowing her eyes.

“Shady?”

Marie is always running around, ducking his head, telling her and her sister to hush and behave. Marie is the one that puts things behind his back, so that no one can see what he has in his hands. “Like you hide. Like you hide behind a mask.”

The bottom drops from his stomach. He can’t come up with anything to counter his four-year-old
sister’s cryptic words, so he shuffles past her, just wanting today over with already.

“Rude,” Taran glares. Ugh. At least Marie is moving his butt to the door, so they can actually have some fun together for once.

Outside, Ren stands at attention at the base of the porch. Hux never specified a time, but he’s prepared to wait here all day if he must. Aems gave him the day off, and when she learned what Hux had planned, she vehemently pushed for him to go. When Ren had asked if she was coming, she merely smiled and told him that this is the first time in a long time ‘Armitage’ has made plans with someone his age, and she has no interest in stepping on his social development. She made Hux sound about ten years old, but Ren understood what she meant. He’s endlessly appreciative that she sees ‘Ben’ and ‘Armitage’ as potential friends. Maybe more than friends.

Ren smiles a greeting to Hux when he escorts his eager daughters down the porch. They wait by the garage for their Papa to guide them to their speeder. “Have you got swimwear?” Hux asks, anticipation for the day’s excursion. The possibilities are endless with Ben in the picture. Hux even goes so far as to smile at Ren’s dog.

“I'll make due,” Ren nods, throat working around his appreciation for Hux's form. He's never seen Hux in an outfit like this. His clavicle protrudes in the flattering, natural light. Ren longs to teethe the skin there as Hux wraps his slight arms around his neck. “Could I tether my dog to your porch? She might not fare well if there’s too much activity.”

“Oh, go for it,” Hux waves a hand politely. He steals several long, indulgent looks to Ben’s efficient handling of the makeshift leash and water bowl, which he fills with water from his own canteen.

“We’re just about ready. I'll probably have you ride with me while my son takes his sisters along in his speeder,” Hux says nonchalantly. If Hux pilots it, Ben would sit behind him, and he'd get to find out how Ben feels behind him and around him.

“Oh. Thank you,” Ren replies. He's got the same idea as to their configuration and hopes to keep his hands at a respectful distance.

“Good, you're ready,” Ren hears Hux call. Marin reveals himself, managing to keep his scowl subdued until Ren nods politely at him from below.

“Why can't he walk?” Marin snaps, when he sees Ren hover by Hux’s speeder. At Hux’s disdain for his behavior, Marin amends himself. “Why can't we all walk? Walking is good for you.”

“Seren and Taran might complain at about, I don't know, the first three miles?” Hux says, sarcastic. “You'll ride with them in the seated one while I take Ben on mine.” The seated one consists of seats safe for tiny children, and one pilot seat. The other speeder has one long seat where two passengers would have to sit back to chest.

“No,” Marin objects, and already things are hostile. He doesn't want Hux sitting with Ben any longer than he has to, and certainly not in close proximity like Hux’s two passenger speeder.

“Stop stalling,” Hux asserts. “Get the bag in the speeder and buckle them up. I've had enough of your petulance.”

Marin can't believe he's saying this. “No, I'll ride with him.” He can't let Ren ride with Hux and he most certainly cannot allow him to ride with the twins, so he'll just have to suck it up. “You even say I always mistreat the steering in the seated one.”
Narrowing his eyes, Hux considers his son’s proposal. Ben shuffles to the side, waiting for instruction, looking painfully, endearingly awkward.

“Alright,” Hux decides, setting the girls up in their seats. He buckles their sun hats on their heads, despite their complaints. He doesn’t miss Ben’s warm smile at their reactions. “Do you remember how to get there?” he asks Marin, who in contrast to Ben’s congeniality, looks like he wants to hit something.

“Of course.” Already he feels out of control, like everyone is deciding his fate for him. It's infuriating. Determined not to make his visceral hatred for Ren too apparent, Marin wordlessly situates himself on his speeder, scooting up as far as his seat and his genitals will allow.

“Forgive my son. He’s cranky in the morning,” Hux says to Ben, patting his arm. That earns him a well-deserved glare from said son. But it’s only the truth.

Summoning his restraint, Ren eases himself over the seat, behind Marin and unsure what to do with his hands. He could hold on to the sides and risk injury, but settles on two grips to either of Marin’s wide shoulders. Marin grimaces and starts the engines, and the repulsorlifts hum to life.

“What about your helmets?” Hux demands.

But Marin ignores him and takes off, sparing Ren a red-hot glare as he looks behind him to reverse. “If you plan on falling off, try not to take me with you,” he growls over the wind howling in their ears. Ren says nothing, tries to be on his best behavior. It’s easy, because the ride is pleasant, if not for his son’s stiff, angry shoulders under his hands. They glide along the beaches of Rhiannon as they taper off into hills, a distant mountain formation to the west. Ren wonders if Hux and the kids ever made trips to the mountains, climbing and adventuring and exploring the natural wonders of their homeland.

As Marin picks up speed, Ren struggles to right himself against the winds that agitate his vision and make him waver on his precarious seat. Marin has it a bit better, shielded by the slim sheet of duraglass set for the comfort of the pilot. Ren still tries to pick up all the details of the peaceful countryside, the sun peeking between the rolling clouds and warming everything below. Suns are meant for life, not destruction. He wonders if Hux ever looks up at Rhiannon’s and thinks the same thing.

Marin turns the speeder along with the give of the changing land, and the hills shift from sand dunes to rocky cliffs, endless and rhythmic. Ren hadn’t anticipated the juts of white rock staggering to unforeseen heights as the land transitions to a narrowing valley. From the distance, he thought all the white ahead was sand. Marin is going awfully fast, confident in his skill as a pilot in his familiar territory. That, or he cares not if he gets them in a wreck where they’ll meet their demise together, smashed against the rock like bugs.

The white cliffs mellow to rocks, and Marin slows the speeder just as the rocks crumble to sand. Before them lies a flat, peaceful beach, crystal clear and sparkling in the warmth of the weekend morning. There appears to be no one else at the park, the only thing accompanying them until Hux and the twins join them is the small building that Ren assumes houses a refresher and water fountains, maybe even a snack machine or two.

“Before they get here, I need to make one thing clear,” Marin says lowly as he parks the speeder and extricates himself from Ren’s grip. “I’m only allowing this to happen so Hux won’t get suspicious. I’d rather be anywhere in the galaxy than here, but this is what it’s gonna take for Hux to stop complaining about the swimming crap, I’ll endure it.”
Ren nods. “Alright.”

His nonchalance is aggravating, but Marin persists. “So—don’t get any ideas. There’s nothing about this I like.”

“Understood.”

“I mean it. I’m not afraid to go against you if I need to. Especially in front of them,” Marin growls, schooling himself into coolness as Hux painstakingly pilots the speeder into an organized, makeshift parking spot right next to Marin’s. The girls are already giggling in excitement for all the critters they’ll get to see, oblivious to the state of their family.

“Alright, alright. Let’s set up our blanket. Then we can go to the tide pools,” Hux tells his girls. Naturally, they cooperate, because they were raised to work as a team.

“Okay, but then the tide pools,” Seren negotiates, countered by Taran’s, “Papa said that already,” which is promptly countered by, “I know! But I want to be sure he knows.”

Ren never fails to smile at the girls’ flamboyance and eccentricities, and Hux’s fatherly hustle that’s so well-rehearsed, it’s like he was made to care for two passionate youngsters. He allows the warm fullness to overcome him. Even if his son hates him, and Hux has no idea who he truly is, and neither do the girls, at least they’re together. Ren files away the feeling, lest he need something good to hold onto in the near future.

Marin’s knuckles clench into angry fists. “Let’s get on with it.”

Ren nods, escorting him to the shore. “Ready?” he asks unnecessarily.

“Shut up.” This is one of the hardest, most grueling things he’s had to do. He doesn’t need Ren’s stupid input.

Ren turns around to see Hux and the girls setting up their giant blanket. Only now, Hux is wearing an enormous sun hat and a pair of immodest sunglasses. His wave and smile in response is the cherry on top. Ren’s stomach does somersaults with the urge to tell Hux how truly beautiful he is, but he staves his tongue and offers a wave back.

Of course, Marin has his own ideas how their conversations, silent and otherwise, should go. “Stop looking at him like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you’re forgetting where you stand, and that when the Resistance doesn't need him, you’ll leave for good.” Marin shucks off his shirt and tosses it into the sand, and toes off his boots like they have a death wish. Ren does the same, though with less vitriol. He tugs his cargo pants down to reveal his knee length undershorts that are just fitted enough to pass for swimwear.

“Papa, let's go to the tide pool,” Seren urges. She brought her little shovel that she can use to pick up the sand critters without hurting them or getting hurt by them. Taran has hers, too, and she fists it eagerly while she waits for her Papa to move.

But Hux is far too distracted by Ben’s disrobing. He really should have expected this. In fact, he's astonished he hadn't spent the whole week anticipating seeing Ben shirtless, not to mention those tight shorts cradling his backside. Ben doesn't turn back around, instead focusing on his task, and Hux is impressed at his restraint from preening.
“Papa, let's go, come on,” Seren sighs, and her Papa finally complies, and let's himself be led.

Because Hux is shameless, he ogles Ben some more from his side, swallowing at the breadth of his pectorals enhanced by the shining sun as he moves deeper into the water with Marin. The girls bend at their knees at a pool that catches their interests, and Hux nearly stumbles over them. They are quick to giggle and reprimand their father’s clumsiness. To which Ben perks up, smiling so that his dimples show. Oh, and his enormous, naked chest. Hux is glad his hat is shading his blush.

“All this and you're not even gonna teach me?” Marin snaps, pulling Ren from his indulgent, unpermitted gaze at Hux and the girls.

By now, he and Marin are waist deep. Ren comes up with a good place to start for their lesson. His parents were his first teachers. They always thought it was important to build sturdy foundations. “Alright. First lesson. We’re gonna plug our noses and hold our heads underwater and count to fifteen. You can try opening your eyes if you want, but squeezing them shut is fine for now.”

Marin should have realized that having Kylo Ren teach him how to swim would primarily consist of actually listening to his instruction, where his impulse is to argue and pass insult. Wordless, expression just shy of disgust, he pinches his nose and Ren follows in suit.

Satisfied, Ren counts off. “One, two, three, go!”

In sync, Ren and Marin plunge into the current-warmed sea, bay water just faintly shifting with waves. It’s the perfect place for a new swimmer to get his bearings. From underneath, Ren peeks at Marin, whose eyes are firmly held shut, nose pinched just like he asked. He really does look like Hux, and if not for his bone structure and his hulking frame that shows no signs of halting in growth, Hux really could be the only parent. Ren loses track of time and jumps back up for air when Marin does.

Marin scrubs the salt from his eyes, summoning memories of the many nights he spent crying over his parents. Of course Ren has the nerve to play dumb and act like none of the shit he did to him ever happened by smiling at him in contentment. “What?” he spits.

At Marin’s now soaking wet flop of hair, clinging to his skull so that his unsightly inherited pair of ears prods out, Ren can't help it. “Your ears.”

Oh, for the love of—“You repel me, you know that?”

“That's why I keep my hair long, too.”

This is truly a test for every ounce of restraint he has. “What's next?”

Ren smirks. “Floating.”

Marin crosses his arms, impatiently waiting for Ren to explain.

“Like this,” Ren says, sinking to his knees and lying on his back, raising his feet to the surface so that he suspends himself in perfect buoyancy with the sea. “Though on your first try, I'll probably have to keep my hand under your back. Try and fill your lungs with air. Your body fat should do most of the floating but the air helps.”

Once Ren feels Marin has had a proper demonstration, he stands tall and holds out his arms. His son glowers to the calm surface of the water, its nearly clear shallowness allowing him to spot a school of tiny, weaving fish.
“Ready?” Ren prompts. He’s met with silent compliance, instead of a sharp ‘shut up’ like before.

Marin sinks so that his shoulders are just peeking over the surface. With far too much brashness, Marin kicks off the sandy floor and flattens his body at sea level. He manages one second of a halfway float, before succumbing to gravity, causing him to slap and kick ferociously at the water to stop from sinking.

He knows the rules, the technique Ren showed him, but it’s unjustly difficult to master his body’s feral, instinctual reactions. Like when Ren attempts to tug him back up, he shoves him off with more force than warranted.

“Hey! Easy,” Ren assures to deaf ears. Marin allows Ren to help him to his feet but only as far as that.

“Next,” Marin growls against his waterlogged sinuses, longing for the day to end.

“Nope. I didn't see you float, did I?”

“I tried to.”

“I know you can get it right. Come on,” Ren says encouragingly. “Please, just get low and I'll help you to your back.”

Marin looks like he wants to hit him—and hit him, he just might—but he manages to sink low again, grimacing at Ren’s hands on his shoulder blades.

“That's it. Slow and steady,” Ren tells him. “Just ease backwards. One foot on the ground.”

If Ren would just keep his mouth shut, this would be infinitely more bearable. Finding his balance on one foot, using the hands at his back for support, Marin manages to stay flat longer than he had the first time. But Ren’s still supporting him and he's got one foot on the ground. It's really not an accomplishment. But Ren tells him ‘good job’ anyways.

“Now try slowly lifting off from the other foot. If you sink, trust your body to bring you back to the surface. Don't panic. I'm here,” Ren says. Marin is proud to have held back a barrage of insults.

Summoning his ever-tested patience, Marin forces his body not to panic as he puts his weight on Ren’s hands. It takes him awhile but he eventually gets his back straight and near the surface while suspending one leg enough that he can let the other leg join him in suspension, balancing on Ren’s hands. He holds his breath just like Ren told him, and his body stops fighting its natural buoyancy. He doesn’t realize Ren’s not supporting him until he sees him from the corner of his eye, grinning triumphantly.

“How’s it feel?” Ren asks, filled with a pure, honest sort of thrill at watching his son succeed.

“Probably a bit better if you moved a bit to the right,” Marin says, and when Ren complies and the sun is blocked from Marin’s eyes, Ren is tickled to realize that his son made a joke.

They practice floating for a bit longer, adding gentle hand movements to change direction and graduating to kicking with help and support from Ren. It’s so surreal Ren doesn’t know what to do with the memory once he already forms it, a permanent treasure.
Kylux Family Beach Day will continue next week! Thank you guys for reading!! I hope you enjoyed this self indulgent chapter loll
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

At the shore, Hux and the girls have been busying themselves with sea creature discovery.

“Papa, look. Look at his tongue!” squeals Taran excitedly, holding up a bivalve in her little shovel that’s poking its body out of its two shells, probably from the altitude change.

“That’s not his tongue. It’s his body. It just looks like a tongue,” Hux explains, keeping an eye on Ben and Marin from their distance. They appear to be cooperating. Maybe, by some miracle, Marin is even enjoying himself.

“It looks like a tongue. Like this,” Taran argues, sticking her little tongue out and wiggling it around as if her Papa forgot what one looks like.

“That may be what it looks like to us, but to him, his shells are his home. Think of it like he’s poking out of his door. Would you be a tongue to a door you were looking out of?”

“No!” she laughs. That’s silly.

“Maybe to a giant, that’s what you would look like. Just like that creature,” Hux explains.

“Papa,” she chides, tickled at the mental picture.

Seren holds up a crablike creature in her shovel, white and pale like the sand and rocks. “What about this guy? Are those his legs or his arms or his fingers, like is he one big hand?”

“I believe they are his legs. The back ones, anyway. I think the front ones he uses to eat, so they are his arms.”

Seren nods. Her papa always has so much knowledge. But he seems to be distracted. He keeps looking at Ben and Marie. “They are so far out there in the water. Can we go out there with them?”

“Maybe when you both are stronger swimmers,” Hux says. “Like your brother, he's learning now. One day when you're older, you'll be taught how to swim.”

“Ben will teach us?” Taran asks.

Hux’s eyes round, but not enough for his daughters to remark. He really doesn’t know what to say to that. “I don’t know.”

“Can we go in the water now?” Seren asks. They’ve been looking at creatures for a while, and she kind of wants to go out in the water. Maybe they can walk in the water with Marie and Ben.

“Alright. Let's put your tools away. I'll take you out as far as your heights will let me. Get your arm floats on,” Hux smiles. He loves his baby girls so much. It's overwhelming how much he does.
“Okay!” they shout unanimously. They jog to their blanket setting and tuck away their shovels, slipping on the soft floating rings around their little arms. Seren’s are green and Taran’s are yellow. Hux rolls up his exercise pants as high as the fabric allows, about mid-thigh.

He escorts his girls to the shallows, letting them splash and rough house in the sparkling water. Longingly, they look out to Ben and Marin, and Hux imagines they want to go out as far as them. “In time, dears, but for now we stay here.”

“Look how good Marie is doing,” Taran sighs. And she's right. Marin is practicing glides under Ben’s supervision. Ben is even smiling. Hux is grateful Ben is enjoying this.


“Another time. Papa doesn't have another change of clothes.” Hux feels a bit gully he can't take the girls out far, but normally they are content to stay where Hux can wade in their trails.

Taran pouts. “But—”

“Maybe Ben can take us. Ben!” Seren calls, waving her hands. Ben cocks his head at the new noise.

“Seren! He's busy,” Hux scolds. He loathes putting a damper on his daughters’ pursuits, but he's already imposed so much on Ben. Babysitting should not be added to Ben’s list of duties.

“He can take a break,” she says. “Ben! Hello!”

Hux groans but allows his daughter to speak her mind. Ben will give her an honest answer. There's a strange moment where Marin absolutely seethes towards Ben as if just looking in their direction is a cardinal sin, but he drops the indignation once he sees Hux and the girls staring. After an expressionless, restrained argument, Marin allows Ben to lead them to the shallows.

“Excuse me, Ben,” Seren asserts, polite and proper. “Since you are helping our big brother Marie swim, maybe you could take us out, too?”

“We are small and have our floats things,” Taran adds, to sweeten the request. “Papa doesn't wanna get wet. Could you please in a little bit?”

Hux flushes, palming his girls’ curly heads. “I didn't say that,” Hux admonishes, then looks up to Ben pleadingly. “You don't have to. I told them I would next time. They'll live,” he says, as much as he regrets disappointing his girls.

This time it's Marin who cuts in. “No, no. Ben’s busy. Next time, like Papa said.”

Seren narrows her eyes. “Marie. Please. You just want to have all the fun with Ben yourself.”

He actually laughs, because he really doesn't know how he ended up here. “No, that's really not it.”

“Yeah-huh. You’re big so you get to swim. Me and Taran should at least have some fun.”

“Aren't you and Papa having fun?”

“Why are you being like this?” Taran exasperates, behaving much like her sister, but for good reason. Because, seriously. Sometimes she thinks Marie just likes to argue.

“I don't mind,” Ben speaks up. “I would be happy to.”
At Hux’s congenial surprise, Marin’s palms itch with rage, with dark anger that he just wants to take out on Ren. He should just probe his mind and push his will like he really should have done ages ago. Marin’s learned long ago that it was the dark side that gave him his ability to push people.

But the minute he does that, is the minute he lets Kylo Ren best him again. This will bring him one step closer to becoming a monster like him. And Hux would know something is amiss, if ‘Ben’ changes his mind so suddenly. Which is one thing he absolutely cannot allow to happen.

“If that’s alright with you,” Ren says, more to Marin than to Hux.

“Please. I know the girls would greatly appreciate you doing this for them,” Hux says. He's never let anyone that wasn't either himself, his son, or his mother tend to the twins. He has grown to favor Ben. Even trust, in the subtlest of ways.

Seren reaches her arms out expectantly, where Taran, who is used to taking turns, asks if she has to wait to go out in the deep end.

“Nonsense. Marin can take you,” Hux says, eying the careful concentration pursing Ben’s features as he lifts Seren into his arms. Marin does the same with a cheering Taran, who like her sister is oblivious to their brother's pointed, calculative glare towards Ben.

Ren is fortunate the saline sea had already rouged his eyelids, for without it, he probably would look as teary as he feels. He only held Marin a handful of times as an infant, and once as a teen after being knocked unconscious by the butt of Finn’s blaster a few weeks ago. As for the twins, he held them only one time in his dark side daze when he kidnapped them and left them for dead.

“Careful, Ben,” warns Marin. Ren prickles from the surreal familiarity of the threat.

“I will,” Ren smiles to Hux, who mouths to him a quick ‘thank-you.’ And Seren, she grips his shoulder, balanced on his hip. She's ready to see the deeper end of the sea.

Hux beams as the four retreats to the horizon. He finds a peace as he lets his girls experience something new and exciting with their big brother and one of his friends. Hux’s only friend, really.

Sighing in contentment, Hux finds his spot on dry land. He tucks away his glasses and his hat, and scoots his tank top sleeves down his shoulders, which fall easily given his slightness. He welcomes the sun to freckle his skin. Hopefully the twins aren't aggravating Ben too severely.

Unsurprisingly, Marin is the only one who is having a tragic time.

“Marie, you are such a grump,” Taran mumbles.

“What did you just say?”

“I said, you are a grump. Ben is cool. You're always looking mean to him.”

Marin adjusts his sister on his opposite hip, not breaking sight of Ren and his silent ogling of Seren. Who is just fascinated at the difference in feeling at being so far from shore. “I'm just being careful. You and Seren should try it sometime.”

But Taran shrugs, unperturbed. “You should try being happy sometime.”

“Happiness isn't a choice,” her brother tells her, one of the many life lessons he has to offer her. Taran pouts, her brother's mood bringing her down. She doesn't really get it, anyway.
On the next giant body over, Seren is having a much more cheerful conversation with Ren. “Can we go deeper? I got my arm things on.”

“Maybe just a little,” Ren tells her. Now that he's gotten a taste, he will greatly miss the miniscule weight of his child in his arms.

She manages to hold off on another request for an entire minute. “Can you teach me to swim?”

“Um. Not today.”

“Please?” She knows just what to say. Politeness and manners gets you things the proper way.

“Maybe your papa can teach you another time.”

“Papa doesn't swim. He does other things, but not swim. You can teach him, too.”

Lurking close, Marin interjects harshly. “Papa can teach you. Or I can. Ben is only here for a little bit. He'll be leaving soon. Real soon.”

Seren’s mouth rounds in shock. “Leaving? Where are you going?” she accuses, branding Ren with her pout.

Ren can't really find an exact answer that won't result in Marin’s condemnation. “I'm not sure.”

“How? But you know you're leaving.” Ben only just got here.

“He's going back to the Resistance,” Marin answers for him. “Remember what I told you about them? They fight in the war. The war isn't here. That's where he has to be.”

“Why?” she asks. She looks at her sister, who's within sight now. Taran wants to know, too.

“That's just the way things are,” Marin says, impatient.

The girls are accustomed to their brother telling them things. This is just another one of those things. But they like Ben. They don't want him to leave just yet.

“But we can have fun today, right?” Ren asks hopefully, concealing his glum.

That was just the right thing to say. Seren’s smile brightens and she hatches an idea. “Can you please hold me out so I can pretend swim?” she articulates, careful to remember her grammar like her papa always taught her.

“That's not a good idea,” Marin barks. He's just on the edge of madness. How can Ren just expect to play with his sisters when he was the one who nearly murdered them?

Seren glares at her brother. Marie is being so irritating. She looks upwards and gently tugs on Ben’s hair for him to lend her his ear. “Marie is being boring. You should do it anyway,” she whispers.

“I heard that!” Marin fumes.

“What?” she exasperates. “You are. You got to swim with Ben. It's my turn.”

“Me, too. I’m next. You really are being a dud. You're putting me to sleep,” Taran says to her brother. He's not making this very fun at all. For once, Seren is being the reasonable one.
Bizarrely, Marin waits for Ren to rescind the offer altogether. As if somehow he'll behave unselfishly, act in everyone's best interests and stop trying to be a part of their family. But if Ren truly felt unselfishly, he'd have left them alone. He hadn't, and he won't, and he's waiting for Marin to object.

When no objection comes, Ren adjusts his giggly daughter in his hands, and holds her out in the waist deep water so she can experience what swimming is really like.

“I'm kicking! Taran, look!” Seren laughs, moving her little arms and legs chaotically. Ren grins and moves her side to side, around in an arc that creates an artful tidal wave.

At the shore, Hux smiles at the pleasant, playful noises. He appreciates how good Ben is with his children. In time, with luck and possibly prayer, maybe Marin will warm up to him.

Ren indulges in many more fun swimming tricks for his daughter to experience, including quick spins and hops, complying with her every request.

“Alright, that's enough,” Marin snaps. He's sick of Ren enjoying himself.

Taran smiles, misinterpreting her brother's instruction. “Yeah, it's my turn.”

All but growling, Marin reluctantly coordinates the exchange of little bodies. Ren smiles at Seren’s ‘thank you, Ben,’ and greets his other daughter with a small nod.

Seren makes a face when Ben passes her to her boring, grouchy brother. If these few days confirm anything, it's that Marie is and always will be a grump.

“You want to do the same?” Ren asks Taran, because she is less eager, almost shy about being in his arms. Taran nods. She wants to have fun like her sister, but isn’t as vocal or forward.

She squeaks when Ren holds her out, laughing like he’s a crazy amusement park ride. Enthusiastically, Ren anchors her against the surface, bobbing her little body with the rippling tide.

“Ah!” Taran gasps when Ben lifts her high and sending a stream of water to sparkle in the sky. She's never been this high over the water. She feels like the swooping birds, skimming the sea with their pecking beaks for fish.

“You like going high?” Ren asks her, swinging her up and around.

Taran waves her arms like they're wings. Not even her brother's scowl could make her sad. “Yes! I've been high, but not this high, Ben!”

Ren chuckles, and boldly he slings her on his shoulders. “I love going high, too. And higher when I'm in my spaceship.”

“Whoa, you have a spaceship?” Taran asks in astonishment. Ben is so cool!

“I sure do. The Millennium Falcon.”

Taran squeezes her tiny fists in Ben’s wet hair. “The Min—Millinem—” she tries to say.

Seren’s attention is away from her grumpy brother and on Ben and his spaceship. “Min...Falcon,” Seren abbreviates. She can't even begin to say the whole name, not without practice, anyway.

“Millennium,” Ren enunciates, glowing with adoration. “When I was your age, I couldn't say it either. I just called it the Falcon.”

“It's big, gray. Kind of shaped like a circle. Maybe I could show you one day—”

Marin jabs a finger into Ren’s back, causing him to falter with Taran poised atop, not letting go. “Hey. We're done. Time to go back. It's getting late. Understand?”

“Marie! Ugh, you're so boring,” Taran complains. She's had enough.

“It's done. Playtime's over. Papa will be angry if he sees you two being disobedient,” Marin snaps. The girls scowl their twin contemptuous pouts, even as Ren maneuvers Taran back on his hip. It's then he can see his uncanny, undeniable resemblance to them.

Ren is overcome with a rush of protectiveness. “Maybe they can play for a few minutes. It looks like Hux is enjoying some time alone,” he suggests to Marin. Surely Hux is, even though he's been watching them the whole time, bathing in the sun.

“Shut up,” Marin hisses before he can drown the impulse. His restraint can only stretch so far.

The girls gape in unanimous shock for their brother's venomous words. Ben didn't do anything wrong. But by now they are used to following orders from Marie and from Papa. Even if they don't like it. Together, they walk ashore and are deposited in the soft, mushy sand to sprint back to their Papa.

“Did you see? Did you see?” the girls ask, shining from their joyous encounter with super-cool Ben. “Ben has a spaceship,” Taran says. “It's the Falcon. That's what he calls it.”

Hux sits up, mellowed out from his sunbathing and the pleasant noises from his children. Well, the girls, anyway. “Oh, wow,” he muses. “Did you thank Ben for taking you both out there?”

In unison, they sprint back to Ben, who appears to be arguing with Marie. Seren and Taran exchange annoyed glances. “Ben, Marie is no fun. It's true. You saw it. We just let him do what he wants,” Taran explains up to Ben’s towering height. Grown-ups are so tall. Needlessly so.

“Yeah, we just forget about him being mad all the time. That's how we do it in our family,” Seren tells Ben, offering her brother a shrug. “But me and Taran are happy you're fun. So, thank you for helping us swim.”

“Yes. Thank you,” Taran agrees. Ben’s smile is funny and odd. Even if he had no scar, it would be an odd face for smiling. But it makes them both feel good to see.

“I had a blast. And I know your brother did, too. He just has a hard time expressing so,” Ren says, bending at the knee to give the girls more of his attention.

Seren smirks wickedly at her brother's angry face. An idea comes from the fun, scheming part of her brain. And Taran, she knows that look better than anyone. Seren cups her mouth around her sister’s ear. The look on Taran’s face says it all.

“What?” Marin demands, close to yanking them by their arms back to their speeder and away from Ren.

“Please! It would be so, so funny,” Seren begs to Taran. She can't scheme without her sister’s approval.

“It's not my choice. It's his,” Taran says, cocking her head to Ben.
Satisfied, Seren leans in for Ben’s big ear. She relays her plan to him, and how this would surely make Marie’s brain explode.

“I dunno if that would be a good idea,” Ren cautions, brow pursing.

“Please! Please,” the girls whine, elongating their vowels.

Ren stands, surmounting to the challenge.

“What?” Marin repeats, countered by the girls’ ‘nuh-uh’s. They can't share this with him! Marie has ruined enough fun.

Like a foolish idiot, Ren lets his heart pave his path. There will be consequences. It'll be worth it. “I got this,” Ren tells the girls, winking deviously. Their excited laughter already makes this worthwhile.

Twenty paces away, Hux narrows his eyes downwind at Ben’s approach. His girls wriggle with glee at something, but he doesn't understand. He's even more perplexed when Ben, in all his shirtless, water-speckled glory, looms close and low. Hux prays he doesn't look completely awestruck.

“Please don’t freak out, but this wasn't my idea,” Ren beams, heart ricocheting in his ribcage. Hux sits up, his tank slipping lower on his slight, freckled shoulders. His even more so freckled cheeks rouge with heat in surprise, waiting for what comes next. If there is anything good left in the universe, Ren will be able to tell Hux how much he loves him, just one more time.

“No, Marie, don't do anything,” Seren warns her coiling brother.

“What did you—” Marin’s throat swells shut when in one fluid motion, Ren bends low and scoops Hux into his arms.

Of all ways Hux expected this day to go, this isn't it. Ben doesn't even explain himself. He just hoists him high against his chest, causing blood to thrum in his ears, flush his cheeks, pulse in the private, untouched parts of his body from the bands of strength pinning him like rope. Hux is speechless, barely registering his daughters’ laughter in the distance. Ben is just so, so close. He doesn't want to think about what might slip out if he could speak.

A splash of water spanks his backside and Hux yelps, springing upwards to Ben’s shoulders. His weight lurches just short of toppling to the water below.

“You know I have to do this, right?” grins Ben’s handsome, handsome face. Hux swallows. He's far too close and Ben’s got him propped up against his tree trunk of a torso, and Hux still hasn't said anything, acknowledged his daughters’ little prank and Ben’s endless enthusiasm. It takes him far too long to shake off the shock, leaving only elation in its wake.

“If you plan on throwing me into this water, know that I won’t go down without a fight,” Hux says, eying the shift in Ben’s warm, heedless hazel stare. If he didn't know any better, he'd think Ben was already taken by him.

“I'm the one with the advantage,” Ren breathes, blood pulsing madly from having Hux so close to him again. Gods, he never wants to leave him. He never wants to leave their children. He wants to repeat this day everyday of their lives.

Hux smirks wickedly, using Ren’s shoulders as leverage to distribute his limbs. Each knee brackets Ren’s hips. Ren stops breathing.
There's no thwarting Hux's plan when he sets it into motion. Hux swings to one side to send his bony fist to the nerve on the outside of Ren's thigh in a move that he no doubt learned in his days at the Academy. Hux's laughter is the last thing he hears before his leg gives out and he topples downwards to the waiting shallows.

The water is not deep enough for the pair to be underneath for long, just enough for Hux to get soaked. He can even stand up on his knees comfortably to help right Ben. His girls' exorbitant laughter rings from the shore. Their heinous plan was a success.

“That was just—excessive!” Ren coughs, high on adrenaline.

“Says the one who plucked me from the sand to dunk me for a prank,” he replies playfully, enjoying the freeness of the moment.

“The girls. They're very, very persuasive.”

“Admit it. You enjoy making me look foolish,” Hux smirks. Longing for Ben's skin again. He’s so close, even when they stand, dripping wet.

“I like making you laugh,” Ren confesses, voice lowering. It was rare that Ren could make Hux laugh, or even smile, during the fleeting moments they were together. So rare that Ren could recall every instance. “When you do, it’s like I can really see you. I don’t wanna look at anything else.”

There’s a fleeting, precious second where Hux sees Ben’s vulnerability, his honesty, or rather, the hint of something he cannot say. Hux clutches onto that moment, the tipping point. He wants so much more from Ben in that moment, and he truly believes Ben can give it to him.

Until an unstoppable force charges and lunges for Ben, tackling him into the water.

“Marin?!” Hux gasps. He doesn’t believe what he’s seeing.

The knife in Marin’s hand injects into Ren’s unprotected abdomen, granting one noiseless scream before Marin pins Ren’s thrashing head underwater with his knee crushing his throat. Unrelenting, despite his father’s pleas, his sisters’ screams. His raw, red anger breaches Ren’s panicked mind. You think you can just get away with this? Playing with them and making nice, pretending you’re a part of this family. You think I’ll let you talk to him like that, say those things to him? I’d just as soon cut out your fucking tongue before I let you close to him, you animal—

I'm so sorry, Ren pushes back. He no longer fears bodily injury or death. His only fear is that he’ll go without his son knowing how deeply he loves him, how he would do anything to take back what he’s done to him. I love you. I love you all. I’m so sorry for everything. I’m so sorry.

Marin’s knee falters, but Ren isn’t even struggling anymore. He isn’t moving.

Ren is underwater and he’s stabbed him, and he’s holding him down and Ren isn’t moving. Marin can’t look away. He can’t breathe.

A neck-breaking band of strength coils around his throat, wrenching him off of Ren and pulling him backwards. Hux shoves him to the sand, the minute waves lapping at his staggered limbs. Finished with him, Hux frantically rushes over to Ren. All this has happened before.

Seren and Taran have their hands clenched and held to their chests. They aren’t paying any mind to their Papa and whatever is left of Ben. They’re looking at their brother, their Marie, like they’ve never seen him before. He’s someone else.
“Ben, Ben,” Hux laments, tugging Ben up from the water. Ben coughs. He’s alive. Hux’s relief comes not only from that, but for his son, who is not yet a murderer. It isn’t until now that Hux holds pride in the fact his son’s hands are clean where his own aren’t.

“I’m fine. It’s fine,” Ren says once he can string together a sentence. When he sits up fully, easing to his feet, Hux’s gasp summons latent tears to his eyes. The knife—Marin’s knife—sticks out of his side, its full blade embedded into the muscle. It’s a retractable, by the look of it. Ren frowns and wraps his fist around the hilt. He’s withstood far worse pains. He glares down at the blood glistening off the blade, observing its change in the light.

Only a few paces away sits Marin, who stares at the sand, and the girls, who have by now covered their eyes with their little hands in shock. They’ve never seen such an injury where a knife sticks out of someone like that. They wish they hadn’t.

The girls’ reaction does not go unnoticed by Hux, who snatches the bloodstained blade from Ben’s hand, sneer twisting his lips. Activating the closing tab, he chucks it far, far towards the horizon and into the sea where Marin will never be able to retrieve it. Ben cradles his wound, concealing the water-runny blood and split skin.

Hux passes Ren a mournful look, and Ren wishes he could help him with what he has to say to their children where ‘Ben’ cannot. “I should go,” Ren says.

Hux nods, unable to form the words. This damn sure won’t be the last time he’s seeing Ben, but there is no saving the day today.

As Ben retreats to his clothes and shoe pile, Hux takes a deep breath. He turns to his children. Seren and Taran are first. They are so relieved to see their Papa’s warm smile, after all the scarring violence. “Can you both do Papa a favor and get our blankets in the bag and wait for me by our speeder? And put on your clothes so you won’t freeze,” he requests kindly. They nod and comply, sprinting to the picnic site, to their lunches they never got to eat. Their tummies rumble at the thought of them, but it’s time to go home.

Hux sees them off. His smile flattens when he regards his only son. “Why did you bring it?” Hux asks, arms crossed. “The knife. Why did you bring it?”

Marin gets to his feet, fists clenched. Hux has to look up to Marin’s height. A strange moment flickers, like he’s speaking to someone else, someone he knew in a past life. “Why did you bring it?” he repeats. His son divulges little from the changes in expression.

“I needed to protect you,” Marin defends. “I don’t regret what I did.”

“I didn’t need protection. Ben wasn’t going to hurt us.” Hux’s heart thrums madly. “He’s our friend.”

“He’s nobody’s friend. He only cares about what he can get from you—and that’s it. Your information and the pull you have that will help the Resistance. That’s the only reason why he’s here,” Marin growls. “Today shouldn’t have happened. It’s not my fault it fell apart.”

Baffled, Hux rakes a hand in his wind-drying hair. “It’s ‘not your fault?’ You came at him with a knife! You tried to kill him!”

“I wasn’t going to kill him. He has to know his place. And that’s not with us. He can’t be trusted! Why are you denying that?”

“So far, the only one who’s shown me they can’t be trusted is you,” Hux spits. “Ben’s done
nothing but help us. He’s been nothing but kind.”

Boiling, Marin’s fist clench so hard, his nails slice through his palms. “Oh, I can’t be trusted, but he can?”

Hux won’t back down. “Ben is honest and has never showed me any signs of deception. He’s kind and helpful and didn’t mind at all coming out here and letting Seren and Taran jump all over him, teaching you and being patient with your belligerence. He’s…a good person. And I like him—”

Hux cuts himself off, shaking his head. He doesn’t fully understand his feelings for Ben and of course Marin won’t understand. “You, however, have lied to me countless times, and you tried to kill him. What has he ever done to deserve that?”

Marin strangles around the truth, everything he has been bottling up for years to protect Hux and his sisters from Kylo Ren’s malevolence. He’s taken the entirety of it and he knew there would be consequences. It’s just been so hard. He knows of no other way than to deal with this than lashing out. It’s in his nature. “If you’d stop thinking about cock for one fucking second, you’d see who Ben truly is.”

If Hux’s hands were his father’s hands—the hands of the commandant who spent nights beating his bastard son Armitage into the ruthless General Hux, malleating soft metal into durasteel—he’d backhand that sneer, those words right out of his son’s mouth. But he’s not that man. He finds no satisfaction in the thought of beating his son into his place.

Marin anticipates the blowback to come, whether it is an insult, a punishment, or even a fist. But his father’s face solidifies into a mask, vulnerability wetting his eyes in an involuntary, bodily reaction he can’t hide.

His tears blur his vision, removing his son’s face from his body. Hux blinks and he sees someone else, a man who takes pleasure in being cruel, holding perceived weakness above others, humiliating and tormenting them for no reason than because he can. Another blink and the tears clear. He sees his son, but he’s not the same boy that came to this planet with him. His son has grown and changed, hardened by hatred, molded by fear and insecurity.

“I don’t even know who you are anymore,” Hux breathes, leaving his son to gape at the unchanging sea before him. Marin lurches, hearing Hux’s and the girls’ speeder take off.

Wounded, gutted, harrowed by guilt, he blinks around for Ren like a dying plea. But Ren’s already moved on and Marin stands alone between the sand and the sea.

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Marin takes his speeder to Lisbeth’s house that night. He doesn’t bother sending a message to let Hux know. They both need their space.

Lis opens her door, her frizzy hair half tied to the side. Her easy smile slips off when she sees the turmoil wetting Marin’s eyes. Wordless, she slides aside to let him in.

Graciously, Marin enters her welcoming home. Everything about Lis is welcoming. Her warmth, her understanding, the slack she lends him that he hardly ever deserves. Marin visits the fixture on her mantle. The framed picture of Han Solo, immortalized and permanent. Nothing lasts forever.
“Come on,” Lis suggests, ushering him to her room. Her bed is big enough for the pair to lie down comfortably, but she gives Marin the space while she takes her workbench.

Marin lies on his side, staring off into space. He closes his eyes when Lisbeth begins to play with his hair. She’s so patient with him, even when he’s done nothing but lie to her. “What happened?” Lis finally asks, because sometimes he needs prompting.

“If I told you, you’d hate me,” he admits. How could she not? He hasn’t been honest with anyone in his entire life.

“I could never hate you. Unless you left me for a white girl. Then I’d just beat you up,” she jokes. Not that they’re actually together in that sense. They’re children. It doesn’t interest them. Not yet, anyway.

Nonetheless, Marin surprises her with a laugh. “No one could ever replace you, Lis.”

“Well, I know I’m no ‘Miss Naedie,’” she sighs, “but you know that you can tell me anything. You trusted me and my mother with your family’s secret. I’m here to listen if that’s what you want.”

It’s so tempting to give in. To let the dam burst until there’s nothing left.

“Kylo Ren is my father,” he confesses for the first time in ages. Once it’s out, there’s no taking it back. Lisbeth’s confusion prickles, and Marin forces himself to explain. “Captain Ben. The man you met who owned the Millennium Falcon.”

He senses her crossness, shock, and the millions of questions budding in her thoughts. So he tells her everything. Everything. How this all started with Ren sexually assaulting Hux to conceive him, how his parents gave him up when he was merely days old and his earliest memory is of a caretaker droids cold, sightless gaze hovering over him. How his first human interaction was with the Resistance and by then he never met his parents until they were captured. How they abandoned him when he was stupid enough to aid in their escape.

Marin dares a look at Lisbeth’s face. He sees nothing but grief sinking her brown eyes. He pushes on to the downwards spiral of the tale that is his life. It’s so surreal coming clean, not having to hide behind a mask like he’s done for so long.

He tells her how he lived with the Resistance for almost a year and trained in the ways of the Force with the small, unheard of school of Jedi. How when Ren came back for him, it was like he was a trinket to be bought and sold and passed around. When Hux came back for him and when he met his baby sisters, it was like coming home.

But then Hux wanted to be with Ren. And by then, Ren had already used him for his powers and tried to kill his baby sisters. So he had to get rid of him.

He tells Lis of how he nearly beheaded Ren then, and how Hux begged him not to. How he pushed Hux’s will away and forced him to run. And how he used his powers to eviscerate Kylo Ren from Hux’s mind, and he’s been lying to Hux ever since.

“I don’t understand. You just, willed it so, and Kylo Ren was gone from his memory?” Lis asks, brow pinched with uncertainty. And something akin to fear. Marin swallows a wave of nausea. He doesn’t want her to look at him like he’s a monster.

“I can’t explain how, but the Force…you know what the Force is?”

“Of course I know what the Force is. It made you do those things?”
“No, I—I controlled it. I made it sever Hux’s memories. I couldn’t kill Ren for real so I did it in the way that matters. And everything was wonderful,” he believes, “until he found us.”

Lis moves to sit on the bed next to Marin once he sits up. “So, correct me if I’m wrong. Your father—Ren, is stalking your family—his family—”

“He's not my family,” Marin interjects. “He's just—a sperm donor.”

Lisbeth holds up a hand. “Just for the sake of clarity, Seren and Taran are his kids. Yes?”

“Yes,” he admits.

“Okay. And your dad, Hux, doesn't know because you wiped his memories of him?”

“I had to. We needed to get away from him. He's a murderer, and a rapist. He tried to kill my sisters. You have to understand, Lis,” he implores.

Lis appears to feel for him, deeply, calling on the grief and resentment towards her grandfather and his role in the Resistance that led to her father's death. “Shouldn't he be the one to decide? If Kylo Ren stays or leaves?” she asks, tentative. “You've taken away his choice. Does that not strike you?”

“Of course it does!” he snaps, rage surging. “Hux had proven to me that he'd choose Ren over me. He's always been blinded from all the evil Ren has done. If he wasn't, he never would have let me go. I had to make a decision. I have to live with it. I've been living with it.”

He withdraws. He didn't mean to snap at her. “It's been so hard, Lis. And now Ren is back, and he keeps putting himself where he doesn't belong. He says it's for the good of the Resistance but I know he's trying to worm his way into our lives. I can't—I’m going insane.”

Lisbeth pulls him under her slim arm, earning her a sigh of relief from Marin. He holds her tightly as if she was the only tangible thing left in his world. “There's something else,” he begins. “It's about you.”

She pulls back to look in his eyes. “About me?” She can't imagine what.

“It's the craziest thing. It shouldn't have even been possible. But it's like—we were meant to connect. Back then, back when I first saw you,” he implores.

“What? What is it?”

Before Marin can spill his final coveted secret, he asks, “The man on your mantle, in the picture with your grandfather. Have you ever met him?”

She can't begin to guess what he's getting at. “Han Solo?”

“Yes,” Marin urges, a bit desperately. “Have you ever met him?” This line of questioning is outright absurd. He doesn't even know why he has to make this connection. Why should it matter if Lis ever met Kylo Ren’s father? Han Solo is long dead, and Marin’s severed all ties with that side of his bloodline. It shouldn't matter whether or not Lis has met him. It shouldn't hold such a stake in his heart.

“What does this have to do with anything?” Lis exasperates. She's never seen her friend so broken.

“Please. Have you or haven't you?”
“I have. Years ago, but I have. I used to see him a lot back when my mom was on speaking terms
with my grandpa.” She closes her eyes, fleetingly lost in the memory. “Just a few times, whenever
he was in the area. He had—my mom said he left the Resistance long ago, but he made time to visit
his pal Lando. I asked my mom if he’s a hero, and mom said something like, ‘he does what he
can.’”

Marin’s forehead puckers. She doesn't understand why he cares so much. “What did she mean? Do
you know what she meant?”

“She said he left the war years and years ago. Like how we did, after my father was killed in action.
Later, it was much, much later when I was a lot older, when I kept asking about my father, when
she told me that my father had been captured by one of Grandpa's enemies. Grandpa begged my
mom to stay, to think about me, ‘cause I was just a tiny baby. But long story short, my mom went
after him. Grandpa called his old friend for help. And that's when she told me Han Solo was the
reason just my father died, and not the both of my parents.”

“But my own memories of him are as a little girl,” Lis continues. Marin hasn’t moved a muscle.
“He would pick me up and put me on his shoulders. And get this—he had a Wookie friend, who
was really fun, and I'd go up even higher on his shoulders. I remember holding on real tight.
Looking up at the stars. Mom doesn't let me call Grandpa as much as she used to. One of these
days I'm gonna call him and ask him if Han Solo’s been by. Sometimes I wonder what he's doing
these days. If he's asked about me,” she says, wistful with nostalgia.

Marin gasps and chokes as if the air in Lisbeth’s room has suddenly gone toxic. He gapes past her
concern. What is happening? Why can't he breathe? Why did Kylo Ren take so much away from so
many people? He took Han Solo from Master Luke and Grandmother, from Chewbacca, from
Lando Calrissian. He took away his childhood, abandoning him like garbage. Ren took away his
humanity by making him cleanse the dark side from his heart, leaving his darkness to seed within
and burden him with murderous impulses. And now, he's taking Hux and his sisters away from
him, and he's about to take away his best friend. And Ren had the audacity to tell him he loved
him?

Lis will no doubt have her fill of him. He's lied to her face, kept countless secrets from her, and he's
the genetic byproduct of the man responsible for Han Solo’s death. Han Solo, her family’s hero
who showed her the stars from atop his shoulders, who she doesn't even know was murdered.
Marin gasps, chest shrinking and crackling. He can't breathe. He can't breathe.

“Marin. Marin, it's alright. Please, try and breathe,” Lis urges.

“I don’t—I don't know what's wrong,” he wheezes.

“What's wrong is you're having a panic attack.”

“What?!”

“Just breathe through your nose. That's it, you got it. Just breathe.” She anchors a hand on Marin’s
wide back, circling her palm soothingly.

It takes him a while but he manages to calm his lungs and tether his racing heart. He closes his
eyes, relishing Lisbeth’s calming touch.

“What was that about?” she tries after several long minutes.

Marin sits up. He doesn’t meet her eyes. “Han Solo was murdered. I’m so sorry, Lis.”
Lis looks stricken. “What?” she gasps, though she heard him perfectly.

“He was murdered by his own son. Kylo Ren. He's Han Solo’s son, and he murdered him years ago. I'm so sorry I didn't tell you. I didn't know how.” The truth is laid out for his best friend, all his cards on the table.

Marin grimaces and watches the information sink in. Lis’s denial, confusion. Her disbelief. The way she looks at him, like he's a different person. “I'm not like him, Lis. I'm not.”

When Lisbeth finally speaks, it's with hardened sincerity. “Is the reason you kept this—our connection to each other, how our...grandfathers were partners, how Ren had killed yours—was because you'd think, somehow, after everything, I'd cut you off because of some blood feud?”

He doesn't understand. “Ren has killed so many, taken so much from everyone I care about. I guess I figured,” Marin sniffles, “that if you knew where I came from, if you knew who I was and what he'd done, that you wouldn't be able to see me as just me. You'd look at me and see him.”

Lis’s disbelief shifts to bewilderment. “You can be so stupid sometimes. I love you. You know that, right? Nothing could change that.”

Sniffling, Marin nods shallowly, and wraps his arms around her, binding her shoulders. “You mean that? Even—even after what I said about what I did to Hux?”

“It was a fix. Somehow, I can understand. If my mother was in an abusive relationship, I’d have done anything to keep her safe, even if she didn't want it.” There's something in her voice. She's not being entirely truthful. She can see clearly how Marin had crossed a line in playing in Hux’s mind. But she loves her best friend. He doesn’t need to be scolded.

Abusive. Ren is abusive. He's so glad Lis agrees. “I have to keep them safe from him.”

“I know you do,” she says. This time she's honest. Marin can read as much, and he wilts under her sincerity. He opens up farther.

“I really messed up today. At the bay. I—lost control. I stabbed him.”

“You stabbed him?!”

“I had to! He bests me physically. He was trying to woo Hux, he wasn't listening to a thing we agreed on when he got here. I had to stop him.”

“And let me guess, Hux thought you were crazy?”

“That's what I meant when I said that I messed up. I have to be more subtle. Hux can't find out I feel so passionately or something will click in his brain. It always does.” Hux is far more clever than most, especially him.

Lis nods, taking Marin’s large hand in hers. “Is there…anyway, any possibility that Ren has changed?”

Bristling, Marin narrows his eyes. “He's a murderer and an abuser. People like that don't just change.”

“I completely agree that he was those things—is those things. But has he tried anything, like hurting you or them? What has he done since he got here?”
“I know how he operates. He does things behind a mask. That's how he tricked me into helping
him not once, but twice, at my own expense. And that's how he manipulated Hux into caring about
him. Would you care about someone who forced you to carry a child?”

“Probably not, but all I'm saying is if he hasn't done anything indicating he has any ill intentions
—”

“I know him!” he explodes. “I know him better than anyone. It's black and it's white. He's never
done a thing for anyone else if it didn't serve his needs first.”

“Hux has killed people,” Lis says, looking him in the eye. “He's a mass murderer. He fostered
countless child soldiers. You can't ignore that.”

Stricken, Marin turns away. “He's better now. He decided to leave that part of himself behind for
our family. He's not doing this for himself. He's doing it for us.” How Hux changed is different.
Hux cared about him even when he was a murderer. He came back for him and was gonna take
them to the First Order. But he was able to show his father a better path. “It's different, Lis. Hux
has always cared about me. Ren has not. I could feel his love through his memories and Ren has
nothing but anger and guilt to drive him to us.”

“Anger and guilt,” she repeats. She only sees these feelings in Marin.

As if Marin knows what she's about to say, he holds up a trembling hand. “Please. I can't deal with
this right now.” It's too much. He just wants to be comforted. Deep down, he knows he doesn't
deserve it.

Lis appears to understand. “Lie back. I'll play you our song,” she smiles. At Marin’s ‘we have a
song?’ she activates her music player, thumbing through the tracks until she finds one suitable for
their friendship. It's a stripped down, acoustic droll, a glimpse of peace between the chaos.

After several long, music filled moments, Lis crawls into bed beside him, and he burrows his nose
into her shoulder. “I love you too, Lis,” he mumbles latently. “Thanks for letting me stay here.”

“Stay as long as you like. Us Calrissians will always be there for a Solo in need,” she smirks,
warming at Marin’s squeeze in response.

A Solo. He's never thought of himself as one. Always Hux’s son, Aems’ grandson. And of course
Leia Organa’s grandson and Master Luke’s great nephew, and Anakin Skywalker’s great grandson.
And of course he's Kylo Ren’s son merely by biology. But with that, he's also Han Solo’s
grandson. He doesn't have a single issue with that title in the least.

He's asleep in Lisbeth’s arms. He dreams the strangest, most surreal dream he's ever dreamt.

_He’s at a wedding. He's sitting front row. It's a beautiful day on a breezy planet he can't identify,
the decorations lazing with the timely gusts._

_Seren and Taran are there in little blue dresses, sitting right next to him. For a second his heart
sinks with the fear that this is the day all is lost, that this is Hux’s wedding to Kylo Ren. But he sees
Hux smile to him from the twins’ side, and Aems to his side with an identical grin. Marin turns his
head._

_Ren’s sitting right next to him. In his dream, this is normal, and allowed. Ren has tears in his eyes,
attention rapt at whoever’s wedding they're all witnessing firsthand. Down the row sits Rey, Finn,
Chewbacca, Poe, and even R2-D2 and Threepio are parked to the side. There’s even Lis and her
mother in the row behind and the older, mustached man that he easily recognizes as Lando. Behind_
them are people he knew in passing when he lived among the Resistance, and people he’s never seen or met. Everyone is happy, glowing, smiling with tears in their eyes. Marin turns his head forward.

Han Solo gazes in watery, unfettered adoration and reverence to his soon to be wife, Leia Organa. Between them smiles Luke Skywalker, their officiant for their union. His grandmother is as old as when Marin last saw her, as is Master Luke. Han Solo is the age he was when he died. But death and tragedy are the farthest themes of this day. Marin has never seen his grandmother so happy. He flicks his eyes to Ren. He's smiling, too.

Han Solo is the first to speak. “I always knew you’d end up saying yes. I just didn't think you’d put it off until we had grandkids,” he rasps. Somehow Marin can hear his voice as distinctive as he knew it all his life.

“I could have waited ‘til the great-grandkids came. Never bothered me a bit,” she jokes, earning her chuckles from her soon to be husband and her brother, their patient officiant. “I only said yes when I knew you’d stay,” she smiles, youthful brown eyes twinkling.

“I won't make that mistake again. I promise, Leia.”

“I know.”

“I love you,” Han vows, to which Leia replies, “I know. I've always known.”

Eventually Luke gets the ceremony started for Han and Leia, A Solo and an Organa. Organa, not a newly anointed Mrs. Solo, because her name is all that she has left of her parents and their dynasty, her homeworld of Alderaan. No one would dare take it from her.

It's late in the day when Marin wakes before the dream can truly begin. Lis has fallen asleep, too, so he focuses on her soft breathing. When he closes his eyes, he lies awake around the echoes of an impossible future.

Chapter End Notes

Marie has 0 chill :’(
i hope you all enjoyed this (tragic) chapter!!!
“Papa, when is Marie coming home?” Seren asks timidly. She and her sister are shaky and cold from their brisk ride home. They still don't understand what happened at beach.

Hux puts one of Aems’ prepared dinners into the cooker, a pouch of meat and vegetable soup. It's more than enough for his daughters and him to eat. His mother should be home soon. She'll have a helping, too. The organizing and planning is far from enough to appease his anxiety. “Later. He needs some distance.”

“Are you gonna yell at him again?” Teren asks, wide-eyed. She doesn't like when her brother and her papa yell.

“Marin did something wrong today. You know that, right?” Hux says, passing his girls two cups of blue milk.

“He hurt Ben. This is the second time,” Taran says gravely, looking sullenly into her cup.

Conflict passes over Hux. This too much for his girls to deal with. They shouldn’t have to see their brother like that. “It was an accident,” he says, but she isn't convinced he's telling the truth. She knows the difference between a truth and a lie. “Your brother is sorry for what he did. Ben knows that.”

“Ben was nice to us. I don't want him to not like us, Papa. I want him to be our friend,” Seren admits.

“He is our friend. We'll see him another day, alright?” Hux tries a smile that doesn't reach his eyes. He sets his girls up with their cooling dinners.

Later that night, Ben’s tethered dog, who Seren and Taran spent some time playing with, makes small noises of acknowledgement outside. By now, the girls are in bed, as is Aems. Hux peeks outside the window.

Of course Ben walked all the way here on his own, with a stab wound no less! Hux pales in shame. At the very least he should have gone looking for him and offered him a ride, but he was far too wrapped up in monitoring the twins for any signs of distress to remember Ben’s main method of transportation is by foot.

Through the window, Hux peeks to his yard. Ben greets his dog with warm pets and kisses. He owes Ben an apology. He watches Ben head with his dog to his campsite, just in case Ben decides to leave, as if Hux and his rascally, murderous children are not worth the trouble. Hux wouldn't blame him if he chose to.

He assembles a container of soup for him, ensuring he gets more than enough chunks of meat and other solids so Ben won't be in want of the nutrition a man of his stature requires. In the cabinet, his hand brushes a bottle of liquor. A hard variety, one he rarely indulges in. Hux grabs it and leaves behind the glasses. He tugs on a sweater and checks himself in the mirror, combing his fingers through ear-length hair. He got a bit of coloring today, painting his skin with a rouge stain. It'll effectively hide any blushes Ben inevitably gives him. That is, if he still wants to see him.
Ren thumbs at his bandage. He wasn't able to find anything more medically advanced than a strip of adhering gauze and antiseptic ointment in town. But it'll suffice for now, as long as he keeps from doing anything strenuous. Abie whines, sensing his injury. “It's alright, Abes. It'll heal.”

A blue glimmer catches his eye. Ren’s spine straightens, his heartbeat spiking.

“I was there, you know,” says Mara Jade Skywalker’s ghost. “When they were born. I was there when you took them.”

Ren frowns. He never expected to see Mara’s ghost again. He doesn’t know what he can possibly say. “Why are you here?”

“Why are you?” Why is he? “They're all I have. I won't make the mistake of ever leaving them again.”

“The girls really are something. I've been watching them. From a distance. Marin, too, though he's the only one who can see me. It's one of the ways he controls things.”

“Why don't you just—intervene when he's not here?”

She frowns as if she has to seriously ask her self why. “For one, your son is wretchedly powerful. He's erased my presence so often that I find it harder to tether. For another, they've been safe here. Hux hasn't been hurting anyone. He's already stressed enough with the girls and his son. Adding to that stress by imposing my…otherworldly form would be a great misjudgment.”

Ren’s instinct to shout, so you could have stopped this? You could have told Hux who he was and told him what they shared, and Hux could have welcomed him home to be his partner and finally surmount the role of fatherhood?

But Ren could have done the exact thing. He could grab Hux right now and tell him everything he knows about him, their children, he could confess every sin he's inflicted on him, every shred of pain that he directly caused him. But none of it would work without his son’s approval or forgiveness. It would all fall apart. There would be nothing left to prove his self-restraint and devotion to his son. Marin would never trust him.

Though, it's hardly as if Marin is even a baby step closer to forgiving him, let alone trusting him. “I understand why you can't. I'm glad you didn't try and stop Marin from doing what he did. It's because I wasn't there that they could have a life. I'm grateful you've been watching over them,” Ren admits, sincere.

Mara smirks. “Why, Kylo, you've grown up.”

Ren can't help it. “Nobody calls me ‘Kylo.’”

She shrugs her hazy shoulders. “Doesn't hurt to try things out. You know, I tried so hard to get Luke to call me ‘Jade’ but he said he liked the way ‘Mara’ rolled off his tongue.”

Sorrow sinks Ren’s heart. “Have you visited them? Luke and Rey?”
She’s already shaking her head as if she expected the vulnerable question. “I can’t. For some mystical reason, I'm tied to the twins. It’s like our energy is integrated. It's funny, they remind me of myself. More specifically, Seren reminds me of myself, where Taran is no doubt a personality clone of Rey. And now once I’ve told you, you won't be able to unsee it. That's my gift to you,” she says teasingly, earning a grin from Ren.

Tears well up in Ren’s eyes. He blinks upwards to the tilt of the galaxy, the glowing cacophony of star systems. “I'm so sorry,” he laments, one of countless apologies he owes the ones he loves. If only there was a way he could make Mara understand that had things been different, had he not fallen, he'd have gladly been the one to die for her.

“You've been given another chance. I would know. My second chance came when I refused to assassinate my target and instead decided to marry him. In time, your family will be there to guide you and give you that opportunity to finally wash the blood from your hands. There's no better feeling.” She can attest as much. She smiles fondly to her murderer. Her nephew, her apprentice, the boy now a man who she believes from experience won't waste his second chance.

Mara Jade dissolves without warning, and Ren is left to gape in the sand to his side.

Footsteps turn his head in the opposite direction. His heart flutters. Hux trudges up the dune toting a container and a bottle. It appears to be an offering.

“I hope I'm not disturbing you,” Hux says, hushed. Ben manages not to look completely terrified.

Abie hums in greeting to the familiar face. Absurdity makes Ren look around for clutter lest Hux get the impression he's a slob. He's sleeping outside, bathing in the sea, living like a nomad, and he's concerned about a littered campsite.

“I brought you some dinner. And if you'd like something to wash it down with,” Hux offers. He holds up the two containers for Ben to take.

Ren smiles and takes the gifts. “Will you be staying to share?”

“Wouldn't it be awkward? I mean, my son shanked you. And tried to drown you.”

“I’m sure there was a misunderstanding,” Ren replies. “Please. Sit.” Their son could be at a distance ready to take his head off, but he's never been able to resist Hux’s comradery. Especially after a day like today.

Hux sighs and finds a spot in the sand at Ben’s side. “You're far too…” he trails off, unable to find the words. “Benevolent,” he decides on. “People will try and get things out of you.”

Ren smirks at Hux’s nugget of life advice. “Marin was just doing his job as a son. He’s fiercely protective of you.” Ren peers at Hux from the corner of his eye. Hux gazes into the sand, mind far off.

Hux is quiet for a long moment, gathering momentum for the downfall. “This isn't the first time this has happened. It's like he isn't satisfied unless he micromanages every person I interact with.”

“Like how?” Ren asks, guilt withdrawn.

“He doesn't let me go out alone, and when I insist, he won't let me go without telling him where I'll be and when I'll return.” His own son won’t ‘let’ him. He’s a teenager. A child. It’s as preposterous as it is shameful. “I try and keep a firm hand, you know, remind him who the parent is. But it's like he sees past that. Like listening to me is beneath him, unless it suits his agenda.” Hux confesses.
Ben hasn't touched his soup. “Eat, please. Don't let my complaining stop you.”

Ren unseals the soup and mixes it around with the spoon latched on the side. He blows on it to temper the steam. “He doesn't want you to go out?”

Taking the bottle of liquor from Ben’s side, Hux uncaps the bottle with a grimace. “At first I thought it was commendable, that he was being careful. I always taught him to be prepared. But then I realized he wasn't being protective. He didn't want me to go out and meet people. To go see the town, to go on dates. Hells, he doesn't even want me to have friends,” Hux grovels, imbibing a burning mouthful of the drink. It pools hollowly in his empty stomach.

Remorse wilts Ren’s eyes. “I don't understand.” Yet he does, entirely.

But Hux isn't finished. He glares out in front of him, seething at the cards he's dealt. “Sometimes. It doesn't happen often, but sometimes I feel like he's different, you know? He's not the boy I raised. Sometimes I look at him, and I see someone else.” Someone who revels in tormenting him, controlling him, pushing him to impossible positions. Marin transforms into something achingly familiar, haunting like an echo. Hux tosses back another mouthful of the headache inducing vice. “I look at him, and I don’t recognize him.”

Ren drowns with shame. It pins him down like a knee to the throat.

“I'm sorry. I sound insane,” Hux says, shaking his head.

“No, I’m glad you can confide in me. Whatever you need from me, it’s yours,” Ren tells him, earnest. Hux smiles. He’s grateful. Frowning pensively, Ren inhales his soup. “This is very good. Thank you,” he says, sure to use his manners.


“It wasn’t anybody's fault.” Except his.

Hux shakes his head, unconvinced. Ren longs to see the smile brightening his eyes, soothing his youthful features and summoning a fluttering Ren’s heart. “I'm willing to put that incident behind us if you are.”

“Some things just cannot be forgotten, Ben.”

Oh, how cruel is the oblivious irony of his words. Ren turns his back on the despair. “Maybe I could distract you. Help…keep your mind off things.”

Raising his brows, Hux teethes at his bottom lip. “What did you have in mind?” he asks, imagination running wild.

“How about a game?” Ren proposes, smiling behind his eyes.

Just like that, he and Ben are back in the swing of things. Hux leans back on his elbows, lax with light inebriation, bottle of liquor choked in one hand. The stars shine down plenty of light, but a fire would be a nice addition. “A game? Are there a lot of rules?”

“Just one. You have to tell the truth. And you have to drink.”

Hux laughs, head lolling back. “I'm liking this already. So spill it. What's the game?”

“'I Never.'”
“What?”

“It's a scoundrel’s game,” Ren explains, warming under Hux’s undivided attention. “So I’ll start with something that you or I could have done at some point in our lives. I could go, ‘I never...got a broken nose.’ Then I would take a drink, because I actually have gotten my nose broken. If you have, you drink too, but if not, you don't drink.”

“Alright. I'll bite.” Hux doesn't recall the last time he's been this thrilled about something so juvenile.

Ren grins giddily, scouring his mind for ideas. He already knows so much about Hux, with the exception of these years apart. This game isn't just for information on what someone has or hasn't done. It allows one to learn how another thinks and feels, and nothing is off the table.

“I never blew something up,” Ren begins. Because if he's going, it's gonna be big.

“Does battle count?”

“When else would you blow something up?” Ren jeers, eager to see Hux’s reaction. Hux snorts and takes a dramatic swig of liquor. Ren snatches it from his fingers and gulps some down, immediately grimacing at the burn. “What's that made of, fire?”

“Lightweight,” Hux smirks, though he looks and feels already past tipsy. He hadn't eaten much today. He can’t eat when Marin gets in his moods.

It's Hux’s turn. “I never...killed someone with my bare hands.”

Ren gawks. This is the man he fell in love with. “Why ‘bare hands?’ Isn't it enough that the question is about murder?” Ren laughs.

“Because it's a given we've both killed people. I'd like to know if you ever done it without a weapon. The idea, it excites me,” Hux leers, inhibition drastically lessened from the booze.

Ren shakes his head and takes a swig. Hux's eyes round, electric smirk titillating his lips. When Ren tries to pass him the bottle, Hux shakes his head. Now things are getting interesting.

Sighing, Ren thinks of something else. “I never...sang loudly in the shower.”

“Gods,” Hux scoffs, snatching the bottle from Ben’s hand. He humming and singing in the shower all began when the girls were obsessed with watching musical shows on their home theater system. “You try spending every waking hour with two little girls and see if their children's show songs don't get ingrained into your brain,” he defends at Ben’s shock and amusement.

Ren snickers, chewing his lip to sober. “You're so good with them. I don't know how you do it,” he says, meaning more than he could possibly say.

At least the nighttime and the sunburn hides his blush. “I don't know how I do it either. I owe just about everything to my mother and Marin. They’ve been like my compass bearing.” Of course it hasn't all been one miracle after the next. But he wouldn't trade his life he has now for anything, not even the throne to the Empire.

Hux adjusts on his hip, continuing their little game. “I’ve never...been married.”

When neither of them moves to drink, Hux holds up his hand. “Wait. Wait, I've got a better one. I never wanted to marry someone, so fiercely, so madly, that all I was missing was a ring and a
white gown,” he adds loftily, slurring a bit.

Where mirth one bubbled now sinks sullenness, remorse for what Ren’s wanted in life. Everything he failed to achieve. Ren reaches for the bottle, brushing his rough fingers on Hux’s smooth ones. He takes a gulp. Cautiously, he hands Hux back the bottle. His heart lurches when Hux takes it. But he doesn't drink from it.

“I've got to hear this story,” Hux smiles, endlessly intrigued. “Please, Ben. I'm dying here,” he whines after mere seconds of Ben’s hesitation.

Ren regards Hux, the love of his life, the father of his children. “All there is to it is that I was too stupidly selfish to see what I had right in front of me. By the time I had, it was too damn late to do anything about it.” After Marin left with Hux and the girls, Ren spent years depressed and hopeless. He was so alone that it was almost like it was like nothing changed in the past few decades. As if he truly was Ben again. Lonely and guarded and ticking like a damn time bomb.

Instead of prying, Hux asks, “Would you do anything different?”

“If I could. I'd do anything to—not have hurt them, so often and so carelessly,” Ren confesses. There's nothing more surreal than talking to the person you're talking about, without them having the slightest realization.

“Some things are fated to be built. Others, they're fated to be destroyed,” Hux tells the bottle, taking an unwarranted sip of the liquor. They've depleted half the bottle.

When Ben looks at him in puzzlement, he continues. “It didn't work, maybe because it wasn't meant to. Think of it this way. If it didn't fail, then you wouldn't be here. In this system, on this beach. With me,” Hux punctuates, grinning freely and bright.

Fuck, Ren wants to scoop him up in his arms and kiss him breathless. “Good point.”

“Your turn,” Hux reminds him, rolling on one side so that his sweater slips from one shoulder. It could be unintentional. It could be deliberate.

Swallowing, Ren averts his eyes. “I never...went out dancing,” Ren says, tongue in cheek.

Hux makes a face. “Who does that?”

Ren shrugs. “Apparently not us.”

“Ha!” Hux laughs. It never appealed to him. At least, not until Ben brought it up. He wonders what it would be like dancing with Ben. “What about...I've never been on a real, honest, actual date,” Hux says suggestively.

Ren tries not to be wounded Hux takes a swig. He's seen firsthand how men gravitate towards Hux.

Hux sloughs his lips with the back of his hand. “So. You wanted to marry someone but you never even took them out on a date?”

“It wasn't like that. What we had...there wasn't peace. We were in the middle of a war.”

“Please, just go. I've got a good one. Your turn,” Hux slurs, stealing another gulp.

“You can go again,” Ren nods. “I'm eager to hear it.”
Ben’s permission is all he needs. “I’ve never was in love with someone I shouldn't have been with.”

Casting his eyes low, Ren recalls their years of partnership, the divide that plagued them then as it does now. He takes a deep swallow from the bottle in Hux’s fingers.

“One day I'm gonna have to hear about your forbidden almost-marriages,” Hux mumbles. He'd press, but tonight, he doesn't want to tug on Ben’s strings like cat and mouse. “You're up.”

Ren considers this next one. “I never wore makeup.”

Hux glares and snatches the bottle back to get a generous swig. “And no, that one's not getting an explanation,” he asserts. It was something he used to do to hide the coloring of his face back when he was a junior cadet. He'd always flush so easily against the other boys’ taunts, verbal and otherwise.

“Suit yourself. I've got a wild enough imagination to know you wore it well.” Under the influence of alcohol, Ren’s looser with his words, evoking shining titillation in Hux’s eyes. “Your turn,” Ren nods.

He catches his bearings just long enough to lose them again. “I never had sex in outer space. No, no, wait. I never had sex planetside, outdoors, in the wilderness!” Hux laughs, grinning lecherously.

Ren hides his face in his too-big hands. “Oh, that's low! That's low.” Blushing furiously—which is absurd seeing that Hux is the one he had sex outdoors with, let alone the only person he's ever even had sex with—he takes a gulp of the drink, Hux’s musical laughter gracing his ears.

“All you, Ben. Was it in a forest? Was there a tent, or was it under the stars?”

It's impossible to resist fueling Hux’s imagination. “There may have been a tent involved.”

Hux drifts backwards, giggling childishly. For a moment he looks as if he’s nearly asleep. Ren’s never met drunk-Hux. He finds he very much enjoys this sleepy, bubbly version of him. Ren feels light like the froth of seafoam. “You still with me?”

All he gets from Hux is a mute grunt. He doesn't want tonight to be over. This is the most fun he's had in ages. “I've got a good one for you. I never kissed a stranger,” Ren proposes.

Hux’s dimmed green eyes glitter in the nighttime haze like the glow of the stars against the sea lapping at the base of the dune. As if he’s done this many times before, he sits up, choking the bottle in his fist, and looks Ren dead in the eye like he can see through his deception. Heavy lidded, lips wetted and reddened with the scrape of his teeth, Hux bows his head into Ren's. He steals a tiny, innocuous peck of a kiss on the corner of Ren’s mouth.

Hux withdraws, satisfied with his thievery. It isn't until he's got his mouth around his bottle that he has no idea why or how he just did that. He finishes the potent liquor in a half-dozen full gulps.

Gaping to the sand, Ren quells his trembling hands on his knees. Even if it was part of the game, the fact Hux willingly kissed him, as chaste and as innocent as it may have been, Hux kissed him because he wanted to. Even if it was to complete a challenge, impress him with his wit and charm. It's more than Ren could have hoped for in this point of his strewn about life.

Hux sets the emptied bottle forlornly in the sand. The game is over. He's utterly crushed. He doesn't want to leave Ben. He prays he hadn't disgusted Ben enough that they can't remain friends. An apology nearly rolls from his drunken tongue until Ben clears his throat.
“I wouldn’t have thought us strangers,” Ren tells him, summoning the courage to look at whatever is glistening behind Hux’s eyes. “Not in the least.”

Heart in his throat, Hux tangles his fingers together, needing to be grounded. He doesn’t know what to say. Gone is his confidence, his forward disposition. He reels against the bitter, acidic anxiety. This whole mess inside him is centered on Ben. Hux hasn’t felt this muddled and needy in his entire life. Ben enchants him into some sort of spell like he’s following the motions of someone enormously congruent to every piece of him. Though that could just be the vision-blurring alcohol that’s goading these girlish feelings. But when he meets Ben’s eyes, he’s stricken with unnamable vulnerability. An interlocking intimacy through a mere glimpse, more severe than logic warrants.

Unrestrained, Ren takes one of Hux’s cool hands in his own. He kisses his knuckles gently as if they were made of precious, fragile glass, and gen overturns his hand to bestow an indulgent kiss to him palm. Hux teethes his lip, arm limp and bent to Ren like an offering.

Ren closes his eyes, brow pinched in remorse. He doesn’t trust himself. There are so many reasons why he shouldn’t do what he longs to do. Fuck, he wants to. Ren pets the skin of Hux’s wrist with his thumb. Hux has yet to say anything. All he does is blush and stare and let Ren move his limb where he wants to.

“You’re still here,” Hux slurs. “You’re still with me.”

“Hux,” Ren breathes, gravitating towards him like a magnet.

Hux peels his fingers from Ben’s limp grasp to pet his cheek. Ben has such regal features. They are unforgettable. “You’re still here,” he gasps in disbelief, like Ben’s finally returned after a lifetime of separation. Hux’s throat swells at the tragedy his imagination summons.

Abandoning all reason, Ren tips forward to Hux’s red, wet mouth. The kiss lances hot and electric, and Hux whimpers like he understands, as if his addled mind is capable how tremendous this moment is. He’s waited so long. It’s been a lifetime. And Hux lets him, welcomes him. Soft fingertips grip the skin of his neck and shoulder and Ren reciprocates with a palm to each of Hux’s flushed cheeks.

Ren keeps him right where he wants him, tonguing deep into his mouth, bold and without reservation. Clumsily, Hux pushes back but he’s trembling too much to have any true conviction in his response. His hand pets Ren sloppily and inexpertly, and Ren is obsessively pouring himself inside of Hux with every stolen breath, every stab of his tongue, getting lost inside of him after so many years apart—

That he doesn’t realize how fucking drunk Hux is. Grimacing, Ren withdraws from his demanding, oppressive kiss but doesn’t let go of his love’s warm face.

Hux makes his tongue work. His heart is about to beat through his ribcage and his brain is swimming, but he’s not drunk enough to not realize that Ben just kissed him. How Ben had kissed him like he was making love to him. “Ben,” he breathes.

But as if the name alone is a curse, Ben sinks with hurt. However Ben doesn’t pull away. He pastes their foreheads together and closes his eyes. He says nothing.

The hum of a speeder in the not so distant distance makes Ren jump, enough to jar his fresh stab wound. It’s dark but not enough for him to be unable to make out the vague shape of Marin on his speeder. Ren wilts. Back to reality.
Marin isn't close enough to see them, and Ren isn't sure he would be able to get a word out before his son starts up again with his telepathic brain grinding, so he's endlessly grateful Marin goes inside without a hitch.

He wouldn't be able to live with himself if Marin found out about his misstep, the advantage he had over Hux. Before he can express anything to Hux, he's pulled in for another toe-curling kiss.

Hux sighs into Ben’s mouth. He desperately tries to get him to kiss back as fiercely as he had, but Ben only frowns and looks at him tragically depressed. Hux doesn’t understand. Somewhere in his inebriated, muddled mind, he knows he did something wrong. “What did I do?” he slurs, childish and wounded.


The complement warms him, and Hux grins sweetly, sleepily. No one's ever said something like that to him. “Nobody's perfect,” he mumbles, trying to play off how easily Ben’s melted him like butter.

Ben looks at him like he's the only thing that matters. “Can you make it home?”

Of course he can make it home! Hux smirks and gets to his feet. With entirely too much vigor. He stumbles in the sand and tips to the side, but Ben is there to cushion his fall. Hux gasps in shock when he lands on Ben’s enormous thighs, and enjoys how thoroughly his hands bracket his hips, even as they gently shove Hux out from his lap.

“Come on, I'll help you stand,” Ren says through gritted teeth, tempering his lust with every ounce of self-restraint he can muster.

They stand together and Ren holds Hux’s up by his waist. When it's clear Hux won't be able to walk on his own, Ren moves his arm around Hux’s back for balance. Hux apparently has his own ideas as to how their walk home should go when he turns toward Ren and expectantly slings his arms around his neck. He's requesting that he be carried.

It's only a testament to how truly drunk Hux is. But Ren can't help himself, so he obliges and tugs Hux into his arms. Hux grins and bats his eyelashes blearily at his savior.

“You're very strong,” Hux hums. Yeah, he's definitely drunk. Ben smiles down at him. Bashfulness from flattery suits him. “I like being carried.” It's not that he's out of his mind. He just wants Ben to know he appreciates a man of talent.

“I can tell,” Ren replies. Hux isn't particularly light, but he's gotten accustomed to his weight. Not to mention, Hux is mostly soft, slim edges and slight bone structure. He has just the right amount of muscle for his lifestyle, which happens to be very little. If the little show he got at the beach is any tell, Hux is even more slim and soft under his clothes.

“You're a good person,” Hux mumbles sleepily against his chest as Ben carries him towards the house. He could very much fall asleep here in Ben’s arms. He just might.

Ren approaches the back door, heart racing when he realizes how close to the treasured homestead he is. He could enter the house if he wanted. He's inches from the door and Hux hasn't moved. “I think this is your stop,” he tries. But Hux says nothing. He's fallen asleep.

He could, he should wake him up. But the door isn't locked. There's a set of couches just on the other side of the glass. Marin and the girls are probably fast asleep, and disturbing them or Hux is the last thing he wants to do. Taking a shaky breath, Ren scoots the door to the side with his
shoulder, careful not to jostle Hux too much.

The door unseals. It smells of clean warmth like freshly laundered clothes, like a scented candle or air freshener. His imagination summons scents and visions of domesticity as he breathes in the space.

Ren hovers in the threshold. Through the dim light emanating from the spacious kitchen, he can make out two uncluttered couches, a nook for reading, a tiny table for activities, a dining table for family meals, walls of artwork and other ornaments. It’s cozy, lived-in. It’s home.

Longing wells up in his heart as he gingerly places Hux down. Ren could weep. He brushes Hux’s soft, titian wisps of hair from his eyes so that he won’t experience discomfort upon waking. Ren pets the suppleness of his ever youthful features. Cheekbones, to his pronounced cupid’s bow, to the swell of his plush bottom lip.

A scrape of dishware alerts Ren of another presence in the room. He gapes to the noise source.

Marin paces from the shadows of the kitchen and braces his gangly hands on the counter’s edge on either side. He glares to Ren contemptuously, but there’s a sick, resigned sullenness shifting behind his eyes. Like he expected this.

Ren should say something. But Marin holds a hand high and commanding, effectively shutting Ren up before he can speak.

But Hux flutters awake, beating them both to the punch. Ben is the first thing he sees, so he smiles. “Hey, stranger,” he hums, hiccupping from the change in position.

“Hey. I brought you home. You had a long day,” Ren says mutedly. He feels Marin looming close but not even that is enough for Ren to peel away from Hux, as if this is the last thing he’ll ever be allowed to do.

Hux squirms atop the cushions. He's delighted Ben is still paying attention to him. He is about to tell Ben as much, until he sees his son’s stern face pop up on his radar. “You!” he scolds in exaggerated shock. Marin says nothing. He just looks sad.

“You,” Hux continues with less conviction. “You both.” Hux looks from Ben to his son, and back again, and back again until there isn't a distinction between the two. They’ve got the same face. Hux snorts, because this strikes him as funny.

Marin’s blood has been boiling since he saw Ren carry his father into their home. Unwarranted, unwanted, uninvited. He's infected their citadel. Marin should have throttled him by the neck and out the door, but he doesn't want Hux to look at him like he had at the beach. Like he was an unrecognizable monster that needed to be tamed.

“My boys,” Hux slurs, a wet twinkle shining in his eyes. “My two handsome boys.”

Marin lashes out with a surge of darkness and sends Hux into full unconsciousness. Now that Hux is out of the way, he elbows Ren in the gut to get him to back away from his vulnerable father.

Ren tries not to make too much noise when Marin’s elbow reopens the wound in his side. He focuses on the care in which Marin arranges Hux’s limbs, tucks him under a blanket unfolded from the chair’s back. Ren breaks the silence. “I’m sorry—”

“Shut the fuck up. I don't care about your apologies. Whatever you did to him tonight, however you coerced or abused him won't matter.”
Ren recoils, sickened. “I would never—”

“It doesn't matter. You can lie and deceive to your heart’s content. I'm taking it all away. When he wakes up, you'll be nothing to him. No Ren, no Ben. Nothing.” Marin palms Hux’s forehead, mitigating the tremble from his fingers. He hasn't done this in years. He loathed how monstrous it made him feel. But it's the closest he can get to bending Hux’s will, and he vowed to never dip from that dreaded well ever again.

“Please,” Ren begs. “Don't do this. You can’t keep doing this to him. He doesn't deserve it.”

Will Ren ever stop? “You don't understand.”

Ren holds his ground. “I do. I understand better than anyone. You think what you're doing is protecting him. But you couldn't be more wrong. It's your fear that guides you. Fear controlled me all my life. I can't stand to see the same happen to you.”

“You have no idea what it's like. To care about someone else, so much you'd cross every line you could,” Marin seethes. Ren knows nothing of his plights. Why is he bothering with an explanation?

Ren moves closer, but they couldn't be farther apart. He longs to close the gap between them. “Fear is why I left you behind. I left you behind knowing Hux would hate me, but I didn't care. All I cared about was getting rid of you,” Ren confesses. He bores into his son’s back. “I told Hux it was because I was protecting him. Even now, it's shamefully ludicrous that I thought he'd believe that.”

“Why?” Marin hisses. An age old sorrow surges like an unkempt storm. “What were you so afraid of that you'd throw me out like garbage? I was barely eight years old. Hell, I was a fucking baby when you threw me out the first time. What was so wrong about me then?”

The torrent of his son’s admission cuts him deeply, but he pushes on. “There was nothing wrong with you. Not when you were born, or when I betrayed you. It was me. It was only me and my delusional power lust that I surrendered you as a baby, and when I'd done so again when you were a boy, it was the guilt for what I'd done to my father. It was consuming me.”

Marin’s hand sweats against Hux’s forehead. “That's pathetic.”

“It was my fear that you would turn on me like I turned on my father. Betraying him, betraying you? I struggle to live with that every day.”

Marin twists around to sear his father with his glare. “Maybe it's time to end your struggle and kill yourself already.”

There's no denying Marin is a product of his failures. “I got close to that point. Many times, even before you were born.”

“What's stopping you?” his son snaps to erase the beginnings of remorse and understanding for Ren's confession.

Ren closes his eyes. He thinks carefully about what he wants, and what he needs to say. When he looks up, his son is glaring. But he's waiting. He wants to know. Perhaps it'll answer some of his own questions about himself and his fate.

“I want us to be together. I want us to be a family,” he breathes. Marin’s lip curls and he whips back to Hux, focusing his dark energy to his susceptible mind.
But Ren won't stand for it. He falls to his knees and places his rough hand over his son’s rougher one. “Don't,” Ren says. “You don't want this. It's hurting you, isn't it? Eating you up like rust?”

Marin’s eyes prickle with tears, because it’s not fucking fair. Ren doesn't get to come in here and try and fix him, as if he were a broken trinket.

“Marin, listen to me. It doesn't have to be like this. We don't have to be angry or afraid anymore. You don't have to trust me, now or ever, but trust that this won't fix things. You can't keep doing this to him,” Ren begs. Hux lies unconscious, oblivious to the two who love him unconditionally, who continue to toy with his fate.

Conflicting shock rounds Marin’s wet eyes. When he doesn't say a thing, Ren persists and squeezes his son’s hand. “There's still time. It's not too late to tell him the truth, Marin. He loves you. There is nothing you could do to change that.” Ren takes a breath. “There's nothing that you could ever do to change my love for you, either.”

“Get out,” Marin says, just above a whisper. He doesn't shove Ren away, or dare blink to stave the tears from falling.

“Please, Marin. I know that if you tell him everything—”

“If you ever cared about me, you'd get out of my sight right now,” Marin snaps, careful not to raise his voice.

Without another beat, Ren removes his hand and noiselessly shuffles out the door from where he came. He keeps his eyes averted and slinks back into the night.

Marin scrubs the tears away once Ren is out of sight. His throat works around a groan, resolve weakening with every breath. He pets Hux’s hair and succumbs to the blooming agony in his heart. Grimacing, Marin folds down on himself, cushioning his forehead on Hux’s flat abdomen.

That night, Marin makes a choice to tame the darkness. He leaves Hux’s memories just how they are, and falls asleep keeping vigil in the armchair facing the back door.

Chapter End Notes

sober hux is as much of a slut as drunk hux!! hope you guys liked the update :) look how good marin is behaving himself!!!! :D
Hux wakes up in his living room to his mother readying a hearty breakfast.

“What did you two do last night?” Aems inquires, tossing together her signature breakfast hash. Most of the food she makes goes to Marin. Much to her dismay, her son eats as small of portions as the twins.

Hux groans against the pounding in his skull. “Hm?” He can't think about much of anything right now.

“This morning I found you and Marin sprawled on the couches. Armitage, he's too young for that, just as you're too old.”

“What do you think we did?” he snorts. He doesn't remember speaking to Marin since the incident at the beach. He isn’t around. He must be on his morning jog. His mother laughs and says something else, but he's already lost in his memories.

The last things he remembers are faint and far off, like dreams. But Hux hasn't been able to remember his dreams for years. All he remembers is laughing with Ben over a drink, drinking, drinking, drinking.

And Ben kissing him?

Hux shoots up, blood tingling his cheeks. Ben had kissed him. He was drunk as hell, but Ben kissed him. Heart rate bursting with giddiness, Hux stands to join his mother in the kitchen.

“So what do you think of Ben?” he asks, nonchalant.

Aems raises her brows in surprise. “He's a fine handyman. He's respectful, patient, and quite handsome, too.” She sorts out the plates. Marin should be home from his morning jog anytime now. “Why do you ask?”

Hux smiles at that. Ben is very, very handsome. “No reason.” He's not ready to discuss anything permanent. If Hux’s memory serves him correctly, Ben had been drinking, too. Doubt niggles its way into his head. What if Ben hadn't meant to kiss him and he's setting himself up to be heartbroken?

The front door swings open, revealing his blank faced son. Aems is the only one to greet him. She doesn't know Marin tried to kill Ben yesterday.

Hux and Marin exchange glares, and Aems sighs in dismay. “I guess it's none of my business,” she mumbles to herself.

“Mother, it's fine,” Hux speaks for the both of them as Marin readies his protein shake, ignoring him. “Marin and I had a disagreement.”

“If you could call it that,” Marin scolds under his breath to his food processor. The darkness in his
heart longs to shut Hux’s mouth, to rid all his memories of the beach and of Ben.

His son’s defiance makes him want to flare up, petulant and immature. “I was just heading out to give Ben some breakfast. He should be in his usual spot, right Marin?” he says deliberately, as if threatening to tell Aems about the incident.

Marin’s blood pressure heightens. “You will not.”

“See, there's your issue. You think you can actually tell me what to do when in fact, it's the other way around,” Hux hums, unperturbed by his son’s persistent insolence. He prepares a bowl of hash and eggs, excited to greet Ben with a meal, no matter how aggravating his son is.

“I'll take it. You should be waking Seren and Taran up so they don't oversleep.” Marin snatches the bowl from Hux’s hands.

“As if I'll let that happen,” Hux counters. Not when Marin stabbed Ben literally yesterday.

“I won't—” he starts, shifting his eyes guiltily. He lowers his voice, gets control of his anger. “I'm just gonna give him the food. I'll give me a chance to...atone.”

“You want to apologize? To Ben?” Hux gapes, not believing what he's hearing.

“Yes,” Marin lies. “Just give it. I'll go.”

Hux sighs, sounding just like his mother. “Alright. But come right back.”

Wasting no more time, Marin leaves without another word. Aems regards her son. “I worry for him. You don't have to tell me all the details, Armitage, but just promise me you and him are alright.”

“It's growing pains, Mother. He'll shake off this bickering phase. I know it.” Hux hopes for the best and prepares for the worst. Though little has prepared him for seeing the worst in his son.

“And you?”

“And me, what?”

She looks at her son, matching his concerned green gaze. “Promise me you'll be alright, dear. That's all I ask.”

The promise can't form, and Aems seems to understand. “Well, if you can’t promise, at least try to work towards it.” She kisses his temple and leaves him to wallow in the kitchen.

Outside, the morning tide rolls in. Ren's campsite gets closer. It's evident Ren is asleep, from his haphazard sprawl. Abie perks up at Marin’s arrival to their site. He can't help but smile. Abie was one of his first friends. She helped comfort him after his parents abandoned him.

Focusing on the present, Marin smirks as he feeds Abie all of Ren’s breakfast. Unfortunately Abie’s eating noises wake Ren up from his slumber.

“That's nice of you,” Ren mumbles up to Marin, who looks as if he'd wish to ignore him and spend all his attention on Abie. Nevertheless, he’s surprised to see him.

“I'm just here to deliver a message,” Marin says sternly. He smiles as he pets Abie but the scorn is clear in his voice. “I already warned you to keep your distance and since you are utterly incapable of following instruction, if I sense you near Hux, alone with him, speaking to him or even thinking
about him, I'll know. And that's when you've lost. I'll make sure you suffer the consequences. And I promise you they'll be dire.”

Ren blinks. He supposes he should be used to this. “So you've come to threaten me?”

“I don't threaten. I promise.”

Unfazed, Ren sits up. “Is this something you do often?”

“When I must.”

Ren nods. “You didn't always used to be such an ass.”

“And you always were. Never failed, even right now,” Marin counters.

“Funny how that coincides between us.”

Without another word, Marin storms off.

Back at the house, Hux is waiting for him, arms crossed. “Well? How'd it go?”

Marin barrels past him. “It went.”

“That's it? That's all you have to say?” Hux grovels. “Did he accept your apology?”

“Yes.”

Hux lets his son get away with his antics this morning. Only to a degree. “Go on. You'll be late for school.”

“I'm taking a personal day.”

“Like hell you are,” Hux scoffs. “Get your ass on your speeder and get yourself to school.”

Marin slams the refrigerator door shut and plops down on the sofa. Seething, Hux finishes readying himself for his shift. Careful not to wake his snoozing daughters who still share his room, Hux storms into his bathroom as if there is some way he could alter his appearance to defy his son. He strikes an idea and pulls out some of his unused cosmetics. Inside the small bag, he finds a tube of rosy pink lipstick. He bought it months ago on a whim.

When Marin sees Hux calmly tug on his boots, he bristles at the discoloration on Hux’s mouth. “What is that?” he demands, not taking to this cry for attention.

“I'm going to work. At least one of us can do what's expected of us. Oh and this shit on my face is just to, y'know, show people how desperate for cock I am. Have a great day, Marin.” With that, Hux shuts the front door behind him and his speeder hums into the distance.

Marin gapes to the closed door, stomach slick and sickened. Hux had thrown his insidious comment from yesterday right back in his face.

“What the hell just happened?” Aems demands from the main hall. She just barely caught wind of her son and grandson's argument, and it was as shocking as it was heartbreaking.

Glaring to the sliding glass door, Marin breathes deeply through his flaring nostrils.

“Marin. What was that about?” she reiterates. When Marin says nothing, she finds a seat closest to
him. “I may have spent a lifetime away from your father, but I know when he's heartbroken. I've always given you two the benefit of privacy. I know you've done things...that I'll never be able to understand. All I ask in return is that you both respect each other and not dwell on your own mistakes. Life's far too short for that.”

Marin turns his nose away. He's about to explain why Hux is angry, about to come up with some excuse of Hux’s bruised pride, when the girls pad in and try to prepare their breakfasts. Aems gets to her feet, lest the girls touch something in the kitchen they aren't supposed to.

“Just think about what I said. And please, for all that is good, go to school,” his grandmother tells him.

Seren and Taran babble about something they listened to on their book recordings, blissfully enjoying their morning. Until their big brother looms in the kitchen to grab a snack bar. They remember how Marin had hurt Ben and stuck the knife in his gut, and they do not wish him good-morning.

Marin immediately recognizes their fear, and in shame, he barrels out the door to school.

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Hux ignores the stares of confusion and interest from the students and staff. He's no doubt the center of attention because of the ridiculous shade of pink accentuating his already dramatic pair of lips. It's a bit liberating, being pretty.

Halfway through the day, he nearly forgets he has it on until he leaves after his shift and stumbles upon Ben. Ben's waiting for him outside of the school, looking like he's done something wrong.

Ren averts his eyes, as if looking at Hux is forbidden. He supposes it is, after his son’s threats.

“Hey. You followed me,” Hux accuses, nothing short of playful. He wants to see if Ben remembers their moment, that barely-there flash of a kiss. Ben’s eyes land on his lips and for a mere instance, his heart soars. But then he remembers the distracting, rosy pigment volumizing his smirk.

Ren’s mouth catches up with his mind. “You...that's a wonderful color,” he sputters.

Hux cheeks tug into a grin. “I'm trying it out.”

“It's working.”

Ben has to have remembered their kiss. Why wouldn't he? “So you've followed me, why?”

“It's my duty. I have to make sure all ends of my mission are covered.” Ren straightens himself out. He doesn't want to pose a threat or impose any sort of restriction on what Hux does or doesn't do. He really should have stayed put at the beach, but there's only so long he can go without being around his love again.

It's possible Ben is playing coy. Heart racing, Hux juts his hips out, hope shining in his eyes. “Does your mission entail buying me a cup of caf?”

Marin’s threat looms over Ren like a storm cloud. He's got to make fewer selfish demands or he
risks losing this whole thing he's built. “Anything for a friend,” he says, nodding professionally.

The carefree, painted smile gracing Hux’s face wavers. He suddenly feels very foolish. He longs for something to mop the lipstick away, to fade back into obscurity. A sarcastic, spiteful comment would be appropriate but the comeback never comes.

Easily, Ren receives his withdrawal. “Know any good places for a caf?” he asks, damned the consequences. He doesn't want to see that look on Hux’s face.

Hux shows them to the shop. Like most shops in Greendole it's within walking distance. They find a table by the window with tools for chairs, the foot and ground speeder traffic silhouetted in the high sun. Hux orders something bitter and Ben orders something sweet. It reminds him of how Marin likes his drinks, sweet and full.

“I appreciate you taking to my son's apology,” Hux tells him, sipping his drink. The heat of the caf stains his cup with the pink from his lips. It doesn't go ignored by Ren, who is immensely struck with longing that he flicks his eyes low. He has a fantasy very similar to this moment. It would be over a caf much like this, at home with the kids sleeping in that he'd ask Hux to marry him.

“He didn't apologize to you, did he?” Hux pushes, unsurprised. At Ben’s hesitation, he shakes his head. “Did he at least give you the breakfast?"

“He brought breakfast for my dog. It was a nice gesture.”

Hux groans in frustration. Of course Marin would rather feed the dog than Ben like he was supposed to. “He's impossible. He lies to me, talks back to me, goes against everything I say—I'm not the best parent. But I'm his father. Did you ever act like that as a teenager? Disobey your father like it was a professional sport?”

Ren forces his face not to divulge anything incriminating. “I was, actually. I argued, fought. Among other things.” Shaking the clouds of time-beaten sorrow from his mind, Ren meets Hux’s scrutiny. “Eventually he’ll realize how he’s treated you. It might take a while. Maybe years, when he’s a lot older. And when you see how much he’s grown, there will be no question that all this was worth it.”

During the first half of his life, his formative years, Hux’s relationship with his father was never as dynamic as his and Marin’s, and now apparently Ben’s and his father’s. Hux was cursed with a father who cared more about the long gone Empire than demonstrating his love or loyalty, and there is no doubt he would have appreciated the compassion and understanding Ben harbors for Marin—and Marin isn’t even his son. How has Hux been this fortunate to find such a wise, caring, compassionate man to share his days with? “You’re speaking from experience?”

“Definitely. Marin is young. He may think he’s got all the answers and he’s got everything figured out, but above all, he loves you. You just have to endure the...growing pains.”

“He stabbed you,” Hux deadpans.

“I can take a hit.” He can take a hit, alright. And the next hit. And the next. Anything to right his endless list of wrongs.

Hux’s chest flutters as if roused by a swarm of colorful butterflies. He’s been attracted to men, but never like this. There’s so much Ben gives him, from companionship, someone to talk to, and refreshing, oddly fatherly advice. Heated, passionate kisses under the stars that they’re both pretending never happened.
Perhaps Ben thinks he forgot, or wants to forget. But Hux won’t settle for anything less than knowing what’s keeping Ben silent. “I remember,” Hux tells him, full of meaning.

Ren blanches. For a moment, he cannot speak. “You do?” he finally gasps. He hadn’t expected, hadn’t dreamed Hux would remember him, their family, what they shared a lifetime ago—

“I wasn’t that drunk, Ben,” Hux clarifies, inspecting his cafe. He prickles with anxiety at the remorse sinking Ben’s features. It’s unmistakable. Ben had expected him to forget what happened. There’s no anger or offense, only heartbeat. “Unfortunately for you, I remember it clearly,” he bristles. “But I can see you’re keen on forgetting, I can do the same. Thank you for the drink,” he dismisses. Hux shoots up from his chair, not meeting Ben’s eyes. He wants to go home, away from Ben’s rejection.

Until Ben stops him with a grip on his wrist. If it were anyone else, Hux would shove the offending hand away. Warily, he meets Ben’s eyes. He nearly recoils at the blaze behind them.

Since the shop is relatively busy, they aren’t making enough of a scene. But Ren wouldn’t care if they had been. Because nothing will get in the way of his pleading.

“Don’t. Please don’t forget. Please,” Ren implores, anchoring in his orbit. “Don’t forget me.”

Speechless, Hux’s throat bobs. How could he not expect Ben’s natural, terrifying ferocity? He barely has a chance to say anything before Ben drags him to the credit terminal to pay, slapping and jabbing the buttons like they’re offending him.

He leads Hux outside to the closest alleyway and presses him into the white brick. He’s waited long enough. Reverently cradling Hux’s jaw, he bestows a tender kiss to his waiting mouth. Hux surges. It feels so, so good to be desired. Ben holds him with both hands, stretching out time with his soft, indulgent kisses.

Ren pulls away and maintains a grip on Hux’s jaw and another on his slight arm, both touches respectful and restrained, no matter how severely he wants to clutch Hux so he’ll never leave him again. Ren closes his eyes. “Don’t forget this,” he hisses. “Don’t forget me.”

Hux finds it in himself to form a response. His lips buzz and twitch. Remarkably, none of his lipstick got on Ben, who’s apparently still hung up on him not forgetting what they’ve shared. “I was fibbing. I never could forget that. Especially with someone like you,” he smiles. But this only makes Ben’s face twist in misery.

To conceal his sorrow, his loss, Ren bends to kiss him once more, tongue lapping away the taste of their cafes. They’re both inexperienced enough that their kisses are matched in tempo. Neither gets too carried away, nor left behind.

“Let me take you out,” Ren offers, looking from one green eye to the other. “Like on a date. A proper date.” We’ll do it right, this time. I’ll do right by you, this time.

A lifetime ago, he would have been able to keep an authoritarian, disciplinarian appearance, and stifle the hopeful elation bubbling up in his cheeks. But after years of doing little else but kissing foreheads, playing little games, reading books aloud, and making meals for the twins, years of telling his mother good-morning and I-love-you, years of watching his boy grow into a boy the size of a man and promising him nothing can hurt them as long as they are a family—Hux lets his smile burst. Thankfully, this reaction doesn’t make Ben grimace. Ben matches him with an equally as bright grin.
“You’re sure this is appropriate? I’m your assignment. You’re still on the job, with the Resistance and all,” Hux leers, playfully coy.

“This is more than just a job,” Ren tells him, and before Hux can request he clarify, Ren continues. “It’s a lifestyle. And I’m the only one who controls my life.” His puppet strings are cut, his leash is unhooked. “And you are far more than just an assignment, Hux,” Ren vows taking his hands in his own.

“So a date, then?” Hux asks, chest fluttering. “Have a time and place in mind?”

“How about tonight? I could—” Ren stops himself from offering to wait outside of his house. He remembers Marin’s threats. “Maybe we could meet somewhere. Right at the road at the edge of the city.”

“Nonsense. We can ride together. I’ll bring a speeder up right to your campsite.”

Ren thinks of their son, his threats and his anger. His unabashed loathing. This goes against everything they agreed on. But it’s what Hux wants, and it’s what Ren wants, too.

As if Hux can read his thoughts, he withdraws, tumult sinking his features. “You’re worried about him, aren’t you? What he's gonna think?”

Ren holds his gaze. “It’s not that I don’t think it’s not possible he’d approve, but these things might take time—”

“I don’t need his approval,” Hux snaps.

“I know. I know you don’t. It’s just that it might not be a good idea just yet.”

Hux clenches his fists. “I don't need his permission or his input in any way. I don't care what he thinks about me anymore. I'm sick of him constantly trying to control every aspect of my life.”

Ren nods, suppressing a grimace. For so long, Hux has been subjected to their son’s demands. But Hux’s torment began with Ren. It’s one of his greatest regrets, along with his relationship with his children—abusive at worst and nonexistent at best. Should he follow Marin’s instructions or Hux’s wishes? He can't win either way.

“All right. We'll do what you want to do,” Ren tells him. Hux’s elated, satisfied grin makes his dread dissipate.

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Hux meticulously combs his hair with styling product, chewing on his lip in concentration. It probably won’t fare well during the speeder ride but he has to at least try. Seren slips inside their shared bathroom.

“Can you do my hair, too?” Seren inquires. Papa always combs their hair and it feels soothing.

“Maybe tomorrow morning, dear. Papa needs to leave soon.”

“Where you going?”
Hux smiles, coy and delighted. “I’m gonna go out with Ben.” Seren makes a noise of approval, but he can see her trepidation. “You like Ben, don't you?” he asks her.

She worries her brow. “Is his tummy okay?”

Immediately, Hux understands. “Ben is alright. He's healed.”

“That's good.” She doesn't seem convinced.

“I know you're worried about him. But he's strong and capable.”

“He's got big big muscles,” Seren says, holding up her arms proudly as if she too had big muscles like Ben.

“You're telling me.” Ben certainly has many, many muscles. “Did your brother go to school?” Marin’s been home but has been keeping to himself. Hux assumes he's holed up in his room.

“Yeah. Marie went.” Seren fiddles with the pleating of her skirt. “Is Marie in trouble?”

Hux has yet to explain the nature of Ben and Marin’s conflict to his girls. “Yes. Your brother needs to reflect on things.”

“What?”

“He needs to think about what he's done. That's what you do when you make a mistake and hurt someone. I'd do the same if I hurt someone, too.”

“You would never hurt anyone!” Seren proclaims. Marie is the mean, angry, grumpy one. Papa is the happy, loving, caring one.

Hux doesn't know what to say to that. One day the truth about his past will come into the light. Surprising no one, the thought of his daughters learning of his heinous past sickens him with shame, tongue bile-slick. It'll happen, one day. There's no ignoring it. “Go into the living room and play with your sister, dear,” Hux tells his daughter. “I'll see you later.”

“Okay, Papa. Kiss my head?”

Hux happily obliges. “I love you, dear,” he promises.

“I love you, Papa,” his little girl smiles, waving goodbye and sauntering off to the living room.

Later, Hux stands in front of his mirror to adjust his outfit: a neat, snug charcoal button up that cuffs at his wrists and a pair of snug, grey half pants. He doesn't want to stick out against Ben’s outfit, which will probably be the one from today. Hux rolls on another layer of lipstick. Ben seemed to take a liking to it.

All in all, he chose his outfit to disguise how slim and soft he is under his clothes. Much like his uniforms in the First Order, shaped to mask his slightness. At least his top. His pants are another story. He doesn't have the luxury of his poofed pants to conceal his feminine legs and hips, the modest yet girlish swell of his ass. Maybe it'll be something Ben will like.

When he steps outside his room and tell his mother about his date with Ben, she hollers and kisses his cheek in congratulations. “I'm so happy for you. Please, stay out as long as you wish. The girls and I will put ourselves in bed.”

Hux’s smile falters. “Where's Marin?”
“He messaged me and said he was gonna be in late. He had plans with Lis. He should be back any moment.” Aems, naturally, understands her son’s concern. “Have you told him?”

“I will. Just. Not yet.” This is the only course of action he can afford to take.

Aems nods, accepting her son’s judgement. “I trust you, Armitage. But promise me you’ll tell him. He only cares about your safety. You know that.”

But that's not true. If he had, he wouldn't have lied to him about Ben saving him from drowning and he wouldn't have spent years pushing Hux away from men who were his friends or otherwise. Marin wouldn't have assaulted Ben for any other reason than scorn for getting close to him. “I’m done being alone,” he confesses, and that's all the assurance Aems needs.

Hux hurries for his speeder lest his son is already on his way home. At Ben’s campsite, he's already waiting for him with a comely smirk. He's hiding something behind his back. Hux steps off the speeder, intrigued.

Straightening, Ren takes a step forward. Hux looks incredible. Sometimes, his life of misfortune gives to moments like these, where he feels nothing short of lucky. “You look very nice,” Ren tries, feeling a bit awkward.

His too-long fingers dance around the gift behind his back. It was a childish impulse to present Hux with a gift. But he wants to treat Hux like how he deserves, and that means bestowing compliments, gifts, anything to make Hux smile. Hopefully this gift won't make him look like a total tool. He presents the gift.

It's a slim, tasteful, leather bracelet woven from black, grey, and green shades of material. “I hope you like it. It took me a while to find the right shop for these types of materials, but when I saw the kit, I knew I had to give it a shot.” How incredibly weathering time is. He's presently giving General Hux a literal token of his affections, nervous heart beating out of his chest.

Tentatively, Hux takes the bracelet and brings it close to examine its craftsmanship. “You did this?” he asks. The knots are quite remarkable. And for Ben to have made this with his two hands? Hux chews his lip, giddy beyond compare.

Ren nods. “For you. Only if you want it.”

Hux smirks, and secures the bracelet on his wrist. “It's beautiful. Thank you.” He's so lucky to have met Ben.

As if remembering they'll be late for something important, Hux urges for Ben to hop on the speeder. It's not that they will be, it's just that Marin could arrive home any time now. He doesn't want to make another scene in front of Ben, or have Marin cut up more than just his gut. “How's your injury?” he asks. While Ben’s given him a one of a kind artwork for his wrist, it would seem all Hux has given him is a stab wound.

“Oh, it doesn't even bother me. I've suffered far worse,” Ren assures him. He climbs on the seat behind Hux and places his hands on Hux’s slim shoulders. Respectful and restrained, much to Hux’s disappointment.

Hux solves his dilemma by scooting his bottom backwards until he hits Ben’s mass. He hears Ben take a heavy breath and move his hands to his waist, and decides that he's won.

He wants Ben to hold him tighter. Hopefully there will be a time when he doesn't have to ever be in want of a gentle, reassuring touch. “Where to?” he calls over his shoulder.
Luckily, Ren found one interesting venue to spend their first date. This is their first real date. Before this, before they were separated, neither Hux nor Ren had ever considered nor cared about these simple ways to spend a day than go on a date. “Just head to the east side of the city. Towards the seventeen hundred block.”

Hux can't think of a single restaurant in that vicinity. Maybe Ben has something else planned. His imagination runs wild. Propelling forward, Hux escapes on a side route so as to not risk crossing Marin’s path. Hux does not allow his teenaged son to control him, but he'd prefer not to risk it. Ben’s already been shanked, after all.

Ben, whose bracelet is the perfect circumference for his wrist, whose large, gentle hands brace his sides, his thighs warm and sturdy against his hips. Already this is easily his best day in years.

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Marin parks his speeder on the garage. He's come home a bit later than usual, but after the day he had yesterday, all he wanted to do was hang out with Lis and listen to her play her cacophonous string instruments. She even tried to teach him, and it was a lot of fun.

But he must return home to Hux and his sisters’ resentment.

Seren is the first to greet him. Instead of her normal ‘hello,’ she confronts him with a Hux-like glare. “I don't like when you hurt people,” she condemns. Taran is quiet, letting her sister speak for them. They're at the activity table coloring.

He shakes off the guilt and shame. He's accustomed to disguising his true feelings. “It was a misunderstanding,” Marin tells them.

“You were already being mean to Ben. We saw. We heard you say mean things to him.” Ben was so nice to them, but their angry brother had to ruin everything. Now Ben probably thinks that they don't like him, since Marie doesn't like him.

“I can't be nice and happy all the time. That's not how life works. One day you're gonna be mad and unhappy and I won't tell you to not feel that way.”

“We aren't happy now. Do we look it? Taran doesn't even want to look at your face.” Seren is so sick in her tummy when she thinks about how Marie hurt Ben. He looked like a monster. She should tell him that. It would really hurt his feelings and get him to say sorry.

Marin starts, then withdraws to the kitchen. He's done talking about it, done thinking about it. He doesn't want to ever revisit the memory of feeling Ren go limp under the water. “Where is Papa?” he demands.

"Grandma said not to tell you,” Seren shrugs, leafing over to another coloring page. She does it out of order, coloring what she feels like coloring, as opposed Taran who colors each page until there isn't a single naked part of each paper.

Abruptly, Taran thwacks her coloring stick down. “Why are you trying to make him mad?”

“He's already mad,” Seren respites. “And I'm mad. He cut Ben’s guts open and doesn't care.”
Marin tempers his rage, determined not to let his sisters—his four year old sisters—get the advantage on him. “If I’m not supposed to know, so be it. Goodnight,” he dismisses, marching to his room.

The twins exchange their perplexity. “What a weirdo,” is all Taran has to say on the matter. She goes back to working in her book.

Inside his room, Marin pops some vitamins in his mouth, the kind he started taking since Ren returned that he keeps from Hux’s eyes stored in a hidden corner of his dresser. It’s merely a type of superprotien for muscle growth, not pharmaceuticals or any type of recreational drug.

Hux doesn’t have to know about it.

“I thought I heard you sneak in,” his grandmother says at his door. She eyes the bottle Marin tries to nonchalantly stash.

“Seren gave me a piece of her mind,” Marin shrugs, like there was something funny about what she said. There wasn’t.

“About how you stabbed Ben?”

Marin blinks, trying to not be affected. “Hux told you?”

“Actually it was Seren. She gave me a piece of her mind, too. I’ve never seen her so angry.”

Anger. Marin never expected to be so distraught that he imbued anger in his sisters’ hearts.

“You know, when you all came here for the first time, I never expected transparency. Not from your father, not from you. I understood there were things in his past that I shouldn't ask about,” Aems tells him, shaking her head. “But to see you both fight like this, like there’s something fundamentally wrong with something in your relationship. It’s breaking my heart, Marin.”

Deliberately, Marin glares to the window. He has a view of the backyard, the passing rain speckling the glass. “I’m working through it with him.”

“What is ‘it’?” she exasperates. She’s exhausted.

“Bad things happen when Hux stops thinking about the consequences of his actions. I’m the one who gave him clarity. That’s the reason we’re here today, in this house, with you, safe from the war.”

“Gave him clarity?” she parrots.

Marin catches himself, determined to do anything to keep his secrets. “He left the war for us. He stopped his killing, for us. I'll never, ever take the chance of losing what we've made. If he forgets why he left, it would be catastrophic.”

Aems steps into Marin’s space to cradle his cheeks between her cool, rough palms. “I know him. He’d never leave you or your sisters. Not for power or veneration, nor anything in the galaxy. And I know you,” she laments. “I know you've been keeping secrets. I see it in your eyes.”

Recoiling, Marin marches for the window. He wants to pummel his fist through it.

“Marin, please. Don't let this, whatever this is, continue to drive you two apart.”

“Where is he?” Marin demands.
“He's gone into town,” she answers honestly.

“With whom?”

Aems looks him dead in the eye. “He'll tell you later.”

Fear burns starkly under his skin. He already knows the answer. Marin’s large hands claw into fists. “Goodnight, Grandmother. I'll see you tomorrow.”

“Your father forbids you from leaving tonight.”

Marin bows his head. His grandmother rarely gives him imperatives, but when she does, they always affect him, where as Hux’s imperatives are the easiest to parry.

Aems closes his door as she slides away, wishing him a good-night and an I-love-you. Trust. She trusts him not to storm after Hux and drag him home. It's unfortunate that he has to defy her.

A glimmer catches his eye from aside his dresser. It's Mara Jade. He hasn't seen her in years.

“Still following your father's footsteps?” she asks, energy suspending her to her natural height, which is about a foot shorter than Marin.

“Still plaguing people with your presence?” he tosses back. He knows precisely which father she's grumbling about.

She sighs, overdramatic. “Unfortunately. Ren and I had caught up yesterday. You left him with another nasty scar.”

“It wasn't as big of a deal as everyone thinks it is. Ben, the stranger, the outsider, was attacking my father. I was protecting him.”

Mara’s glittering blue eyes level with her grand-nephew. “You may scorn like Ren, but you certainly lie like Hux.”

He's heard enough. “Is that all?” he growls, readying his boots.

“You won't be going after Hux. If you do, you'll lose his trust and ruin whatever chances he has finding happiness.”

“He was doing fine until Ren came back. I knew this would happen, so if you'll excuse me—”

“He wasn't! He wasn't happy. Yes, you and the girls and his mother brought his priceless joy, but he's been alone, Marin. One day, you'll all leave to live your own lives, his mother will pass, and he'll be alone. Do you want that for him?”

“Why does it have to be Ren? He could have chosen anyone.”

She floats forward, looming in his space. “Because he's loved him since they had you, and no amount of memory wiping, no amount of time apart could ever change that.” She's speaking for Ren and for Hux, for her husband who knew of no other way to protect his daughter than to cut out her identity. She doesn't scorn Luke, nor Marin, for their actions. She only wishes to guide Marin’s heart.

“What they had was not love,” Marin tells her, sure on his path. “All Ren has ever done is use and abuse him. He manipulated him into caring about him. That's not love. It's sick.”
“All you're doing is pulling on Hux’s strings. You're no different and no better.”

He's so 

*tired* of feeling guilty. But he knows not what to change. How else can he protect Hux from himself? “What the hell do you suppose I do?”

“If you truly believe Ren hasn't changed, let Hux see for himself. He doesn't have his dependence to him, yes? Let Hux choose. You've done so much for his safety, him and the girls.”

Marin stills his hands on his boots. He glares to the floor. “I can't just sit here and—”

“At least wait for him to come home. Just the once. You can see right through him. If he's had his fill of ‘Ben’, he’ll reflect it. He won't be able to lie to you, even to protect you. Or defy you, I should say,” she says. “I've complied with your wishes all these years. Never spoke a word to the girls nor Hux, never appeared in their presence. Trust me. By trusting Hux.”

What she's suggesting, it's unthinkable. Ren could be doing anything to him. “It's not about trust. It's about Ren. I won't stand by and let him into our life.”

“You can't possibly control Hux forever.”

Marin says nothing, clenching his teeth. It's not that he wants to control Hux or even enjoys doing so, but sometimes Hux is blinded by his frivolous, carnal interests. Obsessions, more like.

“Stay in tonight,” Mara Jade implores. “Apologize to your sisters. Do a chore for your grandmother.”

It takes every ounce of restraint in his heart. “I'll give him an hour. Then, I'm going after him.”

Joy shimmers in her smiling face. “A whole hour?”

“Don't push it. I *hate* being pushed.”

But his incredulity doesn't faze the ghost. “A whole hour of allowance. Remarkable, honestly. Enjoy your hour, Marin,” she laughs, like this is genuinely funny.

With that, she fades away, gone until the next time. Angrily, Marin kicks his boots into his closet. It's going to be a long night.

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Hux allows Ben to guide him from the speeder to the other side of the level building. All while Ben rambles on about the plans he made for their date.

“If there's any reason you would wish to pass, I won't take it personally. I will warn you, it's new for me, too,” Ren says, nerves making him stumble over his words. Nerves, and the glittering interest piquing in Hux’s green eyes.

“I'm eager to find out what you have planned.” There's music fading into place, the nighttime sky hazing over with passing clouds and a moonless starlight. Ben’s at a modest distance from his side. After their kisses, he would have thought Ben wouldn't be able to keep his hands off him. The fact that Ben is a gentleman is both a good thing, and a terrible thing.
They reach the door, and Hux can make out the silhouettes of people moving rapidly through the multicolored glass. His heart rate picks up in anticipation. Ren's equally as excited, if not more so, and the doors slide open to reveal the surprise.

Hux gapes at the commotion before him. It's a dance hall. Ben has brought him to a dance hall. Ben takes the lead and guides them inside to skirt the freely moving couples. The hall patrons are paired in twos or grouped in three or more and are moving to the rhythm of the string band out on the floor stage. It's chaos. It's synchronization. Hux can't look away.

“I understand if this is a bit much,” Ren calls over the boisterous noises of the hall. “We can find something else to do if you want.” Not that he's hoping Hux will be disinterested or uncomfortable. He just doesn't want to risk Hux doing something he doesn't enjoy.

Hux whips his head around, heart soaring as the music crescendos into another lively, folky measure, as Ben looks back at him with his unmasked earnestness. Ben remembered they both had never been out dancing. He remembered and wanted to take him to do something they've never done before. “I want to. I just—” Hux cuts himself off, ashamed of the life he's lived, one without music and dance.

“You what?”

“I have no idea how to dance.”

Ben’s eyes light up, and he smirks his perfect, dimpled smirk. “Neither do I!” he shouts. “But it can't be that hard, can it? I'm willing to look like an idiot if you are.”

Hux laughs as Ben offers his hand with a flourish. Graciously, he takes the offering. He has no idea how this is going to go, but since Ben will still respect him even if he makes a fool of himself, he's got nothing to lose.

Ren tugs Hux to the floor and glances to the surrounding patrons. There's a man and a woman dancing close and spirited. It's clear they've been here several times. There's another couple, also a man and a woman, who are similar in form, through less on beat with the lively tempo. Same with an older couple, who simply sway in each other's arms.

Luckily, Ren sees a man and man embracing each other, then pulling apart in an elementary tango. It's clear one of them is the lead, so he attempts to cradle Hux’s back like the taller man holds the slighter one. Equally as lost, Hux sees where he's eyeing and mimics their form.

Ben holds him gently, albeit stiffly, but it's more of an embrace than he's ever had with another person, unless he counts the times Ben has carried him. He places his free hand on Ben’s muscled shoulder and holds on for the ride as Ben leads him into the motions, hand in hand, arm in arm.

“You're a natural,” Hux smirks, marveling at Ben’s deft concentration. He isn't too concerned with making their dance work as opposed to Ben, who’s operating like he's being graded on his performance. Hux is content to be held.

“You think so? I'm trying really hard,” Ren admits with a grin.

“I can tell.” Hux lets his mouth run. “It's adorable.”

Boldly, Ren swings Hux in a semicircle, eliciting a bright laugh from his dance partner. “You make it easy.”

“How?”
“You’re as light as a feather,” Ren grins, punctuating himself by lifting him through his next spin, his arm coiling and binding him close to his chest.

Ren keeps him close as the music falls and rises, eying the fluctuations of his expression with every push and pull, every half spin and readjustment of his arm sure around his waist. Awe, joy, shock, reverence. Ren couldn't be more in love. He longs for the day he can finally tell him, as well as the day he can tell Hux the truth of their past. The day he'll tell Hux his real name.

“What is it?” Hux asks, confused. Ben’s sunk into tumult once more, like he's been reminded of a great tragedy. He thought Ben was having a good time.

“It’s nothing,” Ren shakes his head. His throat bobs along a tremble of nerves. “I just...I never thought I'd get to be here. With you.”

It’s because of Marin, he knows so. Ben has been nothing but cordial to him but ever since the debacle on the beach, Ben’s hesitation has been driving him mad. “Well, it's what I want. I don't care what anyone else has to say about it. Specifically brooding teenagers,” Hux proclaims, sure and confident.

The song ends, and Ren stills on his feet. He's about to explain to Hux how Marin isn't to blame for any lost or hurt feelings, when a jabbing finger taps his shoulder from behind. His blood runs cold.

Hux blossoms into a curious smile, in contrast to Ben’s sigh of relief once he turns. “Can we help you?” he asks their interruption.

Ren could weep in relief. It's an abnormally tall, shockingly muscular woman with brown hair woven into braids, donning a flowy, strapless dress. Her wide face is pursed in a confident smirk. “You two make quite the dance team. May I be so bold to request a dance with your comely partner?”

Ren regards the woman, then looks to Hux for approval. “I don't mind. I'll wait on the side,” Ren starts, minutely interested in how Hux’s dancing will look from the outsider's perspective.

“Oh, he's lovely, but I actually was hoping to have a dance with you. You look like a man who can hold up against my techniques,” she says without a hitch. She would appear to be a woman who gets what she wants.

Hux is absolutely giddy with the prospect of getting to watch him with the strange, large woman. He all but shoves Ben in her direction. “Please! Be my guest,” he snickers, eager to see her follow through with her promise.

Without warning, Ben is swept up by the surly woman's arms and into a series of fluid spins and twirls. The shock and bewilderment in Ben’s face is a delightful sight to see. She actually lifts Ben up, which Hux didn't even know could be possible, and Ben’s groan of surprise makes Hux snicker uncontrollably. He really is a natural!

Bracing for the next spin, Ren grits his teeth and allows his dance partner to throw him however she pleases. At the next series of dips and spins, he nearly calls it quits. But one look at Hux’s pleased enthrallment at him being tossed around like a rag doll, Ren throws himself into the woman's lead. He could really learn a lot from her brazen, heavy-handed leading.

The song is over all too soon. Ren’s dance partner bows, and he meets her with a tired bow of his own. “You've got a lot of spirit,” she tells him. “I trust your husband appreciates so.”

“Oh, we aren't married,” he blushes.
“I've got an eye for these things. Your energies are tethered. Like chain links.” To demonstrate, she links together two index fingers and tugs. “Best of luck to the rest of your night!” she shouts, and moves on to dancing with someone else's lucky partner.

Hux shuffles towards him, clutching his belly. “That was the best thing I've ever seen!” Hux laughs. He can't breathe, he's laughing so hard. “I can't help but ooze jealousy at the last move. I don't think I'll be able to spin you like that after all the practice in the universe.”

Ren pulls him in, both arms sure around his slight waist. “I'm content to do all the spinning. I'll spin you around the whole room if you like.”

Hux wants to kiss him so badly, and Ben is so close, so tugs Ben by his jaw and tips their noses together into the sweetest, most tender kiss they've ever shared. Far more sincere than any of the kisses Hux has shared with Ben, and infinitely more peaceful than the angry, confused kisses from years ago that Hux shared with Ren.

Ren pulls away, for his lips can't help but smile. His tongue fumbles around a confession of love that he's been dying to tell him since he first saw him at the market. “I will warn you,” Ren says instead, “I've picked up several new moves, ones that might terrify you.”

“Bring it,” Hux challenges, licking his lips, and Ren suspends him by his hips and spins him in circles. Together they are the dance floor’s centerpiece, laughing and swaying the night away.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter is filled with countless fetishes of mine, see if you can spot them all!!!!!!!

i hope yall enjoyed this :))) #datenight. also that burly woman at the end is basically me if i ever saw kylo ngl
That night, Ben insists Hux leave him in town so he can ‘run an errand in town,’ instead of having them ride in tandem to his house. Hux knows it's because of Marin, that Ben doesn't want to be seen with him. But while Ben has every right to fear him, and while Marin is as stubborn as nails, Hux truly believes there is a method to the madness. One day, most likely far from today, Marin will have no choice but to allow Hux to be with someone.

So, outside the dance hall, Ben anoints him with warm, wet kisses as fervent as their mingling heartbeats. Hux thanks him for a wonderful night, one he wishes didn't have to end. But Ben assures him that he'd very much like to go on another date, and soon.

On Hux’s way home, he struggles to compensate for the open, empty space behind him, the fact his body is devoid of Ben’s so close and so solid. The night is already a treasured memory. He'll remember it as the night he's felt the most alive. A fond smile graces his lips as he fondles the woven bracelet on his wrist. Longing wells in his heart. He can't wait to see Ben again.

The last thing Hux expected to see was his three children hunched over on the floor, playing a board game. Asteroid Hop is one of the girls’ favorite games, with the spinning of the spinner and the movement of the play pieces and the special landing spaces that send one backwards or forwards. Indeed, the girls find the game most exciting, but Hux never expected to see Marin crouched over the childish game, seemingly enjoying moving pegs and counting spaces.

Hux is almost too afraid to interrupt. But curiosity overcomes him. “What's all this?”

“Marie, it's your turn,” Seren tells him, nonchalant.

Marin immediately looks up at Hux from his crouch on the floor. “Where have you been?” he asks. He tempers the urgency from his voice.

He waited an hour like Mara Jade made him, and another half hour because the game he tentatively started up to pass the time with his little sisters. They were adamant about having him finish. They'd taken to his proposal so well, and after the day of scorn he's had from all sides of his family, their approval was welcome.

“Oh, a little here, a little of there,” his father replies. Hux is glowing in a way that Marin’s never seen before.

“Who were you with?” He knew he shouldn't have allowed Hux his hour.

“You ask a lot of questions.” Hux plops down between his two little girls. The twins always happy to see him.

“Papa, you look pretty,” Taran laughs. Her papa’s lips are painted bright pink and his eyes are sparkling.

“Thank you,” Hux smiles. “You and your sister always look pretty. What about Marin. Is he pretty?”

Taran narrows her eyes. “Kinda. When he smiles.” Marie has smiled a bit since coming home
tonight. It was fun playing the board game with him, even if he was arguing with Seren.

“Marie is not really pretty, if you ask me,” Seren shrugs. “But he was okay tonight. He started a game.”

Hux smiles, the congeniality of the night thrumming along. “That’s wonderful. Thank you for being so thoughtful.” This is unlike Marin, in the best of ways. Refreshing. Especially after the way Marin treated Ben.

Hux flushes at the thought of Ben. He can’t stop thinking about him. If only he didn't have to say goodnight. It felt amazing to be swept in Ben’s strong arms, and held like he's worthy of all of Ben’s attention.

“I was misbehaving today. And yesterday. I was disrespectful and insubordinate towards you and I am sorry,” Marin says, meeting Hux’s pleasantly surprised gaze.

“I appreciate your apology,” Hux replies. “It truly means a lot.”

“And I trust you and your judgement. I know you just want to...entertain yourself with Ben for the time being. I just don't want you to get your hopes up. He's gonna leave, you know.”

Hux’s smile wavers, chest hollowing when his son feeds him the truth. Because it's true. Ben has told him several times that he's leaving once the Resistance needs to send him off on another mission. Ben also said he gets to decide which missions he takes. What if Ben chooses to leave?

“I didn't mean to upset you. But once he's gone, that'll be it. I just want you to be careful, Father.” Marin comments on Seren’s near win at their little game, just as Taran takes second place.

“It's not a big deal, Marin. I'm not stupid.” He changes his tactic. “You do remember that I'm a grown man, don't you?”

“I can't help but worry for you,” Marin counters. “Because at the end of all things, it's you and me and Grandmother and the girls. We're your family. We're what matters.”

Hux’s lip quirks. “At the end of all things,” he parrots. “You're always so serious.”

Forcing himself not to overreact, Marin shrugs and then frowns as his next move on the game board sends him about ten spaces backwards, earning cheers from his sisters. “I'm a serious person.”

“Believe me, I know.”

Marin smiles as his sisters beat him at their childish game, their triumphant grins making his night worthwhile. Thanks to Mara Jade, he discovered that he much prefers enjoying an evening with his sisters than pillaging the town for Hux and whatever dangers that seek to hurt him. Hux is alright. Hux is happy, and if Hux is content and not angry with him, if Ren is groveling in the sand and his baby sisters are safe indoors under his wing, he can spare this little step.

But a niggling thought resurfaces, as they always do. He must learn boundaries, and to trust Hux’s word. It’s the only way his heart will stop aching with guilt. “So, where did you go?”

“Just had a bit of fun. I appreciate you left me to my own devices.”

“Where did you go?” he repeats, tenacity flaring. Seren and Taran start silently putting the game away in its box, trying so hard not to see their brother angry. They do not like it when Marie and
Papa fight.

Hux meets his son’s glare. “I went into town with Ben,” he enunciates. “And now I’m home.”

Trust. Marin will only be able to trust Hux if he’s honest with him. He stands and Hux stands with him, and it’s at this point that his sisters scurry to their shared room. They really do not like it when they fight.

Trust. Trust must be deserved, and Marin has been living a lie for years, a lie that merely by Ren’s presence is dragging into the daylight. If Hux doesn’t want to divulge his whereabouts, so be it. He’ll find his answers from the source.

“And to think, I believed your attitude had improved overnight. Will that be all?” Hux cocks his head.

Stiffly, Marin nods, and dismisses himself to his room. He coils from behind his door, pacing like a caged animal. He waits until at least an hour after he senses Hux and the girls and his grandmother have fallen asleep. Then, he makes his play. He slithers out the back door like a burglar for Ren’s campsite.

He was hoping to bombard Ren in his sleep, but unfortunately, the man is wide awake and crouched before his small campfire. He’s hunched over and meddling with something in his hands. It’s a knife and a block of wood. He appears to be whittling.

“I warned you. I told you not to get close to him,” Marin growls, hands in fists. But Ren looks to him as if he expected to see him tonight. “Are you hoping to be slaughtered? Is that why you continue to disobey me?”

Ren focuses on his whittling. It's his next project, a gift far more nostalgic than a mere bracelet. It's a part of a series. He's carving one of three wooden blocks into the likeness of his children.

He holds up the first one for Marin to see. “I'll need some paint and brushes but Aems has payday this weekend, so it shouldn't be too difficult. What do you think?”

Marin grimaces. “What the hell is that supposed to be?”

“It's you. Well, soon it will be.” Ren continues carving away at the wood. He'll need a smaller knife if he's to inscribe a proper Marin-like frown.

Absurdly, Marin inspects the little piece of wood. It has a blank face, wide shoulders, and a blob for hair. It looks fucking stupid. He wants to chuck it in the fire. But he restrains himself. He's here to follow through with his promise. “Tell me what you did with Hux tonight. I know you were out with him.”

Ren sets his knife to the side. He owns up to his choices. “I took him dancing. He had fun.”

Dancing. Dancing. Marin sees red. Blinded by the rage, he drives his booted foot to the underside of Ren’s jaw, sending him sprawling backwards. Abie whines and yelps, confused at the mess Marin is making.

Ren groans and flops on his back, groaning in pain. He's sustained a lot worse, he thinks, until Marin drives his boot into his gut. Again, and again and again. Ren crumples into a fetal position, protecting his head under Marin’s assault. The kicks persist until he hears Abie’s low growl and a hiss from Marin.
Fuck, he's strong. Ren's no doubt cracked a rib, and his bruised abdomen strains as he gets to his hands and knees. He looks up at his son.

Marin gapes at the fresh wound on his hand. A bite. Abie’s never bitten anyone. “She didn't mean it,” Ren tells him, hoarse from his beating. Marin ignores him and inspects the wound like the hand doesn't belong to him. It looks like a nasty bite.

Humming, Abie trots to Ren’s side, licking his nose with her healing tongue. It wasn't right, what she saw. She had to defend her friend. Her other friend has changed a lot since they last played together.

Marin curls his fingers into a fist. Focusing outward, Marin calls on the living Force to heal his wound. It only takes a few moments but his wound scars over to a pink arc that can only have been made by sharp teeth. It blends with the scars already on his hands.

“You have a gift,” Ren says, gingerly scooting back to his spot in the sand. Abie joins him, staring dolefully up to Marin. “You could help a lot of people with your powers.”

Marin ignores him. It's evident Abie’s uncharacteristic aggression has shaken him. “That was just the beginning if you continue to see him. I don't care if he wants to. Make up an excuse. He already knows you're leaving when the Resistance needs you to.” Not that Marin truly believes Ren would leave if it didn't serve his interests already.

With that, Marin storms back to the house, the stars lighting his path. Every one of Ren’s breaths ache around his injury, but he digs his heels into the sand and resumes his whittling in a semblance of peace.

The following morning, Hux is the first one awake. He prepares a tray of fruits and vegetables for Ben’s breakfast, humming a lively tune from one of the songs from the dance hall as the system’s sun rises. In case Ben is still asleep, Hux gets a cover for the tray so he can eat upon waking. Hopefully Ben will be awake so he can wish him good-morning. Slipping out the back door, Hux cradles the tray in one arm.

Winds toss his hair in every direction. There's a haze of rain in the distance. It'll sprinkle here soon. When Hux approaches Ben’s campsite, he's stricken to find Ben not asleep, but at the beach, having a bath. He's half naked in a small pair of briefs and from behind, he's the most attractive fixture on the skyline.

Hux hangs back for a while, watching Ben stare off into the brisk morning air and wash himself idly. If it weren't for Ben’s dog, he'd probably get away with watching Ben wash the hidden treasures beneath his shorts.

At Abie’s spirited yelp, Ren turns around, shocked to find Hux smirking from his dune. He keeps his chest away. Marin’s assault left him horribly bruised.

“I thought you might want a proper breakfast,” Hux greets over the whistling wind. “All the freshest fruits I could find.”

Ren works his jaw. He keeps his body away from Hux’s hungry eyes. “You can set it down there. Thank you.”

Lips twitching. Hux sets the tray down, not prying his eyes off Ben’s delectable form. Ben’s awfully defensive. “Getting shy on me?” he smirks. Ben’s jaw works, and Hux narrows his eyes at the discoloration scuffing his chin.
Ren ducks his head at Hux’s approach, but there's no use in hiding. He swallows and faces him. Hux takes in the red and purple bruises mottling his stomach, the aching scrape on his jaw from the tread of Marin’s boot.

“What happened?” Hux asks. This must have been between their beach day of doom and now, but the freshness of the bruises blooming indicates his assault was mere hours prior.

Unable to admit what their son had done, Ren searches for a lie. But Hux is far more cunning.

“Ben. What happened? Who did this to you?”

Ren shakes his head. “It'll heal.”

Hux’s heart sinks like a shipwreck. “It was Marin, wasn't it?”

“It's not his fault.”

“How is it not his fault? He's already stabbed you, and now he's beaten you like a dog. It's pretty clear to me whose fault this is.” How dare Marin hurt Ben, after everything they discussed? He should have known better than to ever give into any of Marin’s demands. For years he's succumbed to his will. It's because of his shortsightedness that Ben’s gotten hurt so many times.

“It's my fault. I shouldn't have taken you out. I should have listened to him.” He's been so foolish, enamored with being with Hux again after so many years apart, that he forgot how earning Marin’s trust is the higher imperative.

Hux steps close in his space as if they were dance partners again. “He told you not to see me?”

Ren nods. “I promised to respect your space. Marin only wants to protect you.”

Bypassing the fact that Marin had the gall to threaten Ben, Hux focuses on what he's learned from Ben after all this. “My golem of a son threatened you, assaulted you. Twice over. And you still want to see me?” he asks tentatively.

“Yes,” Ren admits. Against all odds, all logic, Ren will always want to be at his side.

“Even now?” After he's confronted him like a boot confronts an insect?

Ren searches his heart for the truth. The truth that he can admit, anyway. “All I want is for there to be a way that I can be with you, without causing a rift between you and your son. And maybe there's a way I can get Marin to take a liking to me in the process. If I can have that,” Ren swallows, full of hidden meaning, “it'll be everything.”

Hux bores into Ben’s earnestness, ogling his evenly tanned skin, the black swirls of his hair drying in the gusting wind. “I don't understand,” Hux breathes. When Ben doesn't respond, Hux treads in his space, wetting his shoes in the lapping coastline. “How is any of this worth it to you?”

Ren wrenches his eyes to the line where the sea connects to the hazy sky. “Can we start with breakfast?” he asks.

Accepting Ben either isn't going to answer his question or doesn't even know a proper answer, Hux leads them to Ben’s diminished fire where Ben’s dog nests. Hux watches at Ben tugs on his pants, grimacing at his pained stiffness from his battered ribcage. He doesn't even know what he’s going to say to Marin.

“You have a shift tonight?” Hux asks when Ben is ready to dig in. Pretending he hadn't already
confirmed so with his mother.

“Yes. I'm looking forward to it,” Ren smiles around a half slice of citrus. His heart takes him back to the nostalgia of their exile while Hux carried their firstborn. Everything since then has changed. Yet here they are: sitting on a beach aside a campfire, only this time their firstborn had assaulted Ren’s guts instead of Hux’s.

“My mother speaks fondly of you,” Hux smiles, as if it were the most flattering compliment he could say. He supposes it is.

“I do my best.”

They share the rest of the meal in silence, until Hux finally coughs up what he's been dancing around. “I won't let Marin dictate who I choose to spend my time with. I want to be with you.”

“It's not about letting him. It's about trusting him and not becoming his enemy.”

Hux laughs, a sick, disparaging noise. “I've been the enemy for years. It won't change. He's always gonna fight me. He swims upstream for the sake of it.” He meets Ben’s warm eyes. “Do you want to be with me?”

More than anything, he wants to say. But it wouldn't be true. More than anything, he wants his family safe, happy, and loved. If the universe demanded he wasn't ever meant to be in their lives, he'll roll over in a heartbeat. “It doesn't matter. It's irrelevant.”

“Is that a no?”

“Hux—”

“All this, and you can't even answer a simple question?”

“Of course I want to be with you,” Ben snaps in his face. At his fervency, Hux can feel his pupils dilating into maws, his blood thudding lustily beneath his skin.

Hux stands, lips tugged into a smirk, and Ren gapes at his height. He appears to be satisfied.

“I'll see you around, Ben,” Hux says softly, Ren nods dolefully at the name, but thanks him for the breakfast and bids him a pleasant day.

—

Marin wakes to the sound of his father readying a meal on the griddle, the scent of breakfast meats coiling hunger in his belly. He pads into the kitchen. It takes him almost fifteen minutes upon waking to remember Ren’s invasion of their lives.

“Good morning,” Hux says curtly, slicing up the twins’ meals. The largest plate is for Marin, who accepts the serving wordlessly.

The girls are seated at the table and they greet their big brother with their little smiles. After their night of game playing, they feel better about Marie’s attitude even though he and Papa had argued again last night.
“After school, you are to come straight home,” Hux orders Marin while he fashions his pot of caffeine. Hux takes it black nowadays.

“Why?” Marin complains. He hadn't planned on hanging out with Lis but he doesn't like being boxed in. “What if I have plans?”

“Cancel them.”

“If it's to watch Seren and Taran, you don't even work today—”

Hux glares from his perch at the counter, steaming cup in hand. “You're staying home because I said so.”

“So, I'm being punished?”

“I've let you get away with so much over the last few years. It ends now. If I see you haven't come home on time, I'll take away speeder privileges. And you won't be allowed to get a job this summer like you wanted.”

A job and speeder privileges are the least concerning right now. “You're doing this because of him, aren't you?”

“Here we go,” Seren groans to her sister, who glares back at her in a distinctly Hux-like fashion.

Hux passes Marin his cup of cream thickened and sugar sweetened caf. “I'm doing this because of you. I'm not going to share the details if what I found out this morning with Grandmother or the girls, but I refuse to let you behave without consequences.”

Ignoring his full breakfast, Marin glowers to the floor. His palms itch with the impulse to wipe his slate clean, use his darkness to infect everyone's minds. To send Ren away, make Hux and his sisters complacent with every one of his whims.

Marin squanders the tempting dark once more and marches out the door. He leaves his breakfast untouched and his sisters to frown at his rude amount of waste.

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“Everything alright?” Aems asks Ben, concerned as he groans in discomfort lifting the tables into place, a task he normally has no qualms with arranging.

Ren straightens his back to conceal his injury. “It's nothing. I must have...pinched a nerve,” Ren excuses.

“You're a bit young for that,” Aems snorts. “Well. You're not that young.”

“Ouch,” Ren huffs good-naturedly. It's true. The stress and calamity of his lifestyle, both past and present, has given him ample silver hairs along his scalp and temples. He hadn’t noticed his father’s greys until the last time they spoke. His skin still looks relatively youthful, but he always had a permanent frown marring his features. Much like Marin, who takes after him in many other unfortunate respects.

“You know he would probably kill me for telling you this, but my Armitage is absolutely smitten
with you. I've never seen him so cheery. Even when he first came to this system, it was like he was missing something.” She unlocks the restaurant door, letting the small crowd waiting for lunch inside for the hostess to handle. “I just hope that you find him as novel as he finds you.”

Ren greets the newcomers, letting Aems’ words sink in. “I wouldn't dream of taking advantage of him. And I don't know if you can tell but I'm really taken with him, myself. It's just...there are a lot of factors at play.”

“You mean the teenager,” she deadpans. At Ben’s reluctance to confirm, she offers him a smile. “Marin’s heart can be changed. If you're willing to put the work in, that is.”

He's more than willing, even if it means distancing himself from Hux like he had promised their son.

His shift continues with relative ease, despite his abdominal pain. As it ends, and his ultimatum is proven to be difficult to keep when Hux comes in for an early dinner with the girls. It would seem he left the house just before Marin should be arriving. Hux is dressed in a forest green sweater, much like the sweater Ren first saw him in at the market. The girls are in little overalls and striped, fuzzy sweaters, and their brown eyes find Ren immediately upon entering.

Despite their Papa’s reprimand, Seren and Taran find their way to Ben’s side. Ben greets them with his goofy looking smile. Seren thinks he has funny teeth, but she would never tell him that. It might hurt his feelings. Taran thinks he has odd shaped ears that stick out far like wings, but he shouldn’t be too embarrassed because Marie has similar ears and hides them in his hair like Ben does.

“Hey, Ben,” Taran says, waving her hand. She and her sister are getting tall, but certainly not tall enough to even meet Ben’s hip. Ben is a giant. Bigger than Papa and even bigger than Marie, but only by a little.

“Hey,” Ren smiles down to her. If only there was a way to give his girls everything.

Seren steps forward, accidentally bumping Taran with her shoulder. “We would like some soups. And then Papa would like to wait until Gramma lets you off work so you could come with us on a trip.”

“A trip?” Ren asks, eyes wide. “What kind of trip?” Not that he would partake. It’s against his son’s orders. But so is chatting with the girls going within a comely distance of Hux, who’s smiling something in secret to his mother by the door.

“A boat trip,” Taran clarifies. “It’s only for the day. It will be fun. We will wear life-jackets, and Papa has a quadnocs that helps us see the birds and their bird families.”

“Tell him the best part,” Seren jibes. She just wants Ben to say yes already.

“And Marie is not invited!” Taran expels, hyping it up. “So we can have all the fun we want and he won’t be there to yell at us. Don’t you wanna come, Ben? Please?”

Ren pales. This is exactly what he’s not supposed to do. But it’s not Hux asking, tantalizing him with the promise of a life together, it’s the girls begging him with their excited grins and their hopping.

“Oh, I don’t know—”

“Please, Ben? Please, please?” the girls plead, branding him with matching pouts.
He can’t say no, how could he? “Let me talk to your papa first, okay? And get your soups. Does your papa want anything?”

“Nope, he doesn’t eat a lot. Just in the morning and night. Maybe get him a cookie.” Sometimes Papa eats cookies. Just the oat-y, nutty ones with the raisins, but a cookie is a cookie.

As spirited as he always is when it comes to the twins, Ren complies, stepping into the kitchen to wash up from his bussing and get a tray for their soup and Hux’s lone cookie.

Ren meets Hux and the girls at their table off to the side. From the girl's inspection of their surroundings, they hadn’t come here a lot before Ren started working here.

“Thank you,” the girls say, eagerly dipping into their too hot soups. Hux tells them to stir it so it cools, and blow on each spoonful before eating it. Hux beams up to Ben and untucks the fourth chair at his side to invite Ben to their table. As if surmounting an inner battle, Ben hesitates before accepting.

“I assume they told you about our idea?” Hux asks, phrasing it as if spending the evening on a boat hadn't stemmed from him, the adult. “I've got a rental on standby. No pressure.” However, there is nothing but pressure. Hux wants the girls to spend more time with Ben, and of course he wants to even more so. He refuses to allow Marin to control every bit of his life.

“Have you thought about our offer?” Seren requests, prim and proper. Ren never gets tired of seeing how much Hux has imprinted on them.

“Well, while it sounds like a lot of fun, I think it would be best for you all to go. You know, like your family. I don't want to intrude,” Ren says, trying so hard not to reveal any odd signals to Hux or the girls.

Taran pouts, considering his explanation. “But you're our friend. And Marie doesn't really like doing things with us. We'd rather do things with you than him. He's a grump. You're fun.” She can't stop thinking about Ben’s spaceship he told her about. Maybe they could fly in it one day. She's never been in a spaceship.

Sadness piques in Hux’s heart. While he's more than glad his girls like Ben, it's perturbing to hear that they dislike spending time with Marin. He's supposed to be their big brother, their protector and mentor. Not a gloomy plague that they'd rather have replaced.

“Marin can come another time. What do you say, Ben?” Hux asks, feigning coolness and casualness. In truth, he couldn't be more apprehensive Ben will reject him.

Ren can only hold off for so long against three of the most treasured people in his life. He’s gonna live to regret this. His bruised gut protests with his diaphragm deep breath. “Let’s do it,” he says, heart soaring at the girls’ matching cheers.

Hux and the girls wait by the door for Ben to enter his clock-out time. Aems wishes them a safe and pleasant evening. She tells her Armitage not to stay out too late lest he want any unsavory visits from Marin. They all know if Marin knew where they were off to, he’d be hell bent on ruining their time.

Outside, Hux leaves his speeder parked in the garage under his mother’s restaurant. “The marina isn’t too far. The girls and I stopped by just before we came to see you,” Hux says, a little hand in each of his.

“How were you so sure I'd be willing?” Ren asks, because he can’t help himself but banter with
Hux.

“That’s why I had the girls ask. Who could say no to them?” Hux smiles. The girls brighten the sunlit outdoors with beautiful smiles of their own.

Ren snorts. Hux has him figured out to the tee.

At the marina, Ren helps Seren into her life-jacket, a busty contraption bright yellow in color. She and her sister look equally as adorable in the ridiculous garb. It’s even more endearing how they do not complain because they know how important safety is.

The boat Hux chose is reserved at an unmanned terminal down a dock on the waterfront, and the boat house door slides open to reveal their entertainment for the evening. It's wide and long and has safety seats for children, as well as a canopy for the sun. Hux helps his giddy girls onto the boat and has Ben start the engines using the small terminal.

Once they're all seated, Ren turns to Hux. The wind musses Hux’s combed hair in every direction, the sun catches the green-gold of his eyes, and Ren lurches toward his gravitational pull. There's nowhere else in the galaxy he'd rather be.

Hux catches Ben staring, and smirks at his blush. It's a wonderful discovery. “Thank you,” Hux hums, before he can filter it out. “For coming along. I—we needed this.”

Ren longs to take Hux in his arms, but he doesn't plan on making a scene in front of the twins, so he breaks eye contact to pilot the boat from the marina. The girls’ excited laughter fills his heart with wholeness.

“I can see why they call you ‘captain’,” Hux tells him over the wind in their ears. Ben's ease of use with the steering sheds all stress of never having gone on a boat like this with the girls. He trusts Ben to take care of them.

Hux’s throat bobs along his realization. He's only known Ben for such a short while, but he trusts him to help and care for his children, even the viscous, territorial one. He wants Ben in his life. He wants Ben in his children's lives.

Ben flashes him his handsome, dimpled smirk, and slows the boat down for some peace and harmony atop the bobbing waves, and to give the girls a view of the birds nearby. Hux can't but anoint him with a chaste, low lidded kiss to his cheekbone. It feels so good to be with someone.

Flushing all over, Ren steals a gander behind them at the girls, but the girls are far too occupied with the quadnocs and pointing to the birds floating on the wind trembling sea. Deciding they won't scar them for life, Ren bends in for a much more indulgent kiss, one that summons a lusty hunger he must quell.

When Hux pulls back, he forces his heartbeat to temper and his tongue to form words. “You're really quite good at that,” he breathes, hovering in his space.

“I've got the proper motivation,” Ren murmurs, longing for four walls and a bed. But being with Hux, being his partner, having a family—it's just not in the stars. He's not even supposed to be out here, and there's no doubt Marin will find another way to beat him into complacency. He peers off to the horizon, to the impossible dream.

Hux can't ignore the sadness sinking Ben’s regal profile. It happens to often in his presence for him to pass it off. “What is it?”
At Ben’s silence, Hux twists to his side to face Ben more fully. “We don’t have to listen to him. I’m his father. He shouldn’t disobey me as he does.”

It’s not about putting Marin in his place. It’s about reciprocity. Ren offers Hux a silent kiss in response. “I admire the sacrifices you’ve made for your children. They’ll be well worth it.”

Ben’s cryptic comment strikes a chord within. But he doesn’t have the chance to respond when their boat is overtaken by squawking seabirds. Hux glares up in alarm, holding up his arm defensively. None of these damned birds better lay a feather on his girls.

To Hux’s utter astonishment, the twins are holding hands, beaming up at the twirl of birds. High and high swirl the cyclone of birds, far too spirited to be tracking a carcass. Something is tethering them to this spot. To this boat, to the twins.

Seren laughs at the crazy whirlwind around her. Taran had the idea to help the birds come closer, using the push and pull of the air that they can often do together. Papa always gets confused and sometimes a bit scared when they make things move, like books or stones. But they wanted to see the birds. They love seeing the birds.

“Woo-hoo!” Taran hollers over their cacophonous squall. There are so many birds, big and small. White and grey feathers with red pecking beaks. Ben seems to like the birds, too. He laughs along with them. Which also makes Papa smile in the way that makes him look like a little boy.

There’s not a shred of doubt in Ren’s mind that the girls are gifted with the Force. He may have lost his ability to wield it, but he can feel it alive and breathing around them, the twins at the epicenter.

Tears prick in Ren’s eyes. The gift of the Force, something he long abused as a master of the dark side, which Marin has learned to wrangle to do his bidding. It’s been passed down over the generations, from Anakin to Leia, then to Ren and his children.

To see them akin to the living Force in such a free, innocent, beautiful way brings a tear to stripe his cheek. Hopefully the wind will dry it before Hux can comment.

Ren pilots the boat to the far side of the sea. He wonders if he’ll hit land where the girls can discover new species and landscapes. Maybe there’s a private beach much like the beach behind Hux’s home, but devoid of prying eyes and angry, vengeful teens. He could lie with him atop a downy blanket and make love to him under the tilt of the galaxy.

He glowers with detrimental shame. He should not be thinking about having sex of any kind with Hux. All the kissing and the holding has awakened otherwise dormant carnal desires. He really, really should not be letting Hux wrap his arm around his waist.

An hour passes of chasing the wind and enthusiastic bird and fish spotting on the girls’ part. Hux ogles his handsome friend and hopes Ben ogles him in return when he’s not looking.

“I have a confession to make,” Hux smiles into Ben’s oblong ear.

“What?” Ren asks, piloting the boat back to the marina to return the rental. The girls are getting sleepy, as is Hux, despite his adultish attitude.

Hux grins wickedly. “I bought the boat.”

“What? Why? How much was it?” He can’t believe it. Why would Hux need a boat?

“Doesn’t matter how much. I wanted to get something we could share. This could be the first of
many boat trips.”

Ren's lips tug into an incredulous smile. If this domestic, soft, laughing Hux is anything, it's spontaneous. “I would love that.”

He's digging his own grave. There's no way in all hells Marin would ever let him take them all on this boat again. They may wake up to find the boat halfway out to sea and drenched in flames.

But Ren can't help but give in any direction that favors Hux and his happiness. He'd give Hux a whole world if he could.

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Back at home, Marin storms outside at Hux’s and the girls’ speeder approach. Every ounce of patience he can muster is as impossible as he next.

“So you can spend your evenings as you please, but I'm the one who's on house arrest?” Marin demands, glaring hotly. Grandmother had come home and told him nothing of Hux’s whereabouts. Hux and his sisters have given him nothing but shrugs and unimpressed looks.

“You're grounded. It's not house arrest.” Must Marin make every moment of their home life difficult?

“Easy for you to say. You're not the one taking the brunt of all this.”

Hux stalks past his son, into the house where Seren and Taran sprinted to once they saw Marin run out. “Trust me,” he spits. “I take plenty of the brunt.”


Marin ignores him, storming to his room. There is only so much more he can take.

Later that night, Hux follows through with his dastardly, devious plan. The girls are fast asleep, and his mother’s bedroom door is closed. So is Marin’s room, of which there is no sound.

Hux pads into the living room to slide out the back door. The boat is right where he told Ben to put it, parked at the side of the rear additional house used for storage and a guest bedroom. He told Ben to take their boat home, explaining that if he was a real captain, he wouldn't need the coordinates. Ben had laughed, and pleasantly countered that all the best captains had a plan.

Teeth gnawing at his lip, Hux shuffles towards Ben’s campsite. Miraculously, he's awake. Ben always has a smile for him.

Hux takes a deep breath. “We should take the boat out again.”

“We should,” Ren agrees wholeheartedly. He hadn't planned on seeing Hux again tonight. But he's so glad he had.

“Right now.” Sneaking around in the dead of night like a troublesome youth. Hux ought to be
ashamed of himself.

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea,” Ren tries, though the whole of him would like nothing more than to comply with every one of Hux’s whimsical whims.

“I don’t care. Come on, Ben. Don’t make me beg.”

Every time Hux calls him by the wrong name, he feels the deception he’s been living because of his son’s lies. But this wouldn’t be the case if he hadn’t been the sole sinner in vanguarding his son’s descent.

“No one’s out here. Marin won’t see us. Don’t you miss the rush and danger?” Hux leers. Even more reason to turn him down. Hux thinks he’s some wily, accomplished, entrusted Resistance man. The only reason why he hasn’t been executed by the very organization he now allies himself with is nothing short of nepotism.

Ren meets his gaze, and Hux bores into him in an unmistakable ‘don’t say no.’ It’s then he realizes that ‘no’ could never be his answer when it comes to Hux, mindwipe or not. Ren pets Abie in the way that indicates he’ll be leaving and she must guard their post. Contentedly, she chews her scrap of bone.

“Just the once,” Ren says with certainty.

“Whatever you say, Captain,” Hux snorts and animatedly leads the way to their boat.

At the side of the auxiliary house, Ren activates the repulsorlifts that ease it to the sea, hoping the noise isn’t enough to wake the house. Somehow Hux kicking off his shoes sparks desire in his core. Although Hux has objectively nice feet and slim ankles, it’s the act of vulnerable intimacy that has Ren flushing. Thankfully, Hux doesn’t catch onto his weakness. It’s midnight-dark, the stars serving as the sole illumination in the moonless sky.

They settle in the boat, both soaked to their knees, and Ren swallows at the prospect of being alone with Hux for a limitless stretch of the night. He suddenly feels ill, as if Hux would not yield to this setting if he learned of Ren’s and Marin’s deception.

Hux wrings his fingers into nervous fists as Ben brings them far, far from his homestead. After several minutes of speeding through the sea surface, Ben powers down the boat for some much-needed peace and serenity. The water glitters with the stark reflecting starlight.

It’s the perfect moment for a confession. Ben can’t run away or hide behind a far off look out here above the sea and beneath the stars. “I never got to thank you for being so patient with them all. Especially Marin. I can’t describe to you how much I appreciate it. No one’s ever…”

Overcome with emotion, Hux staves his words. Luckily, Ben seems to understand. Ben always understands. Sometimes he feels like Ben knows him better than he knows himself.

“It's alright. I get it. I didn't—I haven't always liked kids,” is Ren’s excuse. “Now that I'm older, I don't know. It's different.”

Different, meaning one day Ben might want a family of his own? “You're good with them,” Hux says in an attempt to fan his desires. Maybe there's more that Hux could share than just his kisses.

“So are you. Better than most. It's shocking to see.”

Hux laughs, all teeth. Ben looks so good under the speckled, heavenly star systems. Errant dark
hairs catching muted highlights, his dark shirt setting his shoulders wide against the glittering backdrop. “Why is it so shocking? Because of my reputation? Plenty of military men move onto have families.”

As if caught in a lie, Ren ducks his chin. Shocking because the only things Ren has ever seen Hux take care of is ousting an enemy, leveling a village, or incinerating an entire system. “Not men like you.”

It's probably the first unfriendly, accusing thing Ben has ever said to him. Hux is taken back. He itches with a need to retort, to toss Ben with everything he's tossing him. It burns hotly like a blistering sunburn, bubbling up inside a simmering rush.

Just when Ben looks properly petrified enough to apologize, Hux palms the back of his neck and anchors their mouths together. He teethes madly at his lips, begging for Ben to reciprocate. He can't explain it and he doesn't want to. Ben is the perfect reflection to everything that he is.

Ren groans and surges into Hux’s kiss. The boat smacks against the water with Hux’s shift in weight when he scoots to Ren’s side, daring tongue fumbling for purchase. Boldly, Ren places a curious hand flat against Hux's trembling chest, feeling the softness of his pectoral to the shallowness of his ribcage. Hux makes a small noise of appreciation into his kiss. They can both barely breathe.

Yet Ren can't breathe if he doesn't have Hux. He's spent so many long, tiresome years without his Hux. Overwhelmed and without reservation, Ren rakes his large hands over the slightness of Hux’s waist. Palms racing up and back again, down to his hips and the shallow vee of his thighs.

Hux coils his arms around Ben’s neck, body reacting to his daring pets and caresses. He wants Ben to hold him, to pull him in his lap, to touch him where no one else has touched. The wind picks up and shakes the boat side to side, but to Hux, Ben is the crux of all gravitation.

He doesn't know how much time has passed as their kissing slows in urgency. They've found a rhythm. How to give and how to take. The only thing amiss is that Hux doesn't know how to ask for more.

Ren wants. He wants everything Hux can give him. But Hux can give him much in his ignorant, oblivious state. He finds his eyes. How incredibly dark they ring with desire. Inky and waning. There's an unspoken question, dewing at his swollen bottom lip. Ren waits for him to spring back into action.

Ren feels it before he sees it. A brush of knuckles against the cloth of his crotch. His face sets aflame and he groans at the delectable sensation.

Swallowing heavily, Hux braves his nerves and drags his fingertips along Ben’s length. His mouth stills on his because he can’t focus on both actions. He’s far too inexperienced in both respects. Ben makes up for his slack, tonguing into his mouth without reservation.

Fear rises, that he’ll be transparent to Ben that he won’t live up to his expectations. Surely Ben, a roguish, handsome, charming Resistance man has taken many lovers. Hux however, has had no one. He withdraws his mouth, presenting Ben his cheek. “I’m afraid I…”

“You what?” Ren murmurs, heated and husky.

Hux flushes. He’s embarrassed. But he can’t hide from Ben. “I’ve never done anything like this. Been physical. At all.”
Ben freezes, something akin to malcontent coloring his features. Panicking, Hux backpedals. “But it doesn’t mean I don’t want to. I really, really want to.”

Ren takes in Hux’s earnestness, the piquing desperation behind his eyes. Hux isn’t himself. He can’t take advantage of him, not like this. Never again. His knees shrink in defensively. Hux visibly withers and Ren can’t bear it.

“Hux, wait a second,” Ren tries, gently bracketing Hux’s hips so he can’t escape.

Stupid, stupid. Hux could shoot himself. He should never have dragged Ben out here. He knew he’d be unable to control his urges but he could no longer stave off the want.

“I want to. Hells, you cannot imagine how much I want that,” Ren swallows, eyelids slipping shut to drift away in the memory of the few precious couplings they’ve shared. Couplings Hux has no memory of. “We shouldn't rush this. Not just because you’ve never—” Ren shakes himself off and palms Hux’s knee. “When it happens, I want it to count.”

Hux thinks back to Marin’s condemning words about Ben’s stay here. “You're not just saying that because your mission is almost over? You want to break ties as uncomplicated as possible?” he asks lowly. A band-aid to his pride. He should count himself lucky Ben respects him this much.

Thumbing through Hux’s decadent swoop of red hair, Ren bends for a chaste, reverent kiss. “There's no force in this realm that could ever keep me from you,” he vows, uncaring of how inappropriate of a promise it is. After everything, he must give Hux at least that.

It appears to work wonders on Hux, who melts into his embrace. Save for their arms around their lower backs, they keep their touches modest, leaning on each other watching the stars glimmer and glow.

Chapter End Notes

dont you just LOVE kylo being a gentleman, blueballing us all? and himself???:)) i hope you guys liked the update!!!
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hux wakes to an empty bed. He doesn't understand why the space is so jarring. It's not like he ever shared his bed with anyone. Shaking off his despondency, he summons the strength to face the day. First is work, then is the scheduled festivities for the two-hundred and ninetieth anniversary of the college's foundation. Regardless of the potential pleasantness of his day, he greets his son at the table with a cold, bitter hello.

“You are to come straight home after school for the weekend,” he orders, bleeding authority.

“Why do I have to when you won't?” Marin complains childishly. Hux and his sisters had spent the day away from the house yesterday but refused to tell him where they went. Hux said it was 'none of his damned business,' and the girls said, ‘it's a secret.’ The dark side had been a tempting force, and every cell in his being wanted to pry the truth from them.

Hux tosses Marin a sneer. “Because you're the child and I'm the parent. Not the other way around.”

“You don't want to do this,” Marin grates, on the precipice. He feels so fucking close to outright snapping.

Hux raises his brows. “I'm supremely unimpressed with your threat. Besides, I have work today, and the festivities at the college. I'll see you later tonight.” He crosses his arms. “Go on. You'll be late.”

Marin slams his fist on the table and barrels out the door. He's never felt less in control.

Satisfied, Hux stars his daughters’ breakfasts. He heats up pre-prepared toast and jam and dices up their favorite type of melon. As always, his girls consume their breakfasts with relative ease. Why can't Marin be this obedient?

Aems readies her day off activities, which primarily consist of reading with the girls on the porch swing and finish painting the house’s back panels. Hux offered to help but she'd rather him socialize with ‘kids his own age.’

Hux glares at his son’s retreating speeder. The only good thing out of Marin’s outright vehemence is that it sparks an idea. Hux readies himself for his shift, rolling on some antiperspirant and combing his ear length hair to the side. His grey shirt is form fitting as are his pants, green with a dark seam striping high in the back.

Kissing his daughters goodbye, he eagerly walks towards Ben’s campsite. Ben is on a comm call. Hux pales, fearing this is the instant he loses Ben to his job with the Resistance.

When Ren realizes Hux is right behind him, he mutedly tells his mother he’ll call her back later. She tells him she loves him, and to be careful.

“Was that important?” Hux asks, feigning nonchalance.
“No—yes, but it could wait,” Ren says, tucking his belongings away. “It was my mother.” He has no idea why he said that.

This appears to titillate Hux. “Your mother? Is she well?”

“She's fine. I actually lived with her for a while.”

“I would imagine, as you are from a family of rebels,” Hux counters. Ren remembers how he told Hux of his anti-hero status, but it is nice to pretend he actually knows his real history.

Ren stands, feeling vastly below Hux’s league. He’s filthy, unshaven, bruised and beaten. While Hux is clean, hair styled to perfection, outfit tailored to his petite figure. “You look good. Very good,” he murmurs, longing eyes raking over his form.

He's not proud of his behavior last night. He was dangerously close to allowing sex with Hux, sex where Hux would seemingly be participating with Ben, completely oblivious to the truth that is Ren. It wouldn't be right. Though it's not as if what he's been doing as Ben is right in any manner of speaking.

“Thank you,” Hux smiles, because he looked nice on purpose. He wore clothes that he thought Ben would like, because not only does he want to invite Ben to his work festivities, but it’s a remarkable feeling to wake up to someone who he wants to look nice for. He also slipped on Ben’s bracelet. He’d never take it off if he could. It’s no secret Ben had stopped him last night from going further than kisses because of his inexperience. Despite the bruise to his pride, he’s determined.

So Hux gets on with extending an invitation to his college's festival. Hux warms at Ben's congenial surprise. “It's a bit later today. We could ride into town together and while I work, you could keep me company at my desk, and afterwards we can head to the festival together...and I swear this sounded less lame in my head,” Hux groans, cursing his foolishness.

But Ben is on his side. He takes his hand and kisses his knuckles. “I look like an utter mess. I'd hate to be an embarrassment.”

It takes a heartbeat for Hux to spin on his heel for his house, without explanation. A few minutes pass and Hux rejoins him with something that resembles a razor. But Hux hands him something from his wrist first. A hair tie.

“It's Marin’s, but he'll live,” Hux snorts, ogling how handsome Ben looks in a low ponytail.

“I'm not so sure,” Ren says, but he can't say no to Hux. He most definitely can't say no when Hux approaches him with the electric razor to trim the moustache and beard from his jaw.

When Hux reveals the clean-shaven man underneath, his heart ricochets like errant blaster fire. Boldly, he kisses Ben’s freshly shaven skin. “How's this feel?” he asks, low and penetrable.

Ren runs his fingers over his clean skin, specifically the part where Hux pecked his pretty lips. “Feels incredible.”

“So now you have no excuse not to come. Unless you find you have something better to do today,” he challenges playfully.

Ren answers with a kiss to Hux’s high cheek. “I'm ready when you are.”

Hand in hand, they make for Hux’s speeder and into town. Hux is so lucky to have met Ben. It
almost seems far too good to be true.

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Marin debates going home after school like Hux demanded, but he's far too disgusted with his father to begin with. So he heads to Lis's house, uncaring of whatever punishment Hux will spin.

“He's probably with Ben. Ren. Whoever,” Lis tells him while brushing his hair with her ivory comb. She likes brushing Marin’s hair as if he were a priceless, ornamental doll. His hair is light, soft and wavy in contrast to her dark, curly, cloudlike frizz. She sits on her bed with Marin between her dangling legs, on the floor, back turned.

Lis’s hands in his hair are a soothing pet and tug. “If he is, then I'll have another excuse to pummel his ass.”

“So you beat on both of your dads?”

Marin stiffens. Ren is not his father. He's the beast who impregnated Hux and lives to this day like a demon sent to torment him. “Ren means nothing to me. I have no qualms with rearranging his face with my fists,” he grovels, feeling Lis’s wince at his colorful mental picture. “And I would never hurt Hux,” he continues, less fervent, like he doesn't believe his own words.

“I know you wouldn't. Not on purpose, anyway.”

Just when Marin turns to argue, Naedie cracks the bedroom door open. She glares accusingly at her daughter and pushes the door ajar, then leaves. Lis scoffs, and shouts an overdramatic “my bad!”

“What was that about?” Marin mutters once they're alone.

“Mom’s enacted an open-door policy when you're over.”

“What?”

“It's not like she doesn't trust us. She goes on and on about how if you got me pregnant, my life would be the one that would be ruined rather than yours.”

Rather than incredulity, Marin withers with shame. Not that he's attracted to Lis. He's never been attracted to anyone. Whether it's because he's too young or just not wired for it, he doesn't care.

It's the fact Naedie has shone the same light upon him as the sickly light that is Kylo Ren, a selfish user who doesn't care if he leaves someone with his mess and burden of abuse.

“Take it easy. She's just covering her bases. That's what we Calrissians have to do, or the universe will find some way to make us pay for it,” she says. She bends to her side table for some hair bands. Marin knows what's coming next. Rows of braids. Lis finds it fun, as she does most things, really.

Marin sighs, surrendering. “Just don't make them too tight. Seren and Taran will have a ball if I can't take these out before I get home.” Her resounding snicker is music to his too-big ears.
Ren thumbs down a datapad reader with a book on the fine art of culinary lighting its face, periodically looking up at Hux at his desk. His shift is short today, as all the school patrons, students and faculty alike, will be heading down to the arena level for the institution’s celebrations. Hux told him he never found the courage to attend in the past.

An objectively handsome man Hux takes his fourth trip to the counter to speak with Hux, to see him smile his curt service smile. When the flirting man finally leaves, Hux leers in his direction. Like he was just waiting to see what kind of jealous reactions Ren had. Hux passes him a smirk from the distance, and Ren can no longer stay away.

“You know that guy?” Ren asks once he's at Hux's desk. Gods, he'll never get over the surreality of Hux governing a library from behind a desk on a swivel chair.

“I think he's a professor here.”

“It looked like you knew him.” Must he sound so insecure? “So, what did he want?”

Hux shrugs. “Something about his wife being off-planet for the next few days and he wanted me to come over after the festival.”

At Ben’s confused sputtering, Hux breaks character. “Look at you. You're so gullible. He was just asking about the archives,” he laughs, titillated at his deviousness.

Embarrassment flushes Ren’s face. He can't help but be insecure, after the years they spent apart. “It's not hard to believe. You're easily the most attractive person here.”

“Ben, you flatter me.” Hux wriggles in his chair. Ben knows just how to talk to him, to look at him like there's no one else in the room.

His shift finishes with his routine reshelving of the books. Patient as ever, Ben waits for him at his chair and stands when Hux offers him his hand. They don't let go when Hux leads them outside to the lower level where the event takes place. It's as if they're a unit, Hux realizes, arm in arm like newlyweds.

The crowd thickens with students and staff of all ages and creeds. To men like Ren and Hux, crowds are unnerving. But as if they were the perfect allies they gather strength to face public scrutiny and chaos through the link of their clasped hands. Thankfully the arena is outdoors, and it's a warm, beautiful day, sky spotting with clouds in the way it often does when the promise of rain is staved off for the evening.

They decide on lunch first. The festival is also a showcase for local restaurants and caterers, and Hux lets Ben decide on where they'll eat. Ben chooses a booth with fried noodles lathered in sauces and meats and vegetables that smell delectable. They choose matching servings that Ben pays for and carries on a tray to a picnic table on the edge of the event. The school building's rear face is decorated with laser light projections to aid the fun freedom of the atmosphere, a stage showcasing the school’s musical talents a booming bass in the distance.

It's quite possibly the largest meal Hux has had in years. He eats every last bite, smiling and hanging on each of Ben’s turns of phrase.

“My school experience was nothing like this,” Hux says after he tops off the fruit infused soda
water Ben ran off to get for him mid meal. “The only celebrations we had were when we graduated. And even those were dull.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean.” Ren had never finished school, on account he murdered his entire class. He's not sure Hux would take a liking to that part of himself just yet. “How's Marin in school?” he asks, because no matter how he lies and deceives Hux, he'll never be able to hide his love for him and their family.

“He's bored with it. I know he's just doing it to get out of the house, though.” Hux’s chest echoes hollowly as it often does when his son’s upbringing is involved. “Can I tell you something?”

Ren nods, because of course he can.

For a heavy moment, Hux struggles with what he aches to say. Across the table, Ren waits patiently. “He hates me,” Hux finally confesses. “I know he hates me. I can see it in his eyes.”

Shaken, Ren bores into him. “That's not true.” It's the farthest from the truth. *It's not you he hates.*

“I’m sorry. This is inappropriate,” Hux backpedals.

Ren braces for impact. “It’s alright. I can listen. If that's what you want.”

Hux cracks. “I wasn't there for him when he was young,” he confesses. “When I left the First Order, I was badly injured, and Marin brought us here so we could be safe. Before then, I have no idea where he was. But he wasn't with me.” Hux barely remembers life before Rhiannon because of his injury, and he and Marin have never discussed life before just as they’ve never discussed the scars marring Marin’s hands, but he knows he's spent years apart from his boy as imperatively as he knows a cardinal sin.

“Hux—”

“It's my fault he's the way he is. I thought that being here, I could make up for lost time, nearly a decade of it. But I've only made it worse. He'll never trust me or have any semblance of faith in me, let alone respect me. Our relationship—it's like he's playing along with a role but we both know it isn't real. It's all a game,” Hux wilts, ashamed of his failures. For his neglect of his son is his most tormented failure of them all.

“Look at me,” Ben implores. When Hux summons the strength, he's appalled to find bitter tears shining through Ben’s dark eyes.

The truth threatens to claw up his throat by his sheer vehemence at seeing Hux devolve like this, to doubt their son’s love in any way. “Marin does not hate you. He may yell at you until he's blue in the face, call you names, disagree with everything you say, profess that he loathes you. But you're his father. There isn't anything you could do to make him hate you.” It takes every fiber of hope to maintain the belief regarding himself.

Ren takes Hux’s fists into his calming hands, thumbs massaging the balmy palms. “I spent years believing that I hated my parents. And I did something to them that I could never take back. And when I stood among the wreckage, I was alone. It was my mother who took me in with open arms.”

Hux unravels under Ben’s confession. “What about your father?”

Time seems to stand still. Seemingly, Ren blips back in time to that fateful moment. The blinding blue that squandered every breath as his father disappeared into the bowels of Starkiller.
“I would give anything to tell him how sorry I am for everything I took from him,” Ren says somberly. Hux gasps. On some level beyond them both, he understands.

“Ben, I don't know what I would do if you hadn't come into my life,” Hux breathes. His stomach full of food, sated and calm, his heart full of adoration and longing for everything Ben can give him.

“Likewise.” Every tear shed, every ounce of heartache proves to have been more than worth it, so long as he has Hux across the table, hand in hand. He smiles to lighten the mood. “And Marin is a teenager. He's not really hardwired to be the pinnacle of obedience.”

Hux laughs painfully and pinches the space between his eyes. “Fuck, don't remind me. It's excruciating.”

“You're not the first or last parent to think they're doing everything wrong. And definitely not the first to make mistakes.”

Hux smirks, chin in hand. “You should charge for these sessions. You'd make a killing.”

Ren bows his head and chuckles, feeling light. “Your money's no good here.”

Gleefully, Hux springs back into action. By now their stomachs have settled, and Hux resumes their hand holding. “Don't make fun of me for suggesting this, but—”

Whatever Hux is about to suggest is canceled out by his groan of indignation when a syrupy cup of frozen dessert topples from a passerby’s tray and down his back, assaulting him with viscous, sugary filth. The perpetrators gawk an apology and offer to help him clean up.

“It's fine,” he grates, although it clearly isn't. He and Ben were supposed to play those rudimentary arcade games but there's no way he can stand another second of this muck down his back! His shirt will most definitely require professional cleaning.

Of course, Ben dutifully leaps to his aid with a wad of napkins and a glare to the retreating backs of the clumsy pair. “Want me to punch them out for you?”

“That won't unsully my shirt,” Hux groans, grimacing at the stickiness. As much as he would like to finish their outing, he can't stand to walk around sugar dipped like a popsicle. “Let's just try to squeeze out of here without getting anything else on us.”

Ren doesn't want to leave. Heart racing, he makes Hux an offer. “Nonsense. Let's get you in a 'fresher and clean you up. You can take my shirt.”

As much as Hux would love the idea of wearing Ben’s shirt and seeing Ben shirtless again, he's not keen on the idea of other people ogling Ben’s musculature. And since the bruise on his jaw is still enormously purple, Marin’s boot prints on Ben’s gut probably will cause some sort of scene. “I wouldn't want to impose.”

“Please, I'm offering. Besides, I have an undershirt.”

How could Hux refuse? “Alright. This way,” he leads, eager to rid himself of his sticky shirt.

In the refresher, they find themselves alone. Hux uses this opportunity to peel off his sullied shirt. He suddenly flushes, vulnerable under Ben’s stare.

Ben appears to understand. “Why don't you go and take it off in a stall and I'll pass you wet paper
towels,” he tries. “And my shirt.”

Good idea. Hux swallows, rushing into the safe privacy of the stall. Not only is he nervous about Ben seeing him shirtless due to the nature of shirtlessness, but Hux has his unruly scars from his pregnancies. Stretch marks ripple low and permanent, and his improperly healed surgical scar stripes ugly and apparent. And he isn't fit. He's not over or underweight, but his muscle definition is nearly unnoticeable and his soft, doughy pallor overwhelming and feminine. Vanity does not become him, but Ben is so incredibly athletic and defined, he can't help but shrink at the thought of Ben casting any sort of judgement on him.

Hux calls for a wet towel, and Ben passes some over the stall door. Miraculously, Hux is able to slough through the gunk with relative ease, even the hard to reach spot between his shoulder blades. Hux flushes at the thought of having to ask Ben for assistance.

Ben passes over his shirt, warm and smelling of sea salt. He tugs his arms through the sleeves. As he expected, he swims in the dark fabric, even with the buttons snapped on tightly and the collar bound high. At least he has plenty of room for his hands.

He swings open the stall to show his approval when he's affronted with the near see-through fabric of Ben's tank top. He can make out his nipples, the mottling scars, Marin’s bruises, his impeccable strength coiled in every muscle. So what if he's staring. Who wouldn't stare?

“Is this alright?” Ren leers at how his button up dwarfs Hux like a robe. He's glad he threw on his tank or his plan would have fallen through. He supposes he could have purchased a tee shirt at one of the festival's booths, but then he wouldn't have Hux ogling him like a prize. It's a foolish, selfish thought.

Hux chews his lip, forcing his eyes to meet Ben’s. “It's much more comfortable. Thank you.”

They end up tossing Hux's ruined shirt, having no interest in toting it around while they resume their fun. Hux tugs Ben through the crowd where the arcade games are set up. Maybe Ben will win him a prize, or better yet, he'll win something for Ben.

Hux takes an empty stall to a simulation blaster firing range type exercise from his Academy days and stress relief while on duty. Hux remembers long years of stress and anxiety on the Finalizer, unforgiving and unrelenting. His tour there was different than anything before. He's long since attributed the plagued memories to the burden of power, and the ever-present race against failure. But this game here, with Ben, is a simple game, and Hux masters the fictional foe with immaculate precision. Hux obliterates every gundark and nondescript masked sentinel on the screen, blood pulsing a lethal high. The game is defeated and Hux turns out grin mischievously from ear to ear as a few onlookers whoop and holler.

“Color me impressed,” Ben laughs. “They didn't stand a chance.”

The booth volunteer awards Hux with his prize. It's a stuffed animal. A whale, to be exact. Green-blue and beautified with soft and fuzzy faux fur. Hux eyes the stitched in logo of the South Greendole Aquarium on the stuffed pet’s side. The aquarium that his little girls had only gotten to visit once because of Marin’s belligerence. Hux tames the aching memory.

He smiles. He's with Ben now, wearing his shirt and winning stuffed animals and having fun. He hugs the whale with his arm, already excited for the next game. “Want to give it a go?”

“And embarrass myself in front of my date? No thank you,” Ren laughs, before he realizes what he's admitted. Hux and Ben are dating, while Ren is calculating every move not to be found out.
Hux noticed his admission, too. His heart soars. Yes, he supposes they are dating. “How about that one? It's a bit more physical.”

Across the way looms a tall strength testing game. There’s a mallet, a platform for where to swing the mallet, and a light up display to show how close the players can launch the little mechanical bulb to the bell up top. Hux smirks, already convinced Ben can ring the bell.

“You trying to get me to break my back?” Ren laughs.

“Shut up. It'll be fun. Plus, everyone will see how strong you are and how lucky I am.”

The roguishness glittering in Hux’s eyes tells Ren that the decision has already been made for him.

Ben already has several fans, mostly women, when he makes his polite approach to the game’s host. As much as Hux can’t blame them, from Ben's delectable form exposed in his tank top, to his dark hair tugged back into a low, wavy ponytail, he'd prefer it if they kept their eyes and comments to themselves.

Loosening his joints with a few stretches, Ren bends to grip the mallet. It's heavy enough to aid his hit, but light enough to keep the swing fluid. He raises the mallet like an executioner’s ax and slams the target hard, sending the bulb close to the mark, but not quite. The small crowd cheers, having seen several mediocre tries so far to match his superior one. He immediately spots Hux, so radiant under the warm sun. He appears to be pleased.

But Ren wants to give Hux a show. “I can hit the bell this time. Stand back,” he warns whoever is behind him, and swings the mallet high and threatening. He pictures Hux’s swelling pride and titillation, his smile and his laugh. The sounds he makes when he's irritated, his flaming passion, how full he is of life now that he's made a home here. How Ren would do whatever it takes to be with him forever, until they age into dust.

The bell rings loudly and the crowd goes wild. Hux cheers freely like a schoolkid, and propels himself to Ben’s side.

“That was amazing,” he pants. He’s never seen such sheer power in someone's form. Ben’s eyes leer in mirth and he accepts his prize. It's a kicking ball, green and black markings comprising its impervious skin.

“I'm happy to have impressed you.” Ren pins the ball under his arm like a flaunting athlete. He supposes he is.

Arm in arm, Hux and Ren weave through the other games. A hoop-toss that's more fun to watch than play, a water slide ride mentioned for large children and teens, more shooting games of various difficulties, and an aisle of virtual reality play ranges. All in all, it's been a full day.

Hux’s legs are shaky from the excitement of the evening as they make for the exit. He doesn't bother asking Ben to walk home. If Marin has any issues with him giving Ben a ride, he can take it up with him. At Ben’s campsite, he kisses him goodnight. The clouds have gotten dense to the point where rain is inevitable, but Ben assures him it'll be alright, and he can return the shirt whenever is convenient. Ben had also given Hux the ball for his children, saying that he’d probably only use it for a pillow anyway.

At home, Hux greets his daughters with a smile.

“Did you buy us toys?” Seren asks, and Taran is too transfixed at the new toys that she doesn't think to criticize her sister’s forwardness.
“These are actually prizes. I won the whale and Ben won the ball. And we decided to give them both to you because you both are such good listeners.”

“You won them? In games?” Taran loves games.

“I did a shooting game and Ben did a hammer game. You should have seen him hit that hammer. He looked like a superhero.” A gorgeous, godlike superhero in that flimsy little tank top.

Aems walks in, a basket of freshly cleaned laundry warm in her hands. “Sounds like you two had fun.” She's always happy to hear her son living, laughing, and loving.

Hux is about to expound on his terrific afternoon, when a glaring omission leaves their house one family member short. “Is Marin still at school? Is he staying late?”

“I dunno. You made it clear he is required to come home after school so I would assume so.”

“One would think,” Hux mutters. He'll give him thirty minutes. Anything more is grounds for additional punishment.

After an hour, Hux finally caves and stamps out a message on his comm to Marin’s contact information. Where are you? Hux glares at the droves of sopping rain splattering the windows. Answer me immediately.

Hux all but growls at Marin’s unhurried reply. Decided to go to Lis’s.

You know damn well you were supposed to come home after school. This will only prolong your punishment. He can't believe this. Actually, he can, and that only makes it worse.

Marin’s response comes minutes later. Whatever.

Whatever. Whatever? Is he trying to drive him insane?

You better come home right now, Hux stabs into the comm. It shouldn't be that big of an issue, but Marin is willingly, enthusiastically showing insubordination.

Through the rain? Dangerous and cruel.

“Oh, I'll show you dangerous and cruel,” Hux growls.

“Bath time!” shout the girls. They grandmother helps them usher past him, careful not to jostle him. Hux grimaces and initiates a voice call, now that he's alone.

It goes directly to voicemail. Unbelievable. This isn't over, Hux sends, and Marin’s resounding lack of reply simultaneously breaks his heart and his patience. Hux swallows his pride and starts a pot for tea.

He goes through the motions, heating the water in a matter of seconds using their state of the art stove top, divvying up his dry tea leaves in its steeper, and watching the water blacken with flavor as he stirs his concoction. He checks his comm. Nothing.

Teenager. He's a teenager. That's what Ben said. He'll grow out of it as if it were worn denims. Hux scorches his tongue on his tea, numb to feeling it. He really wishes he were with Ben right now.

Why can't he be with him? Because of Marin? Marin doesn't care about his feelings or respect him in the least. Why should he have to bend and twist for his son’s benefit, when Ben is just sitting there, waiting for Hux to scoop him right up?
Hux sets his tea in the sink and makes for the glass backdoor. The glass runs like its melting from the torrential rain which Ben is likely sitting in and freezing to death. Hux marches out into the storm, effectively soaking the shirt on his back, Ben’s shirt that he never bothered to change out of.

Ren turns his face up to the falling sky, flat on his back. The rain is chilly but pleasantly so like a refreshing summer shower. Abie agrees with as much down the beach, chasing the lapping waves without a care in the world.

“This is relaxing to you?!” he hears Hux shout over the wind and splattering sand. Ren laughs, because it’s only been an hour or so since they parted.

“You should try it. It’s cheaper than a spa.”

“I don’t go to spas.” Ben’s tank top is soaked and completely see-through enough to make out every outline, every curve, every bulge. His heart rate quickens a jumpy, nervous rhythm.

“Did you forget something?” Ren asks, not unkindly, genuinely curious. The unintentional irony of his words is a bitter mockery.

“I wanted to invite you inside. For the storm.” Hopeful, tentative. Possibly far too eager, but it’s not as if he’s the epitome of coolness when it comes to Ben.

Ren stands to his feet and his dog trots over, ready for their next excursion. “I appreciate the offer, I truly do. But it’s best I’m out here at a distance.” That would surely be crossing a line, even with Hux’s enthusiastic offer.

“Marin isn’t home, and even if he was, I wouldn’t care,” Hux presses, defensive this time. “I want you here and I don’t care what he has to say about it.” The rain falls harder, and Hux is soaked head to toe. His hair is a mess from its unified coif and Ben’s oversized shirt clings to his lean frame.

Ben steps close, and he finds his eyes. This man is always so incredibly intense with everything he says and does. “I care.”

A little ashamed, Hux starts up. “He doesn’t control me.”

“I know. I know that. But I won’t be complicit in adding a rift between you two. I—care about you both far too much for that.” Ren is dangerously close to the surface of the years-hidden truth.

Overcome by Ben’s admission, Hux finds his resilient determination. “There’s already been a rift since before you came here. Hells, since before we all came here.” The rain slows to a steady drizzle, and his sodden clothes course a chill to his bones. “If not the house, let me take you to the storage house.”

“Hux—”

“Stop arguing with me so we can get out of this fucking rain!” Hux shouts, smiling this time. Ben laughs and finally caves, slinging his pack over his shoulder. Hux snatches his hand and sprints to the littler house. There’s a small vestibule leading to a room stacked high with crates from his mother’s past, and a modest cot fit for a traveler. Hopefully Ben will find it accommodating enough to stay for the remainder of his mission, and not just for the storm.

Hux sighs in relief when the small porch to the house shields them from the rain. The code for the latch is an obscure series of numbers his mother set up the day she bought the property. This annex house hasn’t been used for much since. Aems preferred the five of them to sleep under one roof.
As soon as the door slides open, Hux beelines for the climate control. He activates a temperate heat for their stay. He wants Ben to be comfortable, for him to want to stay here.

Ren inspects their surroundings. Through the outer vestibule is a seriously small storeroom, lined with organized, dustless crates. There’s a lone window haloing small succulent plants, the only signs of life from the room, save for the wrinkly cot. It looks far cozier than his patch of sand down the beach. But the room is far too compact for two people to lounge comfortably, and Ren as trouble squeezing by Hux while keeping the parts of him he wants to brush against him with, to himself. Abie is wise enough to guard the vestibule.

“Comfortable,” Ren nods, shrinking to the side. He pointedly avoids Hux’s eyes, far too aware of the privacy this little house awards them. Behind every blink of his eyes, Ren can see memories of Hux underneath him, whining and flustered. He swallows, silently begging Hux not to pick up any of these subtleties.

“At least you and your dog can get dry,” Hux says, eyes above the glistening skin of Ben’s chest. He envisions it close to his, exchanging heat.

“Thank you.” Ren is grateful for the shelter, always is, for Hux gives him shelter in more ways than one. Hux’s eyes dance, then he collects himself. Like he’s accomplished something.

Ren goes to set his bag on a crate, only to have its contents lob over the side from the clumsy shift. Naturally, some of his most precious possessions join his damp extra clothes on the floor, and Ren hurries to hide them from Hux’s view.

“Please, let me,” Ren urges, but Hux is much faster. Hux collects the offending object, a whittled piece of wood carved to the likeness of a person. Too embarrassed to come up with an excuse, Ren offers the truth.

“What is it exactly?” Hux asks, lips tugging into a titillated smile. Not only is Ben a charming, daring pilot and the best company he’s ever shared, an incredible kisser, a caring sweetheart, with immaculate physique and a mesmerizing gaze—he’s an artist. A craftsman of something as mundane and fascinating as a little wooden person. The little person has lines of squiggles for curls. The body isn’t formed all the way. It must be a work in progress.

“It’s a part of a series,” Ben tells him, reluctantly holding out the other wooden sculptures, all for Hux’s personal scrutiny. He takes the offering. He gasps, immediately recognizing what these are.

In his hands are representations formed in the likeness of his three children. The little Seren and Taran pieces are near identical, same heights and patterns for their wavy hair and slight bodies. The Marin one is far taller, and it captures his wavy hair as well as his wide ears, his masculine form. Hux cradles and covets each creation as if they were the original three.

“They aren’t finished yet,” Ren says gruffly. What if Hux thinks they’re strange or inappropriate? “I was gonna give them to you when I was finished. Marin saw his. He wasn’t too impressed.” He’s babbling, but Hux hasn’t said anything. Hux turns the carvings over, inspecting every cut.

“Ben...I don’t know what to say.” Electric, chaotic sentiment bubbles up in his throat. Carefully, he sets the Marin sculpture atop a crate lest he injure it. The girls’ sculptures are more contiguous in structure, but he lays them down just as gingerly.

“They haven’t really taken too much time. Making things really helped me when I was younger, and it still helps me. Especially when the stars keep me awake,” Ren confesses. “Maybe—I dunno if he’d be into it—probably not,” Ren stammers, “Maybe Marin might take up some kind of hobby
like that, besides exercising. Like weaving or painting, or clay work. I dunno. Something to think about."

Hux finds his eyes, and Ren melts at the vulnerability shining through. Before he can talk his way out of his gift—as if he’d ever want to, but he fears he must for the sake of boundaries—Hux crowds in his space and steals an appreciative kiss. Ren groans into his striking warmth, his velvety smooth tongue so clumsy yet bold.

At Ben’s enthusiastic reciprocation, Hux gives into his urge and pushes their chests together, so close and so hot in the compactness of the little house. Large hands find his waist, tight and kneading at his slight sides, and Hux brings his to Ben’s jaw and scalp. Everything from Ben’s sweet-slick tongue in his mouth, to the dampness of his opaque hair under his fingertips, to the breaths they rob each other of, will be forever ingrained in Hux’s sensory memories, no matter how long Ben is here.

Hopefully, Ben is here at his side for a good long while.

Blood pools hotly in Ren’s cock. It’s inevitable, with Hux against him like this. Wet and passionate and needy. Against the command of logic and far too touch starved to resist, Ren brazenly drops his hands to Hux’s fabric-taut ass, massaging the malleable flesh and Hux gasps in shock at his ministrations. He shouldn’t be allowing this to continue, he shouldn’t. So, Ren withdraws the salacious act, suffocating in their now motionless kiss.

Immediately, Hux receives his negative signals. “Why?” he wrenches out. He doesn’t want to be denied any longer.

Ren can’t come up with a real reason. “There’s—so much at stake here,” he says stupidly. “That’s shit,” Hux snaps. He softens when Ben wilts in shame. “All there is to it is that I want you. And if I’m guessing correctly, you want me, too.”

“It may not be the right time.” They’ve never been together at the right time.

Hux considers this, and a bitter grimace tugs on his flushed face. “You know, your nobility used to be endearing. Now it’s just bloody annoying.” But Hux knows why a man like Ben would stave off something he wants. It’s not for the sake of it. “I may be inexperienced but I can make my own decisions regarding it. It’s exhausting being treated like a pet for my perceived own good.”

There’s no denying Hux is in his right mind. He can make his own choices, whether it’s moving along with ‘Ben’ or deciding what’s right for himself and presently, where the two coincide. It’s Hux’s prerogative. It would be wrong to take it from him. Ren thumbs Hux’s lip and delves in for a meaningful kiss, alerting him he’s been heard.

Hux trembles against Ben’s touches, their knees slotted together. He’s so relieved, terrified Ben’s caved. Brazenly, bypassing his piquing fear, he makes for the hem of Ben’s mess of a tank. “We should,” he swallows, “get you out of these wet clothes.”

Mindlessly, Ren shakes his head in a nod, and helps Hux loosen the useless fabric. He should not be allowing this, but who would he be to deny Hux now? With Ren’s maneuvering, Hux’s thin fingers roll the tank up his chest and past his arms. He takes in every inch of him, every freckle, every bruise, every scar, every obscene muscle. “Your scars are fascinating,” Hux breathes, tracing his fingertips down the bumpy, malformed skin on his shoulders and arms. “Do they each have a story?”
“Unfortunately,” Ren murmurs. Their history isn’t something Hux should know. Ren finds Hux’s jugular with his thumb, marveling at his erratic pulse point. “We can’t all maintain a pristine slate of our skin,” Ren smirks, a challenge. Hux truly is an immaculate creature. He’s barely aged a day since they’d parted. And even if Hux was malformed, mangled by scars and physical ailments, he’d still be the most radiant man Ren’s ever seen.

An inward resentment tempers Hux’s lust. “My scars would disgust you.”

“There’s nothing about you that would ever disgust me,” Ren vows, earnest.

Hux unbuttons his shirt, Ben’s shirt, from top to bottom. Slowly, achingly, he strips his top bare to reveal his secrets. He palms his abdomen, the gnarled scar striping low and obvious, haloed by a web of stretch marks.

“I had carried each of my children in me, and I don’t know why I hadn’t gotten the scar healed properly, but it’s a part of me now. And before you ask, yes, I have a cock,” Hux forces out. “My children were a part of an experiment. But my memories of everything are hazy, but one thing I’m sure of is that medical intervention is the only way I can get pregnant.” Hux hangs himself open and bare for Ben’s dissection.

Containing himself, Ren looks down at the scar only briefly. He knows for a fact that the scar is his fault. His final flirtation with the dark side had caused Hux to neglect his recovery after the twins were born, after he stole them from his safety. He knows Hux cannot bear a child again. Ren had ensured it when he tore out the womb he forced inside of him, a lifetime ago.

As if it were his only imperative, Ren looms in Hux’s space, consuming every bit of him. He cradles his perfect jaw, his perfect cheekbones. “You’re incredible,” he professes, because Hux must understand.

Questions bloom on Hux’s tongue. *You’re not confused? Disturbed? Sickened by the unnaturalness of it all?* But Ben answers them with his mouth, his hands painting swaths on his bare, untouched flesh. It's as if Ben knows his body better than he, with every alarming reaction he elicits from his bones. Ben’s untamed, teething possessively at his neck and shoulder, vice gripping his hips like he's afraid he's gonna make a run for it.

Hux moans his first of many uncontrollable noises as Ben paws at him, everywhere but his tenting cock like it were some forbidden zone. Maybe he's waiting for him to make the first daring move. So Hux does. He attempts to grind their erections together, and succeeds, fanning the flames between them.

Ren groans into his mouth, nipping his bruised lip. Hux’s clever hand levers between his legs at his prize. Fuck, it's been so long.

“Ben,” he breathes, overwhelmed.

Ren’s gaze darkens, a perverse thrill coursing through him at Hux’s belief this is his first time. This is their do-over, he supposes. He wants so badly to make this good for him.

But for Hux, for all intents, this is his first. Hux may not know who he truly is, what they are to each other. But he does know, he *understands* him on a level beyond comprehension. “Are you sure?”

Rapid fire, Hux nods. “I'm ready.”

Ren’s eyes flutter shut as Hux boldly sweetens the deal with a rubbing of his heel along his cock.
“Are you sure?” Ren repeats, rendered stupid from Hux’s pets.

Thankfully, Hux doesn’t brush it off. “I’ve thought about it. A lot.”

“What have you thought about?” Ren bores into Hux’s blackened irises. He can’t get enough of him.

“What it feels like to be with someone I desire, someone who desires me,” Hux says, a near whisper. “Someone who I’d entrust to hold me—”

“Hold you?”

“Hold me down,” Hux babbles. “And find their way inside me, I wouldn’t care if it hurt—”

“Fuck.”

—and they’d make me theirs, again and again. And I’ve thought about that being you, Ben. I want it to be you.”

Overwhelmed, Ren accosts Hux by his hips, all but slamming him into the nearest wall. He teethes at the paleness of his throat. “Lie down on your back,” Ren pants into his flushed ear, electrified when Hux immediately complies.

Ren nearly curses up a storm. They are without any sort of lubricant, save for saliva, but Ren wouldn’t dare risking hurting Hux, despite his claim of pain tolerance. Ren glares around the room for a miracle. He lands on the succulents by the window. Smirking in triumph, he returns his attention back to Hux.

Atop the cot, Hux writhes in anticipation. Ben looms over him like he’s a prize to be won, but when he braces his arms and legs over him, gone is his carnal hunger. Behind Ben’s eyes simmers another hunger, where Hux imagines he’d be content to nestle in his chest for eternity. The dichotomy of the two sides of Ben is striking. He feels as if he’s not looking at Ben at all, but an entirely different person.

“You’re still so beautiful,” Ren tells him, uncaring of his phrasing. He mops a hand down Hux’s chest, marveling his staccato, shallow breaths. “May I touch your scar?”

The fact Ben would ask makes him widen his legs a bit for room. He nods, speechless. Ben’s touch is tender, reverent, loving in its nature. He’s never known a touch like it, in such an intimate, private place.

Ren graduates to warm, placating kisses on the rippled flesh, as if he could pour every ounce of his bottomless love into them. Satisfied, Ren mouths lower to the waistband of Hux’s damp pants. He nibbles his erection through the fabric to make his thighs shake.

An unspoken question, Ren unclasps the pants, and an unspoken answer, Hux arches his hips to free his bottom. When Hux is decadently nude, Ren takes his hardness in a gentle fist. Like he said, still so beautiful.

“Ah,” Hux squirms, his knees falling to the side. He’s an opening for Ben to enter, in body and heart, and soul if he believed in that kind of thing. Being with Ben makes him harbor that belief. Maybe they were meant to meet, to bond, to become one.

Hux shakes as Ben releases him and climbs above him to reach the window. He laughs at Ben’s ingenuity. Count on his roguish Resistanceman to tap lubricant from a plant.
Graciously, the succulent oozes a clear, odorless gel, a perfect consistency for Ren’s plan.

Between Hux’s thighs, Ren brushes a careful finger against his opening, the tight, nearly virginal tension there both alarming and exciting him.

“Don't be afraid to tell me to stop. The last thing I wanna do is hurt you,” Ben tells him, eyes dark and full of meaning. Hux nods. His cock throbs at the sight of Ben low, preparing to enter him.

Sparing little more, Ren drives a steady finger into Hux’s warmth, the slick, delectable tightness of him. He aims for the nerves inside, his gelled fingertip milking out confused shakes and whimpers.

“How good?” Ben asks, like he can’t tell already. Hux nods, heavy lidded and gasping.

Hux gnaws at his bottom lip as Ben adds another finger, every move burning at the crux of him. A pawing hand jerks him with maddening friction. He's never known a gentle, thorough touch like this before. It hurts as Ben fucks him with more fingers. But his body accepts him as if there were no other purpose for it. Ben was always meant to find him and get close to him, and take him and make him his. Hux needs the burn. He needs it to burn more.

“Just relax,” Ren coos. It’s like they’re together again, truly together, where there isn’t a soul who could possibly remove this moment for them. Hastily, Ren strips off his pants and sets his erection free.

Hux gapes at it as he imagines the endless possibilities. After all, his is the first cock he's seen. It's an indulgent shape and substantial size, proportional to Ben's enormity. He feels loose and slick, and that feeling combined with the view of Ben’s enrapturing cock, makes him tremble and quake. Ben falls close atop of him once more to tongue at his neck, bumping their oversensitive hardnesses and panting into his flushed flesh.

Unable to resist the perfection of Hux’s ribbed, soft chest, Ren darts his spearlike tongue to a nipple, lapping at it and suckling at it into redness. Hux groans and spreads his legs high and expectantly, and Ren can no longer deny him. Sitting back on his thighs, Ren squeezes out some more of the gel from the succulent, and mops it over his cock. Hux’s slimmer, redder cock dribbles onto his stomach in unbridled anticipation.

Ren finds Hux’s hole with his dewy fingers. He cannot believe that he's allowed to do this with him, to join them in this way. The first time, they were on the run, with doom waiting for them on the other side. But now, all that waits for them is the possibility of a life together, where all the matters is how good he can make Hux feel. Ren anchors himself into him, achingly slow and steady as Hux’s body yields.

White knuckling through the searing stretch, Hux curls in on himself as Ben rearranges him from the inside. Ben bottoms out and bends low to bump their noses together.

“How goood?” he tells him, “breathe for me.” They stay like this for an aching moment, light headed from each other's hot air. Ben brackets his thick arm behind his neck, pinning him for maximum leverage. He moves his hips a slow rhythm for him to get used to being fucked and filled.

“Oh, fuck,” Hux groans as he gets lost in the feeling of being underneath and open, having the most private part of him stretched to the point of breaking, made for Ben’s pleasure. Ben grunts in his ear, clogging his senses with his heady pants.

Hux can't get pregnant like this, but Ben fucks him like he can, with drive and a purpose to claim
him, while being exceeding gentle and cautious at the same time. He can't get pregnant but for the first time, he wishes he could. Never in his life had he thought pregnancy would be erotic in the least, but the thought of Ben taking him and pumping him full of life, their union expressed in creation, makes him whimper with need. He claws at Ben’s shoulders, writhing under his thrusts.

“Fuck,” Ren strangles, slamming into him. Either he's good at his aim or he's just damn lucky, but his fucks are more than enough for Hux, who cries in ecstasy, whose arms and legs grip him like he’s about to disappear.

“Don’t leave me,” Hux gasps, completely out of control. All he knows is Ben has given him so much, enlightened his life beyond compare. He may be in love with him, but he doesn’t have anything to compare this kind of love to. It doesn’t make sense, but on some profound, star-high level, if he were truly in love, he knows in his heart he’s been in love with him for years. Ben can't leave. He'd be lost without him.

Like a blaster bolt to the back, Ren’s orgasm comes without warning. He pulses inside him with abandon, filling him unequivocally.

As Ben gapes above him, lost in his throes, Hux mewls, wide eyed and overwhelmed, and he locks Ben as though he dare not lose a single drop of his seed. Ben fondles Hux’s cock with his fingers and quaking abdomen until Hux comes, wanton and unhinged.

It's mesmerizing, Hux’s undoing. If there is a life beyond his devotion to Hux, it's unfathomable. Ren’s love, his unparalleled obsession with him, is impervious to the darkness, to the pressure of time and distance. Still seated inside of him, Ren tongues into his kiss swollen mouth, their stomachs come-slick against each other.

Ben eventually pulls out, and Hux closes his eyes to retain every sensation. He hadn't meant to confess that he didn't want Ben to leave him. Hux shivers as Ben finds his eyes.

“I'm not going anywhere,” he promises, sealing it with a kiss to Hux’s sweat tangled hair on his forehead. It's a vow he wishes was easy to keep.

Hux smiles softly and let's Ben coddle his side, before moving to grab his discarded tank top to swipe up their mess. Hux smirks, silently commending Ben’s ingenuity in making his first time work with just the materials around them. They tug the cot’s sheet over their bodies, Ben snug behind him.

Ren holds his love tightly, overwhelmed with simultaneous elation and haunting dread at what is to come once Hux wakes. For now, he breathes in Hux’s scent, praying to a deaf force for absolution.

Chapter End Notes
how it feels to finally post this chapter:
They wake before the sun does. Hux gasps at the immediate feeling of slick oozing from his sore, bruised bottom. He feels open and used, desirable and worthy. It's incredible.

When he rolls over, he is shaken to see Ben already awake, sitting up and mopping a hand over his eyes as if he'd been caught crying. The sorrow is gone in a flash, and Hux believes he could have imagined it.

“Is it morning already?” he asks, turning on his back. Maybe Ben isn't ready to talk about whatever ails him. Or maybe he really had imagined it. Ben answers with a coveted, reverent kiss.

“Almost. I hope you slept well.” Ren slept for several hours, his most restful in ages. But the last few moments before the sun he's spent in turmoil, when he woke up to meet his happiest self. But this can't continue. Not before having Marin come clean to him. And that, Ren might have to wait years for, if it'll ever happen at all.

“It feels like a bomb went off in my asshole, but other than that, I feel lovely,” Hux hums, laughing at Ben's utter mortification. “And I mean that in the best way possible.”

Ren can't help but laugh at Hux’s crassness. “I wasn't prepared for that. Your delivery. It was amazing.”

Hux sits up, leaning on an elbow. He eyes Ben’s bruised abdomen that's healing, albeit slowly. “Do you make a habit of bedding the charges of your missions?”

“Just the ones worth breaking the rules for.” And he's broken so, so many rules.

“So that's who your great love was? Someone you sweet talked along the way? “Great love?” Ben parrots.

Hux leans close, resting his face on the warmth of Ben’s chest. “The night we played your drinking game, you told me about your love. The one you wanted to marry.”

Ren brings a hand to the softness of Hux’s hair. Hux has always been the softest thing he ever touched. Transference. It’s how Ren imagined he’d fallen for him. Softness beneath a cold, lead shell, like calloused skin massaged into supple smoothness. Ren had welcomed his softness to seep into his heart, and it was inevitable.

“He wasn't a charge. Just someone who shared more than history with me.”

“What happened to him?”

Ren hesitates as if struggling to answer. Not only because the truth is bloody, obviously, but because he has to fabricate it. He chooses a middle ground. “We lost what we had because of the war. He's happier now without me. I was just making him miserable.”

This catches Hux’s interest. “Miserable?” he finds that surprising. Ben has never made him feel
anything of the sort. But then again, he’s only known him for a few fleeting weeks.

“I used to be...such a fucking asshole. I treated him like garbage, and never showed him I cared, and anytime I had, it was because it benefitted me. It's my own fault he left. He's better off with me as someone to forget,” Ren says, petting Hux’s slim, freckled shoulder. The truth paints the best lie.

Hux lays a palm flat on Ben’s chest to thumb his enormous collarbone. He smirks against his skin, needing to hear him smirk back. “So now I'm here to take you in when you proved yourself to be such a pitiful partner.”

Remarkably, Ren’s only response is amusement, “Lucky you,” Ren smiles.

“Lucky you, more like.” At Ben’s hum of approval, Hux moves in for a hot, heavy kiss. Ben’s tongue is stale from sleep, as he imagines his is as well, but this does little to dampen the fire inside him. Hux moans indulgently, appreciating every one of Ben’s enamored caresses.

Hux trails a hand down Ben’s chest. It's incredible how his hand is dwarfed across just one of Ben’s pectorals. He reaches lower to the swell of Ben’s cock, so strange under his fingertips.

With Ben’s help to retrieve the gel from the succulent plant, Hux manages to coax him into full hardness and slick him up. Ben’s weight in his hands is incredibly mesmerizing, so soft yet substantial in contrast to how it feels inside of him, burning and full. He moves his hand back and forth and pants into Ben’s groaning mouth.

Satisfied, Hux positions himself over Ben’s cock, either knee digging into the thin space available on the cot. Ben gropes his ass and guides him to his tip.

Ren loves how beautifully Hux’s body takes him. It's as if he was made to make love to, and the unhindered bliss tightening Hux’s features reveals that he knows so. Hux is still slick and open from last night. He opens for him in an embrace like no other, his lip teeth-scraped and rouged.

When Hux is fully seated on him, Ren tugs Hux down for a sultry kiss, mussing his hopelessly tangled red hair, cherishing every hum and whimper he coaxes from him. Impulsively, Ren slides his hand down Hux’s back to his ass, massaging the malleable flesh and delivering a spank.

Hux gasps, wide eyed. He begins to move in little rocking movements and Ben grips his hips to help him along. Hux makes these embarrassing noises as Ben's cock stirs up all the sensitive, needy places inside him. His thighs ache and Ben doesn't look nearly as overwhelmed as he knows he does, but Ben's looking at him in that intense, weepy way that he whimpers in bliss, reveling at his subjugation under Ben’s stare.

“You like this?” Ren asks huskily, boring into him. Hux’s immediate, desperate nod pushes every last one of his buttons. “I bet you could come like this. Just like this, without touching yourself.”

Hux whimpers in bliss because yes, he truly thinks he could come like this. Exhausting himself, laboring over Ben’s cock, even as Ben thrusts upwards to meet him halfway.

“Tell me you love it,” Ren groans. “Tell me you love this. You do, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me.”

“Fuck, yes,” Hux whines, against his will in a high and effeminate octave. “I love this. I love—I
love how you felt coming inside me, just filling me up—"

Ren seizes, gripping Hux by his spread-apart hips to comply with Hux’s whims, because it's unbelievable how much Hux boasting about being filled with his come turns him on. Ren gasps as Hux comes from being fucked and filled, his red, sensitive cock spurting up Ren’s chest and stomach.

Hissing at the expulsion, Hux flops to Ben’s side, numb from his overexertion. Whatever was left of his energy was zapped when Ben made him come just like he said he would. He's asleep within minutes, lips tugged into a soft smile as his sated body is engulfed in a warm embrace.

Later, not much later, Hux awakes to Ben’s soft hums in his ear, the prod of his immodest nose a not entirely unwelcome annoyance. He finds that he enjoys waking up aside someone still asleep. But despite his resolve, his bladder protests. And the sun has been shining for a few hours. It's time to face the weekend day. Thankfully, it doesn't take much to wake Ben.

“Good morning,” Hux murmurs, a restart of their day, reveling in the mundaneness of it. Ben kisses his ear, his jaw, whatever he can reach.

“We can't make this a habit,” Ben says, regret sinking his words. “Not without telling your family.”

“By family, you mean my little tormentor. My giant tormentor.”

“His approval is the most important.” Ren has no fucking idea how he's gonna get it, but he knows he must.

“And if he never gives it?” Hux sits up, haphazardly dressing in his clothes from yesterday. His pants are still damp from the rainstorm but he yanks them on to preserve his modesty for the twenty-pace trek back into his house.

Ren doesn't have anything to say. There's a terrifyingly exceeding chance Marin never will. But Hux, now dressed, answers for him. He squats on the edge of the cot, long every bit as defiant and stubborn as the time in his life when Ren fell in love with him. “I've got another idea.”

At Ben’s confusion, Hux slides over to his side, bringing a hand to Ben’s tangled hair. “We could do what we want because it's fun, and because we want to, and I'm not gonna let my son ruin this for us.” Can't Ben see how he makes him feel?

When Ben clearly isn't convinced, Hux shifts, a bit too desperately. “Marin doesn't have to know. It'll be our secret,” he tries, though the thought of lying to him, any more than he already is, sickens him.

Ren moves to brush Hux hand away, then takes his hand in his own, thumbing his soft, slim knuckles. “I know you don't mean that,” he murmurs. “His approval is what matters most.”


“He's—your child. You're supposed to make sacrifices, often difficult ones. Because you love him, even if he is the most stubborn and ridiculous adolescent.” Ren turns Hux’s palm over to pet mesmerizing circles. “I'm not saying we can't continue what we have. Just don't lie to him. You won't like what comes of it.”

Typical Ben. Sensible. Logical. Utterly, aggravatingly right. “At least come in the house with me.
You need a shower. And we'll tell him over breakfast. Deal?"

Ren's instinct tells him to shoot Hux down, but the earnestness and veiled vulnerability in Hux’s face has him bite his tongue. Hux is the oblivious, deceived one. Both Ren and Marin have been lying to him about their family, his history, the bloodline their children share. For years, Hux has been subjected to their son’s whims. Before then, Ren had taken every opportunity to manipulate and use him for years, even before Marin’s conception.

“Right after the shower, you'll tell him?” Ren asks, because he can't take lying to Marin about his and Hux’s renewed relationship. He'd rather take fifty beatings, fracture every bone than lie to him.

Maybe this is the push Marin needs. If Hux were to come clean about how he wants Ben in his life, maybe Marin would, too. But in his heart, he knows that it won't be that simple, not in the slightest.

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Marin wakes before Lis does, on her bedroom floor and with his hands strictly to himself, as Naedie would have it.

“Hey,” Marin whispers, prodding her shoulder. “I’m gonna head home. I'll comm you later.”

Lis mumbles something of a goodbye, and all but elbows Marin in the face and rolls on her side, scrunching the blanket up to her chin. Marin ends up sneaking out as soundless as possible. But he still manages to get flagged down by Naedie in the kitchen.

“Haven't seen you at the clinic,” is her greeting. Matter-of-fact, non-accusatory, like most of their exchanges.

He decides to spare her a conversation. After a night of disobeying his father, he's not terribly excited to show his face at home yet. Hux has many creative, persistent ways of making him pay for every time he defies him. “I didn't plan on returning. Nothing good came out of confiding in you before.”

She ignores his slight, or rather catalogues it for later inference. “Did something happen?”

“Ren won't mind his own, but other than that, nothing out of the ordinary.” Marin takes the offered cup of fruit. He doesn't hate Naedie or even dislike her. But it's been such a struggle to find it in himself to stomach uttering a full sentence to her. “Hux is...furious with me. He actually gave me a curfew, which I broke. But I couldn't stand being there knowing how angry Hux was. How he looks at me.” He's been looking at him like this for years. It wasn't until Ren returned that he realized.

“How does he look at you?”

Marin considers the question. It feels like their old chats. He supposes she can't help but shrink him. “Like he knows what I've done to him. Like he finds me to be...foul. A miscreant. Like he can barely stomach the sight of me.”

“A parent could never feel that way towards their child. Not even Leia Organa, I'm sure, even after everything that Kylo Ren had done to her.”
She's comparing him to Ren. Marin allows this. There's a clear connection, he sees. Marin's twisted and bleached Hux's memories whereas Ren murdered her love and soured her name, and betrayed her cause and becoming her enemy.

“It's just been so awful since Ren returned. Hux is infatuated with him without even knowing their shared history or his real name.” At the table, Marin stabs at his fruit. His eyes flicking to Han Solo’s grinning face on the family hearth. “And the worst part is, I can't keep him away from Ren without giving anything away. It's like, the more I tell him to stay away from 'Ben,' the more he gravitates towards him, just to spite me.”

Naedie divulges little from her calculative scrutiny. “You have got to start giving your father some slack. He's been through a lot of changes. Maybe it's time to repent. Apologize. Show him you're fighting so hard to protect him, not to hinder him.”

It all seems so simple—but this is Ren. Ren makes the rules change. Ren makes him want to dabble with the tempting darkness and rip apart everyone's minds, including Seren and Taran, to demolish Ren's taint and memory. The realization terrifies him.

He cannot allow Ren to best their bond. ‘Ben’ may be Hux’s friend and playmate, but Marin will always be infinitely more than that. Hux carried him in his womb. He rescued Hux from death and tragedy, as he did for his sisters.

He refuses to let Ren win this. Topping off his small breakfast in several determined chomps, Marin thanks Naedie for her insight. Maybe once he figures out how to defeat Ren, there will be a possibility he can start attending his therapy sessions again.

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Hand in hand, Hux leads Ben to the glass door. At Ben’s hesitation to cross the threshold, Hux tugs him inside with far more force than his stature allows. “Marin isn't home. I promise.”

“I don't think we should shower together, then,” Ren tries, anxiety goading. The last thing he needs is to be caught with his pants down.

“Relax. I can keep my hands to myself long enough for us to get all this off us,” he chuckles, referring to the crusted come pinching their skin under their wrinkled clothing. “Just through here. Don't wake the girls.”

Ren is carted through a hall with walls of framed holos, their cycles too fleeting for Ren to grasp any idea what they're of—his guess is of the girls as rowdy toddlers—until he’s brought to a neat yet lived-in room with not one bed, but three. Two little beds and one large enough for a man. The two beds are occupied by the twins. Hux, apparently, sleeps with them at the foot of his bed every night.

Hux sees the unease shift over Ben’s countenance at the sight of his snoozing girls. Like he's barged into something incredibly strange, unconventional. What kind of parent shares a room with his children, at their age, no less?

But criticism is the farthest from Ren’s feelings. He's simply so overwhelmed by the sight of his daughters in peaceful rest, the becomingness of their home, he can almost pretend he belongs here. That they've been a unit without hitch for years, long before the birth of their children and long
“I like to keep an eye on them. You can never be too careful,” Hux says, too defensively. “They're not particularly light sleepers. We'll be alright.” Is this all too much for a man like Ben? Sure, he liked the girls, had no issues in spending time with them. But to hint at what Hux’s life is full of, children and domesticity and familial responsibilities, might not be what Ben has in mind for a future, if he has one at all.

“I understand,” Ren says, taking it all in. His heart longs for such a blissful reward.

In the shower, Ren takes his time and wraps his arms around Hux’s thin frame, a cocoon of strength bracketing him from the deviltries of their world. The water cascades down their backs and Ren can't resist his possessive pets and paws to Hux’s skin as he washes him. Hux melts against his chest at the hands soothing his back, his chest, his ass and thighs.

Outside the refresher door, the twins wake rambunctiously, already arguing about something inane. Hux smirks at Ben’s concern. “They normally bicker like thieves right after they wake,” he murmurs into Ben’s cheek. “I'll finish up. Try to stall until I can get you some fresh clothes.”

Ren's protests are silenced by Hux’s fluid kiss. Each and every time they kiss, Ren savors the contact as if it were the last they'd ever share. Maybe this is the time he can tell Hux how he loves him, without having to explain how it's seemingly happened so quickly. As Ben, they've only been together for weeks, and they've been involved for a fraction of that time. Hux excuses himself while Ren is caught in his internal dispute.

In the kitchen, Aems is preparing a fresh breakfast for her grandchildren. Taran and Seren are at the table, comparing their little beauty marks and moles on their arms. Marin had come home just a few minutes after her Armitage hopped in the shower. When he finishes and joins then in the kitchen, Marin’s presence will surely tighten the room.

But Marin slinks to the table, looking not angry or irritated, but guilty. He greets Aems with a soft smile, an honest one at that. She frowns in a way her Armitage often does when Marin misbehaves, only this time, Marin is behaving congenially, sincere and pleasant. He even joins in on the mole comparing with his sisters. They all would appear to have a small selection of them. Marin’s are far lighter and more collaged like Armitage, whereas the girls have dark ones strewn far apart that they say look like ‘tiny, lost bugs.’

Seren and Taran much prefer their brother when he's calm and makes jokes. They are almost too afraid to mention what’s been bugging them since they saw Marie walk through the front door.

Of course, it's Seren who can't keep her mouth shut. “Marie, what's up with your hair?”

Marin blanches as he feels the top of his head. He must have fallen asleep with the braids in and forgot about them! “Um. Lis was playing with my hair.”

Delighted, his sisters laugh. “Your white boy hair. That's how she said it one time,” snickers Taran. “I like it. You should wear it all day.”

“I just might,” he smirks, which somehow makes them laugh harder. He catches his grandmother's chuckle, and decides the braids can be left. It's worth being laughed at if it means he's the one who made them laugh.

Hux, freshly showered, pads into the kitchen. He's a bit flustered as if he's been caught in the act, but not exactly unproud of his behavior. He kisses his mother and his daughters a silent good-
morning. Marin is left kiss-less. Hux barely looks at him.

“Nice of you to finally grace us with your presence,” Hux says as he passes Marin to brush by the laundry room. He rifles through Marin’s cleaned clothes, tugging out the largest shirt and exercise pants he can find.

Marin knew an apology was necessary, and that it would especially be far from easy. When Hux comes back into the kitchen, Marin is sure to make him pause. He confesses to his father that he has something to get off his chest.

Brows raising, Hux allows his son the privilege. “I’m listening.”

“I’m sorry for disobeying your orders. I should have come home last night. I shouldn't have let my pride get in the way. As usual,” he laments, warily meeting Hux’s eyes.

Hux peers down his nose at him. Rarely does he have the height advantage over his son. It's as if Marin is maintaining a seat at the table to ease his conscience, to give Hux a rough reminder of what the upper hand used to feel like. “Apology accepted,” he says, with a lot more being unsaid than he’d like to be.

“And I know I’ve been…overbearing at times, specifically with whom you spend your time with. I just want you to know that I keep a stern hand because I love you and I wouldn't be able to live with myself if anything happened to you, Father. I'm also trying to say—” Hells, he can't stand to speak any more of this, but he must, “is that I am sorry for trying to sabotage your friendship with Ben. I know it can't be easy to be without someone, um, similar in age and life experience to talk to.”

Hux’s smile beautifies his features, shocked and confused and elated all at once. “You find us similar?”

“No, not literally,” Marin stammers. This is making him physically ill. “You both were soldiers, were you not? I'm happy you're making friends. Ultimately, I want Ben to succeed in his mission and help the Resistance. I have no personal vendetta against the man. I've just been overly suspicious of his motives. To protect us.”

Marin breathes a weighty breath. Hux is getting happier, so happy he's even smiling at the clothing in his hands. Fuck, thank the maker. Hux’s joy is a balmy, soothing projection. If Ren can keep his distance, maybe Hux will stop looking at him like he's some untamable beast. “So, are we good?” Marin can't help but ask.

“I appreciate your maturity, Marin,” Hux smiles, sincere. But with what he suggests next, it takes all of Marin’s resolve to not crack. “I was thinking about inviting Ben over for breakfast. But only if that's alright with you.”

It's a challenge, a threat. Both Hux and his son know so, as does Aems. Marin gapes, as if his carefully crafted plan has begun to unravel. But Marin schools himself into submission, determined not to break. “Sounds fine to me.”

Hux measures his son’s sincerity. He doesn't know if Marin means it, but he can tell he wants to mean it. “Alright,” he excuses himself and makes for his bedroom.

The behavior is so peculiar that he finally registers the white noise of Hux’s shower has been polluting the silence for the past several minutes. Marin makes little of it, no more than a niggling thought.
Seren and Taran continue to debate one of their many topics worth arguing, this time regarding Seren’s dislike of the new book they're reading. Taran’s taste in books is far different than Seren’s. She enjoys books about monsters and aliens while Seren enjoys books about friendships and families.

They'll never agree on several things, including what books to read, but they continue to compromise and take turns on picking their next book. It never occurs to them to simply read different books, for their favorite part about reading is their heated discussions with one another. At least they agree that spaceships and spaceside adventure is cool.

The fork in Marin’s hand clatters against his plate when Hux enters the room. He's not alone.

Ren put up a fight when Hux came in the shower with fresh clothes, a hopeful smile, and the offer of joining them for breakfast at the family table. His immediate question was if this was alright with Marin, to which Hux replied, yes. He found it as impossible to believe then as he does now, when Marin’s mask threatens to crack against his rage and shock of seeing him.

Aems is pleasantly surprised to see Ben this morning, who by the looks of it had either spent the night or borrowed her shower for a wash and a shave. Good thing he had. His personal hygiene was beginning to concern her.

“Good morning, Ben,” she smiles. In unison, the twins gawk at their unlikely visitor. They cheerily greet him with warm hellos and good-mornings. Ben seems to light up at the sound of their musical voices, the unease melting from his shoulders.

“Thank you for having me,” Ren tries, pointedly avoiding Marin’s glare. Hux guides him to a chair, the one right across Marin, as if to make a point. He leaves Ren to his own devices at the table with their three children. It's all too surreal for him to make proper sense out of how he's supposed to behave, what he's supposed to say, how he's supposed to say it.

Taran clears up the silence while Hux fixes Ben a plate as if he were some eager housewife. She waves to Ben. She's happy to see him.

“It's so cool you're here,” she says, clasping her little hands in front of her like she does when she gets excited and needs to ground herself. “We are about to eat. It's really good food.”

“I'm sure it is,” Ren says, trying to ignore the white-knuckled grip Marin’s straining on his silverware. He dares to look at his son’s face, but Marin is glaring to the table, seemingly inward.

Marin refuses to look at Ren. He just knows he'll see his smug victory over him, that arrogant bastard. Hux must feel victorious, too. Somehow, Hux manipulated him into giving his consent to allow Ren over, when he failed to mention Ren was already in the house. Showering, making a nice home for himself. Wearing his clothes. Marin vows to burn them.

What else had Ren done while in their house? Had he rifled through their things to pick up every little detail of their private lives for his own consumption? Had he spent the night here? Had he slept in Hux’s bed, mere feet away from his sisters?

Had he touched Hux with his disgusting, perverted hands? Sullied him and debased him like he were some toy to use and abuse and spit out—

“Marin, how many sausages do you want with your eggs?” asks Hux, deceivingly innocent.

“I'm not hungry,” Marin all but growls, searing the table wood with his glower.
Hux shrugs and slides Marin’s serving onto Ben’s. At least someone will be appreciative. Hux prepares both Ben’s and Marin’s caf, both similar in sweetness, because Hux remembers how Ben ordered his before. It’s so strange how preparing breakfast for someone can be so satisfying. And Ben seems to appreciate all his efforts. Hux warms all over as he sets Ben’s breakfast in front of him. He longs to kiss him but he fears he’ll traumatize not only Marin, clearly, but also the girls.

Marin’s food is plopped down as an afterthought, as is his mug. Thankfully, the girls titter on about their story to Ben, who listens on with keen interest. Hux melts a little more at Ben’s sincerity. He’d really enjoy more mornings such as this.

“Can we talk about your spaceship? The Flackin?” Taran inquires. Her sister agrees with the next line of questioning.

“Oh, you mean the Falcon?” Ren replies. “What would you like to know?”

Seren munches on her breakfast, quickly so she can ask her questions. “The Falcon. How fast can it go?”

Ren is all too happy to oblige. “Well, that depends on the terrain. If we’re talking in your average atmosphere, the Falcon can reach speeds over a thousand kilometers an hour. In space, almost three times that. But those are just with the sublight engines. Now the hyperdrive can take her faster than the speed of light. Twice as fast as any Imperial warship or even the First Order’s.”

Seren and Taran have rough ideas of the Empire and almost none of the First Order. But Ben is way more interesting than those things. “Do you get chased?”

Ren laughs. “I do get chased. A lot, actually.”

“Where is your spaceship? Can we see it?” Seren asks, eyes flicking over to see her Papa’s look of disapproval. “Or a picture or holo would be neat. Whatever, though.”

“Unfortunately, it took off without me. My friends and family are taking care of it while I’m here.”

“I’m glad.” Taran picks up her glass of blue milk with two hands so she doesn’t spill. “That you're not gone with the Falcon. I like listening to you.”

“Me too,” Seren agrees, picking up her milk to drink just like her sister is doing.

The girls make polite and innocuous comments to Ben, who’s every bit as polite and sincere as always. Hux gets a full, whole feeling warm in his belly. Ben is so good with his children. It’s a shame Marin is such a little asshole towards him.

“How are Lis and Naedie?” Hux asks his son, allowing Ben time to converse with the girls, about space travel this time.

“Same as always,” Marin says tonelessly. Is breakfast almost over?

“You're not eating,” Hux remarks.

“Not hungry.”

Hux leans in, low and private. “You said you didn't have a problem with Ben coming over.”

Determined not to let Hux get the upper hand, Marin shovels his eggs into his mouth. “I don't,” he says around them, defiant with his lack of manners. Hux blinks, and focuses his attention on Ren.
It's as if nothing’s changed. Ren is infecting their lives, and Marin oozes with fury. He's lost. He might as well just give into temptation, mangle everyone's minds, including his baby sisters’. He's got nothing left to lose.

“Marin, is everything alright?” Aems asks, hushed. She can sense the tumultuous conflict burdening her grandson. Armitage seems to be pointedly ignoring his signals. She hardly approves.

“Just have a headache, is all,” he mutters, swallowing every ounce of his bottomless, never-ending malcontent. He refuses to yield to the darkness. He's not like Ren. He's not like Hux, either. He glares at Ren from his perch, calculating every option he has.

On the other side of the table, Seren and Taran are oblivious to their brother's plight. To them, Ben is the coolest thing to cross their table, ever.

“Papa took us to the spaceport one time. We saw all the big spaceships.” Taran rattles on about the different spaceships they've seen while Ben listens on in rapt attention.

Hux doesn't understand how he lucked out with Ben. Ben is everything he could want in a man. Giddily, and a bit manically, he envisions many more mornings like this one, where he wakes in Ben’s arms, pleasantly sore and sated between his legs, kisses him first thing, and cooks him and his children breakfast.

Ben would make such a wonderful father. It seems to come naturally to him. Foolishly, Hux hopes that maybe, with time, Ben would like to live here permanently and take to his children as if they were his own. Maybe Ben will love them as a father would, and he would ask Hux to marry him.

Marriage? Really? He's only just met Ben. It would be completely foolish to think a few weeks of knowing a man and one night of incredible sex could possibly warrant a marriage and domestic fantasy. But he feels like Ben’s come into his life so fluidly, as if he was always meant to be there —

“Papa, is that okay?” Seren inquires politely, snapping Hux out from his fantasy.

“Is what okay, dear?”

“To show Ben our tech toys. Please, please?” They want to show Ben all their different awesome toys. Not the baby ones, but the cool ones. Because Ben is cool, they want him to think they're cool, too.

“Oh, sure. If that's alright with him.”

The girls give Ben their sweetest smiles, and Ben’s mind is made up for him. “I'd love to see them.”

Spiritedly, the girls scoot off their chairs and guide Ben bodily to the living room where they store their learning toys, their fun time toys, and their fun learning toys. Hux smiles as Ben entrusts his new tour guides. Ben is either an incredible actor or he genuinely is enchanted by them.

Hux smirks to Marin like he's won some kind of contest. “Look at him. He's having a blast.”

“That's fantastic.” This is all getting out of control.

“I don't know why you hate him so much. He's never been anything but kind to us. You're the one acting like an ass all the time.”
“Must you?” Aems scolds her son. Hux only shrugs. Because it's true.

Marin burns with shame at Hux’s crassness. “I don't hate him. You're just digging your own grave, is all. Pardon me if I don't want Seren and Taran to get attached to someone who is gonna leave them.” It's getting harder and harder to depend on Ren’s self-preservation. His next feat will be deciding a fitting punishment for Ren's meddling into their lives. If only his punishments ever worked.

“Ben's not going anywhere.” Hux wishes he could be as certain as he sounds. “He told me. He likes being here. He likes us. All of us. Though it's beyond me how he likes you.”

Marin ignores him. “You don't think it's strange? Like he's just...too much into our lives. It's like we don't even get a moment to ourselves anymore.” He glares to the living room where Seren and Taran are demonstrating how to listen to their story recordings. Taran pokes the device in Ren’s ear. Marin highly disapproves. He looks to his grandmother but she's as happy as Ren is at their play.

“We have plenty of moments to ourselves. You're just too caught up in your shit to enjoy it when we do,” Hux says.

“Armitage,” Aems warns.

“You've seen how he acts,” Hux defends. “I'm sick to death of it.”

“And I'm sick to death of you acting like Ben is our fucking savior,” Marin snaps. “I shouldn't have let this get this far—”

“Let this?”

Aems lays a hand on Hux’s arm. “You both should table this to discuss in private. You know how the girls hate it when you argue.”

Hux and Marin share guilty looks. They both know how awful it feels to be on the wrong end of the twins’ contempt.

Seren sighs as the elevated voices at the table dwindle to whispers and peaceful silence. She wasn't about to let Marin’s arguing ruin her fun with super cool Ben. Ben even started to pull away, far too concerned with the table and not with her and her sister’s toys. She knows Taran feels the same.

“This is my box for my coloring,” Taran says proudly. She's never been able to show anyone her colorings besides Papa and Marie and Grandma. Showing Ben will be so exciting.

Ren inspects the drawings with the utmost care and attention. They're beautifully colored, bright pages of all sorts of creatures. It clear Taran has spent a lot of time on each page from how meticulously she's filled the pages. “You did these?” Ren asks, astonished.

“Yep,” Taran nods, beaming with pride.

“They're amazing. I can see how hard you've worked on these.” Ren flips page after page, absorbing his daughter's work.

Seren sees how much Taran’s pretty drawings are making Ben smile. She wants to find something she did to make Ben smile, too. She strikes an idea and sprints to her and Papa’s room for her and Taran’s most recent project.
She returns lugging small terrarium about the size of her head filled with sand and shells, some grass and rocks. She plops it on top of their activity table. Taran grins, because she, too, would like Ben to see their project. “This is our ter-i-um.”

“Ter-i-um,” Taran corrects.

“Terrarium,” pipes up Hux as he clears the table. Marin is still frothing at his chair, not taking his eyes of Ben.

“Oh, right. That,” Seren says. “Anyway, Papa got us this ter-i-um so we could make a little world for a critter. Of course, we are too little to have a real critter live inside. But maybe one day.”

Taran agrees. “Yep, one day. Maybe we can put a family of critters inside. But I bet even if we made this ter-i-um really nice, the critters would want to live in the real world, not our pretend one.”

Ren inspects their little world, endlessly fascinated by the girls’ passion. “This is really neat. I love the big stone. It looks like a little cave. I'm sure at least one little creature would love to make a home here.”

“Maybe,” Seren shrugs. “Marie thinks critters are nasty. Papa knows things about everything. Like critters and spaceships and different planets. He talks about all that.”

“What does Marin talk to you all about?” Ren asks, because he can't help but wonder.

Taran stretches to whisper into Ben’s ear. “He only cares about leaving the house. And sleeping. And being a jerk.”

Ren raises his brows. “I'm sure that you all do more than just that,” he says just as softly.

“Ugh. I guess sometimes. He plays games with us. And oh! Today he came home and Lis did his hair into braids.”

Ren’s far too enraptured to temper his litany of comments. “Ah, I see. It really looks nice on him. You should have him braid it more often.”

This makes the girls chuckle, and Marin’s ears prick up to catch a whiff of their conversation.

“We would but we can't do it. Papa puts our hair like this,” Seren says, pointing to her twin pigtails. “Me and Taran can't even do this to our hair.”

“I'm actually quite good at braiding.” He has years and years of experience braiding his mother’s hair. As a child, he enjoyed playing and learning all the different braids he could do for his mother. Of course, none of them looked nearly as skilled as the ones she did. But she always appreciated his efforts and enthusiasm.

The prospect of learning something new and cool always excites them. “You can? Can you show us?”

“Oh,” Ren fumbles, looking to Hux for approval. Marin has finally moved from the table to the kitchen where he's slapping together a protein shake, seemingly distracted but Ren can feel his senses on them. Hux smirks and joins them in the living room, drinking his caf from the sofa. “If you have to tools, I'll gladly show you,” Ren says.

“Tools?” Taran has lots of tools.
“Like a brush and a comb and a few hair pins. Stuff like that.”

In a flurry, the twins sprint to their bathroom they share with their Papa for the requested items. They return with little handfuls of all the tools they could need and deposit it at Ben’s crisscrossed legs. “Now you can show us?”

A weighty silence allows Ren a moment to calculate the risk of complying. He's clearly already on thin ice as it is. But Hux beams in anticipation from the sofa, like this is the grandest entertainment he's ever seen. Marin shuffles with his food processor like there's nothing else to be said.

Ren surmounts his despondency and ushers Seren in front of him, cross-legged, her back to his front. With the utmost delicacy, Ren untangles her dark, curly hair from its bands and separates the locks into two parts. He has just the design in mind for Seren. Something not easily sullied by her rough-housing and spirited play.

Hux adores Ben’s ability to bond with his girls. It comes so naturally to him. And Ben is so talented with doing hairdos, far better than Marin, himself, or even his mother had ever done. A braid that he's never even seen before slowly appears on his daughter's little head as if by magic. “Were you a hairdresser in another life?” Hux can't help but tease, marveling at Ben’s blush.

“Nope. Just have a lot of practice.”

Taran is, to put it bluntly, completely amazed at Ben’s work. It looks so cool and pretty. Seren is gonna freak out by how cool it looks. She didn't even know doing something like that to hair was even possible!

In the kitchen, Marin downs his energy supplement in several angry gulps. The room is awfully quiet for Seren and Taran's first show and tell with the dreaded ‘Ben.’ Maybe it's possible they've finally grown bored of him, and they're busying themselves with putting back all the mess they made.

Marin glares to the living room. By the look of what's transpired, the twins are farthest from bored. “What's all this?” he bristles, addressing Hux.

“Ben’s generous enough to show the girls how he braids hair. It's nice, don't you think?” he says, clearly pleased. Like he's won. Like he's on Ren’s team.

Unbelievable. The minute he takes his eyes off Ren, he's doing Seren’s hair! Like it's normal, like it's allowed. He's dangerously close to lashing out before he catches himself. He will not allow Hux to see him as the enemy. He leans in close to Hux’s ear so Ren won't eavesdrop. “You're just gonna sit here and let him touch them?” he hisses.

Of course, Hux shrugs him off. “Seren, you're gonna love it. You look like a little princess,” Hux says, over dramatic and cutesy, purely as a slight to Marin. Seren’s squeal of excitement only punctuates his victory.

“Hux—”

“Just let them be,” Hux scolds. “Unless you want to drag Lis over here to finish the job.”

Marin sneers, sickened to his stomach at the choices before him. Either force Ren out of the house and be scorned by his family for who knows how long, or allow Ren to touch his sisters’ hair and enjoy their innocence. He sits himself down aside Hux, glowering at Ren's stupid profile. Seren and Taran’s joy do little to ease his contempt. In fact, it only worsens it.
Ren makes an art of how he's shaping Seren’s dark hair. It's not long enough for anything overtly fancy, but using his skills he hasn't used since he was Marin’s age or younger, he manages to complete Seren’s hair with relative ease.

He admires how lovely his daughter looks donning a braid fit for royalty. It stretches in fine twists around her head like a tiara, the baby hairs by her ears loose and flowing. “All done. Your Papa’s right. You look like a princess.”

Seren shoots up and tentatively brings her hand to the swirls of braiding against her head. She sprints to the refresher, and Ren grins at her coo of amazement. “Grandma, look!” Hux hears her shout, interrupting whatever his mother is doing near the bedrooms. Her hum of agreement is telling of her bright enthusiasm.

“Papa, did you see what Ben did! It looks so cool,” she gasps, rushing to her papa’s side.

Hux kisses his baby girl’s forehead. “He did such a good job, didn't he?”

“Yes, he did.” Seren makes a small noise of befuddlement. She forgot to say thank you to Ben! She dashes to Ben, who's now readying a very eager and a bit nervous Taran for her own braid style. From behind, Seren throws her arms on Ben’s big giant shoulders, careful not to mess up all his hard work. “Thank you so much. I love it. I love it so, so much!”

If there's one thing Ren is sure of, it's over his unconditional love for his family. Adoration wells up in his throat, threatening to giveaway his coveted secret. “I'm glad you like it. It was my pleasure.”

Marin glares as Ren accepts an embrace from Seren. He doesn't deserve her gratitude, in any stretch of the meaning. And of course, Hux is weak in the knees at Seren’s hug. As soon as the twins break from Ren, Marin will show Ren just what he deserves.

Seren scoots in front of her sister, and they exchange giddy, toothy grins. They can’t explain why Ben putting their hair into braids is so fun but it just is. Ben seems to be having just as much fun as they are, smirking around the hairpins held between his pressed lips. Seren watches in rapt interest as Ben forms a poofy bun above where Taran’s ear, haloed by a fine braid as if it were holding it together. She has no idea how he's managing to make such use of Taran’s hair. He’s an expert.

“How do you know how to do this?” Seren inquires. Ben’s moving onto the other half of Taran’s patient head.

“My mother taught me. She taught me everything she knew about braiding. It was important to her to because her mother taught her.”

“Your mother?” For some inexplicable reason, they want to know about Ben’s mother. Seren and Taran know they don't have a mother. Papa explained to them a few times how they came from him like how momma dogs and other critters carry their young. Papa said at one time, they were both little growing things inside of his tummy.

“Yes. She taught me a lot more than just braiding.”

“Like what?”

“Well,” Ren hesitates, wanting to give the girls some version of the truth. “She taught me to read and write. She taught me how to be a good person.”

“A good person,” they parrot, trying to decrypt the meaning of such an unheard-of phrase. “What
about your Papa?”

Ren doesn't visibly divulge anything incriminating. He can feel Marin’s scrutiny on his back like the burn of a lightsaber. “My father taught me how to fly. And how to shoot a blaster.”

“A blaster. Like this?” Seren holds out her hands, mimicking a simplified blaster form.

“Exactly like that,” Ben laughs. Seren asks on and on about what kind of blasters he has, it even gets Papa to join in on the discussion. Papa loves talking about blasters and things that explode. Marie, of course, doesn't contribute at all and just slouches and sulks.

Ren finishes up with the other bun in Taran’s hair. Her cherubic face is framed by the fine wisps of brown, now accentuated even more so with the large buns lined with thin braids on either side. Seren cheers at the finished product and rushes her sister to the refresher. Their delighted noises are music to Ren’s ears.

“Thank you,” Hux mouths to Ben, still cross-legged on the carpet. Ben responds with a meaningful look. It aches in the most beautiful of ways to be on the end of such a look.

The girls quiet down in a way that would be alarming, until they grace the trio with calm, collected steps. Hux smirks, not knowing what's next.

Seren prods her sister as if to prompt her to speak. Taran nods. She's ready. “Ben. You should live in our house.”

Ben’s objection of uncertainty, combined with Hux’s entertained yet stern reprimand, and Marin’s dead silence, is an odd reverberating sound. Hux crosses his legs. “Girls, I'm sure Ben is very flattered by your invitation, but—”

“But that will never be allowed,” Marin continues for him. “This house is for family. I don't care how nice your hair looks.”

Taran glares, Hux-like, at her big, annoying brother. “You're just mad because you're boring and Ben is actually cool.”

“No,” Marin flushes. “Ben isn't family. And he's not staying here.”

“Marin, stop yelling at your sister—” Hux asserts, only to be immediately shut down.

“I'm not. I'm setting her straight.” Ren squirms miserably on the carpet, but Marin ignores him. “This is what I told you about. Now they're getting all attached to this man, and you have no one to blame but yourself for it.”

Seren steps forward. “Ben can stay here. We have a lot of room.”

“Where? On the floor?”

“No, in our room. He can sleep in Papa’s bed.”

Hux flushes, although not nearly as red as Ben. “Seren, dear—”

Marin holds up a hand, nearly swatting Hux on the mouth. “There's no way that's ever gonna happen, and I suggest you get these foolish ideas out of your brain as soon as possible.” Never has Marin said such a cruel litany of things to his sisters.

But Seren doesn't care. “He can. Papa didn't even sleep there last night. So, when Papa isn't
sleeping there, Ben can.”

Realization dawns on Marin like a douse of brine. “He what?”

“Papa didn't sleep there,” Seren crosses her arms, sure of herself as if empowered by her new braids alone. “So, there is definitely enough room for Ben.”

Hux didn't sleep in his bed last night? Where had he slept? Had he truly been with Ren, the entire fucking night? Marin feels so stupid for letting this get this far. Stupid, stupid.

He dares to look at Hux, who doesn't look the least bit triumphant. He looks ashamed. Like he's made a grave miscarriage of judgement and is afraid of Marin looking down at him. But Hux’s shame means nothing to him. Hux had always been weak, and Ren had always known how to prey on him.

Marin stands. He can't even stomach to look at Ren. All he can picture is his ugly, smug face joining them for breakfast, making a nice little home for himself after he took him who knows where and what he did to him.

Vision tunneling, Marin escorts himself outside through the back door. Hux calls after him, muffled and miserable. He doesn't care what he has to say for himself. Hux has already been compromised in the worst way possible.

Even the fresh air seems suffocating. He's been so stupid with how much he was willing to sacrifice so Hux and the girls wouldn't be angry with him or treat him differently, or be disappointed or disgusted with him. He shouldn't have cared about any of that, not while Ren was slowly and secretly gaining the upper hand.

Marin breathes heavy and dry, nausea rising in his throat. His eyes catch on Abie’s white fur. She's outside the annex house. There hasn't been anyone in that house for months. Carefully, Marin marches to the doors. He doesn't acknowledge Abie besides look at her, as she does to him. He shoves inside the dimly lit storage house. He looks at the only thing that's been touched. The bed.

All this happened here, right under his nose! Never in his life has he felt this humiliated, this disgusted. The bed sits sullied, mauled in the wake of whatever horrors Ren inflicted on Hux. Marin tears at it, thrashing the sheets to the floor and upheaving the mattress and frame. He can't believe he let this happen, not now, not again—

When Marin comes to, the room is a wreck. He stands alone before the splintered shrapnel that used to be the bed frame, the gouged mattress. Any signs or indications this bed had a prior use is now destroyed. Marin feels no relief, no consolation from his destruction.

This must end. He doesn't care how, if his humanity will be lost, if Hux will hate him. This has to end right now.

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

I'd like to give a warning for the disturbing content of this chapter. We're finally hitting the final act of the fic!!! THIS is as low/depressing as it gets, so you can breathe a sigh of relief!! hahaha.

Marin breathes in the staleness of the storage house. By now, he’s plucked out his braids. They made his skull itch. Neither Hux nor Ren have summoned the stones to come out here and reel him back in. Whether it’s because they don't care or because they're scared of him, Marin’s glad for it. Regardless of their feelings, Marin knows how he feels. He's terrified at the murderous ideas crawling from the deepest recesses of his mind.

The best way to be rid of Ren is to make Ren do it himself by either compelling him to take a ship and never return, wipe his mind of them altogether, or a combination of both. But there's no guarantee that will even work. But it might be his only option.

Because there is another glaring option, to take Ren out in the middle of nowhere and shoot him dead, but he's never killed anyone. There's bound to be some side effects he hasn't even realized yet. Like Ren. He killed his father. Marin could end up very much like him, and that would be an egregious but fitting tragedy.

Murdering Ren might be the safest option. It will be clean, final. Hux will hate him, but eventually come to his senses. As for himself, he's never had a particularly happy life. He never expected it to improve. Who knows, maybe with Ren finally dead and gone, he'll finally be able to start anew. Maybe Ren’s death, the certainty and finality of it, the permanence, will be the cure to all his ailments.

Marin paces around the room in a cloud of rage. He's never felt such a suffocating pressure, like the walls are closing in on him like a trash compactor.

A strange object on the floor catches his eye. It's him. Well, it's Ren’s clumsy version of him, carved from greenwood. Marin saw it before, when he drove his boot into Ren’s gut again and again. Now, Ren has captured his frown, his shaggy hair, the breadth of his chest and his daunting height. He turns the miniature over, absorbing every detail. Ren’s even captured his ears. That was probably his favorite part.

Nausea rises, unable to be quelled. This isn't the first time he's mentally acknowledged his likeness to Ren. There's no denying his powers came from his Skywalker blood, but he refuses to allow Ren’s relation to damn him any longer. He shoves the wooden figure back inside the pack where it belongs.

He shakes loose Ren’s comm. It's worn with use, seams lodged with particles of sand. Marin
fumbles with the controls, calling the first address in the register. The other side of the call connects within seconds. Marin gets the result he wanted.

“Marin? Is that you?” gasps General Organa. She hasn't spoken or seen her grandson since the day he left. It's been years. Across the stretch of worlds, she receives his holographic visage. He's matured exponentially, looking like a young man. The shock of loss burdens her heart. Time has taken so much from her.

“Yes. It's me.” He recoils at her visible reaction at the sound of his voice. He's sure it's changed from his youth. It's probably difficult for her to hear and see him like this. “I'm sorry I haven't called,” he says. She hasn't aged a day, or changed a bit.

“I'm so glad you called. I've missed you. So, so much.”

“I've missed you, too.” His throat feels heavy, weighted down.

“Have you been alright? Not a day goes by where I don't think about you.”

He shrugs off the impulse to lie for her sake. He's not calling her to make her feel better. “It's been hard. Out here, on my own.” He's alone. He'll always be alone.

His grandmother wilts, holo flickering. He half expects her to argue with him, to insist he's not alone. “Your father loves you. He always will,” is what she surprises him with. He hates hearing it. She's one of the few people in all of existence that he could always feel comfortable being completely honest with. “I wish that were true.”

General Organa has had only one call like this one. It was with Ben, of course. The night before he'd slain his fellow students, wreaking havoc to everything their family stood for. “I've felt his love. I know you have, too. You can't erase that.”

Erasure. She must know about his betrayal to Hux. An age-old burden forces him into acceptance. He pushes past his grandmother's hopeful promise. “Grandmother...I finally have the strength to do what I must to protect us. I never meant for it to get this far,” he says around a surge of tears. He can't stand to see the confusion and heartbreak shining in her holographic eyes.

“Marin, I know you—”

“I never meant to hurt you or risk you hating me. I never meant to take him from you. But this is all getting out of control. I have to end it.”

“Marin, please. Talk to me, please,” she begs, in disbelief of what she's hearing.

“I'm so sorry, Grandmother. It has to end this way.”

“Whatever you do, please don't—”

Marin shuts off the comm with a succinct thumb, breathing shakily. The plan is already in motion. His grandmother is always gonna love Ren, no matter what he does to her or to his children. When you're a mother, everyone will always come second to your children. But Marin has no mother. Hux is all he has, and he's already been proven to act in his own self-interest, time and time again. Inviting 'Ben' over for breakfast, welcoming him into the safe-haven they've worked so hard to protect.

Marin fiddles with the comm, opening all lines to transmit. He puts his finger over the
holorecorder. He'll be a masked voice for all the galaxy to hear. He memorizes the comms signature, and relays his message.

“To any First Order affiliates or sympathizers out there. I have the known identity and whereabouts of a renowned traitor who has been leaking First Order intel to the Resistance for years.” He repeats the comm signature twice before ending his transmission, heart in his throat.

He waits five minutes. After ten, he crouches on the floor with his back against the door, barricading himself from all angles. After twenty, he receives a transmission. It's from the Resistance, the same line he just used to speak to his grandmother. He ignores it.

A few minutes later he receives a message from a signature he does not recognize. The signature is partially concealed by some type of advanced technology. He answers the call.

“Who am I speaking to?” barks a steely, feminine voice. There no holoprojection. The voice forbade it.

“Who I am is not important,” Marin replies, going for intimidating. “What matters is I have what you want.”

The line is dead, as if the voice has ended.

“I have Kylo Ren. He's your enemy, is he not?” As soon as the words leave his lips, the fear that he’s made a grave miscarriage of judgement solidifies like an abdominal pain.

“What is your location?”

“If I give it to you, and you come here, there will be consequences if you harm anyone on my home planet. You'll come here for Ren and Ren only.” This is madness. He should just kill Ren himself, once and for all. But with the First Order after him, he'd surely run off, saving his own skin. He doesn’t have to mar his soul for Ren’s sake.

“Who am I speaking to?” presses the voice, irritation rising. She sounds as if she knows the answer.

“I have powers far beyond what you can imagine. I'm merely delivering Ren to you as a courtesy. I need to know you'll only bring a small party to retrieve him.”

The voice pauses as if wagering a gamble, suspended between the parsecs. “Noted.”

“Rhiannon is the system. He'll be at the spaceport outside of Greendole.” He feels physically ill. “Don't make me regret this gift. I won't hesitate.”

The connection dies, severed by the other end. Marin swabs at the sweat beading on his lip. Everything is finally set in motion. There's no stopping it. He places the comm on Ren’s bag, ignoring the tremors in his hands.

It's time for this to end.

Inside the house, Hux has withdrawn inward. Marin has been outside for some time now. He thought it best not to smother him, after he just figured out that he and Ben had slept together. Hux zones out as the girls occupy Ben, who is trying his best to participate in their conversation. Hux can tell Ben is off put by Marin’s reaction, too.

He shouldn't have been so brazen about his relationship with Ben. He knew how far Marin can be
pushed in situations like these, but he disregarded all care and concern for his son’s mental stability.

Just as Hux makes for the back door, Marin appears right through it. He's curiously blank in the face.

“I was worried you ran off,” Hux says. Marin barely reacts.

“I need to speak with Ben in private.” He doesn't have the energy to lie or concoct excuses.

Hux swallows, a guttural impulse. “Regarding?”

“It's alright,” Ben says, standing from his spot with the girls.

Hux’s heart worries in fear for what his son might do to Ben when his back is turned. “You don't have to.”

“It's fine. I have some stuff I wanna say to him anyway.”

Ben is so noble. Hux’s luck evidently persists. He hopes his son can control himself.

Ren follows Marin outside, separating themselves from the house several paces. He doesn't wait for Marin to begin. There is so much he must say. He vowed to never keep it secret.

“I still remember what ran through my head the first time I laid my eyes on you, right after you were born. All I could think about was...how small you were. How I was afraid I’d hurt you somehow, just by holding you.”

Marin doesn't react. Ren continues. “I'd give anything to go back to that moment and hold you in my arms. Words cannot describe what I'd give to redo it all. To see you say your first words and take your first steps,” he all but cries. This all seems like a rhyme of some significant moment in his past. “Back then, Hux and I. We weren't—” he cuts himself off, finding the words. “We weren't what we are now. We've both changed for each other. We can be together, now. We can be a family.”

Marin looks him in the eye, unafraid. It's like he's been animated by the strange, yet natural part of him that revels in psychological torture. He supposes he gets that temperament from Ren. Not that it matters anymore. He passes Ren his comm, and Ren takes it, confusion knitting his brow. “I alerted the First Order that a traitor is in this system. They should be here within a day. Probably sooner.”

Ren can't process his son's cool, calculative confession. “You...you what?”

“If I were you, I had better start running. Save your skin. It's what you do best, you miserable prick,” Marin spits, blankness shredding with a succinct gnashing of his teeth.


“How could I?”

“They're looking for Hux, too! How could you not think. Phasma, her allies will find Hux and capture him, or worse.”

Marin sneers at Ren’s reasoning. He's not being reckless. He can handle the First Order’s minions.
The Force will be with him. “Well, if you're at the spaceport where I told them you'd be, it won't be an issue, will it?”

Ren sags, searching his son’s face for any hint of deception. How could Marin risk everything like this? All in the name of his hate for him?

“You truly hate me that much,” he breathes, more to himself than anything. Hatred blinds, as does fear. Ren may be Force null, possibly forever, but he feels nothing but darkness in his son’s heart.

“You already know the answer to that.” Finally. He's triumphed. Now Ren will have no choice but to run unless he's willing to let the First Order come close to harming Hux, or the girls, forbid it so.

Marin has yet to see how close to the precipice he's brought them, how true and raw the danger is. His hatred has forced his hand. Now Ren has no choice but to face Phasma. There's no telling how this will end. But he knows for sure he cannot risk Hux’s and the girls’ safety, not any more than Marin so carelessly has.

And the worst part is, he has no one to blame but himself. He shouldn't have pushed into their peaceful lives. Whenever life gave him something precious, like Hux’s attention and the girls’ approval, he craved more. And he's to blame for his son’s angry heart. He sees no other way around the truth.

“I’m so sorry,” Ren says. He turns away. There is nothing more to be said.

Hux is waiting for them at the door. He managed to refrain from clenching his fists so tightly his skin splits, but the urge remains. From the tumult sinking Ben’s features, there's no telling what Marin threatened him with.

Ben approaches him. “I have to leave. I'm sorry this is so sudden. But my presence here has brought a risk of danger to you and your children.”

Hux can't believe what he's hearing. “What?”

“I must leave,” Ben grates, like the words alone burn him from the inside out. “I-I don't know when I'll see you again. But it can't be helped. I hope you understand.”

“I don't understand,” Hux says, at a complete loss. But then it strikes him. How could he have missed this? “What did he say to you? What the hell did he say to you?” Marin is behind this, of course!

“He didn't say anything,” Ren implores, but Hux isn't convinced.

“A minute ago, we were all—” Hux swallows, getting a hold on himself. “You weren't planning on going anywhere. Explain to me why that's changed.”

Ren can't bear to see the heartbreak twisting Hux’s face. He can't bear to say anything more. Making an impossible decision, he turns away.


“It’s not safe for you that I’m here. If things were different—” Ren shakes his head. He can’t entertain the thought.

“How am I in danger? Just tell me,” Hux begs. He looks to Marin like he’s never seen him before. Marin has done something. He’s either threatened him or worse. “Tell me what he said.”
If Ren tells Hux that the First Order is coming for him, there will be so much to explain. Marin would not allow Hux to know Ren’s connection to them, true or otherwise. And Hux might try and do something and needlessly endanger himself, or possibly learn the truth Marin has been shrouding for years in the most painful way possible. “Just stay here. You all will be safe together.”

Ren marches into the annex house to retrieve his bag. He shudders at the state of their bed. There’s so much to make up for. Outside, Ren kneels to Abie. He instructs her to stay. She’s kept him company for years, and he’s treasured every moment with her, but she’s not his dog. Abie whimpers, but complies, and sulks in a full belly crouch on the annex house’s porch.

But Hux is far from satisfied with Ben’s excuses. “Is it me? Us? Give me one reason. A real one.”

Ren takes in his betrayal, his heartbreak. How lost he must be. Ren forces his feet to move to leave. How dare Ben walk away like this. “Dammit, just tell me!”

“Because I love you,” Ren tells him. Finally, after years and years of keeping it in, dying every day that they were apart. He doesn't care about how inappropriate his must be to Hux, how this is the worst possible timing for such a grave confession. He doesn't fucking care. If he dies today, he’ll do so knowing Hux knows how he feels.

Stunned, Hux gapes as Ben heads off. Ben’s really leaving. He’s utterly pummeled. Hux coils his arms around his abdomen. Because Ben, somehow, some way, loves him.

Because Marin is the one to drive Ben away from him.

“Why?” he demands once Ben is out of sight, turning to face his blank faced son.

“Ben left. On his own. I told you, it was only a matter of time.”

“I know you had something to do with this. You threatened him or said something to him.”

“I did not,” Marin lies. Hux can smell it on him.

“You must have done something to him.”

Marin only glares.

Hux sneers, sickened to his stomach. “You couldn't let me have this, could you? You're just hell bent on making me the most miserable fucking person alive.”

Marin knew his would be hard. He embraces the heartache at Hux’s scorn. “Oh, I make you miserable? Last time I checked, you were fine before Ben came here. Your misery is Ben’s doing. Not mine.”

“Stop trying to spin this.” Has Marin always been so vile, so manipulative?

“There's nothing to spin! I've told you countless times how men like him—”

“Men like him,” Hux scoffs. “It's always been about men, hasn't it?”

Shockingly, Marin shuts up. Hux has stricken something. He doesn't care because Ben’s left him, because Ben loves him. Boastfully, Hux looms in his space. Marin’s always thought that him being with a man is his worst possible fate. Whether he actually finds same sex relationships repulsive or he just can't help but try and control and meter every iota of his life—Hux doesn't care.
“You couldn't let me have him. Because it disgusts you, doesn't it? The thought of Ben and I together?” Hux registers the pressure dropping in his ears, the air crackling around him. But Hux persists, taunting. “Parents aren't supposed to be lorded over by their children. Parents aren't supposed to be miserable every time their child comes through the door! It's considered normal for people to grow fond of one another, to care for each other. To fall in love and to fuck!”

Marin flinches. But Hux has had his heart pulled out of his chest and stomped on because his son has been a controlling, oppressive force in his life like nothing else. He does not relish taunting and barking obscenities at him but he's so sick of being disrespected. Does Marin have any idea what he gave up to raise him?

“And you bet we did,” Hux spits. “We had sex. To be more descriptive, we fucked. A lot. He held me down and shoved inside me again and again and it was incredible. Is that what you wanna hear? Is that disgusting enough for you?”

Marin’s hands accost his shoulders, bruising the thinly muscled flesh with a rancorous shake, Hux’s neck snapping back and forth from the ferocity of it. “Stop speaking,” he hisses, baring teeth. Hux, having never been assaulted by his much larger, stronger teenaged son, is stunned to silence.

“You call yourself a parent? You treat a stranger better than you treat me. Your own son,” Marin growls. It's a relief, really, to hear how miserable Hux is when he's around. It'll complete the picture he’s painted. “You have no idea what I've been through for you. And you never will.”

Hux reels at the unhinged turmoil flashing through his son’s eyes. There's something hidden there. A coveted, crafted secret. The vulnerability hardens to fury before he can begin to unpack it.

“Accept that Ben is gone and never coming back. The sooner you do, the better it'll be for us all.” Marin pulls away. “Go back inside and stay there until I tell you it's safe to leave.”

Marin makes for the garage, and Hux finally finds the words to properly reprimand his son’s erratic behavior. “Where the hell are you going?”

Marin doesn't say a word, like explaining himself is beneath him, least of all to Hux. Hux reeks with complete, devastating shame after the whole encounter. He's never felt so weak and humiliated for how Marin had scorned him, how uncontrolled his reaction was. It was like Marin had lost the last shred of respect he ever had for him. At a loss, utterly wounded, Hux goes back inside through the glass door.

The only force powerful enough to bring him back from his lull is his daughters and their welcoming presences. They've busied themselves with shuffling through Aems’ music library. Hux’s heart wrenches with immediate sorrow at the perfect braids Ben made in their hair. Marin’s speeder blasts away, muffled by the walls of their home, Hux’s neck and arms throbbing from his son's abuse.

His mother sits alone at the table, chewing on her thumb and staring off into space. Hux joins her and as it turns out, her parsec long stare is for him.

“There's something terribly wrong, isn't there?” she asks him, keeping her voice low.

Hux reorders his hair, impulsively crying for the safety net of order and structure and protocol. “Just that Marin hates Ben enough to somehow convince him to leave without a moment’s notice.”

Aems extends a hand for her son to take. “If this truly was Marin’s doing, you should set him
straight on what he does or does not have a say in. Just because he's your son, it doesn't mean that you can't fight against him. As long as it's something worth fighting for.”

“What will that mean for Marin?” he asks, dreading the answer.

“You can't keep putting yourself second. Does Ben make you happy?”

Hux teethes his lip. What he feels for Ben is beyond words. He nods, longing for the warmth of Ben's arms.

“Then there's the answer to your question.” She kisses her son on his cheekbone. “Marin wants you to be happy. Eventually, he'll be the one who wants to find that middle ground.”

Seren pads over to the kitchen, arms encircling a collection of holo disks. “Papa, where did Ben go?” She and Taran wanted to show him their fun music collection. He was just here a second ago. Taran sprints from the living room to the kitchen, daintily tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear to preserve the beautiful braided buns.

Hux smiles consolingly, though it doesn't reach his eyes. His girls are so receptive that they can probably tell. “Ben had to leave for a bit.”

The girls share shocked, confused looks. “Is he coming back?”

Hux hesitates. What can he say? “Ben hasn't told me exactly when, but he said he's gonna come back. I'll let you know when as soon as I do, alright?”

One of the many disks in Seren’s arms slips out one side of the clump and Taran bends to pick it up for her. “Why did he go?” Seren asks softly.

Hux can't stand to hear the disappointment in his daughter's voice. “Ben works with the Resistance. He's important to them.”

Taran fiddles with the disk in her little hands, staring at its casing. “I thought he was important to us.”

Aems squeezes Hux’s hand, sensing his strenuous solemnity. “He is,” Hux insists, not fully understanding the weight in his words, but he can feel how grave they are, by some unfathomable sense.

Hux makes for his bedroom to tie on a jacket and slip on his boots. There's a brief moment of hesitation before he untucks a small, concealable blaster from a case under his bed. He slides it into his pants at the small of his back. He hasn't shot a blaster in years unless he counts the carnival game he played with Ben. The blaster is for protection, or at the very least, intimidation.

“I'm going after him,” Hux tells his mother once he's ready. He knows it'll be worth it when he manages to get Ben to stay.

Aems hugs him goodbye. “We'll be here when you get back.”

With that, Hux leaves on his speeder, zooming faster than he ever had before.
“Ben, Rey and Finn are on their way in the Falcon. It’ll be anytime now,” General Organa tells her son via comm. “Don’t do anything without them. A few hours, max.”

“I may not have a choice. I cannot risk Phasma knowing Hux is here,” Ren says. It’s probably another half hour to the spaceport on foot. He hastens to a jog. He must get there before Phasma does.

“I understand—”

“The only thing you have to understand is that I’m gonna do whatever it takes to make sure the First Order never comes close to Hux or our children. If it means going out blaster’s blazing, so be it,” he says with vigor. If anything happens to them, it'll be his fault and his alone.

“I was gonna say that I understand that you’re gonna do what you have to do,” his mother chides. “Promise me you'll make it out of this one. Do what you can but do not attack without backup.”

“I'll do everything I can,” he grates after a moment’s pause. “I love you.”

“I'll always love you,” she implores. “May the Force be with you.”

Ren shuts down the comm, breaking into a sprint.

At the spaceport, Ren searches for any type of weapon. A blaster, a vibroblade, anything. All the merchant booths that offer weapons are heavily fortified so that vagabonds such as he will have a difficult time stealing one. Perhaps if he had the Force on his side, either dark side or light, to manipulate minds into allowing him to steal, but then he would stand a chance in defeating Phasma and wouldn’t need a weapon in the first place.

His only option might be to allow himself to be captured, but something tells him Phasma would hardly bother with the courtesy of capture. A blaster bolt to the skull would be more likely. Or perhaps, death by flamethrower immolation would be more her flavor.

He manages to locate a metal staff in an alley, one sharpened with a splintered tip. He thinks of Rey. She was a formidable opponent but proved herself to be an irreplaceable ally. He could really use her talents in a time like this.

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Marin pulls up at Lisbeth’s booth. She can't be at the spaceport with the First Order on their way. He was hoping Lis wouldn’t work today but alas, there she is charming a group of older women with her handcrafted mortar and pestle bowls.

“Pst,” Marin interrupts. Thankfully his abrasive presence scares away her potential customers.

“What do you want? I'm working.” She's irritated that Marin would scare away business, though not surprised. Marin can be a scary man-boy sometimes.

“You need to leave. There's gonna be some unsavory visitors here in no time. It's not safe.”

“What? How do you know?”

Marin starts closing down her booth for her. “Because I called them.”
“Who?” Lis asks, afraid of his answer.

“Who do you think?”

Lis pales, queasiness simmering. “The First Order?” Marin’s silence serves as his answer. “Why would you call them?”

“I gave Ren the proper motivation. I don't have time to hear about how you disapprove,” he growls. “All that matters is that I have to get you far away from here when they do come.”

Lis knows Marin has suffocated under years of pressure, with Hux, with Kylo Ren. But this is new. Willingly selling someone out to the enemy. That's low. No matter how much they deserve it. “Is anyone gonna get hurt?”

Marin stiffens. He can't lie to her. “Probably.”

Unbelievable. Marin has no regard for anyone but his agenda. “I thought I knew you,” she says, doleful.

They can't lie to each other. “You thought wrong,” Marin snaps. He's more resigned than anything else. “Just go. Don't return until I tell you.”

She's not gonna put up with this. Whether Marin’s a war criminal or the Resistance’s golden boy, she's not gonna be pushed around. “I never took any orders from men and I'm damn sure not gonna start now. But you got your wish. I don't want any part of this.” Lis stalks off to her speeder and leaves him in her dust.

Marin doesn't have time to decipher the sickness he feels from being on the wrong end of anti-male scorn, or the entire array of Lis’s condemnation.

What he doesn't know is that Lis stuck to her threat. She's not home, but in fact at the other side of the spaceport where Marin won't be able to see. He may be a complete ass, but he doesn't deserve to risk it all for his daddy issues.

Marin glares to the sky. There's little traffic today. One shuttle here, another there. Until a droning thrum fades in from above and a shuttle alien from the others breaks the high swaying clouds. It's black, transforming hull stretches far and wide, drenching the port in shadow. Marin holds in a breath. They're here.

Several aisles down, Ren awaits his reckoning, measuring each step toward the craft as if it were his last. He supposes they are.

He staggers into view just as the boarding ramp is descending. The spaceport is rapidly clearing of bystanders. They all know the First Order when they see it. Humans and xenos of all kinds weave around Ren like a current of terror, but Ren holds his ground, staff sure in his hand like a walking stick.

The High Enforcer has always been one of the first on the battlefield, and stepping onto the doldrums of Rhiannon is no different. Neck to boot in a void-like shade of black matte armor, Phasma, helmetless and all, bombards the peaceful system with her hazardous presence. Her eyes immediately find Ren.

“Somehow you look even more lost and haggard than I remember you,” she says in place of a greeting.
At least he's still got his head, for now. But from the trigger-happy Stormtroopers flanking her sides, head loss seems imminent. “You look good. Very...brawny,” he counters. She probably doesn't receive many compliments.

Phasma’s smugness splits into an overdramatic grin. In one fluid movement, too practiced for Ren to fully see, she brandishes and aims a daunting looking weapon, a harpoon of some kind, her ice-blue glare sharper than its daggered tip. The Stormtroopers remain standing at attention. “Give me one reason why I shouldn't shoot you dead.”

Barely flinching, Ren uncurls his fingers around the makeshift staff and allows it to topple to the side. It was a useless weapon anyway. “I have none.”

“Fine with me. Any last words?”

Ren says nothing. Phasma isn't like him. She has no emotional ties other than her power. One day, she too will fall. The zealous, authoritarian ones always do. He awaits the blow, but it never comes.

“There's one thing I can't figure out,” she says, stalling as if watching Ren wait to be executed is far more entertaining than the act itself. “Who the hell would go through the trouble of ratting you out to me? If they wanted you dead—and they'd know I would kill you as the traitor you are—why couldn't they do it themselves?”

Ren swallows. Phasma notes the involuntary action. Much to Ren’s horror, he catches a glimpse of a familiar figure nesting in the trees behind the landing pad, where Phasma can't see from her position. It's Marin. Has he come to watch his end, so he can sleep comfortably knowing he's dead and gone?

“Maybe they thought you would have a more befitting plan for my execution.”

“I think,” she starts, ignoring his poor attempt at flattery, “that one of your minions called for me to lead me into a trap. Well, trap or no trap, I don't give a shit. I couldn't resist seeing you after all these years. I'd risk capture if it meant I could be the one to eviscerate you.”

“There’s no one here but me. I'm alone.”

“Is that so?”

Behind the shuttle, Marin reaches out for the commander's mind as their argument persists. Phasma is her name. He's never met her, and Hux hardly discussed his life before Rhiannon, but he knows she'd shoot Hux on site if she ever found him.

To Marin’s utter mortification, Hux appears in the nearest alleyway. He approaches brazenly, blaster in hand. Marin has no time to get rid of him before Phasma locks eyes on him. Marin calls to the darkness that’s in all beings, between all of space, festering beneath his skin like a cancer. He sinks his claws into her mind, just enough to tug on her leash if she comes close to threatening Hux.

In a flash, Phasma reacts to the new, predictable presence. “Pleasure to see you again, General!” she shouts across his distance.

Horrified, Ren spins around. “Hux! Get out of here!”

“As if I would just let you walk through hell for me,” Hux fires back. Phasma is clearly here for him.
Whatever Phasma is about to insult them with gets lost in a wave of dark energy, snapping her mouth shut. As if possessed, she aims and launches her harpoon into the target: Ren’s back.

“Ben!” Hux cries, rushing to him. Ben is launched backwards onto his back with a pained, suffering grunt from a swift *yank* on the harpoon’s wire. Hux gasps and fires his blaster at Phasma’s impenetrable, blaster-absorbing armor.

Dark energy throttles the retaliating Stormtroopers. They are frozen in place, effectively neutralized. Hux doesn’t understand why until he sees the pained confusion animating Phasma’s face, as if she can't quite believe what she's doing. She, too, freezes. There's something or someone who's in her head, forcing her limbs to act against her will.

Somewhere, deep in the recesses of Hux’s mind, he has seen such manipulation and display of power before. But he has no time at all to decipher the familiarity. Hux falls to his knees at Ben’s side. Fuck, the wound is so devilish, he can’t look away. Phasma or whatever is holding her hostage lanced him as if he were some game hunted animal.

“Ben, Ben. Don't move,” Hux tells him, frantic. He can't lose Ben.

Ren groans, agonized. A spear's impalement is unfathomably more potent than a lightsaber’s. Every nerve is alive and screaming instead of burned and cauterized. His weight shifts, twisting the harpoon further inside. The tip lurches high and bloody, pointing to the sky like a sun dial. He can't breathe.

Hux is there, shadow blocking out the sun, calling his name through the fog. This is how he always imagined his final moments. Except—

“'s not Ben,” Ren coughs, tasting the rise of blood. It stains his teeth and tongue, slicks his throat into a coppery mess. He’d feel cold if Hux wasn't palming his face, begging him to keep his eyes focused on him.

“What? Ben, don't try to move. I'm gonna get some help.” Who on this damned planet could possibly help with this? He glares to the crowd of useless Stormtroopers, to Phasma’s mute, betrayed stare.

Ren coughs again and finds the strength to speak. “My name isn't Ben.”

“I don't understand,” Hux laments. He looks around for anyone who might have a comm to call for help, but the enclave of the port is clear. Everyone knew to run when the unmistakable First Order shuttle descended like a wraith.

Marin. He's right there, looming behind the Stormtroopers! “Marin! Marin. He needs help.”

Slowly, Marin approaches. His hold on the Stormtroopers sustains and he compels them to part and allow him through.

Hux gapes at the surreality of his son’s command of the troopers, how fluidly they yield to his seemingly effortless commands. If Marin is strong enough to control a whole garrison, then surely he can help Ben. *My name isn't Ben*, Hux thinks, but there's no time to decipher it. Marin has to help him now.

“Marin, quick. He doesn't have long. You must use your powers,” Hux begs, panicking.

Ren pants, craning his neck to Marin’s approach. The harpoon wrenches with the movement, but Ren must get his eyes on him.
“You have to help him now,” Hux implores. When Marin does nothing, just stands there *staring* like he can't believe his eyes, Hux loses it. “What the hell’s wrong with you? Don't just stand there!” Marin can't just let Ben die.

Ren closes his eyes against Hux’s desperate, one sided pleas and demands. This is the part where Marin caves and realizes what he's done, from deceiving and manipulating Hux, to keeping their family apart, and loathing Ren with every fiber of his being. This is where he saves Ren from the wound he inflicted on him. This is where he tells Hux every part of their story. This is where they all recede from the edge and they can finally go home.

“Do something!” Hux shouts, heart breaking. Marin’s just standing there like—this is all a part of his *plan*.

“He won't,” Ren gasps. “He can't.”

Hux melts to Ben's side. He can feel him slipping away. “He has to.”

“No, no. It has to happen like this. I have to die. It's the only way.” If he hadn't killed his father, he would have never come back to the light. He'd have died a monster, and would have left his mother alone forever.

Ren uses what strength he has left. “One day, he'll tell you what really happened. Everything. It'll be hard—” Ren coughs up thick, tarlike black. “It'll be hard...to find it in yourself—to forgive him.”

“Ben,” Hux cries. “I don't *understand*.”

“It's alright,” Ren murmurs. He's so, so cold. It's almost time. He looks at Hux for as long as he has left.


Around the gaping agony of the spear, floods heavenly, pure warmth in his shallowly beating heart. Hux loves him. It's time to finally let go. He died once already. He's looking forward to seeing the Falcon’s viewport stripe with stars. To hear his father’s gravelly drawl welcoming him back on his crew.

“You love him?” Marin asks, finally speaking. He's taut with restraint, holding everything in.

Hux nods. He can't be alone anymore. He needs Ben. And Marin can't be the one to have doomed him to a life of loneliness. “Please. For me, Marin. Do it for me.”

Marin steps back to the drawn garrison. For a moment, all is lost. It feels like death.

With a burst of dark energy, Marin compels Phasma to release the wire connected to her harpoon launcher. Hux holds his breath.

Hux gapes as Marin kneels low. He palms a hand on Ren’s sweat-slicked forehead. Ren’s eyes have closed. He's got only a few heartbeats to spare. Marin focuses past the darkness tethering the Stormtroopers to the slivers of light until the light shines to beams of brightness. He channels the light like a flow of freshwater.

In a swift electrocution, Ren’s wounds begin to heal. Marin times it right and yanks on the harpoon, healing as new blood spills with every tug. The wire is wrenched out following the
harpoon, a long stream of metallic red squelching out like an untamable snake. Ren’s already passed out from the healing. When he wakes, alive and well, Marin knows he'll be surprised at what he finds.

When the wire is cleared, Marin fuses together the rest of the shredded flesh. Hux’s appreciation falls on deaf ears. Clinically, Marin prods at Ren’s jugular for a pulse. As he suspected, Ren is healed.

“Thank you, thank you,” Hux babbles. He almost lost him. He hunches over in a desperate embrace. When Ben wakes back up, he'll have a hell of a lot of explaining to do. But there will be time for that.

Hux looks up to Marin. He has so much to say, so much to apologize for. But the space his son occupied is empty. There are only footprints in the dust.

The Stormtroopers, including Phasma, silently file into the shuttle. With Marin in tow.

Not in tow, but in front. He's leading them.

He gasps Marin’s name, but no sound escapes. He sees Lisbeth chase after him—she was here this whole time?—but the shuttle shuts its ramp. The ship acends past the safety net of clouds, disappearing, succinct and final.

Marin is gone.

Chapter End Notes

if yall are wondering where the frick that ending came from, we will explore marin's headspace in the next updates!! thank you all for trusting me :D
Please be warned for descriptions of a disturbing mental state and suicidal ideations.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He’s gone. Marin’s gone.

Hopelessly, Hux gapes to the cloudy sky. The shuttle is gone and Marin is gone.

He can't speak. There aren't words. Hux slumps on his side. He bumps into something. It's Ben, sprawled on the ground, his gut freshly healed and face slack with unconsciousness. Marin saved his life.

“What the hell happened?” Lisbeth shouts once she's at Hux’s side. “Where did he go?”

Hux’s disturbing silence serves as her answer. It wasn't supposed to end like this.

“What happened?” Lis presses. “How could Marin just leave with those...those beasts?”

“He's gone,” Hux drones. He doesn't believe it. He can't.

That's not good enough. Marin is her best friend. Hux’s son. “How is he just gone?”

“He's punishing me,” Hux breathes. “That's why he left.”

“You can't be serious.” Marin wouldn't just take off with a group of murderous bastards just to prove a point.

“He's punishing me.” Hux repeats the mantra, soft and only for his ears.

“What the hell are you gonna do to bring him back?”

Blearily, Hux blinks up at Lisbeth’s height. What is he gonna do to bring him home? What can he do? Where the fuck would he start?

Lis punctuates herself with promises that sound like threats, that she's gonna get her mother to help because apparently Hux is too self-absorbed to do anything to help. She leaves him alone to choke on her dust.

Minutes, or possibly hours pass before Hux even moves. Ben gasps awake, and he flinches at the abrupt interruption. He cradles Ben’s head as an afterthought. It's just enough so that he knows Ben can catch his breath.

Ren coughs and focuses on breathing. Breathing. He’s still breathing. He’s not dead. Sliding a shaky hand over the bloodstained and shorn cloth covering his abdomen, Ren finds the skin mended. He cranes his tired eyes to the bloodied harpoon. Marin is the only one who could have healed him so fast and cleanly that he barely feels the wound. Marin saved him.

His hopeful joy is tempered by Hux and his evident despondency. Hux hasn’t spoken a word or so
much as looked at him, but already, he knows something is terribly wrong. His throat is dry but he finds the words.

“What happened?” Ren croaks. Hux looks at him like he didn’t even know he was lying there.

“Marin saved you,” he says, toneless.

Ren sighs, closing his eyes briefly. He didn’t have to die, not for his son. His son saved him out of the goodness of his heart. Marin cares about him, maybe even loves him. “Did he—why did he?”

Hux shakes his head. He doesn’t know.

There’s something else. “Where is he?” What if something happened to him while he was unconscious? Ren couldn’t bear the thought of losing him. Or worst of all, the thought of Hux losing him.

“He’s gone,” Hux says heavily. Sorrow mangles his blank countenance, and it’s gone in a flash.

Ren sits up to investigate their surroundings. It’s just an empty landing strip with several abandoned ships and moving crates. The merchants and visitors had fled as soon as the First Order shuttle broke atmosphere. Marin is gone? “Gone? Gone where?”

Hux cradles his skull, refusing to stand. He doesn’t have the strength. Ren remembers only a few other times he’s felt this kind of heartbreak from him. “He’s with them,” he confesses. He sounds so defeated and lost and ashamed at what’s transpired.

“Did they take him?” Ren gasps, fearing the worst. Marin is strong but it’s more than possible the First Order has had time and patience to come up with ways to overpower Force users.

When Hux doesn’t reply, too far gone in his sorrow, Ren kneels low to his side. A fresh, scorching fear threatens to swallow him whole, the fear of only being able to imagine what the First Order will do to him. “I promise we’ll bring him back, and punish those responsible—”

“They didn’t take him,” Hux interrupts.

Ren doesn’t understand. “Then where—”

“He left with them. On his own.”

What? What? “That—that doesn’t make sense. Why would he just—leave with them? On purpose?” How could he? Why would he? This is worse, so much worse.

Unevenly, Hux hobbles to his feet. “It makes perfect sense,” Hux shrugs, masking to feign coolness.

“There must be some explanation. He wouldn’t join them.”

“Of course he would.” Marin wanted to leave. To be anywhere but here, with him.

No, he wouldn’t. He wouldn’t. He’s never been like them. “That’s impossible.” He won’t hear it.

“He’s punishing me,” Hux nods, sure of his reasoning. He deserves it. He deserves to be alone.

Ren’s heart breaks. “Why would he want to punish you?”

Hux, blank faced and pale, ignores him and walks back to his speeder. He takes every step as if he
were scaling the edge of a cliff.

“Hux, wait. I promise we’ll bring him home. I’ve got resources. We’ll find him in no time.” When
Hux doesn’t waver, Ren panics. Had everything come back together just to unravel all over again?
“Hux,” he reaches for his arm, but Hux shakes him off.

“Don’t you fucking touch me,” Hux growls. His mask slips and all Ren can do is pray to whoever
is listening that he’ll never have to see such vulnerable heartbreak in Hux’s eyes. That he’ll never
again be the one to put it there.

Hux straddles his speeder, and heads home. Ren watches him leave.

Ren came here to Rhiannon with the goal to reconnect with his family. Now, because of him,
because he couldn’t keep to himself, their family is more strewn apart and splintered than ever
before. How could this have happened?

A familiar hum pierces the veil overhead and the cloud cover gives to the girth of the Millennium
Falcon. They must have activated the implant in his neck, to pinpoint him right to this spot.

The Falcon lands far more graceful than he's ever seen it. Rey must be piloting. Wasting no time at
all, the boarding ramp descends. Rey, Finn, Poe, and Chewie storm off it. They're expecting battle.
Ren hates to admit it, but he wishes the fight was still here. Maybe Marin wouldn't have left them.
He'd gladly take a blaster bolt to the gut if it meant Marin were here.

Rey is the first to approach him. She senses he's unhurt though she's perturbed by the blood
soaking his clothes.

“What happened?” she asks. After Marin’s transmission, they half expected to find Ren with a
lightsaber sticking out of his chest. The Resistance also intercepted Marin’s open broadcast
wherein he called for the First Order releasing the location of a traitor. Knowing Marin, he most
likely tried to out Ren.

Ren cracks. What can he say? He spent the last few weeks going around Marin’s back to spend
time with Hux and the girls, when he should have just fucking listened to him and kept his
distance. He should have left knowing they were safe and whole without him. “Everyone's alright.
The First Order came and gone. No one was hurt.” Ren takes a breath. This is all his fault. “Marin
went with them.”

“They took him?” Finn asks. Marin may be just a kid, but he's stubborn as hell. What the hell is
Phasma thinking, that she's gonna get him to be her minion?

“No, he was commanding them. He left with them. Voluntarily.”

Rey pales. She never, ever saw that in Marin. Sure, he's been conflicted since he was small, but she
never thought he'd reach that point, to fall as Ren had. “How could he have commanded them? Did
they do something to him?”

“His powers are unparalleled. He controlled a whole garrison with his mind. The way he did it, it
was effortless.” Natural, a part of him taunts. “And it's my fault. He left with them because of me,
just being here. I knew I shouldn't have come here.”

It is, of course, a lot for them to swallow. Chewie gnarrs in sympathy, and Ren has never been so
relieved to hear the familiar noise.

“I'm sure Hux has the ability to find him. Where the Stormtroopers are, that's where he'll be,” Ren
says, trying to remain positive. He can't lose hope, not after he's come this far. It can't end like this.

“General Organa and Master Luke are on a cruiser orbiting the planet,” Poe informs him. “They didn't wanna be far if anything happened here on the ground.”

Together, they plot their next course of action. Rey can see how hard Ren is trying to remain tactile, the torment tightening his features giving away how much he truly blames himself. There's nothing she can possibly say to assuage that guilt. It's stuck there, stubborn like an incurable infection.

Hux told Ren that it would make sense that Marin would leave to punish him. But why? Had Marin always wanted to join the First Order because he knew how far his powers reached, and wanted to do what Ren and Hux couldn't? Or was it because he knew leaving Hux would make Hux blame Ren for his disappearance to make him loath Ren once more?

Or maybe Marin left because being with Hux, living with what he did to his memories and dealing with the aftermath and Hux’s resentment, began to be far too unbearable for him to find a real reason to stay.

“You said Hux has resources. We should start there,” Finn decides, with Rey, Poe, and Chewie’s agreement. Though Chewie has no reason to help Hux, he has every reason to save Marin from destroying himself. Marin’s just a boy, like Ben was.

As if Hux wants anything to do with him right now. But this isn't about them. It never should have been, back when they made everything they did about themselves and put Marin second.

Ren tells them they should take the Falcon to Hux’s mother’s property line. It's quicker and safer that way. On the ride over, Ren briefs his mother via comm on what's transpired. She tells him she is so, so sorry. She's one of the few who can understand what Ren must be burdened with. Ren knows this. It only makes him feel worse.

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Stiffly, Hux lets himself inside his house. His mother and his daughters are watching a show that he barely registers. He finds a place at the table to pick at the dirt under his nails.

“Armitage? What's wrong?” Aems asks, sensing her son’s blued hue. The girls can feel it, too, and hope there is something they can do to make him feel better.

“Marin left.”

“He left? To where?”

“He made it clear he no longer wanted to be a part of this family, and he left.”

Aems stands to meet her son’s side. “What are you talking about? Tell me what happened.”

“He left! Off the planet! Far from this system and far from me,” Hux snaps, foundations crumbling. The girls alarm rises at their papa’s angry sadness, but keep their comments to themselves, seemingly having a private conversation with only their looks of concern.
“How? How could he have done this?” Marin wouldn't leave, not like this. “Where did he go?”

Abruptly, Hux gets to his feet. “I'm going to lay down.”

His mother calls after him but Hux turns away. He beelines for his and the girls’ room and opens the door just enough to see his lonesome bed, adjacent from his girls’ beds.

He closes the door.

He approaches Marin’s closed door and almost knocks, foolishly worrying about disturbing his boy. He pushes through and shuts the door behind him.

Marin’s room was an addition to the house, and Aems could only afford a few dozen square feet. But Marin always said it was more than enough as long as it has a window. Hux moves through the space, floating, as if his surroundings might shatter. Marin has always been neat, like him. Practical and utilitarian, like him. His only decorations are of paper maps of their system, and none others. Was he looking for another place to go, all this time? How come Hux never saw it?

Hux searches the room for any signs of Marin’s longing to leave with the First Order. But there's no secret comm, no manifest of his plans once he's free of his life here. There's his school supplies, orderly on his desk, incomplete school assignments, and a stack of those novels comprised of comic strips, half a series read.

There's more books and papers, and a datapad reader that Hux bought him for a wide collection of medical texts that he's showed an interest in. A corner of a printed photo peeks out from the stack. Carefully, Hux slides it out.

It's one of the several photos Aems insisted they took as a family. Likely one of the first. The twins are still babies, maybe three or four months old. Hux sits with Seren in his lap, Aems sits with Taran in hers, and Marin sits in the middle. Taran and Seren are focused on something behind the camera while Hux and his mother grin sweetly, enamored with the fresh turn of their lives.

Marin’s smile isn't nearly as bright. It doesn't reach his eyes. Oh, his eyes look so old on such a youthful face. They're dulled by an incomprehensible heaviness. Something has been eating at his son for years, possibly since before they came here. Something has been hurting him, and Hux was either too stupid or too selfish to see what it was and help him.

It's been years, but Hux has failed to remember much of anything of Marin’s early childhood. He barely remembers holding him as a baby, kissing his little hand, smiling down at him through his blanket. The sick, disparaging dread of having to say goodbye. Marin never mentioned anything before Rhiannon. What was he hiding from him?

Unblinking, Hux stares at the younger Marin in the picture until his eyes strain and weaken to wetness. Tears fall, thick and hot against his wind burnt cheeks. It's like he's been ripped apart. He's lost him.

What if Marin never comes back? What if he never sees him again?

As if hemorrhaging an open wound, Hux wavers and collides with the floor, unconscious. He really should have laid down.

Aems would have been able to hear her Armitage thud to the floor. But her attention has been diverted to the massive freighter staining the coastline with its mechanical whir. The twins scamper to the back window, noses smudging the glass, eager to get their curious eyes on the disturbance.
Aems instructs the girls to stay inside. “Under no circumstances will you approach that ship, understand?”

“Okay.” Taran shares a sullen, uncertain look with her sister. “Is that where Marie is?” They can't feel him like they normally can, but they feel a familiar presence, two actually. They know Marie left and made Papa and Grandmother as sad as can be. Maybe one of the presences is their brother.

Aems steps out onto the back porch, holding up a hand so the girls stand back. The ship's ramp has descended, revealing Ben. She still doesn't approach. Hopefully Ben can shed some light on what's happened to her grandson.

Other characters trickle out. Four total. Two men, one woman, and what she suspects is an enormous Wookiee. She hasn't seen a Wookiee since long before the fall of the Empire. The group maintains a safe distance, standing some ways from the ship and conferring within themselves.

Behind the glass door, Seren gasps at all she sees. “Ben is back!” she grins, but even seeing Ben isn't enough to make her sad heart happy again. “Marie might be in the ship,” she tries, lips quivering a bit as the sadness grows.

Taran nods. “Maybe.” Marie clearly isn't on the ship, but she doesn't have it in her to break the news to Seren.

Together, they inspect the small group that left the ship. It's clear to them the girl with the serious expression is the familiar presence they sensed. They don't understand why or how, it just is, like some things are. The two men look friendly. They smile and are talking about something they see on their home.

The fourth person doesn't look like a person. He looks like a furry monster. His hair covers his whole entire body, from head to toe. Even on his face. Taran narrows her eyes in thought. She can't remember a creature like that in all her coloring books.

“Taran,” Seren whispers, for no reason at all. “I want to get a closer look at that guy. The hairy one.”

“Grandma said no,” she asserts. “No means no.”

“But they flew with Ben. They may all be friends.”

Seren does have a point. And the hairy man does look really cool. “Maybe. Maybe. But only if Grandma says so.”

Outside in the backyard, Ren notes the girls’ curious faces through the glass. He sees no Hux, only his mother. “Is Hux alright?” he asks, voice trembling.

Aems crosses her arms protectively over herself, a gesture that Hux often does. “No.”

There's no time for Ren to swim around in his guilt. “I need to speak with him.”

“Where's Marin?” she demands. It hasn't been all that long she's knows Ben, and isn't sure she can allow herself to trust Ben yet, but she knows that he'd never hurt Hux or their family. She just needs to understand.

“The First Order has him. He left with them on a shuttle he called. My friends and I want to help bring him home.” Ren swallows. “It would appear that he’s joined them.”
The First Order? She recoils, fully aware of every criminal act the First Order is capable of. And Marin left to *join* them? The how, the why is not important. But she can't help but wonder. “Is this because of you?”

Ren is tired of lying. “Yes.”

For a moment, Ren thinks she'll lash out and scorn him, tell him to leave and never return. But she slides the door open to let them both inside, her way of accepting his faults and giving him a chance to better them.

“Grandma, can we say hi to Ben’s friends?” Seren blurts, not letting Taran’s swift elbow to the gut dampen her curiosity.

Aems looks to Ben as of to ask, ‘are they dangerous?’

“Oh, um. Sure you can see them. I've known them for years. But I've known the Wookiee the longest. Since I was born, actually.”

The Wookiee must be the hairy man. Seren and Taran spark an idea. “They can come inside and we can introduce ourselves. W'll make room on the couches.” This will also give them an opportunity to ask Ben’s friends about Marie since Grandma, Ben, and Papa won't talk about it.

“You can invite them in,” she says to Ren, much to his surprise. “Just tell them to leave their weapons on the back patio.”

Not wasting any more time, Ren steps out and ushers the rest of them inside. Understandably, they hesitate. But they don't want to be rude so they awkwardly disarm themselves and set their blasters and lightsabers on the duracrete and shuffle inside. Chewie is first, and he ducks his head through the threshold.

Immediately, Seren and Taran gravitate to Chewie. Rey, Finn, and Poe offer polite greetings to Aems and the girls, who are far too occupied with ogling Chewie than meeting them.

“You have a lovely home,” Rey tells Aems. She eyes the twins, taking in their impeccable light. Smiling softly, she imagines if she had hair covering her body from head to toe, the girls would be as interested in her as they are in Chewie.

“Hux is in Marin’s room. First door on the right,” Aems informs Ren, and he takes the cue and heads that way. “Girls, let's give Ben some time with your papa. Why don't you introduce yourselves to our guests and show them where they can wait?”

Chewie whirs softly and waves a hand to show the girls that he's nothing to be afraid of. This seems to be successful, and the girls snap out of their daze to politely instruct them to sit down on the couches.

“Do you want a drink or a snack?” Taran asks, turning to look each new face in their eyes. There's the tall hairy man that Ben said he knew him since he was a baby, there is a nice looking man with curly hair, another nice looking man with fuzzy hair like Lisbeth’s, and a pretty woman who has bright light behind her eyes and under her skin, down to the center.

“No thank you. We just ate,” Finn fibs. He doesn't want them to go out of their way. Surely once Hux realizes who’s in his house, he'll kick them out.

“I'm Taran, and this is my sister Seren. Ben's our friend, too. What are your names?”
The twins really do look like Ren and are every bit as precious as he described them. “I'm Finn. He's Poe, she's Rey, and the big guy is Chewie.”

“Chewie?” Seren repeats, committing the name to memory. “What a cool name.”

Chewie gnarrs in agreement. Han gave him that nickname back when they first met. Long before the war, before Luke, Leia, and Ben came into their lives.

“What? I'm not gonna pretend I understand what he's saying.”

“Chewie can understand you and me but he can only speak Shyriiwook. Chewie's a Wookiee. He can't make our noises, just like we humans can't make his,” Rey explains.

“So nobody knows what he's saying?” Taran inquires. “That must be frustrating.”

“Ben and I can understand him just fine,” Rey smiles. “We both have known Chewie since we were children.”

“So you are real good friends with Ben?”

“We sure are,” she says without hitch. More than friends. They've become a family.

“He's really nice to us,” Taran smiles, and her sister vehemently backs her up. “Ben makes our Papa happy, too.”

“That's wonderful,” Rey smiles. “Is Ben the one who did your hair?” She'd know that style of braiding anywhere. Seren and Taran wear it beautifully.

“Yes!” they say, beaming proudly. “We both like Ben a lot. And Ben likes all of us. Even our brother, Marie.” Seren and her sister exchange uncertain glances. “Have you seen Marie? He's big and tall like Ben and has light hair and he probably has a big frown. Taran, go get a picture!”

Taran scrambles for the family photo album, the one that was really expensive and shines the pictures up in the air in full, bright color. Under normal circumstances, her Grandma wouldn't approve of them handling the album because sometimes they are far too clumsy to be trusted. But Grandma's mind is other places. She's sitting at the table like Papa was doing, closing her eyes as if to pray.

The Resistance watches on as the little girls locate the best picture of their brother, even though they know exactly what Marin looks like. The girls flip through pictures of mostly them and their grandmother. There's a rare few with Hux. It's chilling how happy and perfect his life appears with his daughters and mother, as if this is the most unjust reward for a man like General Hux, harbinger of death and destruction to countless lifeforms.

Something glittering and faint catches Rey’s eye behind the girls’ bowed, concentrating heads. It's the form of a dormant memory that she just can't grasp and make sense of. It's gone in a blink, as if it was never there.

Taran settles on a picture collage, the rarest of its kind. It's from a few months ago. Their Papa and Marie are the only faces, and they have their heads up straight, smiling as much as they can muster the energy to into the camera. In the second picture of the collage, Papa is smiling harder and squeezing Marie’s shoulders. Marie looks like this is all too childish for him. In the third picture, Papa is kissing Marie’s cheek and Marie’s scrunches in more of a genuine smile than a grimace.
“That's him. He's really tall and he may not like it here all the time, but he belongs here,” Seren says.

Rey’s heart sinks, plunging into blue. “We haven't seen him. I'm so sorry.” Chewie hums in apology, as do Finn and Poe.

Resigned, the girls quietly put away their album. Ben's friends look sad, as if they truly missed Marie, too. This day really has been strange. First, they had such a fun morning with Ben, then Ben left, then Marie left, then Ben came back. Why did Marie have to leave? Can’t they all just be home and be happy?

--

Ren gently pushes open the door Aems had told him was Marin’s room. “Hux?” he calls, but no one answers. He lets himself in and nearly trips over something sprawled haphazardly on the ground.

Hux is slumped on the floor, unconscious. Alarmed, Ren kneels low to his side and prods his pulse-point, listens for a disturbance of breath. There are no signs of immediate trauma or any indication that Hux has done anything more than faint. Ren takes it upon himself to carry him to the bed. Marin’s bed.

Once Hux is settled, youthful face taut in betrayal even in rest, Ren looks around the room. It's an undeserved peek into Marin’s life, but he supposes this will be the only time he'll be afforded it. He studies the wide array of texts. Marin’s primary interests align with biology, primarily human, but there are plenty of texts that reflect the natural flora and fauna of their home.

Marin also likes topography, and anything to do with nature. Whereas in his youth, Ren had always wanted to take off and leave his home, visit every system between the stars, Marin appears to only be concerned with his bubble. This is their own world. If Ren had known that his coming here would destroy all they'd coveted and held dear, he never would have dared come here.

Ren finds a photograph of his family, tucked under the bed frame as if someone had dropped it. It was likely in Hux’s hands when he succumbed to his exhaustion. He nearly loses his footing too when he picks up the artifact to inspect. It couldn't have been more than a few months after they came to Rhiannon that it was taken. Marin looks just as he looked the day they all left. The girls are small babies. The time he lost being in their lives is something he'll always mourn.

Hux squirms awake. He bores into the ceiling, eyes wide and unrecognizing. There's no blissful moment where he's forgotten what's happened to his son, no breaths taken that aren't taken in distress. Marin’s gone, Marin’s gone, and he's the one who lost him.

Boots to his right alert him that he's not alone. It's Ben.

“Your mother let me in,” Ben tells him. There's something in his hands. It's the photograph of them all together for the first time. Remorsefully, Ben tucks it away. What if Ben can see the turmoil staining his boy’s eyes, too? He almost begs Ben to look. Can't you see? Can't you see how lost my boy was, and I never even realized?

“What's your name?” Hux asks instead, having no energy to sit up. When Ben freezes, he clarifies himself. He's tapping into a rage he didn't know he was capable of. Rage spawned from hatred and
heartbreak and passion and love. “When they shot you and I had you dying in my arms, you told me your name wasn't Ben. What's your name? Your real name.”

“It doesn't matter what my name is,” Ren tries, though he knows that won't be good enough for Hux.

“Answer me.”

“I can't.”

“So you can fuck me, but you can't tell me your real name?” Hux spits, bile rising at the hurt flickering in Ben’s features.

Ren finds the right words. “I can't tell you because it's not my place to tell you.”

“What the hell does that even mean?” He's sick of not knowing, being shoved around like a damned hapless puppet.

“It means,” Ren begins, kneeling by the bed to make them eyelevel. “It means that I love you far more than I could ever say,” he confesses. “And I'm gonna get him back. I'm gonna bring him home.”

Hux flushes. He doesn't know how he could love him, how Ben could already be so devoted to him and his son. He never expected to be loved by someone like Ben, so soon and so fiercely. “You barely know me.” Though sometimes he feels Ben knows more about him than he knows himself.

“You barely know me,” Ren parrots back.

Ben would only toss that back at him if he was conscious when he shouted and pleaded to Marin to save Ben’s life. He doesn't know if he meant it, if he truly meant it. Now that Marin’s gone, everything’s changed. It's like his son abandoning him lifted a veil overhead and unobstructed his judgement. Marin saved Ben when he said he loved him. He left when he said he loved him. Heartsick, Hux sits up on his borrowed bed.

“I only said that so Marin would save you,” Hux grates, needing the words to bruise. He's lying, but Ben won't be able to tell. He needs Ben to hurt as he's hurt. Because if Ben hadn't come here and stolen his heart, Marin would have never left.

But deep, deep down, he knows he would have lost his son, some way or another. It was only a matter of time before Marin decided he didn't need him anymore.

To Hux’s disappointment, Ben doesn't look shocked or hurt at all. It's like he expected to hear something that cruel from him. “I'm going to get him back. I'll stop at nothing, understand?”

Hux’s heart lurches. “What if he doesn't want to come back?” he asks, barely above a whisper.

But Ben won't stray. “I'll bring him back even if it kills me,” he vows. “And when he's back home, safe, and not willing to part with you ever again. I'll go back to where I came from. And nothing like this will ever happen again.”

Tears blur Hux’s vision, and for a second Ben blurs into a haze, like a memory. He doesn't want to part with Ben. He can't. But he knows he, too, would stop at nothing to bring Marin back. The fact that Ben would as well is enough to know he'll soon have to make an impossible decision.
Space is cold.

The darkness surrounding the shuttle envelopes like a nightmare. There's nothing but its icy binding. The First Order is a spaceside dominant organization. It makes sense its members spend most of their lives trapped between sheets of metal and duraglass. It's where Hux spent his life before his desertion. It's where Marin will spend the rest of his. However long or abrupt his life may be.

But the vacuum of unforgiving space is arbitrary in comparison to the angry, gaping maw inside him, feeding off the energy of every lifeform in his wake. Marin closes his eyes. He feels the maw, rabid and insatiable now that it's risen from dormancy.

“So, you're him?” the Stormtrooper’s leader asks from the organized crowd. Phasma is her name. He's felt her mind from the inside, as he felt her whole garrison. All of her top men and women devolved into his subjects.

“What?” Marin asks. It didn't occur to him she could break his hold to speak to him.

“You're Hux’s and Ren’s spawn, aren't you?” The boy is everything she imagined he'd be. A haunting mix of both her former commanding officers. It's disturbing how he has Ren’s arrogant gait and Hux’s poise. Ren’s terror and Hux’s emotion. It bleeds from him.

“That doesn't matter now.” Marin glares through the viewport to the enormous Star Destroyer, growing larger every heartbeat. The other Stormtroopers in the shuttle stand at attention, because Marin hasn't commanded them to move.

He hasn't commanded Phasma to move, but she's given herself permission to speak. “I suppose you're here to finish what they started? To claim the galaxy as your own? I'm sure you'll get farther than either of them ever did. Given your talents,” she grimaces, loathing being invaded and commanded like some programmed droid. But there's something admirable about his method of leadership, as sinister as that may be. Power over the mind. True power.

Rule the galaxy? “That sounds incredibly pointless.”

Fucking figures Hux and Ren’s spawn would be every bit as useless as them. Wasted potential.

“Then what the hell are you doing here?”

What the hell is he doing here? Leaving was his only option. A proper step in his evolution. It was only a matter of time before he succumbed to his urges to use and manipulate. Becoming this mind wrangling, soul eating thing was only a matter of when, not if.

It was inevitable that he lost his place in his world. He crossed line after line, twisting Hux’s mind for years until he was an unrecognizable waif, nearly murdering Ren more times than he could count.

Hux can have Ren. There's no place for him if Hux has a need for Ren. He's sick of fighting for a life he was never supposed to have. Let Ren fool himself into thinking he's fit to be with Hux and his sisters. At least Marin has the stones to own up to his true identity.
Commanding Ren and Hux’s former minions had been instinctual. Easy. Natural. All he needed was the proper motivation to leave his selfish parents and the burden of his lies behind. If it worked so well for Hux and Ren, why can't it work for him?

He finally finds an answer to Phasma’s question. “I don't belong with them. My place is far from society where I belong only to myself.” Where I won't be able to hurt anyone I love.

“Then what the hell do you need us for?” she growls, searing him with her glare.

“You all know where Hux is. I can't risk you or any of your people going back to hurt him,” is one excuse. But the real reason is far more daunting to them both. The maw inside him widens an insatiable void. Has he always felt like this? With each and every angle of him orienting to its allure?

The shuttle docks in the massive docking bay. Marin embraces the chill, so different from Rhiannon’s sun. It pimples his skin where as the sun tans it. There are no such resources here on this massive docking bay, and definitely not on this Star Destroyer.

This is the Finalizer, the other minds of the docking bay inform him. He knows Hux’s memories. This is the Star Destroyer that Hux chose over him when he was barely a few days old. He looks forward to grounding it to its permanent residence. He has some ideas for where that may be.

He may look like a man but he's barely a teenager. Phasma projects involuntarily. Marin counters with, how I loathe men. She finds herself bizarrely agreeing.

“Where to next?” she asks briskly as if she could maintain some illusion of control.

Marin regards her. She's a fine warrior, trained in ways he'll never be able to master, not that he'd bother trying. She's terrified of him and what he's proven he can is capable of. But she doesn't let that fear control her like it does Ren. She uses it to problem solve, to pinpoint a weakness or a fault in her enemy, in this case Marin. There's no doubt that she could find it. It's heartbreakingly obvious.

Marin’s technique merely consists of melding his mind over hers so that she'll never be able to follow through with her strategy. Instead, he imposes his. It’s nothing new. Pushing into her memories, Marin finds the location of a room he's never been to but he knows it still must exist. It does. She sees the room pulled up like a datafile, grimacing at what she finds behind her own eyes. He doesn't need to instruct her or the garrison of trusted Stormtroopers to do a thing. Their commands are beyond words. He forces his will deep down into their bones.

Marin marches off the shuttle onto the busy, orderly docking bay. In his exercise clothing and tangled hair, he sticks out like a blemish on the Finalizer’s crisp blankness. He'll need to change.

Through a pulse of dark energy, the lingering officers are not permitted to speak to him or regard him in any way as he passes. Marin ignores their initial shock at his keen manipulation. He feels no guilt for the treatment. How is what he's doing any different than what has been happening to these minions their whole lives?

Now alone, but under no threat of retaliation, Marin approaches the room he sought. The door opens to his presence, as if it were waiting for him all this time. Before he breaches the threshold, doubt shakes him. He closes his eyes and tugs on that gnarled center of him, burning and tormented like singeing flesh pinned inside flames.

Hux abandoned him. Ren used him. His whole life can be reduced to these two events. Sometimes
the events recycled themselves, and Marin was unfortunate enough to live them more than once.

Ren never loved him. He's never been prouder of how sure of this imperative he had always been, down to the second that he met him.

Hux never wanted him. All he's done is make him miserable and ostracized, plagued his life with his monstrous overbearance.

So much he's certain of. And yet, this does not empower him, not even the least.

He skims the fear, the anger, the guilt, oh, the guilt for everything he's done to them, everything he's lost because of his fears and selfishness, he's just like them—

The flames are fanned. He enters the room.

There's hardly anything he can use to describe Kylo Ren’s room. There's a bed, void of sheets and a pillow, its dustless surface untouched for years. There's a strange triangular pedestal, shining empty under the useless spotlight.

He finds a place to sit, a platform right by the abandoned pedestal, and takes in the oppressive moment.

It's been years since he's been this far from Hux. He already feels liberated from the yawning distance, an infinite way away from everything he's done to him. He can finally atone for all the years he's made him miserable and lonely. The oppressive moment beats on.

Marin moves to the closet, walking on air. All remaining articles in Ren’s closet are woolly and stark black. He pulls out a long, heavy tunic and mechanically puts it on. It's cold in space but the cumbersome fabric does little to warm him. He's felt cold like a corpse since Hux showed him he'd rather be with Ren than be his father. Since he realized he's so much like Ren and Hux would still take Ren over him. Ren would let himself die just to prove it.

He doesn't need Hux, or family or friends, or even allies. He doesn't need anyone. The tunic fits just right, long and binding over his frame and over his muscled arms, as does the belt and buckle, snug around his abdomen. It fits so well that the urge to command Phasma in here to snap his neck rises with bile. He tugs on a pair of leather gloves to conceal his hand scars.

The scratched, black and chrome helmet will complete the ensemble. He's never seen Ren in this helmet but the helmet is imprinted by his taint, just as he is. It's an artifact, a testament to Ren’s true identity, just as he is. For he wouldn't exist if Ren weren't a rapist and a murderer.

That's who he is. That’s where he comes from. He wouldn’t be Marin without hurting Hux, just like Ren.

Marin reminds himself that Ren is gone, as Hux is gone. He's on his own path now, carved through the minds of every last one of the First Order’s fascists.

The helmet hisses close around his head. For the first time in his life, he's unstoppable.

Chapter End Notes

i know that last scene was creepy as fuck but tune in next week to see what lil marie
has planned for the FO!! :D
“What's Jedi?” Taran asks, her brown eyes wide and inquisitive. When the nice pretty lady Rey said she and her friend Finn were Jedi, she didn't know what to make of it. Seren clearly hasn't either and Taran would be surprised if she had because not only do they look the same, they know a lot of the same facts and ideas.

Rey debates telling her to ask Ren in case he'd prefer not to expose them to their world. But being a Jedi isn't just a part of their world, it's their identity. Anakin, Luke, Ren and even Marin were Jedi for the short time he lived with them. They have the right to know. “The Jedi are keepers of the peace. They protect people who can't protect themselves.”

Taran considers this. “They're like warriors?” Her papa is a warrior. He can shoot big blasters and things.

“When the situation calls for it, yes. We have certain...tools we use in doing so.”

“Tools?”

She should have known her answer wouldn't satisfy them. “We use our lightsabers. And our relationship with the Force helps us solve conflicts without hurting anyone.”

This Rey lady is definitely from another planet. “The what?”

Finn cuts in. “The Force is what connects us to everything around us. Person to person, even person to tree and creature, even the air we breathe. Everything is connected.”

The idea of the Force is so far out there to the girls. But somehow it makes sense. Why else would they be able to see Papa and Grandmother without looking, or feel empty like a nutshell with Marie gone?

“That's some crazy stuff,” Seren mutters. Why hadn't Papa told them about the Force?

“And what's even crazier is that some people, like Rey and I, can do things other people can't using the Force.”

“Like what?” Seren asks.

Instead of explaining, Finn focuses on a stack of books and manipulates the energy around it to lift it into the air. He expected the girls, as inquisitive and enthusiastic as they are, to gasp and coo. Which is why he's a bit offended when they look at the book's motion like it's completely normal.

Taran frowns. “What? I don't get it.”

Finn makes a face. “It's a floating book. That's not weird to you?”

“Why would that be weird?”
“It's kinda weird that you don't think it's weird.”


When Finn confronts them with more of his questions, they prove themselves by making the whole center table float as if it had its own repulsorlifts. Chewie gnarrs in confusion, and the look on the Resistance trio's faces says it all.

“You're doing that?” Poe interjects, trying to sound friendly and not terrified at the powerful four-year-olds.

“Poe. That's a table. The table is doing that,” Taran exasperates, her and her sister shaking their braided heads.

Finn snickers at Poe getting stumped by the clever little girls. “You walked right into that one.”

The table manages to set itself down without much noise, but Ren chooses this time to rejoin the group in the living room. The girls are the first to approach him.

“Is Papa okay?” Seren whispers, eager to hear any news.

“He's alright,” Ren fibs. In Marin’s bedroom, lightheaded and angry, Hux had complained about the strange noises coming from his living room, and Ren explained it was several trusted Resistance members including a well behaved yet vocal Wookiee that Aems invited in. Hux proceeded to grovel dispassionately about his mother’s misjudgment, but his heat fizzled out. For the first time in the face of the enemy, Hux doesn't truly care for defeating them or even expressing any distaste for them. All he cares about is bringing his son home, by any means necessary.

“I'll be bringing your brother back home,” Ren informs them.

Seren smiles softly, grateful for the hope Ben gives her. “You should tell him that we miss him. And that...and that…”

For all the words that Seren has sometimes, it's strange to hear her at a loss for them for a change. “We really miss him. Please tell him that. And we want him home because…” Taran searches for the end of her reasoning. “Because this is home. It's not the same without him here.”

Ren’s heart aches. He'll stop at nothing to bring Marin home.

There’s something else, something he was far too afraid to mention to Hux alone in the confines of Marin’s mausoleum of a room. “Aems. I'll need your help in convincing Hux to seek refuge on one of our cruisers. You, him, and the girls. Just in case.”

“In case what?” She can't stand to hear the words she suspects Ben’s about to say.

The very idea that Marin would do anything to endanger them is a foul and harrowing though. But he can't be sure the First Order’s silent planet killer won't be used here, especially now that Phasma knows who exactly inhabits Rhiannon.

He also can’t be sure Marin wouldn’t use it, either.

He steps close. She looks as if she might hit him. “The First Order has a weapon that can destroy entire systems. I hate to be the one to say this, but Marin left on his own volition. If he somehow learns of the weapon’s location, it's possible he might retaliate—”
The slap Aems delivers to his cheekbone rings loud enough for the entire room to jump. The girls stare at the floor, unaccustomed to violence in their own home, and certainly by violence committed by their grandmother.

In the aftermath, Aems closes her eyes and breathes. When she opens them, Ben doesn't match her remorse. He looks resigned, not surprised in the least to be slapped in his face. She can't bear to look at him in this state.

“I'm sorry, I just—”

“It's alright,” Ren tries. He should have known how this would affect her.

“No, I shouldn't have taken it out on you. I can't even begin to describe what it feels like knowing that you unleashed someone like that into the galaxy. Living day to day knowing what your child has become. First—and now Marin—” she chokes, heart breaking. When Armitage came home for the first time, she kept her questions about his sins and crimes to herself for she feared what would come of his answer.

“Aems, you have to listen to me,” Ren says, powering through his stinging cheek. “Marin’s not lost. He's not a monster, not now and not ever. I have a plan, but meanwhile, we can't risk staying here. Think about the girls.”

Hux trudges from the hall, ignoring the new faces in his living room. He's heard everything his mother and Ben had argued about, the slap she delivered that shut him up. “You can guarantee they'll be safe aboard your cruiser?” he asks, gravely with exhaustion. He doesn't care about his honor or his pride or the damned Resistance. All he wants is Marin back.

“Yes. They have your interests at heart, all of you.”

Hux swallows, overcome with a haunted feeling as he instructs the girls to pack up for a little trip. He can't help but feel death by planetary genocide is a fitting demise, and is sickened when he realizes that he's afforded the chance to save himself. Hope, something that he's stolen from countless lifeforms. It's a sobering, brutal reckoning. He wouldn't be surprised if the universe kept him apart from Marin for the rest of his life just to prove a point.

Ren hears Hux and his mother argue over something that sounds suspiciously dangerous. About Hux coming with him to bring Marin back from the belly of the beast. Immediately, he interjects. “You need to stay on the cruiser. I won't have you risking anything more,” Ren tells him.

“I don't take orders from you, Ben,” he spits, clearly indicating that he's tired of the pseudonym. “I'm going after him, whether it be with you or not.”

Ren can't let that happen. “The girls need you. They don't have anyone but you.”

“And I don't have anything without him and I'm not gonna just sit here and wait for you to piece this back together for me. Besides, you don't know the First Order like I do. I know every weakness.”

Ren holds his gaze. “I know you know what's at stake here, but—”

“No, you have no say in this. Absolutely none,” Hux snaps. “If you hadn't come here, then none of this would have happened.” Hux wants the words to sting.

“I know. I know that. And...I know you won't be backing down. If you come along, know that I'll do whatever it takes to keep you safe. All of you.”
Ben’s vow reverberates hollowly to his ears. He shoves past him and grabs his daughters’ hands, ignoring the concerned faces of Ben’s friends his mother invited inside. He hesitates. There’s someone they’re forgetting.

“There are others you must protect from whatever—they might do,” Hux starts. “Marin’s best friend and her mother. They’re not far from here.” It's odd, caring for another lifeform as if they were family. Lisbeth and her mother never did anything wrong in being here, living in their community and sharing playful evenings and dinners with. Marin will surely be devastated if anything happened to them.

Ren gladly obliges to Hux’s surprising request. Not much later, the Resistance leads the Hux family onto the Falcon. Even in the chaos, Ren grins softly at the twins’ coos of bewildered fascination with the freighter having never been exposed to a spaceship before.

Hux's usual judgmental sneer is nowhere to be found. He is given a seat next to his mother in the main living area, propping his daughters up on either knee and holding them close as if they too might slip away. He closes his eyes and imagines holding Marin at their age, and finds there is no memory to speak of.

When they arrive at Lisbeth’s house, Ren sends Chewie to explain to her and her mother what's come of Marin. After their initial teary reunion, having spent their years together between the wars, Lisbeth wilts. She should have tried harder, said something, done something to make Marin stay. But Chewie gnarrs at them reassuringly. Sometimes people must break before they can be mended.

“This ship is so cool,” Seren whispers up to her papa’s ear when the ship is flown high, it's walls buzzing all around. But her papa is staring far off into space, squeezing her around her middle. “Ben is the captain,” she informs her sister, just in case she forgot.

“I know. This is the Falcon.” Clearly, this is Ben’s ship. Taran can imagine seeing Ben handle the buttons and lights, because the ship is exciting and complicated, and Ben is both of those things. But Papa doesn't seem to care about the cool ship. He just stares at the floor.

The twins quiet down when their comments go unacknowledged, which is far unlike their papa. They focus on the ship's whir and the voices of Ben and Lis and Miss Naedie down the hall. They may be talking about Marie and planning to go find him. The girls don't know what they can do to help. All they can do is squeeze their papa’s small frame.

Finally, Hux speaks. “Papa’s gonna have to go bring your brother home. You're gonna stay with Grandma and Lis while I'm away, alright?”

“What? Where are you going?” First Marie, and now Papa?

“I'll be coming back as soon as I can.” He can barely stomach leaving, but he would never do anything to endanger his daughters by bringing them along.

A cold, bitter hollowness forms in their hearts. Tears fill Taran’s eyes. “Don't go,” she whimpers, squeezing him tight. Seren is at a loss for words and holds him tight, too. His shirt is wet now from their silently blubbering faces.

Hux’s face twists, and he kisses their braided heads. “I don't want to, I swear. But your brother needs help. And where I'm going...it isn't safe for you both. I promise to be back soon. Just stay with Grandma. She'll protect you.” His mother rubs a comforting hand between his shoulder blades. She'll keep them from trouble while being housed, protected by the Resistance. Had it not been for his innocent daughters, Hux is sure the Resistance would have preferred to leave him for
dead if Marin decided to deliver some much-deserved cosmic payback and obliterate their system.

Down the hall, Ben steals a glance at him and his sniffiling girls. After everything Hux said to him, Ben still looks at him like he's the centerpiece of the room. Reluctantly, Ben disturbs their peace.

“We’re docking in the cruiser. Certain members of the Resistance have taken an interest in this development. I'll be speaking on your behalf. If that's alright. Unless you want to meet with them.”

“The less I deal with them, the better,” Hux complains, feeling the minute shift in gravity as the ship pills through their docking bay. He tightens his hold on his daughters as if his flesh and bone arms could shield them from uncertainty.

“All we need is a location. It's possible they can retrieve it.”

Hux is heady from his nausea. He might actually pass out. Again. “What will they do with him once you find him?”

Ren wavers and kneels low, so that he's lower than eye to eye with him. “Whatever they have planned, good or—otherwise. They'll have to go through me.”

After everything, Ben’s devotion to him and his children hasn't slackened. Even after Marin used Phasma to skewer him like fishing bait and nearly killed him. “I can't lose him,” he breathes, to which Ben replies, “I know. I know.”

The Falcon lurches. They're safe aboard. Ren ushers Hux and his mother outside, the both of them cradling a girl in their arms. Where the girls would normally be beyond excited to see the new and captivating structures around them, they are instead attempting to never part from their father or grandmother.

Ren leads them through the sparse bay to the closest lounge and requests for the Jedi to help clear the room to give them their privacy. If any of these Resistance fighters realized that General Hux is aboard and under special protection by yet another First Order ex member, the fallout would be catastrophic. Ren assures them that he'll update them shortly.

Finn volunteers to guard the door if not for Hux’s sake, but for the little girls’. And Hux’s mom was nothing but kind and doesn’t deserve anything vengeful Resistance members have in store for the once-General Hux.

Down the hall, Ren greets his mother with a desperate embrace. After what’s happened to Marin, grief for his past sins has grown viciously. He can't believe he put her through this, for years.

“Ben. I’m so sorry,” General Organa tells her son, heavy with regret. There was always something more she could have done. It's unlikely that she'll ever forgive herself for Marin’s descent, as well as Ben's.

“We need to find him. Now,” he implores. “I need to get any information you have so I can come up with some kind of plan. We're running out of time.” Every second that passes is more compounding agony for Hux and their children. Marin could already be past the brink, tormented by the dark side into malleating his fears and guilt into someone unrecognizable. Someone like Ren.

His mother tells him that according to their scanners, several bases have been evacuated and multiple First Order’s Star Destroyers have made the jump to hyperspace to an undisclosed location. Although their number of spies have dwindled since Phasma’s reign, she hopes this is enough to bring Marin back to Ben. She’s tried reaching out with her senses for anything that could
disclose Marin’s location like how she found him first, years ago, but it never worked when Marin left with Hux, and it hasn’t worked ever since.

“He must be controlling them. I don’t think he would use them to hurt any innocent people.” Not yet, anyway. But the darkness is like a cancer. Once it exsanguinates one’s carefully crafted morality, there’s no telling what will be left in the aftermath, who will be breathing Marin’s lungs and beating his heart. “There has to be another way to disband them. Hux spoke of secret triggers and implants for his control lest he ever lose it. Maybe there’s something else.”

Ben’s hope and determination is as resilient as hers. She has no doubts about his success in bringing Marin home. Tears well in her eyes, overcome with heartbreak as she recalls the last time she saw Han, she was thinking the same thing. She can’t lose Ben, too. Not like this.

Immediately, Ren senses where her sorrow takes her. “Marin’s had time and time again to kill me. And there’s no question that I deserve it, I know I can bring him home. I’ll make it back in once piece. For you.”

Her tears fall, and she cradles Ben’s jaw between her two cool hands. “You’re so much like your father.”

Ren wilts, flickering with mourning. After all these years, he still misses him.

“But don’t come back in one piece for me,” she orders. “Do it for you.”

With that, Ren wraps her in another warm embrace, treasuring the moment to hold with him until the end. For the first time in a long time, he prays that end doesn’t approach too soon.

Ren stifles the age-old dread in favor of bringing his mother a sliver of good news. He really wants her to meet her granddaughters. “You know who's on the ship?”

“I felt them the moment they came aboard. You were right. They’re...pure light,” she smiles. “I’d love to introduce myself. That, and spoil them rotten,” she chuckles.

“Oh, I know it. They’re gonna be on your side before I ever get them on mine.”

“In time, they will be. I can feel it.” They’re so close this time, but it’s gonna take everything to get there. “You’ll bring him home, and you’ll all finally be together. And that's when your life begins.”

Outside the room housing the mournfully quiet family of Huxes, Finn steps aside to let Ren through.

Hux is sitting on the floor, both arms still around his daughters. They keep shifting their eyes to each other, unable to fathom what it'll be like with their papa gone for so long. He said it would only be a few days, but he wasn't certain. They know bad things can happen unexpectedly.

Ren kneels low but gives them their space. “Hux, may we speak in private?”

Immediately, Hux kisses his little girls on their heads and arranges them in their grandmother's lap. He pulls Ben aside. Has Ben found him? Has something happened to him? Unblinking, Hux holds Ben’s gaze.

“We have reason to believe Marin is commanding the First Order’s legions. He's already forced several bases into evacuation. We don't know why or where they're being sent. But the Stormtroopers and officers are being ordered to comply.” Ren leans in closer, full of graveness. “Is there any way to trounce his control over them?”
A lifetime ago, Hux would have laughed in the face of anyone who told him he'd be entirely complicit in dismantling the First Order. But everything has changed. He's not the man he was. His children are his life now. He'll bring Marin home if he has to set the world on fire. “The triggers. There's another place I can activate them. But it won't just be the top-level Troopers. It will be all of them, every age and level.” Even the one who defected and joined the Jedi.

At his post a few paces away, Finn stiffens at what Hux is implying. He always knew his destiny was to destroy the organization who enslaved him and expected to meet his end somewhere along the line. If this is the only way to defeat them, there is no other choice.

Immediately, Ren senses Finn’s shift. “That can't happen. I've seen the children at the plants. Thousands of them. They're innocent.” He thinks of Finn and what it took for him to surrender his allegiance. That kind of bravery will not be found in another, as his heroism is unparalleled in vivacity. Maybe there's something else that can cripple the Order as severely without taking that many lives, innocent and otherwise.

Hux darkens as if recalling an intimate, private detail of his past. “There’s something else. But I don’t know if it will work.”

His eyes flick to Finn. He wonders if Hux remembers Finn and his choice to abandon the Order. “What? What is it?”

“Datafiles. Every Stormtrooper. Their homeworlds in which they were taken, their parents and their locations. My father...when he created the program, he had the First Order keep tabs lest any members of the child’s family were to try and find them. There’d never been any true issues, not one a blaster couldn’t fix, but I kept a server for all the data to collect and sit in case we needed it. Maybe if—” Hux shakes his head, because how could this even work? What’s he supposed to take this on, faith alone? Or worse, something as foolish as hope?

But Ben knows exactly what his plan is. “Maybe if we released the information, the Stormtroopers would disband on their own?”

Hux nods, desperate for anything that can lead to Marin coming back to him. “It'll work. Right?” he adds, too desperate.

“Yes, I know it’ll work. All they need is a few that’ll shake the careful structure. The rest will follow. No bloodshed.”

“No bloodshed,” Hux parrots, nodding profusely. He should be burning down buildings, slaughtering thousands, millions to return his son to him. But Ben, he trusts him. Ben’s unwavering faith is holding him together, joining all his tattered ends between the palms of his hands.

“We’ll leave right now,” Ren tells him. And because he can’t promise it enough, he says, “It’s gonna be alright. You’ll get him back.”

Hux looks as if he doesn’t believe him. He moves back to his daughters and tells them it’s time.

“You won’t be long?” Seren asks, voice low.

“No, not long. I promise.”

“We can come with you. We’ll be quiet and listen,” Taran tries, as if she could somehow change her papa’s mind.

“It’s too dangerous. I wouldn’t be able to go on if anything happened to either of you, understand?”
They nod. They know how much their papa loves them. “What if something happens to you?” Seren asks.

“Ben will watch out for me,” he smiles, committing to memory his daughter’s angelic faces. He’s nothing without his children. “Please watch your grandmother. Make sure you all have eyes on one another at all times, understood?”

The twins nod, reaching out to hug him one last time. His mother kisses his face and he smiles in gratitude for her continued support as every breath of her radiates comfort. His little girls seem so much smaller against the backdrop of all things. He forces himself not to dwell on how he’ll be able to protect them from everything, himself most of all. He couldn’t even keep Marin from harm.

Chewie trades spots with Finn to guard the three remaining Huxes and he waves through the threshold to alert the sad little girls he’ll be protecting them. Thankfully, they wave back, always curious even when they’re upset.

Rey and Finn lead Hux and Ren back to the Falcon. Ren hovers by him when they’re aboard so that Hux’s refusal to acknowledge the Jedi in any way doesn’t hamper the mission. Ren can speak for him. Ren gives them a set of coordinates that Hux discloses. It took him a moment to remember them, having been home only once in the past two decades. They’re heading to Hux’s homeworld of Arkanis.

Hux knows the two Jedi are only offering help to see to the destruction of the First Order’s Stormtrooper program. Hells, the male one looks so familiar he may have higher personal stakes than Ben does. Let them have their victory. Without Marin, he feels indifferent to it. If he ever gets his son back, he’ll never allow himself to behave outside his son’s interests again.

Hux finds a seat in a private cot down the hall, carved in the wall like a cave. He assumes the Jedi and Ben are talking about him, about what a mess he’s made. How he must be such a failure of a parent that he let his son run off and assume command of his ex-organization.

Ben joins him almost an hour later. “We’re halfway to the coordinates,” he informs him. “I told them it would be best if they manned the ship while we went to your site on foot so we don’t draw attention to ourselves.”

Hux straightens. He lost track of time. What must have been an hour felt like a blink of an eye. As usual, Ben is soft and understanding. Achingly patient with him as if he were the most fragile heart. One would think Ben would have snapped at him by now, or scorned him in any fathomable way for inconveniencing him or nearly getting him killed. But after everything Ben’s been through for him, and everything that Hux said to him, Ben’s still here, traveling to the ends of the galaxy to help him find his son.

“Thank you,” Hux whispers, clenching every muscle. “I wouldn’t have been able to do this, if not for you.”

“You wouldn’t have been in this mess, if not for me,” Ben argues.

But Hux shakes his head. Ben sees the good in people. Hux sees what ills lie beneath, and in the case of his own son he not only sees the ailments, but he pointedly ignores them. “This was bound to happen. I lost Marin long ago.” What would Ben think of him if he knew he lost him as a baby and assumed care for him almost a decade later? “One of the last things I said to him,” he stammers, “was that I was miserable anytime I was with him. I said so many vulgar, selfish things. I pushed him away. I let him slip right through my fingers.”
“Hey,” Ren croaks, moving to join him on the cot. “Don’t do this. Don’t blame yourself. Marin, he’s driven. Stubborn. I know he doesn’t want to be apart from you, not forever.” Ren teethes his lip, heart racing. “You know, in a lot of ways, Marin reminds me of myself.”

Through it all, Hux snorts. How preposterous.

“Yeah, at that age, I was reckless, narrow, and just plain stupid. I’ve hurt so many that I cared about, killed for sport. And after I lost nearly everything, I wanted to lay down and die. But then…” He searches for the proper phrasing. “Then, I found something else to keep me going besides all that anger. That little…guiding star. And it took me to hell and back, but after, I found something worth living for. My guiding star,” he says, right to his star.

He’s one of many stars, but this began with him. It’s because of Hux that he’s begun to forgive himself for his countless misdeeds. They formed another star, a misguided boy in desperate need of a star of his own, and two stars of pure light, two girls who will solidify all their paths to absolution.

“It starts with him,” Ren continues. It begins with the desire to move forward and heal. “But you’re gonna be the one to lead him. That’s all he needs. You just have to remind him what’s worth surrendering to and what’s worth letting go.”

Ben’s honesty, his sincerity is so sickeningly sweet, it drips on every edge of him. He can’t imagine life without Ben any more than he can imagine life without Marin. “What I said about needing you gone, and—and how I only said what I said to get Marin to save you—”

Ren hushes him with a chaste, warm, slack-lidded kiss. Hux’s heated breath tethers him in his orbit. “But what you know—or think you know,” Ren says shakily. “Whether you know—truly know what you are to me. Nothing could ever erase my love for you. Nothing.”

Dizzy with feeling, Hux opens up to Ben’s heady kiss. He kisses like he believes every promise and vow in his heart. Hux gasps wetly as they part and wraps his arms around Ben’s neck, desperate for comfort. --

Droves of Star Destroyers and command shuttles weave into orderly formation around their landing site. Marin’s never seen such fluidity in command before. He peers through the slot of the mask outside of Phasma’s command post, high over the bridge and overlooking the fleet blocking out the stars. Phasma’s mind had been a hard one to wrangle, but without her he’d have no way of setting up his plan.

The lesser officers who refuse to obey the chain of command had taken a considerable amount of encouragement, largely from his powers. Luckily, he’s where he needs to be to harness the sheer mass of energy required to tie the First Order down. Just a few more hours and the entire organization will be here. Marin glares down to the moon’s hazy atmosphere. A fitting end to a heinous organization.

A gaggle of officers fuss and deliberate amongst themselves. Marin is tempted to pluck the information from them just out of curiosity as to what they’re caught up on. In the mask and cloak,
no one can tell how young he is. And with Phasma as his enforcer, he doesn't have to say a word. The sound of his own voice grating through the vocoder is nauseating.

Marin compels Phasma to order her men. “Speak up. Any objections to our new route can go through me,” she says, Marin’s words animating her mouth.

“My Lord...the entire fleet is almost here,” a lieutenant asks. “What purpose could there possibly be? To evacuate every base and gather them here? There's nothing out here.”

“You aren't here to question orders,” she instructs against her will.

The officer cocks his head to the masked nuisance. “These are your orders? Or Kylo Ren’s?”

Marin understands why they would mistake him for Ren. After all, he's wearing his awful mask. But this is the only way to operate here. One must lose one's identity.

When Phasma closes off, her perpetually disgusted features twisted, the officer respites with insubordination that under anyone else's reign would ensure a swift expulsion from his rank. “Forgive me for speaking out of turn, but how do you expect me to follow a known traitor and ally to the Resistance?”

Marin steps forward, cold and calculative. Do not mistake my silence for passivity, Marin sneers through an unwanted mental connection. The officer cringes at the violation. It's clear there's more where that came from.

As soon as Marin pulls from his mind, he plucks the officer’s confused litany of instinctual thoughts. To the officer, he swears he could have been spoken to by the estranged General Hux, now remembered as a ‘coward and a disgrace to the First Order’ since he deserted at about the same time as Ren.

“The First Order is reaching its end,” Marin speaks, accent crisp through the helmet’s vocoder, breaking his silence. “This system is where you and every officer like you will spend the remainder of your days.” Locked aboard the Star Destroyers like prison inmates, where they'll never be able to hurt anymore innocent people again.

Phasma is the only armed one around, second to the group of armed Stormtroopers at attention by the threshold. But that doesn't stop the irate officer from getting in Marin’s masked face. “You won't get very far. Whatever mystic command you have over our leader won't hold up against our armies, you traitorous rat.”

Waving a hand, Marin throttles the minds of the nearby Stormtroopers and commands them into corralling the officer by his shoulders.

“You're all the same,” Marin sneers, and he dismisses the impudent officer to be locked down until landing.

“What now?” growls Phasma, on her own volition. All her training had never prepared her for an opponent like him. Morbidly, she grimaces with the realization that this boy will probably be the final foe she'll face. In this realm, anyway.

The leather gloves creak over Marin’s scarred fists. The darkness coils around each fingertip, coursing through his veins. “This is where it ends.”
The Falcon docks on a shaded landing pad on the outskirts of a gloomy, hazy network of grey terraces, folding high and towering like stacks of books. Arkanis’s skies bleed with rain and the thick drops collect in streaming rivulets against the Falcon’s geometric viewport.

Rey debates shoving Finn to alert Ren and Hux they’ve arrived, but decides it’s more her responsibility than his to tend to Ren and his family. For all she knows, Finn’s just here to see the end to the Stormtrooper program. At least, that's what they hope Hux can accomplish.

“Yes and no,” Finn corrects. Her knowing, unimpressed look is a proper consequence for assuming her thoughts were for him to hear.

“Let me guess. You're here to gloat? Even the bad guys can make amends, right?” she says. Finn was the first to lend acceptance of Ren when he came to live with them. She never scorned him for seeing the good in people.

“I know you hate when I gloat,” Finn smirks.

“I loathe when you gloat.”

Finn spins around in the copilot’s chair. “But...you gotta admit. This is the best possible outcome. General Hux is about to blow the dam on his child soldier enslavement ring. His weapon of choice is ‘hope.’ Seems like a great ending to me.”

“This is for Marin. He's not doing this out of the goodness of his heart.”

“Isn't he?”

Rey softens. The prospect of Finn finally being lead to his homeworld, and possibly his family, is enough for her to align with him. She knows that once the First Order is neutralized, she'll be right beside him in this ship heading for whatever system where his family is.

Ren shuffles into the cockpit. “He’s requested that we go alone.”

Finn and Rey hesitate only a moment. “You sure you don't need backup?” Rey asks.

“No, from what he tells me, everyone here is dead.”

They don't know what to say to that. “Have your comm on you,” she tells him, impartial to sitting on the sidelines. She knows Ren understands what's at stake here.

Ren readies a jacket, one not dissimilar to his father’s that he had stashed away on the freighter. He's not sure Hux has the proper attire for the chaotic weather outside. Easily, Ren shrugs off the jacket and offers it to him. “You'll be leading the way. I don't want you to lose focus.”

Hux swallows and takes the offered jacket. It dwarfs him, as he suspected. He's grateful for Ben’s kindness. Words cannot describe what comfort he's given him.

Hux leads them outside to the gravelly path. He hasn't been to this system in decades. Arkanis is his homeworld, where he learned to be a functioning member of the First Order, but it's not where he was born. His mother told him he was born on a Star Destroyer and was taken from her immediately after entering the universe. Hux can't bear to imagine how she felt, to lose a child
before he could even name it.

“This way,” he tells Ben, leading him up a hilly path that cuts through stony towers and enclaves. All stones are marked with names and even some engravings of faces. It's Arkanis’s largest graveyard.

Ben’s confusion is evident. But he doesn’t bother explaining anything. They're almost to the marker in question.

Brendol Hux’s memorial is a comparatively large, cavernous work. The tomb holds itself as high and mighty as Brendol had when he was giving a rousing Stormtrooper plant commencement speech, while he was disciplining his bastard Armitage over a disagreement over morals. Hux steps inside as if it were the day of his father’s funeral when he was barely nineteen, gaping at the immaculate, permanent structures.

Brendol Hux has sat cremated and undisturbed in an urn since then, his visage engraved in the above wall. It's an image Hux has seen many times before. In moments of strength, yes, but more often in moments of weakness.

Somehow, Ben appears to understand. He sobers, averting his eyes to the ground. Hux presumes he knows of the Commandant from his knowledge of the First Order.

“Relax, I'm not here to mourn,” Hux says, breaking the white noise of the rain. “The payload is here.” Stowed away like a relic in a forgotten, sterile tomb.

Hux reaches down to a concealed touch pad that activates a small, seamless trapdoor. A dusted stack of data disks reveals themselves. At Ben’s silence, Hux attempts to explain himself. Though how could he ever make him understand? “My father's program was his crowning achievement. Not even the Empire had such a flawless, tactile army of expertly trained soldiers. But he always feared he'd somehow...lose it all. A cleverer hand would take his work right from under him.”

Ren kneels to Hux’s side to investigate the disks. “He kept these? If he ever needed the Stormtroopers to disband?”

Hux laughs, a dry, painful sound. “Gods, no. The kill switches. That was his contingency plan.” When he first met Ben, he’d given him a way to activate them. But as Ben put it, the Resistance has no interest in mass execution.

Hux swallows. He once destroyed datafiles much like these, files of his hidden personal history. One of his greatest regrets was purging all data of his mother to ensure he ever give into the weakness of wanting to go after her. How grateful he is the universe brought them together, regardless.

“No, Ben. These disks are all mine.” His father had no idea that he kept such extensive records of his first several generations of Stormtroopers. “I never thought I'd have such a tremendous reason for revisiting these.”

He'd never imagined he’d leak every attachment to the Stormtroopers he could harvest over the years, and certainly not under these circumstances.

Ben takes his shaky, cold hand in his wide warm ones. “I believe this will work. I trust in the goodwill of this step you're taking. You've already sacrificed so much.”

Blearily, Hux looks up to his father's stony visage. “I don't think I turned out how he wanted me to.” Not only is he a deserter, a single parent of three, performing simple, menial tasks to pass the
days along. Lonely, until Ben came along. His life hasn’t equaled to much in comparison with his past life, in the quantifiable sense. But it was his life, and it was a near perfect one. It’s his greatest shame he couldn't even hold onto his son.

“You're definitely not the only one,” Ben tells him. “Come on. It's time.”

Ren gathers the disks and gives Hux a few minutes alone with the mausoleum. After a few heartbeats, Hux follows him to the freighter without looking back.

On the Falcon’s comms, Ren and Rey manage to hook up enough for the information to reach on all servers that Ren knows for a fact the First Order religiously monitors. Hux sits off to the side, mind on only one thing.

Once the data has been dumped, Ren sits next to Hux at the nearby table. “Once the Stormtroopers begin to unpack the information of themselves and their comrades, it'll only be a matter of time before they turn. Then maybe we'll be able to pinpoint Marin’s location, using any information the turned Troopers can bring to light.”

“I don't...I can't just sit here and hope that it'll work. This is pointless.”

“It'll work,” Ren convinces him. “Because once the seed is planted, they won't be able to ignore it, or purge it from their memories. There's nothing more powerful than the sheer drive to become whole. A lifetime of conditioning couldn't erase that.” Ren swallows, dangerously close to revealing his secret. “It couldn't erase that in you. Or me. Or him.”

Hux clouds over with tears. He hopes. That Ben’s right, that Marin will come home to him, that he hasn't lost him forever.

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The Finalizer’s scanners rattle with an influx of data, page after page of classified information blipping freely across their screens. The surrounding wall of armed and ready Stormtroopers are alerted on their wrist panels. Several of them recognize their two-letter-four-number excuse for a name.

Phasma’s leash is slackened enough for her to demand what just happened, what’s making the Troopers break form and flip through their screens as if they found the most enterprising reading material. “What's this?” she asks. Marin allows her, because he wants to know, too.

“Information dump, my Lord,” the officer tells them, as if Phasma is still in command.

“Ignore it,” Marin barks, commanding and relentless under the vocoder. He doesn’t want to lose his window to destroy this dreaded organization while he still has the strength. The proximity to the Force enriched moon helps Marin remain in charge, but the growing tension among the officers is making everything more difficult for him to wrangle. “We proceed as planned. Instruct all ships to land on the moon. Now.”

When the officer hesitates, Marin drives the two distracted Stormtroopers to compel him with the noses of their blaster rifles. He tries not to think about how much more difficult it is, as if whatever information they read had disturbed their allegiance entirely.
The reluctant Stormtroopers threaten the officer into passing the command, and the ships slowly but surely begin to descend into the moon’s atmosphere. Every moment they get closer to the Force enriched moon, Marin trembles in both trepidation and invigoration from the overwhelming dark energy. He sees why Supreme Leader Snoke chose this place to dwell. This will be a fitting place to retire all the devilish First Order ships and weapons of mass destruction.

The personnel, however, he knows not what to do with them.

Everyone seems to be radiating nausea and uncertainty from Marin’s control of their susceptible minds. Marin doesn’t know how many minds he can wrangle at once, or if he truly has a use for them in the end.

He should have known this was too easy, he thinks, when the first line of Troopers inch from the bridge. Marin stops them with a burst of energy. What could have possibly gotten into them that they’d defy a direct order?

It’s then that he sees it. Confusion mostly, but there’s traces of hope, promise, a hidden, buried longing for a home. A family. Marin seethes, every fiber of fury sparking alive.

This is unacceptable. He’s never known an anger like this. Like its around him and inside him, tugging him in every direction, tearing him apart from the inside. Is it the proximity to the Force enrichment on Snoke’s moon? Is it that the dams have finally blown?

Or since leaving Hux, have his senses been widened to a broader scope where he’s finally realized how putridly angry he’s always been?

And that these officers have the nerve to try and fend for their humanity after spending so long beating the galaxy into submission, is enough for Marin to snap. Once the ship is properly docked, hovering a thousand feet over the moon’s surface, Marin strangles every precarious mind of the surrounding Troopers into gathering the sweltering men and women who man the controls like sheep for slaughter.

“You won’t get away with this, Ren!” snarls the higher-ranking officer, backed up by his lesser cohorts. “He’s going to end us. He’s a traitor! Resist him and finish him!” he shouts to the visibly struggling Stormtroopers.

The data breach has already shaken their foundations, like a stone tossed in a glass house. The Troopers see their leaders fighting against them, unjustly manipulating their officers, forcing their hands like puppets on strings—and with the prospects of a history, a name an identity beyond the betaplast armor, it’s enough for them to resist.

In sync, they lower their weapons. There’s a first time for everything.

At the officers’ relief, victory over ‘Ren’, their enemy, Marin coils around that anger awoken from hibernation. A wrecked scream erupts from his throat, swallowing the surrounding darkness like a disingenuous black hole. Every Stormtrooper is tacked under his thumb through sheer force of will. Without the darkness, he would not be able to herd five, ten, twenty, a hundred of their corrupted minds. The darkness gives him the power to wrangle hundreds. Thousands. Spread apart so thin, Marin wavers on his booted feet, clutching at the dome of the helmet like it’s suffocating him and clamping down on his skull. It’s everywhere. It’s everything.

He gasps, doubling his coverage. The more souls he entraps, the simpler the task becomes. Like his efforts strengthen with every Trooper under his complete control.
In the Stormtroopers’ first official act of mass defiance, they push back on Marin’s hold. But they’re no match for Marin’s unparalleled power. No one is.

He thinks of what Hux might think of him, if he ever learned the truth as to who he really is, what he’s been capable of for as long as he can remember. He thinks of what Ren might say if he were to see him like this, donned in his armor and mask like some sick parody of the real thing.

Marin calls to the darkness to disperse those harrowing thoughts. He’s not for anyone to use or to manipulate or to lie to or to shame. There’s never been a weapon like him. This is who he’s meant to be.

The drone-like Stormtroopers raise their blasters to the trembling crowd of officers, and begin to fire.
Two dozen shrieking officers are pummeled with blaster bolts until their lifeless bodies hit the floor. All Stormtroopers, including Phasma, stand to attention like drawn bows. The only noise in the room is Marin’s breathing. It grows more labored as he lurches forward to the mangled bodies of the officers.

They're all dead. Marin killed them. Coldness collects in his gut. He killed them. The Stormtroopers were the blaster and he was the one who pulled the trigger. Numbly, he looks to the armed Stormtroopers for confirmation. Faceless, helmeted, they confirm what he's committed. There isn't a hint of conflict in Phasma’s exposed countenance. Marin has complete control.

Somehow, he isn't surprised. It makes sense that he'd take a life. It's who he is, ingrained in his genetics like a carving in a stone. Marin kneels low. He's never seen a smoking corpse before. He imagines these deceased officers have seen many, that they've caused the loss of countless innocent lives.

Ren and Hux have most definitely seen many corpses such as these. He imagines how they felt the first time they took a life. Did they revel in it? Were they mortified? Or was it nothing new to their eyes, having been surrounded by death all their lives?

He's done the universe a favor in killing them. There will be worlds made safer from their loss.

How many more lives can he save?

Marin closes his eyes, focusing on every Stormtrooper and calling on the darkness for guidance. “Round them up,” he demands. “All of them.”

He's going to do what Hux couldn't when he abandoned the First Order, what Ren refused to when he had the chance because fuck them.

The darkness clogs all critical thought. All that's left is hatred. Fuck them. Fuck their facsimiled, manufactured love. They never truly cared for him. They used him to get closer to each other. His only regret is that Seren and Taran will have to learn how to think for themselves. They'll be stronger for it.

When the dust clears, when he's forced every one of these menaces to kill themselves, it'll be over. He'll finally be free.

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Ren adjusts on the bench next to Hux. Since the data dump, Hux has closed off as if a tremendous weight has been shrugged off leaving behind a disoriented shell. All he can do is stare into space and hope for a miracle. Hope and pray that without the Stormtroopers, Marin will let his guard
down. He'll feel lost, confused, and he will come back to him.

Hux doesn't indicate he's aware when Ren eases away to the far hall. Rey and Finn have relocated to the cockpit. They're on their way back to the Resistance’s fleet.

Ren’s feet take him to familiar corridors that lead to compartments he sincerely doubts Rey knows exist. He stops at a hidden compartment. His father often stored barrels of dungseed oil in these. The oil wasn’t illegal, but skipping out on Imperial tariffs sure was. Instead of a barrel of priceless oil in the compartments sits a well visited crate. It's been awhile since he's opened it.

Ren unlocks the mechanized clasps and eases open the lid. The contents sit just as he remembers. Cases of tools, lightsaber hilts, and a flat case for colorless lightsaber crystals. He doubts Rey knows about his trophies. His shameful souvenirs.

In one case sits a relic he rescued from the forest moon of Endor, decades after it was abandoned. Vader’s helmet. Ren turns it over in his palms to test its weight. It's a gruesome reminder of his failures, what he could have fallen towards, especially everything he'd already lost. But it also serves a promise of retribution. Vader fulfilled his destiny and destroyed the Sith. He died for Luke and became Anakin once more. Ren vows to follow in his steps, every last one this time.

The other Skywalker approaches him from behind as if she sensed his uncovering of Vader’s mask. She hasn't seen it before. It's possible that she doesn't understand its significance.

She can't disguise the haunt in her eyes at the sight of the relic. It's as clear to her what this relic is, as it is clear why Ren still has it.

“Organa’s on hold. It's important,” Rey speaks, remembering what's at stake.

Inside the main living area, Hux abates from the other presences in the room. He's entirely focused inward, even as Ben comes into view and the freighter’s comms chirp with a connection. He can only focus on one thing, one tremendous light in his heart. He honestly fears he'll die if he doesn't find Marin soon.

“There's been a development,” informs General Organa over the voice comms. “One of our informants has finally been able to come forward with a location for the entirety of the First Order's fleet.”

Hux’s ears perk up. The three Resistance fighters converse over the comm. All about his son, like they have every need to be reunited with him as he does.

“But something isn't right. They're getting their orders from an unseen source. Or informant can't describe how—invasive the control is.”

Electrified, Hux stands to his feet. “It's him,” he breathes.

“There have been casualties. Only officers, but there's been an unprecedented amount,” the voice continues. Ears ringing, Hux’s blood thuds behind his skull. He'd fall if it weren't for Ben’s strong arms around him. The other two are a blur, and Hux assumes they continue their comm call. But Hux wilts, because he can't think. He can't breathe.

“This is my fault,” Hux groans. “Because of me. He's doing this because of me, because I've failed him——” Hux cuts himself off, strangling around a sob.

Everything falls into place. He’s to blame for his son’s fall. He treated him like an untrustworthy, vile criminal, had no sympathy for his lifetime of struggle. Now Marin’s murdering. He's a
This wasn't supposed to happen. Marin wasn't supposed to end up like him. He's good. He's a good son. Hux crumples. He ruined Marin. It was his taint that brought him to this point. How could he have let this happen?

“Hey, hey,” Ren hisses, holding him steady. “Look at me. We know where he is. We're going after him right now, all four of us.”

“He won't,” Hux grovels, pulling away from Ben’s earnestness. “He won’t come back to me. I've tainted him. I've already failed him.”

“You can't think that,” Ren tries, but it's the wrong thing to say.

“Who the hell are you, Ben?” he growls, shoving Ben off him. “You have no idea what this feels like. It's excruciating. Knowing there's not gonna be a happy ending. Not for him. I know why you people are helping, so you can throw us over the ash heap. So just stop pretending you want him back in once piece.”

Exhausted, Ren faces Hux’s heartbreak. “I can't tell you who I am because—”

“Because you love me, is that right?” Hux snaps.

“Because this isn't about us! That's what we keep forgetting. We've forgotten so many times. I'm ashamed,” Ren tells him. “I'm ashamed of what we've done to him.”

Hux grimaces. It's infuriating how right Ben is, and how much it irks him to know Ben harbors such an amount of guilt for what's happened to Marin.

Ignoring the concerned faces of Ben’s Resistance undesirables, Hux cradles a hand over his abdomen, an impulsive gesture that he falls back on in an instance of tremendous stress. “I don't care what he's done or what he's doing,” Hux starts, swallowing his dread.

Ren finishes for him. “I know, I know. You just want him home.”

Hux nods. Gods, he's never felt this lost.

“We’re in route. It'll be less than an hour,” Rey says, making good use of the silence.

Hux paces away and hovers by the boarding ramp. He'll be the first one off the ship and will be the one to bring Marin home.

--

Taran yawns into her grandmother's shoulder. Papa has been gone for long enough that she and her sister could take a nap. Chewie came by and gave them blankets. He's been standing by the door with Ben’s dog. She wishes there was a way to understand Chewie’s grrs and grunts, but Ben and his friends have been gone with their Papa. Not even Ben’s dog understands his grunts. She can tell.

“Are you two getting hungry?” Aems asks her tired girls. “Maybe I can get them to bring you a snack.”
Across the room, maintaining a patient and reserved vigil, Chewie gnarrs gently to confirm he heard. This earns twin grins from the girls.

"Thank you," Aems speaks up for them. "Maybe something sweet. Their father always gives them something sweet for special occasions."

Graciously, Chewie heads off to find a treat for the girls. He intercepts General Organa in the hallway and passes along the task. This is the perfect opportunity for her to meet them. She picks up some cheese bread that's available in the mess hall, like the kind Marin liked when they lived together.

When Chewie returns, he's not only bringing a snack, but a visitor. Neither Aems nor the girls know her face, but the girls can feel how different she is. How special, compared to all the other people and aliens on this ship. She's smiling to them like they're the most tremendous miracles she's ever beheld.

"Chewie told me you both wanted a snack," General Organa says softly, drawn to her granddaughters like magnets. They don't look a thing like Hux. She can only see Ben in them. Until they speak, revealing their prim Hux-like accents, their language skills highly developed for their ages.

"Who are you?" Seren asks, sitting up from her slouch on the cushioned armchair. Seren and Taran regard the new woman with interest, and it's not just because she carries a tray of yummy snacks.

"My name is Leia. I'm with the Resistance," she says, marveling at their uncanny brilliance. Their little heads of dark hair are braided up in the unmistakable Alderaanian style. They look nothing short of royalty. Ben must have had something to do with it. "You both know Ben, my son."

They both smile in delight. They like Ben so much. "Ben's a nice man," Taran says. "He's so nice, and cool, and makes Papa laugh." Ben's nice to all of them, even Marie, who really doesn't deserve it."

"Glad you think so. Means I did something right."

"He's so nice that he's going after our brother. Marie would never do that for him, though. Marie does not like Ben. Not one bit," Taran says gravely, shaking her head.

"He cut him and made him bleed," Seren whispers, making a cringing face. "And he punched his nose and made him bleed. And he held him under the water—"

"Dear," Aems tempers, burning in shame at her grandson's actions. She can't imagine what Leia, Ben's mother, must think of her. First Armitage, and now Marin. How can she make further excuses for them?

Before Ben’s mother can say anything in respite, she tries to come to Marin’s defense. “Marin is a disturbed boy,” Aems tells her. “I'm not ignorant to that fact. But he's not lost. He knows the difference between right and wrong. He's a good son. Please—" she cuts herself off, wishing the twins didn't have to hear this. “Please. I know your people want to save lives. Please don't do anything to hurt him. He's just a boy."

General Organa knows all too well the torment that Aems is inflicting on herself. All too well. "There is nothing I want more than to bring him home to you safely. I can promise you that."

Aems face crumples, but she eases it to gratefulness. She needed to hear the Resistance doesn't plan on hurting her grandson. "I see where Ben gets his open heart." She swallows, a lifetime of
shame rising. “I spent a lot of time with Ben to know he’s honest, caring...I envy your strengths as a mother.”

General Organa sets the tray down on the closest table. “Believe me, he got into enough trouble for ten lifetimes. Especially when he was Marin’s age. I understand what you and your family are going through. I have faith he'll come around.”

“Um. Leia,” Taran interjects. It’s a bit odd for General Organa to hear such a formal enunciation of her name from her very, very young granddaughter. “Marie is just the worst. He acts like we are all the bad guys. That's not how he's supposed to act. We're family. Family is not supposed to be like that to him.”

Her heart breaks hearing such a confident opinion from her about Marin. “That's just how Ben acted. I can vouch for a lifetime of being on the wrong end of his anger.”

Unconvinced, Taran shakes her head. “Nope. Ben is the nicest person we ever met.” She knows how she feels.

General Organa is glad the girls disagree with her. “I'm glad you think so. He sure has grown up these last few years.” She smiles as the girls shyly pick up their forks to eat the treats she brought over for them. “Ben told me all about you two. I think he likes you both just as much as you like him. Maybe more.”

“Really?” they gasp. They can't believe it.

“Surely. He told how good you are, especially how well you treat your father. He's happy you get along.”

This seems to make the girls sad. They know Marie and Papa don't get along. They know Marie yells and says mean things to Papa, things they never wanted to hear.

“But most of all, he told me how much he cares about you and your family. He wants to bring Marin home so you can forgive each other and finally be happy again.”

The girls chew on their sweet cheesy breads, absorbing the nice lady's words. She's just as nice as Ben.

“Thank you for the food,” Seren and Taran say when the plates are clean. Seren stacks the plates up in the way her Papa taught her to so the clean-up is made easier. She looks up to Leia’s eyes. They're big and brown like hers and Taran’s. “Do you know when they'll be back?”

“Soon, sweetheart. Soon.”

Poe Dameron ushers into the room. “Sorry to interrupt, but the Falcon’s almost to the mark.”

General Organa bids the girls goodbye, and reserves a congenial, grateful handshake for Hux’s mother. “I promise we’ll bring him home.”

Aems offers a watery smile, placing a hand on the girls’ little heads. Oh, how she hopes so.

The general and her right-hand man suit up for battle. They pray they won't have to fight, not if Ren and the others are successful.

“The Calrissians want in on the fight. The mother is a marksman and the daughter doesn’t have much pertinent skill, she’s just—”
“She's just angry?” General Organa continues for him. She knew Lisbeth as a baby, from time to
time when Naedie would pass through. When she found out they were living happily in seclusion,
she couldn't have been more grateful.

“She said the kid ran because of her. She wants to help. I suggested she talk with you.”

General Organa nods. Just down the hall, Naedie is conferring within a group of trusted pilots,
some of which she knows from back in her days of service. Lis is at her side, crossing her arms.
The girl's eyes bug out when she sees General Organa.

“I know all about Marin. He told me everything. You, him, Kylo Ren, all of it,” she affronts in
place of a greeting. “Marin never mentioned anything about wanting to leave. He left because of
Hux...but it was also my fault. I said some things that may have made him feel alienated.”

“Lis,” Naedie interjects, “We talked about this.” She doesn't want her daughter blaming herself for
something like this.

General Organa understands her heavy heart. “There was nothing different you could have done.
And right now, you need to focus on keeping yourself in line. Your mother doesn't want you to put
yourself at risk, not for this.”

“But there has to be something that I can do, some way I can help—”


“And whose fault is that?!“ Lis snaps, tears in her eyes.

Holding up a hand, General Organa comes up with a solution. “Poe will show you the docking bay.
You can help him prep the Starfighters for takeoff. That sound good to you both?”

Lis and Naedie exchange glares, but Naedie doesn't have the same contempt behind hers. All there
is is regret, and perhaps an inward scorn. She never meant to bring her daughter back into the fight.
But she knows her. Her passion, her relentlessness. She knows how much she cares about Marin.

Lis turns to General Organa, straightening her spine. “I accept.” With that, Poe and the Calrissians
march off to the docking bay.

A familiar light converges at her side. She doesn't have to look to know who it is. “You're out here
whispering words of assurance to everyone. You almost have me fooled. Almost,” Luke says.

“It's different, this time,” she says warily. “The closer we get to the mark, the more I feel it. You
feel it, too.”

Luke nods. “He's already began to kill.” They've all killed. But that was the war. And Marin’s a
child. Luke and Leia have every suspicion Marin has been orchestrating mass executions.

General Organa turns to meet her brother's eye. The metal digits of his false hands twitch and
tinker in the silence of the enclave. She doesn't know who or how many Marin’s killed, but she can
feel the loss, a stinging echo.

“I know he'll come back. I know it. I just hope Ben—” She cuts herself off, her grief having never
begotten to time. What if Marin takes that final step? What if Ben doesn't make it out of this?

Luke embraces her, understanding completely. As always, the universe only allows one ending.
Ren pales at the new coordinates their spies revealed Marin may be on. It's the moon Snoke hid himself for years, a puppet master operating from afar.

Rey and Finn argue that they should land directly on the surface and make their approach on foot to avoid making themselves as large a target as they would be docking inside a Star Destroyer in the Falcon.

“Please tell me you have an idea on how we get from the ground to the Destroyer,” Ren frowns. He won't risk Hux getting injured, captured, or worse.

“It involves a certain type of daring recklessness, so I certainly hope you're up for it.” Then, Rey explains her plan: commandeering an entire shuttle of Stormtroopers. “We've got three Jedi between us. We can easily parry their blasters.” She includes Ren in her account of the Jedi, something she would have never dreamed of doing before this.

He glares at her, without heat. “Even if I had a lightsaber, it's been years since I used one.”

Rey prepares for the drop from lightspeed. “We have a spare.”

“With you?”

“In the back. Luke thought it would be best if it remained aboard as a backup while we had the Falcon in possession.”

Rey’s explanation only confirms his suspicions that the extra saber is Anakin’s. “I'll stick to a blaster,” Ren grovels. He doesn't want to go near that relic.

“How's that gonna hold up against the Stormtroopers? You gonna watch your back and Hux’s?”

*You assume that I have a priority in making it out of this alive,* he thinks. But Rey has a point. Ren trudges into the storage where Rey says the lightsaber is. It's in a bin at Hux’s feet. He's glowering daggers into the table.

“We’re about to make the drop from hyperspace,” Ren says, searching in the drawer for the timeless saber he would have once killed entire systems to find. It's just as he remembers, far too powerful and far too old. It's a large girth in his hand. He hopes to adequately protect Hux in this uncharted terrain.

Hux says nothing, the only indication that he heard being the inky darkness behind his eyes.

“They want to arm you,” Ren continues. He lays down a spare blaster. Hux doesn't look at it.

“Will this work?” Hux breathes, gazing up to Ren with the most fragile, wounded look. He’s not talking about the blaster.

“It will. I can feel it.” His mother said it was the beginning. But to him, it feels like the end is approaching.

“Ben,” Hux withers, imagining his greatest horrors coming to life. “Your weapons...if anything happens to him—*"
“Listen to me. This will work. There is nothing, nothing that I wouldn't do to bring him home to you.” He's prepared to die for it.

Finn pokes his head out from the hall to the cockpit. “The captain wants you to find your seats. It's gonna be a rough landing.”

Ren nods, taking Hux's limp hand. Hux doesn't react. He's numb. “It'll be safer in there. Come on.”

He ushers Hux to the cockpit and gets him to buckle into the rear seat. Hux glares at the strange configuration of the dashboard, the viewport, the pair of rocking dice pinned above.

It's almost like he's been here before.

But he doesn't get a chance to unpack this eerily familiar place, the hollow loss in his heart. The vague dusting of betrayal buzzing on the surface. Now, he must face Marin, along with every mistake and misjudgment he's ever made.

“Hold on tight. We're making our landing at lightspeed,” Rey alerts her crew. Behind her, Hux reaches over to hold Ren’s hand in a nervous clench. Ren gladly obliges. Hux may have not expressed any sort of gratitude for Finn and Rey’s help, and Finn and Rey may have not acknowledged him in any way, but they share something profound in common. They all would do anything to help Marin and bring him home.

When Rey pulls the final lever, the ship's hull skids on the moon’s flat surface. The reverse thrusters kick in and slow the Falcon to a halt. There doesn't appear to be any damage to the ship other than scrapes.

As a unit, they gape outside at the sky before them. There are countless Star Destroyers lining the green-grey skies, hovering dauntingly. It may be every Destroyer in the entirety of the fleet. Where there would normally be a steady flow of crafts both leaving and docking, the Destroyers sit like monuments. The only indication that they're inhabited are the speckles of lights on the hulls through the haze.

The Destroyers are motionless, mostly. But there's something off about them. Ren narrows his eyes in perplexity when one of the Destroyers releases noncontiguous clusters of objects to fall to the gravitational pull of the moon. The same thing falls from another Destroyer. And another, a few moments later. He holds his breath.

Finn claps a hand over his mouth. “Is that…?”

“Those are people,” Rey gasps. “The officers.” She grimaces as she senses their deaths, the Force absorbing their souls with every stilled heartbeat.

Hux never wanted this for Marin. Nothing like this. But it was he who pushed him away, he who infected him into this life. If there was anything he could do to take it all back...there aren't words.

Ren hardens. They're running out of time. He powers through his guilt. “We need to get moving. With the officers gone, he—” Ren rephrases. “We may not need to hide the Falcon from their scanners. We can land on the hull, crawl in through the incinerator exhaust system. At this altitude, they won't be functional.”

Wearily, Rey nods. It's their best plan. There's only one problem. “Which one is he on?”

“That one,” Hux says heavily. It's his Star Destroyer, the largest of all the others. The Finalizer looms high over a rocky jut of land. They've all been here before. The dark side thrums all around
but the epicenter is just under the Finalizer’s breadth. Hux swallows. This place is haunting in its familiarity. The white stretches of salt, the tall, jagged cliffs, the sickening green of the poisonous atmosphere. It’s as if he came here in a dream.

The Millennium Falcon weaves in between the tomb-like Destroyers periodically dispensing clusters of black clad humans. It's unclear if their jumping from the hangars or if they're being killed and then dumped like space junk. Ren darkens. Regardless, there's no denying this is Marin’s doing.

The darkness grows more potent, extending itself in and around their freighter. It gains strength the closer they get to the Finalizer. Ren’s been here twice before. He can deduce Finalizer looms over the yawning, swirling energy source Snoke had made for himself, his project. But was it for himself, or someone else? Someone he ordered Ren to create inside Hux by force?

“Up there,” Ren says. “The bottom vents are too small for the Falcon.”

Rey pilots the Falcon into the appropriate enclave. “You feel that?” she murmurs to Finn.

“It's like...a black hole,” he says, unsettled, as Rey sets the Falcon behind an energy shield, and because the atmosphere here is toxic, they may have to wear rebreathers until they can make it safely in the halls to find Marin. That is, if they don't get shot first.

The Falcon stills. After checking the atmosphere and finding it's completely breathable, the unlikely quartet wastes no time and files out the easiest and most accessible exit, the top series of hatches. Finn and Rey leap out easily and Ren helps Hux hobble out, far less fit than the other three. Ren steadies him as he's overcome with a wave of lightheaded nausea. Hux isn’t in any sort of healthy state.

Once they're all outside, they slink through the narrow conduit halls, following Rey’s lead. She knows Star Destroyers like the back of her hand.

“We should try the bridge first,” she says. “The bodies...they were falling from the hull’s hangar. He may be overlooking it all from up there.”

Another round of deaths pierces the Jedi’s senses. The deaths came from this ship. They make no comment on the loss.

When they finally snake down the first public hall, they're not alone. The hall is lined with an even row of Stormtroopers, their white betaplast armor shimmering with the striping lights. They make no move to acknowledge the intruders.

Until just one of the several dozen turns their head slightly in their direction. Rey and Finn draw their lightsabers. But the Stormtrooper merely observes, angling his head in undisguised curiosity, and perhaps shock.

When Ren steps into the Stormtrooper’s view, the Trooper snaps back to attention. Ren doesn't have his lightsaber drawn, but his desperation has him sprint to the Stormtrooper and wrench his helmet off.

The man underneath the helmet winces, but stares off, eyes glazed over as if he were a reanimated corpse. Had it not been for the beads of sickly sweat running down his pale face, Ren would have thought him dead. Someone is using him, seeing through his eyes like a periscope.

In unnatural, mechanized unison, the Stormtroopers, including the now maskless one, draw their weapons. They aim to fire.
The pair of Jedi angle their lightsabers, Rey green, Finn blue. They're prepared to collide head-on. Ren, too, ignites his blue blade. He transforms into a shield in front of Hux, who doesn't even raise his blaster. He's overcome with a sickness of his own as he looks from drawn Stormtrooper to Stormtrooper. Marin is commanding them better and more efficiently than he's ever seen. Bile claws up his throat. There's so much wrong with this picture.

The Stormtroopers begin to fire, beam after beam parried by Finn and Rey’s artful strokes. Ren can only parry clumsily. He's not attune with the Force, and he prays his failure won't result in Hux getting injured.

“Stay behind me,” Ren barks as the bolts persist. An errant deflection grazes Ren’s thigh, just barely singeing the skin.

Hux complies, looking for some sign of his son behind the violence. All he sees is Marin. All he feels is loss.

“He's just trying to hold us off until he can finish destroying the First Order,” Ren says, grunting as another bolt grazes his arm. “As long as you—” Ren gapes, not believing what he's seeing: Hux determinately stepping past him. He's going to get himself killed!

“What are you doing?!” Ren shouts as Hux walks into the line of fire. He parries another round of blaster bolts, trying in vain to gain ground enough to grab Hux and bring him to safety. Rey and Finn try to do the same, but the blaster fire persists. Miraculously, Hux passes unscathed.

But not a single bolt hits him. The Stormtroopers are only aiming for Ren, Finn and Rey.

“Hux!” Ren cries. But Hux doesn't look back. Once he’s past the Stormtroopers, he beelines for the gateway to the bridge.

The blast door seals indefinitely behind him.

--

Marin knows they're here. He senses it. Whether they've come to apologize, tell him they're sorry, he doesn't care. Whether they're here to kill him, he doesn't care. Soon he'll be dead, as will this wretched, powerful place, along with the rest of the First Order.

He can't stand to live like this. A shell, a monster. If death is the only way he can escape his fate, then death will become him.

His feedback from Phasma: the weapon will be prepared within the hour. In the meantime, he continues to gather the groveling officers like sheep and shooting them over the sides. This way, no one will escape. No one will go unpunished.

He allows Hux through so Hux can see what he's become. It will be a fitting end: Hux finally seeing him for who he truly is. A monster.

Hux breathes shallowly and pained like the room is running out of atmosphere. There aren't any Stormtroopers in the bridge, nor officers. Alive ones, he should say. A heap of their bodies lies tossed to the side. They've been dead for hours.
Hux looks up. A black clad figure overlooks the green-grey atmosphere of this wretched place. Time stands still. He's done this all before. It's like another dream. Airy, Hux walks across the bridge like he's done a thousand times before, a lifetime ago. He doesn't belong here, not anymore. Marin was never meant to step foot here.

Marin, clad in black. Hux needs to see the face of his son.

The man in black turns around. His mask is an assault. It haunts him. He knows that mask. And it has no place on his son. Hux limps closer, boring into the black sit haloed by silver. The mask lets him come close to find answers.

He brings a hand to the dented, scratched matte black durasteel. The mask allows this. It allows him to trace the chrome bands in reverent, confounded fascination. Terror, visceral confusion.

He doesn't think about how insane it is when he finally speaks the aching question.

“Who are you?” Hux breathes. “Who are you?”

The mask crackles. “It's me,” the mask finally speaks, the vocoder distortion of his son’s voice harrowing to his ears.

Hux flinches. No, no, no, he shakes his head. This isn't Marin. This is something else. “This isn't you. I know you. I know this isn't you.”

“This is who I was always supposed to be. You just didn't want to see it.”

“Marin, please,” Hux begs. This is Marin, his firstborn, the boy most precious to him. “You're not supposed to be here. You're supposed to be home, with me.”

Wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong. “There is nothing else for me besides this.”

“What?” Hux exasperates. He doesn't understand why Marin would go through all this. To get back at him? To destroy the organization Hux had help build? That pales in comparison to how seeing Marin like this cuts him so deeply.

“Death. Destruction. Despite everything I've tried to do to fight it, it's come so naturally. It's—remarkable,” he believes. Marin clenches his leathered fists. “It's so accessible I risk executing the remainder of this legion before I can have them properly kill themselves and obliterate every evidence of their existence.”


If he could, Marin would relish the idea of destroying everything Hux and Ren achieved together. Taking down the very Star Destroyer they traded him for as a newborn, crumbling their towers and gouging their dutiful workforce. Flattening their fleet into dilapidated space rock with the very weapon they built.

But there is no lying to himself, his true reason for demolition. Without the First Order, Hux can finally live without fearing they will come for him of the twins. Hux can be safe.

Which is why he must die with the Order. Without him, Hux won't have to live in hell every day. He can make a life with those he truly loves. And if that means with Ren, Marin has no more fight left in him.

He still hasn't responded to Hux’s demand. “Leave. Before I make you.”
Hux can tell when his son is trying to manipulate him. “So make me.”

Marin says nothing. He closes his eyes, sensing another group of officers being sent to their deaths.

“You won't. Because you're you, not this,” Hux grimaces. It's beyond him how a suit like this could harbor so much power. “You're my son. You're caring and loving and...and you will become a far better man than I'd ever hope to be,” Hux chokes, tears in his eyes. “I know I wasn't there for you when you were small. I know that. And there's nothing I could ever do to make that up to you. The time, those moments, are lost, and I'm so sorry.”

Hux finds his bearing, and persists. “I'd do anything to fix that. I'd do anything to bring you home to me. There's not a thing more precious to me than you.”

Marin’s helmet cranes high as if scenting the wind. He hovers, speechless. Until it hits him: the Stormtroopers outside have all deceased. The blast door aches red with the power of impenetrable plasma. Ren and the Jedi are breaking in.

“It's too late,” Marin whispers. “I'm not the son you think I am.”

Hux shakes his head, unconvinced. “You have nothing to prove, Marin. You're good. You'll always be good.”

Years of lies and deceit threaten to rip him apart at his seams. “You have no idea what I've done to you. How irrevocably I've been abusing you. You have no idea.”

Hux flinches, chilled to the bone. But he knows his son. He’ll be a better man than him, and his father before him. “I know you did what you did to protect me, now. I understand—”

Years of lies, manipulation. He should just tell Hux how he toyed with him like a trinket just so he can see the hatred burning in his eyes. But he clings to the tattered lie. It's all he has left. “Just leave. Get out of here!”

“I'm not going anywhere unless you're with me.” Hux stands his ground. The air around them crackles. Something's about to give. The dam is creaking, overrun.

Marin starts, then stiffens at the glow of the door. He senses it now. The Jedi sliced their way through the lines of Stormtroopers and are now hacking through the sealed durasteel. The minds he's tainted tug at every end of him, peeling back his edges like torn skin.

“Please, Marin,” Hux pleads, clawing at the strange textured cloth binding his arms. “I won't allow you to do this to yourself.”

Hux whips around to the creaking of the door. “They aren't here to hurt you. They don't want you to hurt anyone else, either.”

“I'm more powerful than them,” Marin asserts. “Any Jedi, any dark side user. Stopping me isn't even possible. You're wasting your time.”

Hux will not lose him. Not again. “Marin—”

The carved hole through the door wrenches open. Ren is the first one through, shoulder first and spilling onto the floor after the shorn metal with a pained grunt. The two Jedi are after him, their lightsabers drawn.

Immediately, Hux shields Marin from the perceived threats. Despite their vows and assurances, he
can't leave Marin’s fate in their hands.

At Ren’s terror, no doubt at the unmistakable mask and cassock Marin is puppeteering, Marin withdraws completely to the window to oversee the progress to the Order’s destruction. He closes his eyes. Ren feels so near but he ignores him, honing on the Stormtroopers. The number of officers are dwindling from thousands to hundreds. Phasma’s preparations of the planet killing weapon is drawing to completion. Soon, the moon will be nothing but forgotten rock.

Distantly Marin hears Hux defending him. He can't imagine what for.

“Stand back,” Hux snaps. He eyes the pair of Jedi angling their blades low on standby. Ben deactivates his. Hux cowers. He's never seen such raw terror in a man’s eyes. Ben looks like he's seen a ghost.

“I can talk to him,” Ren tries once he regains any feeling besides unadulterated horror. He never expected it to get this far. He thought he knew true heartbreak, but seeing Marin on this ship, masked in black like a wraith, grinds what's left of his selfish longings into dust.

It's not about Marin forgiving him, or even loving him. It's about Marin’s wellbeing. The life he's lead for him has scarred him irrevocably, but as long as there's good in him, no matter how large or small, there is hope he can be saved.

Hux holds his ground, blocking the bridge.

“Let me. Take this, and let me talk to him. Please,” Ren begs and he disarms himself and holds out the Skywalker heirloom for Hux to take because he knows the flavor of protectiveness in Hux’s eyes. He's seen it before, all the times he betrayed him and took their children from him.

Summoning the strength, Hux yields and lets him pass. Eyes pleading, because this is his last hope.

Ren approaches slowly, every step a journey. It's surreal to see Marin in this state, helpless to the darkness encroaching him, void of identity and expression under all that black. Bizarrely, Ren tries a joke. “You don't get any points for originality. That's for sure.”

The room shifts as the deaths of the remaining officers aboard ring through the Force-sensitive, strong and weakened alike. Ren grimaces. There's so much blood on Marin’s hands, and in turn, Ren’s own.

“They may deserve to die, but it isn't your judgement to cast. This isn't your battle and these aren't your lives to take. They should be tried before the Republic and be held accountable for their crimes.”

This finally gets his son’s attention. Tried and punished? “What, like you were?” Marin snaps. Ren chills to the bone at the familiar growl of the vocoder. He hears the mask around his skull as if it were on him again.

“They could never have punished me as much as I punish myself,” Ren confesses. “The Stormtroopers will disperse as long as you let them. You've done so much to help defeat this organization, to help the Resistance end them once and for all.”

Hux swallows, his confusion piquing along his dread. Beyond his plan to sever the Order’s hold on the Stormtroopers, he has no idea what they're talking about. The two Jedi gauge them, and Hux isn't sure why he thinks they've been through this before. It's like they've seen how this ends and they don’t favor what comes of it.
“I've felt this, too. Lost, hopeless, like you've reached the end of all things. Like you're drowning in a sinking field but you just can't suffocate,” Ren laments. “It's not just the dark side. It's your fear and guilt—"

“The dark side gives me power unlike any other. No Jedi, no Sith has ever become this powerful,” Marin snaps, wavering with ferocity. Or is it uncertainty?

“The dark side is a sickness! What you're gaining isn't making you stronger. It's crippling you. This is why you have to take the leap to forgiving yourself. So you can begin to heal.”

A grating, suppressive force summons in his chest. His lungs quake like they've awoken from dormancy. For a moment, he senses an outside force triggering the breathing attack. His body is being pushed into this unnatural response. He collapses and hyperventilates. Instantly, Hux is at his side.

“Ben, what's wrong?” Hux panics as Marin stares them down from behind the mask. Rey and Finn still haven't moved, their loyalties tested.

The pressure is gone, and Ren breathes long, cleansing breaths. Marin cocks his mask to the side. “I could kill you with a mere thought,” Marin scorns. “That's true power.”

Still on the ground, Ren searches the heartbreak in Hux’s eyes. There are too many layers to unpack. There's so much pain. They've all been through enough. Intrepid, Ren meets their son’s obscured eyes.

“So, do it. Kill me,” Ren says, soaring high on faith. He ignores Hux’s desperate objection. “You can’t do it, can you? Like how you tried to drown me or impale me or behead me. You didn't have it in your heart.” Ren moves close, back on his feet again. “You don't. You couldn't do what I did.”

Marin may be his son, and they may be echoes of one another most especially through the lenses of their shared mistakes. But he's not him. No matter how thoroughly they overlap, Marin isn't a monster.

Marin’s shoulders slump. He's considering something, a damnable offence. Hux is inexplicably skilled at reading him under all the obfuscating black. “I don't have to kill you to destroy you,” he grates, as if he doesn't believe what he's saying. The darkness has taken reason and heart from him. He's a vessel owned by his fear. He turns away to cock his mask high towards the space-sky through the viewport. He senses the Resistance near the system. “I could destroy them.”

Without the First Order, the Jedi, the Resistance, there'd be nothing for Ren and Hux to go back to. There'd be nothing left for them to care for. There'd be no war. And most of all, Ren would lose everything.

Despite Ren’s grip, Hux leaps into the air, furious, aching heartbreak twisting his countenance. He tears for the mask, anything to rescind Marin’s horrific pledge. All he sees is his mother, Seren and Taran. Their blood on Marin’s hands.

The mask doesn't yield. Deliberately, it’s steely dome slams into Hux’s skull sending him backwards and spilling him in Ren’s arms. Behind the mask, Marin sneers incredulously. “Stop getting in my way.”

This is the only way he can finally end this long, tired tale. He just wants it to be over.

Ren supports Hux in his arms, weakened and scuffed from the blow. He pleads to Rey and Finn to stand down. Just wait. Give him a chance. This will work. He's going to come back to us, Ren says
with his eyes. He must believe in him.

“Seren and Taran are on the cruiser, Marin. Pull yourself from this. You aren't what the dark side plans for you. You're more than that. I can feel it,” Ren begs.

No. Impossible. “Liar!”

"You take down the Resistance, you'll be destroying them, too."

"I'm done with your lies, Ren!"

The name expels without him realizing. But Ren overcomes the shock, supporting Hux against him from behind. "They aren't lies. We relocated your sisters in precaution for what you might do to them. With the planet killer. We removed Lis and her mother, too."

Hux lolls backwards, all his weight against Ben. “Ren…” Hux whimpers. That name. Ren. He knows that name. His head throbs from Marin’s assault, no doubt concussed. He gasps around a sharp string of dry sobs. Every shred of him struggles to come up with an explanation for the biting, disparaging confusion. All it took was a name, and he's falling apart and he doesn't understand.

Ren tightens his hold on Hux, rocking in tandem with his bleary, tormented writhing. To hear his name from Hux's mouth, all that meaning and desperation. It's like he's alive again. But what makes him say what he says next isn't spoken on behalf of his well-being, his identity, or his happiness. It's about Marin, his guilt and betrayal. What he must do to heal.

“You have to tell him,” Ren implores, bracing for impact. “You have to. It's eating you alive.”

Marin bows his helmeted head, so lost in his anger and guilt that he doesn't see beyond them. He can't see beyond the mask. It's blinding him behind its plates, pulling the breath from his lungs. The darkness is dissolving the beating heart in his chest.

Marin rips the mask off his sweat laden head, and shoves it to the ground with a tremendous clatter. He can finally breathe.

Hux wavers at the reveal of his son’s face. He anticipated another. Ben’s arms around him are too constricting so he eases from him, and is met with no resistance. Marin’s twists away but Hux stops him with a hand on his glove.

Hux pries for the gloves’ seams, and removes them succinctly to reveal the scars underneath. All these years, Hux had not once asked him about his scars. They were from before, when Hux still allied with the First Order.

He cradles his son’s larger hands in his own. “I did this to you, didn't I?” Hux breathes, meeting Marin’s teary eyes with his own. “All this began before. Didn't it?”

Face twisting, Marin nods. He's so close to the end. He can’t speak. But Hux encourages the truth from him, his soft hands warm over his mutilated ones. “You gave me away when I was born. My life began alone. I was always scared and in pain. We...weren't a family until you had Seren and Taran. Around then, when I was already a boy, was the first time we truly met.”

The empirical truth is more awful than Hux could have imagined. He wasn't ready, but he knows there's so much more.

Marin's tears fall at Hux's groan of self-loathing. Sure, his life alone on his home planet was a
travesty. But the real travesty is that Ren was the one to evacuate Rhiannon of Seren and Taran and all the ones closest to him, for no other reason than to save them from him. Marin looks to Ren for guidance. In return, Ren nods. It’s time.

It’s in that moment, Ren's mask lifeless on the ground juxtaposed with the unfettered, undeniable support Ren’s offering him, that he comes to the conclusion that Ren understands him on a level no one else can. In the end, Ren’s the one who is truly on his side. He always has been, even when he didn't know it.

“Just let me die. Just let me die here,” Marin groans, sick to death with grief. He's so close to the end.

“Tell him,” Ren tries for the final time. All his faith is instilled in Marin. Not a fiber of it is misplaced.

Hux turns around. He sees Ben like he's always seen him. Always at his side, offering every piece of himself. But from the moment they met, he knew there was so much more to him. Time and time again, he's tried to piece it together.

“Tell him, Marin,” Ren repeats. The mantra chips at Marin’s resolve.

*He'll hate me. He'll hate me and he'll never forgive me*, is what Marin tells himself. *He'll hate me he'll hate me he'll hate me—*

“Please. Tell me,” Hux whispers, thumbing his son’s sharp cheekbone. Whatever it is, he must know.

There are very few times in one's life that present the opportunity for one to prove who they are, to the barest of bone. For Anakin Skywalker, it was when he denounced his allegiance to the Emperor and saved his son. For Shmi Skywalker, it was when she parted with her only son to gift him freedom and adventure and heroism through the Jedi Order. There are moments for heroes like Luke, Leia, and Han, and for Rey, Finn, and Poe, the heroes of more modern tales. There are even moments for undesirables like Ren and Hux, who would have never stepped back from their descent if not for their love for each other, and their family. Moments like Marin’s, who braves a lifetime of suffering to prove to himself he refuses to be lorded by his fear and anger, and makes the choice to let go.

Marin reciprocates Hux’s grip, his thumbs gouging either temple. He focuses on breathing. On the Light. On healing. He grasps every one of the severed ends comprising Hux's addled mind and pulls.

Marin pulls and pulls the shorn ends until the heartbreaking, menacing, unquestionable truth shines bright like bleaching sunlight.

The switch is flipped.

Chapter End Notes

*explodes, my guts showering down on my laptop*
Marin releases Hux as if he’d been burned. Hux can only gape in unadulterated shock—betrayal—before he topples to the side and into Ren’s confused arms, inert from the swift restoration of his long-gone memories. Or rather, whatever Marin could find and repair. Some things may be lost, but he gave Hux the truth. All that matters now is that it’s done. It’s over.

The floor beneath begins to shake. The weapon is activated. Ren and his allies will only have a few moments to escape complete destruction.

“It’s the weapon,” Rey lunges for them. “We need to go. Now.”

Marin turns away. He’ll face the same fate as the First Order, now that Hux will know what he’s done to him.

Ren tosses Hux over his shoulders. If Hux’s memories could truly have been restored, he’ll face it with him, head on. With Marin, most imperatively. He won’t leave without him.

“There’s still time,” Ren begs, Hux unfortunately unconscious. He always had a better way with words.

“You have what you came for,” Marin grates, eyes glassy. “He’ll love you for you, and hate me for me. It’s how it was meant to happen. Just go.”

“Whatever comes of this, we’ll face it together,” Ren promises. The Finalizer creaks under the stress of the weapon’s growing energy beneath. “Even if he’s angry with you or if he never trusts you again. I’ll be on your side, always.”

Marin sags. The fight has left him. “You never were before.”

“I’ll never make that mistake again,” Ren vows.

Gods, it’s insane how believable Ren is. But can’t Ren see? “I blew it. It’s over for me. I ruined everything.”

“You’re still a child,” Ren chastises, as if Marin has forgotten. “Your second chance is there. Only if you decide to take it.” It’s something Ren learned long ago. “If you stay here and let yourself fall, it’ll destroy him, understand?” As if Ren would ever leave Marin here. He’d just as soon fall with Marin and the Order, if he didn’t already have faith Marin would take this second chance.

“I already destroyed him,” Marin crumples, tears falling freely. He’s already lost. How can he possibly face Hux after this? Years of lies, deceit, manipulation? Ravaging the most true and pure parts of him, all for nothing? And Ren, having seen every end of this, has become the pinnacle of morality and reason. He won’t be able to face himself, let alone Hux, after this. Why should he even bother?

“So what if you had?” Ren challenges. “It’s not on you to build him from the ground up. We’re here with you, all of us.” Rey and Finn posture their support, refusing to yield as the Finalizer around them trembles and quakes. “Bottom line is...I’m not gonna leave you behind. Not again.” If they have to be crushed by an interplanetary implosion to prove it, then so be it.
Like cleaved crystal, Marin splinters, then shatters. He’s so tired. He just wants to go home, even if Ren is the one to lead him there. Marin takes one last forlorn gander at the mask forgotten on the floor.

This isn’t him. This isn’t how Hux and his sisters will remember him as. The traitorous, bastard son who killed himself inside a Star Destroyer for no other reason than to prove a point. Ren is wretchedly, painfully in the right. It takes everything in him to admit this to himself.

He gives Ren a shaky, minute nod.

Ren’s heart soars and wastes no more time. Together they make a break for the Falcon, fighting against the pull of gravity along with the droves of other shuttles trying to make their escape.

Every last Star Destroyer is swallowed in the moon’s upheaved core, their metals rejoining the space rock in the cold vacuum of space.

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_Hux sinks into the soft, unyielding man seated beside him, who offers him nothing but love and sincerity in his soulful brown eyes._

“I left him with them,” he finds himself saying. “He gave me the chance to run away with him and I blew it,” Hux groans. He’s referring to Marin. “I jumped off that cliff after you because I couldn’t bear to live without you.” Such a confession has never bled so freely. It’s the closest thing as a declaration of eternal devotion he can presently offer.

But to whom? Who could he have left Marin for?

The man brands him with his kiss, tongue lapping against his own. Then he kisses his cheek, the corner of his eye. It's the most childish, embarrassing kiss he's ever received. He would do anything to be kissed like that every day.

“Ren…” he finds himself saying, heavy with exhaustion. Ren? “Come with us. Forget about these people and come with us.”

The man—Ren—looks at him with so much heartache it’s like he can see him split at his seams. It’s Ren. Of course it’s Ren. Who else would it be? Ren’s the father of his children, the man who completes him, and makes him feel alive. He can’t believe he’s begging like this, after everything Ren’s done to him. But being with Ren is what he’s always wanted. Insanity, insecurity, chaos and all. He’ll take the whole raw, bloody package.

Ren regards him beating heavy with remorse. “I’ve wanted that more than I’ve ever wanted anything.”

_Hux suspends between the difference of their present worlds. “I can’t,” Ren grates, heartstrings snapping as Hux’s hope flickers to confusion. Betrayal. “I can’t,” Ren repeats. “I can’t just let them die.” Them, the Resistance. Ren’s family. Marin’s family. Seren and Taran’s family. They’re so small in their cradles._

_Hux wavers at Ren’s final assertion, concave, gutted. He’s unable to speak. Ren’s laid it out for_
him, bared and honest.

The vision changes—the memory?—and Hux is left in the wake of the storm. He’s in a bed, gut haphazardly bandaged, shorn and empty. “What’s happened?” the man asks, obliviously sincere. The man. It’s Ren. It’s always Ren.

“Something terrible,” he groans. “Something terrible has happened.”

“What?” Ren implores.

“I can’t…” Hux trails off, weakly. He doesn’t recognize this husk he’s become.

“Just tell me, please. I have to know you’re alright.”

“Where were you?” Hux blurs, mournful ire grappling his heart. “Why did you leave? I’ve been searching for you for months. I told you I never wanted you to leave me, not like you left him.” Marin, the son he’d abandoned. He was supposed to go back to the Resistance for Marin, but everything changed. He couldn’t find him or Ren and now the twins—Seren and Taran, have been taken from him. They’ve been taken. He’s never held them or seen them with his own eyes. He can’t breathe.

He sees himself, face slack and unconscious. His belly is swollen as it was just yesterday. It’s his space station, his safe house. The droids are working diligently to remove the twins.

There they are. His two beautiful baby girls, removed with careful precision by his droids. Swirls of dark hair, squealing cries, slippery with fluids, tiny fists trembling with life.

A gloved hand programs the droids. They’re removing his womb, flopping it into a small basin, rendering the organ as useless, rotting garbage. He’s looking through someone else’s eyes as the vision shows him unconscious and vulnerable, abdomen deflated from the birth and organ removal. Hux’s face, even unconscious, is taut with confusion, betrayal for what’s happened to him.

The vision shifts to the babies. They’re cleaned and prepared by the droids for their new lives, vitals tested, umbilical cords sheared. Mechanically they’re sealed in their incubators, cries muffled, newborn eyes shut and unseeing.

The figure in the room, the one whose eyes he’s seeing through, lurches to the droids. Stripes of electric blue demolish the medical droids, along with it their memory banks. The newborns continue their squealing. Electric blue fizzes away and the view of the assailant pans to the infants, now unsealed in their cases. Their pained, wailing cries echo in the dark of the bowels of the Millennium Falcon. Alone, helpless. Hour after hour after hour of cold, starving, suffering. Their newborn heartbeats faint and ebbing.

Blood drains out of his heart, torn open to hemorrhage. He lunges for his tormentor, for Ren, the man who stole his children. Who stole his heart with no intention of putting it back. He claws for him, but Ren overpowers him. Ren always overpowers him, with his lies and his love and his iridescent heart.

“I promise. I would never hurt you,” Ren lies, again and again. “I love you,” he vows, and it’s the purest of truths. Fuck him for it.

Brows pinching, Hux drags his fingers along Ren’s chest, to the time bomb that connects their fates. The fate he sealed with a deathswitch. When he falls, Ren will come tumbling after.
“We’ll find them,” Ren vows. “And Marin, we’ll all go wherever you want to go.”

Grimacing, Hux searches Ren’s dark eyes. He can almost believe that to be true, that Ren wants that and that he wants that for himself. “He won’t,” Hux murmurs, far off. As if he can sense the way Marin feels from the interstellar distance separating them.

“Of course he will,” Ren believes.

“He hates us.” His heart misleads him frequently and excruciatingly, but he knows this to be true.

Ren flinches, but attempts to smile. “We’re his deadbeat parents. I wouldn’t expect anything less.” Ren’s always trying to make him smile.

Except when he isn’t. Except when he tears the heart right out of him.

Hux spins around and the memory changes. Ren is there. Ren is always fucking there. “Where is he?” Hux’s heart speaks for him. Where is Marin? Where’s his boy? The boy he only just met in Resistance captivity. He only just met him. And he calls himself a father. He’s ashamed, so ashamed.

Ren wavers. “He’s with them.”

Hux’s throat bobs, ice bleaching his veins. “Why?”

“It had to be done,” Ren confesses.

Ren says something else, but Hux doesn’t hear it over the pulse in his ears. Blinking his eyes around the befuddling memory of the moments before Ren knocked him out—Marin running to the hangar, dirty blond head bouncing along in his spirited sprint. Ren’s hands on him. Being kissed for the first time since Ren had last kissed him nearly a decade ago, warming his beating blood. The penetration of darkness, a loathsome sensation he’s all too familiar with.

Ren left Marin behind.

Ren’s jaw cracks audibly from the vehemence of Hux’s punch, choking on his clumsy excuses. Blind with agony, Ren quavers in the doorway. Another fist comes, marring his proud cheekbone and sending him into a crumple against the doorframe. Rage throttles him. “Look at me.”

Ren complies, meeting his eyes. Hux flares, gripping Ren’s bruised, throbbing jaw between two clawed palms. “Turn this thing around. We’re going back.”

“It’s done,” Ren says. It’s done. It’s over.

“We have to go back. Turn this damned ship around,” he repeats, smaller this time. Wounded, chipped away.

“It’s done.” Resounding. There’s no changing what’s happened.

Flashing openly with grief, Hux feebly attempts to control it, tightening with practiced anger. “Ren, you better turn this ship around or—”

“Or what?” Ren shatters, tumultuous like a landslide. He swats Hux’s hands away, invading his space. “It’s done. I did it and it’s done and there’s no taking it back! It’s done already! You’re going to have to live with it! It’s done! It’s over!”
Hux seethes, he can’t stand the sight of him. He seals himself away, deep into the ship, rolling his palms over his eyes. His bones itch with a newfound weakness, brittle as if from a lifetime suspended in zero gravity. Aged with his misery, victimized by his loneliness. His hands skate under the elastic of his pants, rubbing low over his uneven, hairless patch of skin low under his navel. Soon, the skin will be rippled with a new scar. This will not be the first scar that Ren gives him.

Ren’s reach stretches to every part of himself. It’s his greatest downfall.

The memories assault him with the truth, now unable to ever be forgotten.

Marin. Oh, he’s so, so heartbreakingly young. This is the first time they’ve truly met, when Hux first spoke to him as a prisoner of the Resistance. “Your voice. I know your voice,” the boy once said, before he saw his face.

“Run along,” Hux chastises. “Your mother’s probably worried sick,” he drones, completely oblivious, already eager for General Organa to make her next visit. Now that’s a worried mother.

“I don’t have a mother. Hey, don’t go! I’m talking to you,” the child shouts after him, slapping a palm on the glass as if Hux is some exotic animal in captivity he’s trying to get a rise out of.

Hux scoffs, turning back to the viewport. “Let me guess, is your mother dead? Did I kill her and you’re here to seek revenge?” Resistance dogs, always on some fool-hearted crusade.

“No, I don’t have a mother! But I know you came on our ship with my father, Kylo Ren. You’re the fugitive, right?” Marin asks, barred from the truth. This was the first of many instances Hux’s world came crashing down.

The memories change. So begins his litany of mistakes.

It’s not far from the moment he and Marin first met, and only a day since Ren had torn Marin from him. He only just met him, and he’s already trying to part with him. Again. “I can’t leave him. Just—just wait here until I bring him back,” Hux implores. Ren. It’s always about Ren.

Rage bubbling, Marin yanks at Hux’s arm. “We don’t need him!”

“Yes, I do!” Hux expels. Foolish. Foolish!

But Marin is having none of it. “You care about him more than you care about me,” Marin accuses, hot resentment coiling through his torrent of tears. “You’re exactly like him! I never mattered to you!”

Hux buckles under his boy’s fury. “That’s not true,” Hux grates against the tightening of his throat. “You always mattered. You were the one thing in my life that I’d always, without fail, held so close to my heart. I should never have allowed Ren to keep us apart.”

Hux crumples, taking his son’s scarred hands in his own. Back then, he never asked about Marin’s scars. He didn’t want to know the answer, how his neglect led to his son’s suffering. The cave rumbles with another stream of cannon fire. “When I had you, I was made to believe I was going to care for you as you grow. But then Ren—he was so young and foolish—he lied to me and told me you were supposed to be given to Snoke. And I barely—I barely put up a fight. I turned my back on you because I wasn’t brave enough to defy Snoke and go against orders,” he confesses, imploring Marin to understand.

But how could he ask that of his child? He’s given Marin nothing. He’s taken away his son’s
childhood, a life, a family. Had he been brave enough, he would have deserted the First Order and
taken Marin far, far away. Marin would have grown with him since birth, and wouldn’t have those
scars on his hands or those tears in his eyes. But his son’s tears gush, his hands have bled, his
heart breaks. All because of him.

“But I won’t make that mistake again. I’m coming right back this time. Do you understand?” Hux
pleads. Because he can’t do any of this if it means having to do it without Ren.

The memories. They’re unchangeable. He can’t take any more. He can’t bear it.

But inside, one of his most tormented memories resurges. In the years after this day, he thought of
this moment constantly, in moments of facsimiled triumph and moments of devastating failure.
What he did this day was inarguably his greatest mistake.

On the Finalizer, Hux ogles his firstborn as if he’s about to disappear. Not even a week old, his
baby is already trying to smile. It’s an awkward tug of his little mouth. Hux feels himself smiling
back. It’s Marin. He’ll never be this small again.

Hux’s sweet, tragic expression drops to a scowl at Ren. “I thought he was to be your apprentice?
Unless I heard incorrectly while you were sodomizing me with a droid.” His tone no longer
carries any residual fondness. They’re well past whatever physicality they shared in exile, fighting
for survival.

“Snoke’s orders have changed. He’s to take him now,” Ren tells him through his vocabulator.
Little Marin protests at the noise but there isn’t any time for comfort.

“You’re a liar,” Hux spits, acidic. “Master manipulator.” Typical Ren. Nothing’s changed and it
never will.

His mask disguises his flinch. “I can’t lie to you.” He means it. Marin whines at the mechanical
voice of his mask, threatening to devolve to tears. Hux knows Ren is considering passing a sleep
suggestion to its mind. But Marin is concentrating on wrapping its tiny fist on one of Hux’s fingers,
and he dare not rob Hux of this moment.

“I know you feel connected to him, but it was never part of—”

“Spare me. I’ve had enough.” This is all Ren’s fault, Hux had believed. If it weren’t for him, Hux
wouldn’t have yet another burden weighing him down. Ren did nothing more than force him
through an emotional storm because it was beneficial to himself. Ren’s crippled him, poisoned him
with his deception. There was never any clarity in his decision making, his risk assessing. Hux
tears himself away from Marin. He’s so empty.

“Gods, turn around. Just turn around! He’d do anything to go back to that moment, to make things
right. If he could do it again, he’d choose love, he’d choose life, he’d choose Marin, every damn
time.

Ren, his torturer. The beast who stole the very children whom he forced inside of him. Ren, who’s
lied and deceived and played his heart like an instrument.

Had he always been this suggestible?
Ren, who kissed him so gently and touched him so reverently, he could almost believe in his love even when they were the cruelest of enemies? When Ren fed him and built him shelter while they were trapped on the planet he kidnapped him on? How Ren held him to soothe their unborn child, allowing him to sleep in the ebbing ocean waves? Oh, how Marin loved the ocean while he was in utero. Marin would always move around and reach out with his growing hands when Ren was near, making little impressions of his tiny fingertips in Hux’s distended belly. Ren loved seeing those, and despite the discomfort, Hux loved seeing how happy it made Ren.

He doesn’t know if he’s remembering things wrong. How long had he been this naïve? Had he been misled all the times Ren told him he loved him? All the times he longed to scream it back? Or when Ren assaulted him and forced him to bear his children, all in the name of a deceased, forgotten dark lord?

The memories plague him, one final time. He feels hands on his skull. Not Ren’s, for once. But Marin’s.

Marin came for Ren’s head when he saw what Ren had done to the twins. He didn’t allow Ren another chance, as Hux had time and time again, and cleaved them into the opposite direction, for years, for years. Ren with the Resistance, and them on their own.

But Marin hadn’t simply kept them apart. He dove into him, stole and plundered.

The memory is the most recent he has of Ren. All he felt was the all-encompassing longing to never part from him. To never let him go. He begs, he pleads to Marin to go back for Ren. He can’t live without him. “Don’t—I can’t. We have to go back to him. Please, Marin. I’m begging you.” I can’t lose him. I love him. I love him.

Marin lashes out, ignoring his father’s wince. Calculative, Marin forms his lie. “Why would we go back?” Marin tries, his dark oil sinking into the folds of Hux’s brain. Twisting his memories, severing each link of all the iterations of Ren in his mind. Hux’s coveted image of his soulmate, shrouded indefinitely. “You don’t care because you’ve never met, seen, or heard of a Kylo Ren in your life. He’s not the father to your children. He’s nothing. Any man with that name or with that face is of no significance to you. He’s no one. He’s nothing to you.”

Hux blinks, tears cooling on his cheeks. He blinks away the darkness clouding his vision. The weary face of his son greets him, eyes wide like saucers.

What was done, was undone.

Marin, older, angrier, far more lost in his fear and hatred than Hux could have ever imagined. Marin from mere moments ago, pulls and pulls the shorn ends until the heartbreaking, menacing, unquestionable truth shines bright like morning sunlight. The switch is flipped.

Together, they begin anew.

--

Hux opens his eyes.

The duraleather stench is the first to assault his senses. It’s summons a familiar acidity to the air. He’s woken up here before.
He sits up on the cramped bunk, finding the need to crouch. He dry heaves but nothing comes up. He hadn't eaten much of anything since—since—

He's not alone. Someone is guarding the halloing threshold. Immediately, Hux absorbs every detail of him like he's only just learned how to distinguish color. Hux stands on creaking knees. The man stays stock-still, expressionless if not for the dewiness of his dark, soulful eyes.

Ren. It's always been Ren.

He closes his eyes. It aches how he hasn't seen Ren in what feels like a lifetime. It has been a lifetime. He's lived a whole life without him. It's bizarre realizing everything he knew about himself has been a farce. His life hasn't been his without Ren. He's been incomplete, and it's tragic how little of himself has returned to his ignorant, oblivious self.

He opens his eyes, lashes gummy. “How could this have happened?” he croaks.

Ren keeps to himself, finding that although Hux’s torment is unbearable, he can breathe easier knowing Hux is no longer trapped in the dark. “I'm so sorry,” is all Ren can say.

“How did this happen,” Hux gasps wetly, more to himself. He looks to Ren. He can't believe what's happened. It's as if he's been turned inside out and shuffled back into place again. And all the pieces are overturned and rearranged, every bit in some lump, chaotic whole.

Hux lurches into Ren’s space. He fumbles clumsily against him, gripping his arms tightly enough to bruise his bones. And Ren lets him. He always lets him.

“Ren,” Hux whispers, twisted by a heartbroken, mangled grimace. It’s terrifying how easily he could misplace Ren, from his face to his voice, to everything around him. Everything they shared and never got the chance to share. Their mutual discord, their pointless hatred. Their seized opportunities and triumphs, but it's their missed chances and failures that stick out the most. Their life, their love.

Marin. The girls—

Ren’s hands find his, anchoring him back into his orbit. “Do you know who I am?” Ren asks, wavering fiercely, like only Hux holds the answer. Ren supposes he does, because he doesn't know who he is unless Hux does.

Everything scrambles to fall into place, from the years after his and his children’s departure to the weeks with ‘Ben’ and everything they shared. It's all too much. Unfathomable. Ren's hands on him are surreal, but appreciated.

“You're…” Hux tries to find the words. You're my anchor, and I've been drifting over swaths without you. Ren’s hands find his face, bracketing like a guarding vice. Naturally, their foreheads tip together. It's a better position to more efficiently suck out all the air between them and leave them lightheaded.

“I told you. I'd never leave you. Never,” Ren murmurs, bumping their noses. “It's gonna take a lot more than…” He can't find the right words. ”Something like this, to keep me away.”

A whine shakes loose, low in his throat. At the crux of this travesty is Marin. Their son. Their son. He had taken Ren from him. He took what they had and blew it to hell.

Their son, who they almost lost. “Where is he?” Hux hisses.
Ren swallows. “He's on board. He's safe.” That's all that matters. “We're taking you both home. One of their pilots will be taking Aems and the twins home. I'm gonna do everything in my power to ensure nothing like this ever happens again.”

Marin’s aboard, and safe. Immediately, relief warms him. Losing Ren had undone him. But losing Marin, truly losing him, would be his end. “Ren, what do I do now?” How can he face Marin after this? How can he look at himself, after this?

Ren doesn't know for himself, but he knows that there's something they all need. “You love him. I know—I have no idea what you must be going through right now, but you have to love him. And he isn't blameless. But neither are we.”

“I've been so alone,” Hux grovels, remembering every sin and assault Ren inflicted on him, every profession of loyalty and love. Every time he told him to let go of him—don't touch me, every time he pleaded with him to stay—don't leave me. It makes no sense, where they are in their story.

Hux is stricken with a daunting, omnipresent fear that he'll lose Ren again. In a way that he's lost him before. As if any moment he might look at him and not recognize him. Everything he's felt and shared and made with him could be lost again, and he'd never even know it. He better say what he needs to say, before he never again gets his chance.

“I love you,” he tells Ren, forcing out the words that come so easily. “You know that, don't you?” You had to have known. Even when I hadn't known, you must have. Even before when I tried so hard to despise you. You must have known. He's loved him for years.

“That's why it hurt so much,” Hux continues, nonsensically. “Every time you took them, and every time you left me. Every time I let you. That's why it hurt.”

It's unbearable, seeing Hux like this. Ren cannot take any more, but he must. “I know,” he nods desperately. “I know.”

“You must have known, hadn't you?”

“I did,” Ren assures him, holding him close and burying himself into his neck. He smears his skin with his tears, painting a permanent picture.

“I love you,” Hux repeats, clutching him tightly. Ren can slip so easily through his fingers.

“I love you,” Ren promises. He’s home again.

After years and a lifetime apart, Ren and Hux finally reunite, against all odds and everything that’s stacked against them. They fit together better than most pairs, Ren’s breadth around Hux’s slightness. They deserve each other. Whatever comes next, they’ll face it together.

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The swirl of stars flashes blue-white light around Rey and Finn’s heads. Marin’s slumped on the floor. They haven’t said much to him.

He stripped off his outer layer, Kylo Ren’s old robes, and tossed them into a heap on the side. He’s cold without them. He deserves to be cold.
Marin senses Hux has woken up. Neither he nor Ren has come for him. To talk to him, slap him, nothing. He probably should get used to this. Being alone, ostracized. He’s a liar, a manipulator, and now a murderer.

Finn can’t take the silence anymore. He turns around in the Falcon’s copilot seat. “We’re glad you’re okay.”

Marin glances to him, shame pooling hotly. He can’t bear to look at their faces.

“Your grandmother, um. General Organa said there are reports of ships evacuating safely. So far, there’s no sign of them reconvening.” Finn truly wants to believe the data dump had worked, and that all surviving Stormtroopers have broken their loyalty with the Order. But he knows it’s more probable they are seeking refuge, now lost without their masters. Both scenarios are just as much of a success. The First Order in all its massive power, has finally been dismantled.

And Finn had received a message from Poe that the Stormtrooper data dump included information on FN-2187. A birthplace, a homeworld, and possibly a connection to his real parents. After Marin and Ren’s situation is settled, he knows Rey will be the first to suggest they trace back his roots.

Rey turns, too, regarding the miserable boy. “I know you didn’t mean for things to get this out of hand. But we meant what we said. We’re here for you, no matter what.”

Marin crumples. “I don’t deserve it.”

“Yes, you do. Everyone deserves a second chance.” Finn leaves Marin with the tremendous weight of his words. He deserved one, after he defected. Ren deserved one, after he slayed Snoke. And maybe even Hux had, when he left his life with the Order to raise his family.

Marin buries his face in his hands. Hoarse sobs bubble up from deep inside. He knows what Finn and Rey are thinking, how they see him. He lost himself. How can he face Hux, after everything he’s inflicted on him?

The space beside him fills with Finn and his clean leather. Finn sits at his side and dares a hand to palm Marin’s quaking shoulder. “You know we’ll always have your back, kid.”

He doesn’t deserve it. He doesn’t. But he squirms into Finn’s arm so Finn can better his embrace.

After hours that feel like days, Rey alerts the crouched pair they’re making the drop from lightspeed. They’re home. A Resistance shuttle will be enroute shortly after them to return Hux’s mother and daughters home to Rhiannon, too.

Finn’s still secure around Marin’s wide shoulders. “I can’t face him,” Marin whispers, gaping to the Falcon’s durasteel flooring. An idea strikes him. “Maybe, I could go with you and Rey. I could resume my training.” I can be good, do good. I can’t imagine how Hux is gonna look at me.

Rey and Finn exchange heartbroken looks. Instantly, Marin misinterprets. They don’t want me, no one will have me, is written all over his face.

Before he can utter a word, Rey speaks up. “We would be honored to train you. I mean that. And maybe the future holds something different for all of us. But for now, you’re meant to be home with your family.”

Marin slouches. She’s right. He’ll always appreciate Rey’s wisdom, and call on it when in times of conflict.
“We’re touching down soon. Prepare yourself,” she assures him. Nothing can prepare them for the figurative impact of what’s to come, but she won’t allow Marin to be left behind. Never again.

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Hux inhales Ren’s scent. He knew Ren as Ben, but he never forgot Ren’s scent. It’s a warm, salt-saccharine smell, perpetually drenched in earth. They sit in the bunk, Ren’s back to the wall and Hux between his splayed thighs, flushed face burrowed in his chest.

The past weeks are the most recent in his memory, of course, but his memories have slowly settled and become far clearer within the span of his hours-long embrace with Ren. He sees their life, before his mind lost him. So many years willingly apart and loathing each other. So many years wasted on the Order. The Order’s gone. He feels no remorse for its loss, only for what it took to destroy it.

He pictures Marin. He closes his eyes against a new surge of tears.

“We’ve dropped from hyperspace,” Ren breaks the silence. Hux flinches uncharacteristically. The sound of his voice holds new meaning.

Hux thinks of how Ren had been Ben. Everything he said to him. He’s been operating selflessly, driven by his loyalties. ‘Ben’ had treated him with respect and kindness and devotion that he’d never seen from Ren. He was caring and understanding towards his children without attempting to change their lives for him. He doesn’t have to ask himself if it was sincere. He already knows. He’s learned more about Ren as Ben than he’d learned in their years aboard the same Star Destroyer, and he hadn’t even known his true name.

“What happens now?” Hux asks, terrified. “I don’t want to lose you.”

Ren squeezes him tighter. “You won’t.”

Hux speaks the aching concerns eating at him like a parasite. “I've never been in control. Not once,” he confesses, begging Ren to understand. The only time he felt in true power was Starkiller’s first and only detonation. And even that was just to prove a point. Billions of lives lost, all to prove he could.

“I ruined him. He wouldn't have—if I hadn’t given him up, he wouldn't be like this.”

“Maybe. Maybe if we left with him, things would have been different,” Ren chokes. What else would have changed if they left the First Order together when Marin was born? The possibilities are heartbreaking. “But he’s here. And he wanted you to know. He wanted you to see what he’d done to you. And he wanted to come home.”

Hux crumples, prying himself from the sanctuary of Ren’s warm chest. “I can't do this without you. I never could.”

Ren kisses him then, a warm, meaningful press. He's so in love. Hux kisses him back like he's gasping for air. They are whole again. They part, for heads plastered together. “I have no idea what to do now,” Hux laments. He genuinely doesn’t know.

“I know a good place to start,” Ren says. “Tell him how you feel.”
Ren always knows what to say and how to say it. How has he lived, let alone functioned without him? “I don’t know what I feel.”

“You do. I know you do.”

Before Hux can finish, the Falcon hums around them in the telltale way that indicates it’s descending through a planet’s atmosphere. Ren searches Hux’s wet, conflicted gaze. Overcome, Ren kisses him once more. A promise.

The Millennium Falcon glides down to the Aems-Hux estate. Rey easily finds their spot on a flat patch of plain, dusted with sands and grasses. Ren is the first to move for the exit, followed by Hux, who’s clinging to his arm like a blind man.

Marin and the Jedi are only a few paces behind. Hux doesn’t turn around when he hears the scuff of footsteps against the boarding ramp.

Giving them their space, Finn and Rey squat in the sand to make a call to the Resistance for an update on the state of the First Order refugees, the abandoned Stormtrooper plants boarding stolen children from infancy to adolescence that will soon be liberated. But the current dilemma is Ren’s and Hux’s responsibility to solve.

Marin braces for the inevitable as his parents turn around. Ren offers him support, telling him with his eyes, have patience. It’s gonna be alright. Hux’s eyes tell a different story. Closed off, stock-still, fixed on an empty space. Hux can’t even look at him.

He can’t stomach being on the end of Hux’s heartbreak. “I’m sorry,” Marin tells him, oddly, immensely grateful when Ren’s hand on Hux’s shoulder offers Hux much needed consolation. But Hux has never looked as gutted as he does now. Pale and sickly, exsanguinated. It’s all his fault, regardless of how guilty Hux appears.

Marin sounds so young. If Hux closes his eyes, he could swear he can feel his little arms snaking around his middle just like the first embrace they ever shared. It’s a treasured mental picture, one he hasn’t visited since Marin took it from him. So much was taken. Who he is, what he’s capable of, what Marin’s capable of.

He tries to speak his true feelings, just like Ren said he should. “I’m glad you’re alright. I-I’d have nothing without you, Marin,” he promises. It’s the purest of truths. But the longer he holds Marin’s gaze, the harder it is to ignore what Marin’s done to them. When he looks at Marin, he feels the cosmic loss of Ren, and through Ren, the loss of himself. Through this loss, he feels the loss of his son. It’s far too great to surmount after mere hours of gaining it all back.

Grief. Desolation. Where Hux’s words profess love, Marin drowns in Hux’s anguish. There’s no doubt Hux loves him. He loved him the moment he first laid eyes on him and hadn’t stopped, not once, even now.

Hux still loves him, even after his fiendish betrayal. Instead of comfort, Marin gags on disgust, solely inward. Hux has loved him, done nothing but try and make their lives work together given the cards they were dealt. All Marin had done was use, lie, manipulate into compliance for years. Because of him, Hux has never been truly happy or truly himself. He stole it all away.

Hux’s love confirms one thing. If someone like Hux could love him in the face of his betrayal, he indisputably doesn’t deserve it. Wordless, Marin excuses himself and like a drone heads for the house.
“He won’t hear it,” Hux says, dejected. “Ren, I need to take time to think things through. I don’t want to lash out at him, or say anything I don’t mean—”

“I know. It’s alright,” Ren assures him. “You should focus on welcoming the girls home. They’ll be here shortly.”

At the mention of reuniting with his daughters, Hux smiles as if at peace. Because they’re not just his. They’re Ren’s, too. It’s insane how he didn’t realize so before. They look exactly like him, from their complexion to their dark features and wide, cherubic smiles. Marin, who he always thought looked like himself now looks far more like Ren, from his stature to his bone structure to his voice. Their children reflect Ren in a litany of other ways beyond the physical, both shameful and admirable.

“I should have seen it before. They took to you so naturally. I just thought I lucked out,” Hux says. He finally feels whole, like the storm’s cleared. Marin and he may be at their ends with one another, but Ren has come back to him. Perhaps this time, they can finally try being a family.

Before Ren can get out another word, Hux speaks the fierce words in his heart, lest the opportunity is ever rescinded now that he knows the Resistance is on their side, and won’t take Marin or Ren from him. Now that Marin’s home, even though they are long overdue for an honest exchange. “I want you to live with us and be a part of our lives. I want us to be a family. I know it’ll take everything for us to make it work, but I want to try.”

Ren sweeps him close like a gust of wind, hands on his waist, and Hux cruises along the pull. “That sounds like a dream,” he grins, hope bright in his eyes.

The sky behind the parked Falcon hums with the approach of an unfamiliar, noncombatant transport. Ren easily recognizes Poe in the pilot’s seat from how fluidly he makes the landing. In a matter of moments, the shuttle gives and the door unseals. Aems is the first to jog out, a granddaughter in each hand.

“Papa!” the girls cheer, hair still done up in Ren’s braids. Hux drops to his knees to embrace his girls, heart in his throat.

“I’m so glad you’re home. Where’s Marie?” Seren asks between kisses to her Papa’s cheek. Seren and Taran reserve kisses like these for their happiest of greetings.

“Your brother is inside the house. He gave us a real scare, didn’t he?”

“Seren and I talked about being nicer to him and not getting mad when he does. We can do it. We can be better and be nicer,” Taran insists.

“Darlings, you’re perfect,” Hux breathes. It’s beyond him how wise his four-year-olds have become. He certainly has never been the pinnacle of morality. Now that his eyes have been opened, he feels Ren’s warmth in theirs, mingled and entwined. His countenance crumples when the pulls back to ogle their deep chestnut eyes glittering in mirth, their cherubic, full complexions, their guiding light. How could he not have seen Ren?

“Oh, Ben is okay, too,” Seren smiles, itching with the need to hug Ben as well.

Hux kisses his baby girls once on their foreheads, mindful of Ren coiled patiently behind him. Nothing could have prepared him for a reveal to his girls about themselves on such an astronomical scale. “Papa has to talk to you both about something really, really important, alright?”

“Is it bad?” Seren and Taran don’t like bad.
“It’s not. It’s good. But before I do, can you both please run in the house and hug and kiss your brother? Give him a good welcome home.”

The girls saunter into the house without hesitation, exceedingly excited to fulfil their Papa’s request. Hux embraces his mother, tethered in her maternal comfort. If only he grew up with her influence, he may have made a home sooner and with far less bloodshed.

“I know you have questions, Mother. I have answers,” Hux says. “Marin’s inside. We’ll meet you in there.”

Aems nods. Not an ounce of her trust in her son is misplaced. She kisses Armitage, then Ben, thanking him for his help. They couldn’t have brought Marin home if not for Ben.

The conclusion of the shuttles passengers unload. Poe, Luke, Leia, and Chewie with Abie in tow. Lis and Naedie march off. They’re happy to be home, and happier to not have fought in another war. Hux tells Lis that Marin’s inside. He knows she’s been sick with worry for him.

Leia embraces her son. “You did good.”

“It was Marin. I knew he’d come back. I’ve never been this sure about anything,” Ren gasps, like he can’t quite believe his hopes weren’t shattered. “And Marin restored Hux’s memories, and now he wants me to stay here, Ma, I can’t believe it.”

“I can,” she beams. She always believed in him.

At Ren’s unfettered joy, Hux swipes a tear from his cheek. Both Ren and his mother are smiling at one another he fears his presence, though the key topic of discussion, would dampen their celebration given his and Organa’s past relationship.

“We should go inside. And please, come as well. You should be there for this,” Hux says, directing his invitation at Organa.

She raises her brows in pleasant surprise, and accepts. The Resistance wades outside to discuss their plans going forward, acts of hedonistic discord that General Hux would have surely scowled at and retaliated with firepower, just on principle. But Hux’s mind is far from that arena. All he can think about is how he can’t wait to break the news to the twins that their family has doubled in size, how happy he is that Marin is safe at home despite their crimes to one another, and that Ren is real and he’s finally his.

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Marin stands still in the center of the living room. It boxes him in condemningly like he doesn’t belong. It feels like months since he’s truly been home.

He flinches when the front door bursts open, revealing his overly excited little sisters. They're on him in a flurry of cheers and smiles. He kneels low and warms under their embraces. They’ve never been this happy to see him before. He hadn’t realized until now.

“Don’t you ever leave like that again, Marie,” Seren scolds him, squeezing him tight. “Papa cried. We cried. Gramma cried. It was awful.”
He wishes he could make that promise. But now that Hux can see him for who he is, is this place
not his rightful home? He hardly deserves a life with them. “I’m sorry for making you worry,”
Marin says instead. He chokes around the shame for the threats he made in his dark side polluted
haze against the Resistance, and his sisters and the rest of his family, too. “I’m so glad you kept
each other safe.”

“We missed you. We were so scared you left and were never coming back. We said we’d all be
nicer and happier to you,” Taran sniffs.

Marin hates that he made his sister’s cry and think that this was somehow their fault. “You know I
love you both. No matter what happens,” he vows.

His grandmother comes inside right after the girls, and hugs him and kisses his temple. She will
always hold her child and grandchildren the closest to her heart. Lis comes inside shortly after. She
all but slaps him for scaring her. Marin hugs her the tightest. He doesn’t deserve her.

Hux is the next one inside. He briefly glances at his son with his mother but otherwise silently
ushers Ren and his head and a half shorter mother inside. It’s awkward enough welcoming the
notorious General Organa into his home. Luckily Luke Skywalker and Poe Dameron, both having
either been his targets or victims at one point or another, were glad to wait outside. This is twice in
two days the Resistance cohered under his roof and among his property. It’s astonishing how little
this perturbs him now that things have been put into perspective.

Marin glazes over Hux. He can’t bear to be in his presence. Hux is being so calm and congenial
that Marin doesn’t know if it would be worse if Hux were hiding his hatred for him, or if Hux were
incapable of the feeling.

“Lis, you should go,” he hates to say. He doesn’t want her to see him like this, to hear what his
loved ones have to say about him. He promises to comm her soon.

Of course, she understands. “I better see you soon,” she says, and Marin swallows and nods and she
leaves the family to reunite.

Marin’s red-rimmed eyes land on Leia Organa, his grandmother. She’s smaller than he
remembered. She’s sporting the warmest smile he’s ever seen, all for him.

“Marin,” Hux says, apprehensive yet persistent. It’s like he doesn’t know how to handle him, and it
makes Marin ill. “I want you to be here for when we tell them.”

“I don’t think I should,” Marin blanches. The fog tugs him down in his despair.

“Please?”

Marin flinches. Hux’s decency is unlike anything he’s ever been on the end of. He has no choice
but to comply. He finds a seat on the smallest couch expecting to be left alone while the rest of the
family takes the fuller seats. But General Organa is unyielding and steals the seat beside Marin.
She grabs his large hand between her small, cool ones. Aems passes them a fleeting look of
confusion at their closeness, but all will be revealed soon.

“It’s good to see you, kid,” General Organa says to her grandson, mirth warming her brown eyes.
They’re Ren’s eyes, Seren’s and Taran’s.

“It’s good to see you, too,” Marin whispers, quenching his sorrow. She was the first person he ever
trusted. Oh, how he’s missed her. He never should have left. He should have made it work, Hux,
Ren, the girls, his powers. He’s been so lost without her guidance. It’s a miracle he’s made it this
far without her.

“Mother, girls, please sit.” Hux pulls Ren beside him. He doesn’t want to be apart from Ren ever again. “This concerns us all, and will shed a light on things.”

Aems waits patiently. Her Armitage has been through so much. She never expected to hear from his past but was always willing to listen.

“I’ve known Ben for years, since we were young. It must have been twenty years we’ve known each other. His name isn’t Ben, not anymore. He’s Kylo Ren and he and I commanded the First Order together under the Supreme Leader. It wasn’t until we’d been ousted by one of our subordinates that we left.”

Aems hadn’t expected this. Kylo Ren. The name sounds familiar, infamous like a haunting thought. “You’ve been acting as if you never met.”

“That’s just the thing. I didn’t know who he was. The memories of him were—” he shudders, unable to meet Marin’s eyes. The feeling is mutual.

“I don’t understand.”

Hux fidgets and Ren soothes his twisting fingers with a warm, grounding palm. “Ren wasn’t always like this. Honorable, courageous. Someone to be proud to know and love,” he says meaningfully, mindful of General Organa’s keen attentiveness. Someone like her probably never expected someone like him to speak about her son like this. “He was a real bastard, like me. A perfect match, really,” he smirks brokenly.

The smirk slips as he continues. “When the girls were born and Marin was young, he decided Ren was no good for us and together we left him. But I wanted to stay with him—and Marin, he just wanted to do what was best for us. He used his powers and tore the memories of him and everything we shared.”

Recoiling, Aems digests the revelation. If Marin had done something like this, it would surely account for his despair and anger and secrecy, for Armitage’s confusion and disillusion. But her Armitage crumples. There’s something else, something big.

Hux sags into Ren’s side. He mourns the years of fatherhood lost, in both his and Ren’s respects. He takes a breath. It’s dead silent. Even Seren and Taran brace for whatever their father is about to say.

“Mother,” Hux grates. “Ren is their father.”

She’s speechless. Until Seren speaks up for her. “What?” She doesn’t understand.

“Dear, Ren is your father. He's Marin’s father, too. You all came from me. But you're half a part of him.”

Seren and Taran exchange confused glares. Their hearts beat rigorously. Ben in named Ren? And he’s their father? “But how?” Taran gapes. She needs more answers.

“He's the reason why you all exist. It was his—idea for us to have you all,” he paraphrases. The truth of Marin’s conception is still far too raw. If he told his mother what Ren did to him, he’s not sure he could make her understand that Ren isn't that man anymore. “He wanted an heir. Hells, that was a lifetime ago.”
“Really?” Taran gasps, smile blossoming wide. Ben is Ren, and Ren is their father. They've come to like Ben so much.

This is like, the best thing that could have happened.

“Yes, I am,” Ren speaks up. He flicks his gaze over to Marin, who's concentrating on his and General Organa's clasped hands. “I couldn’t tell you and your father the truth because it would reveal Marin’s secret.” Marin’s expressionlessness doesn’t waver.

Seren laughs, a delightful musical noise. “We’re family,” she smiles, matter of fact. Her mind races. There's so much to think about.

“Yes, we are.” Ren has never felt as impervious as he does in this moment.

As amazing as this discovery is, something just doesn't add up. “But…” Seren just doesn't understand. She regards Ren, his big brown expressive eyes on hers. “Why didn't you stay with us?”

At Ren’s confusion, Taran finishes what her sister is trying to say. “You're our family. Family stays, and lives in this house. You just came here a little bit ago.” There's no animosity, only sincere interest. She doesn't understand why Ren, their other father, wouldn't stay with them.

Hux’s heart breaks all over again. “We would have been with him, but—” But what? Can he really blame their brokenness on Marin? He wouldn't have done what he did if not for his and Ren’s failures.

“But I made a lot of mistakes,” Ren finishes for him. “When you and your brother were born, I was a real jerk. Your Papa didn't even like me, not a bit. The only person who did was my mom. And even then, she didn't really.”

The girls realize their next discovery in unison, as they do most things. Ben-or-Ren’s mother. The nice lady from the Resistance ship. Taran peers behind her to confirm. Yes, oh yes! She's family, too! She's their grandma. Two parents and now two grandmas? This is such a wild, special day.

Seren’s urgency shines through her next question. “Are you gonna stay now?” Already their family has grown twice over. They can't leave, not now, not ever.

“I would love to,” Ren says, and turns to meet Aems’ eyes. “Only if it's alright with you all. I know you have a life here. I'd never want to do anything to compromise it.”

Aems sighs. It’s going to take a while to unpack all this. But there’s one thing that can’t be denied. “Regardless of what you may have done in the past, Ren,” she says, trying out his proper name, “your place is with your family.”

Abruptly, Marin pulls from General Organa’s warmth and marches to his room, gently closing the door behind him.

Ren is the first to try and fix things. “I’ll go talk to him.”

But Hux stops him. “No, no. I need to. Besides, you need to get reacquainted with your daughters,” Hux smiles. It feels so incredible for Hux to finally acknowledge their pedigree.

Hux excuses himself and pauses outside Marin’s door, breathing deeply as if summoning the courage from the motion alone. “I’m knocking,” he knocks, “and coming in.”
The door opens soundlessly and Hux eases inside. His son’s cross-legged on his bed, back against the wall. He looks so much like Ren. It’s terrifying how he hadn’t noticed before. Marin’s reach was more potent than he ever thought possible.

Marin doesn’t have to look up to know it’s Hux. He wishes for an easy way out of this, but life is not awarding him any shortcuts. Not anymore. Hux approaches him with caution as if he’ll lash out at any moment. Marin loathes himself for doing this to Hux, reducing all their interactions to dormant predator versus timid prey. Perhaps this is his punishment. Hux will never look at him the same, see him as anything but a beast.

Hux finds a seat on the empty corner of Marin’s bed. Marin would gouge out his eyes if it meant he didn’t have to see how scared he makes Hux, embodied in Hux’s slouch, a wobbly lip, and nagging, clenched fingers.

“I thought I lost you,” Hux whispers. He doesn’t ever want to feel like that again. To lose Marin would be the end of the line.

“You would have been better off.”

Hux shakes his head, begging Marin to see how he truly feels. “No. You’re my son. And I shouldn’t have let you live like this. I was supposed to protect you. I’m so sorry.”

Hells, he can’t bear to hear how sorry Hux is while he’s the one who’d disgraced him. “You don’t have anything to apologize for.”

“I do. I do. I shouldn’t have let you go like I had. I should have been there for you, held you, fed, you, raised you. I’m so, so sorry.” Hux cries. When he looks back, all he sees is failure. The picture is clearer than ever before. He doesn’t deserve to call himself Marin’s father.

Marin, who would be stone-faced if not for the glassiness of his eyes, allows Hux to continue, though he shouldn’t. He should be the one in tears apologizing, not Hux.

“I know you did what you did to me because you were trying to protect us. I can see that now,” Hux nods, trying so hard to believe every word. Marin can’t ever feel like he doesn’t belong, not again. He can’t lose him.

This, apparently, is the wrong thing to say. Marin withdraws, closing off further.

“Marin, I mean it. I know you were trying to do what you thought was best for us. I forgive you.”

But Marin’s heard enough. “I had no regard for your autonomy. I ravaged your mind like it was a plaything. I treated you like you were disposable. I used you.”

Hux flinches, resentment darkening his soft eyes. “What do you want me to say?”

“Anything but turning this around and saddling the blame on yourself. I can’t stand it.”

“Marin,” Hux tries, persisting. He’s so desperate to win Marin’s favor, he all but asks him how to feel. “I know you did it for me, for my safety—”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Marin—”

“I didn’t do it for you. I did it for me!”
The room shakes from Marin’s explosion. It shakes hard enough for Hux to break.

“I did it for me,” Marin repeats, unwavering. *I did it for me.* He may have deluded himself long enough to sustain his lie, to believe he was protecting Hux. But he endured the years of lying to protect his secret. He let his heartache from Ren’s abandonment turn into hatred, and he let his hatred for Ren change everything about himself. He let his hatred for Ren turn Hux inside out.

A tear salts Hux’s lips. He opens his heart to Marin, unloads his tormented thoughts, the root of his son’s betrayal. “You took him from me,” Hux accuses, brittle and bellicose. “Why?”

It’s much better this way. They can empty this out in the open. “I wanted you and Ren to suffer for what you did to me. You both abandoned me. You didn’t even give me a name. And Ren had used me to get to you. You lied and cheated. I was tired of you two always getting away with it.” Marin winds back his hostility. “I wanted a family. Without Ren, you could finally focus on me for once.”

The wounds have never healed, not for either of them. Hux sags, begs his son to meet his shameful, guilty gaze. “If there were a way to take it all back, I would. I never should have chosen anything over you. Not the Order, not Ren.”

“Marin,” Hux continues, daring to palm his son’s proud cheek. He looks so much like Ren. “There is nothing you could do that could compromise my love for you. You could do both me and Ren. We’d definitely deserve it, and worse. But that wouldn’t change a thing.” He can see the memory clearly now. He was in a Resistance cruiser masquerading as an anonymous fugitive who had just birthed Marin, Ren somewhere off nearby trying to orchestrate a way off the ship. A nurse handed him Marin as a bundled infant. Shock kept the more embarrassing emotions at bay, until little Marin opened his eyes and regarded him as if he could see all his secrets. That was the moment he fell in love with him.

Marin crumples. It’s everything he’s wanted to hear from Hux. He couldn’t make himself listen until now. “I hurt you,” Marin grates.

“You did. You really did.” Marin made him feel powerless. Learning his life had been a lie at the hands of his son had wreaked his foundations. But he always knew Marin was capable of something like this, and in the end, Marin’s deception can easily be attributed for the shameful example he and Ren paved for him. He’s a child, and was more of a child when he took his memories.

Marin sighs, clenching his scarred fists. “I don’t want you to look at me like that anymore. Like I’m some kind of monster.”

“The only monster I see is the one I’ve lived with my whole life. When I look at you, I see nothing but my handsome, caring, strong-willed boy. I meant what I said back there. You’re a far better person than me or Ren. I don’t know how someone like me could make someone like you.”

Marin squeezes his eyes shut. In their precarious years as a family, Ren-less and none the wiser, Hux had never said anything so honest. Perhaps ousting Ren from Hux broke him, chipped away the best and worst parts of him. It’s like all these years on Rhiannon, Hux was a wandering spencer of himself, and only now is Marin truly speaking to his father for the first time in ages.

“And I want you home, with me. I want,” Hux swallows, “I want Ren to be in our lives. He's your father. He cares for you as I do. Unconditionally, Marin, I promise.”

Marin can’t face Hux’s resounding truth. “I’m sorry,” Marin sobs, shaking his head. Immediately, Hux is there to tend to his boy. He cradles Marin close, anchoring him into his much slighter
shoulder as his boy cries and cries.

“I know,” Hux says, holding him tightly. Marin clings to him like he’s trying to push the air from
his lungs. “I’m sorry, too. And I forgive you.” Hux does. Marin’s his son. They’ve all made
mistakes. He has hope this travesty will only bring them closer.

Hux forgives him. He holds him tighter, burrowing his wet face in his shirt. “I don’t deserve your
forgiveness.”

“You do. I promise you,” Hux murmurs. He kisses Marin’s sandy hair.

“I love you,” he sobs. “I won’t ever hurt you again. I won’t.” He has a new mission now. It starts
with this: “I forgive you, too.”

Hux makes a small noise in his throat. He hadn’t expected to ever hear that coming from his boy.
They hold one another until the dusk fades to night time. It’s not fixed, but it’s mending.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter legit makes me cry!!! i hope you guys like this!!! it took a LOT out of me!!
:D
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Marin faded in and out of unconsciousness but is now awake and leaning on Hux’s shoulder, his lean arm around his shoulders and hand in his hair. Hux pets Marin’s soft hair like he used to do when Marin was a small boy. Making up for lost time. “You know Ren will be staying with us, right?”

Marin stiffens. “I know.”

“I can’t have you running off like that again,” Hux swallows. “So whatever needs to happen to get you to stay. I’ll do it.” How the hell is this gonna work? Unless by some miracle Marin suddenly has stopped loathing Ren. He prays this isn’t an impossibility. Ren was the one who got him on the freighter away from the now destroyed First Order. And Marin couldn’t kill him, not like he and Ren killed their fathers.

“I know.”

“Marin, I’m serious. I can’t take losing you again. We’ll figure this out.” They can make it work. They have to.

“I’m not gonna kill him, if you’re worried.”

Hux tightens his arm around his broad-shouldered son. “I know you won’t.” It’s one thing he knows for certain. Marin saved Ren and brought their family back together.

“I’m sorry for making it my chore to keep you alone for so long. It was wrong of me to take him from you,” Marin murmurs, muffled by Hux’s shoulder.

Hux’s somber smile sharpens to a smirk. “Please, you two are practically the same person. I have half the mind to blame myself for not seeing ‘Ben’ in you.”

Marin permits Hux’s judgement. He knows he isn’t attempting to insult him and oddly, the words do not sting.

“I’m just so happy you both are with me again. Your feelings for him are your own—but please try. He’s not a complete failure as a parent. After all, he gave me you.” Hux pulls back to look his son in his mirroring eyes. At the earnestness shining through, Hux anoints his boy’s forehead with a warm, healing kiss. Marin doesn’t have to say another thing. Hux feels it in his heart.

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In the living room, Leia sits enthralled at Seren and Taran’s excitement over the new addition to their family. Her son has never looked so happy.
“So, you’re living here now?” Seren demands, bouncing from Leia to Ren.

“Maybe,” Ren smiles. He hopes so. He prays so. But he won’t stay here unless Marin wants him to.

“What about you, Grandma Leia?” Taran asks, testing out the name for the nice woman, their second grandmother. “We have a big house.”

“I can see that. It’s a beautiful home. I’m just not sure I’d fit,” Leia laughs. She enjoys the title ‘Grandma’ very much.

“We can squeeze you in here. We can buy new beds.” The answer is so plain and simple in her eyes.

Ren reels them back in. “Her place is with the Resistance. She’s always been a hero to all, and now that the First Order has disbanded she can focus on reviving the Republic.”

“That’s so cool. You both are so cool. Seren and I liked the Resistance space ships.”

Seren interjects into her sister’s comments. “I’m very happy you’re a real part of the family.”

“I’m happy, too. There hasn’t been a day that’s past when I haven’t thought about you both. Marin, too.”

The girls grin. They remind him so much of his mother. He can feel she sees it, too.

Aems volunteers to start dinner. If there’s one thing she can control in this life, it’s when and where the meals are made. Ren expresses he’d like to help, just like the evenings and mornings in the restaurant of bantering and polite chat. Leia keeps the girls entertained, sharing stories of the Resistance that they were so interested in, from her roots in the Rebellion and onward.

“You were a princess?” Seren gasps, wide eyed. Her grandmother. A real princess!

“I used to be, back on my home of Alderaan. I parted with my home long ago,” she says, glossing over the painful details. “Then I joined the Rebel Alliance, and that’s where I met Luke and Han. Oh, and Chewie.”


“Luke is my brother. We’re twins like you two,” she smiles, delighted at their titillation to this fact. “And Han...was the love of my life. Han was Ben’s father. He passed away years ago.”

The girls droop a bit, but there’s one thing they can’t ignore. “Wait, I thought you all said his name is Ren, not Ben.”

“Ben’s the name I gave him when he was born. He changed it when he was older. Ren suits him more, but I’ll always call him Ben.”

Their new grandma and Ben-now-Ren-now-father’s stories are far too complicated already. Though they have a feeling there’s so much more complicatedness where that came from.

“We really like Ben. Um, Ren. He’s been so nice to us. And he was so nice to our Papa and even Marie when he was acting up. Seren and I haven’t met anyone like Ben, ever.”

“I’m glad. I know he always loved you both since the day you were born.”
The girls beam. Maybe, in some way, they knew that Ren was their real father. They’d like to think their hearts can know something that their heads don’t yet understand.

Hux steps into the room after gingerly shutting Marin’s door. He petted his head until he fell back asleep. Hopefully Marin will sleep through the night. He pads into the kitchen. Ren and his mother busying themselves over dinner is a pleasant surprise, the first of many striking, unbelievable reminders that Ren is real, Ren is here, and is never going to leave him again. The girls are chatting up Ren’s mother. Ultimately, he’s grateful for their acceptance and curiosity with her. His little girls are welcoming and inquisitive, never afraid to ask a question.

“He’s asleep,” Hux says to Ren softly. “I told him we’d talk more in the morning. For now, I thought it best he gets some rest.”

Ren nods, sautéing the remainder of ingredients into the stir-fry. Marin needs to rest, to reflect on things. When he almost went off the deep end, he spent months in isolation to gather his center. For the first time he’s grateful he’s failed enough to know when his life turned around. Now, he knows enough to believe Marin will save himself.

He only looks up from what he’s doing on the stovetop when Hux doesn’t waver from his spot, seemingly trapped in the moment. He looks up. Hux beams warmly with all his attention rapt on Ren’s tasks.

“It suits you,” Hux says. He’s so happy to have Ren again.

When the meal is ready, Ren serves six dishes. A seventh goes in a container for Marin, as per Aems’ request. This is the largest meal he’s ever made. He’d very much enjoy making meals like this every night, forever.

Leia is lead to the table by the girls. Seren insists she sit beside her, and Taran does the same for Ren. They are by far the most well-adjusted children in the entire system. Despite their excitement, the girls temper their voices because Papa said that Marie was asleep. He’s had a long, strange day and needs to sleep. They all do, but the girls are far too excited.

Ren is all too happy to tend to their needs during dinner. Hux eats up the new, enticing display of Ren in their home more that he eats the physical meal. Unlike the tense breakfast with ‘Ben’, the wholesomeness isn’t fabricated or all in his head. Ren’s staying here. They’re gonna be a family.

“I’d like to say some words to Marin before I leave, but it can wait ‘til the morning,” Leia murmurs to her son. Ren asks her where she’ll be spending the night, and she benevolently informs him she can camp with the Jedi aboard her shuttle and that ‘Chewie makes a great pillow.’

“I appreciate you staying for him.”

Leia smiles softly. Ben smiles in a way that’s all Solo. If only Han could see the man Ben’s become. A house, a family, a partner. He is her greatest achievement.

When dinner is completed, Aems urges the girls to get ready for bed. She tells them to say goodnight to the newcomers. Spiritedly, the girls embrace Leia who bends down to reciprocate.

“Thank you for the stories,” Taran says.

Seren nods. “We really like listening to you.”

“You both are very good listeners. I can see your Papa taught you well,” she smiles, uncaring of the inadvertent compliment she gave the once-General Hux. It’ll always amaze her how things have
Ren kisses his mother goodnight. He thanks her for protecting his family and for always being there for him, even when he’d least deserved it. He’ll see her in the morning.

“Goodnight, Ben,” Seren says, switching to hug Ben-Ren’s long legs. “Sorry, what should I call you?”

“You can call me whatever you like,” Ren laughs.

Hux bends down to kiss his girls one more time. “You may call him Father or Papa or Daddy, whatever you decide on. Why don’t you two discuss it tomorrow so you can be extra sure.”

Of course. Papa has the best ideas. The girls give Ben-Ren one last squeeze before heading off to bed. They had a long, eventful day.

When Ren’s alone with Hux, scrubbing the dishes clean, he expels a warm, unencumbered breath of relief. He’s finally done it.

“My mother said she wants us to have our privacy so she and the girls are camping in her room tonight,” Hux says lowly.

Ren would hate for them to start altering their lives for him. “That’s not necessary. I can take the couch.”

“Ren,” Hux scoffs. Ren will never tire of hearing his name on Hux’s lips. “You’re not a house guest. You’re… the father of my children, the love of my life, the missing piece to everything. You’re home.”

Ren dries his hands on a rag, awe and reverence bubbling up. He needs to hold Hux again. So he does, arms bracing around his slightness. “I’ve searched my whole life for you,” Ren whispers, sharp nose burrowing in his soft hair. The words make the purest of sense. In the years they spent together, they were trapped in an aimless loop, lost without a bearing. Now that the barriers are down, it’s as if they can finally meet for the first time.

“I’ve missed you,” Hux whines. He loves him. He’s loved him with a broken heart and he’s loved him with a broken mind, but his love for Ren has never faded, and it never will.

Hux leads them to bed, fighting the urge to peek into Marin’s room to see if he’s vanished again. Trust is earned and learned. He must have faith Marin will do the same. He tugs Ren into his room two doors down. Ren doesn’t miss the glee glittering in his eyes. Ren’s pulled into the dim room and the door shuts behind them.

Hux is on him like glue, tonguing into his mouth. His body cries for Ren as it’s been doing for years and years. “Ren,” he whimpers. “I need you.”

Nodding, Ren kisses him back, lost in every sultry caress. “You have me,” he whispers. He’ll always have him.

Feverishly, Hux paws at Ren’s shirt, tears of excitement to be close to Ren pooling in his eyes. It’s been so long. Sex with Ben had been incredible but it’s been years since he’s made love with Ren. He all but shoves him to the bed so that he falls on his bottom. Luckily Ren has an amazingly fit core and lands without toppling. Hux mounts his lap and grinds his crotch onto his.

Ren groans low and reverberating in his mouth. Overwhelmed, he pulls from Hux's petting. “I
thought about you every day we were apart. Even before, after we had him. I feel as if I can finally breathe again.”

“You’re such a sap,” he smirks, as if he hasn’t been sticky with love and nostalgia.

“There’s plenty where that came from,” Ren promises, gasping when Hux slides to his knees and tackles his pants buttons. Even from before, Hux has never done this before. There’s something toe-curlingly intimate about Hux looking up at him wide-eyed and full of reverence, braving through a new, intimate experience.

Coyly, Hux opens his prize. Ren’s always been pleasantly large in all respects. He wastes no more time and tongues him for a taste, his own cock hardening at the salacious intimacy of the act. He moans as Ren’s earthiness, the weight and stretch of him on his tongue, Ren’s gentle fingers on the nape of his neck. After several clumsy, enthusiastic bobs of Hux’s panting mouth, Ren spurts preemptively, coming in thick globs on Hux’s lips and chin like a damn teenager.

“Fuck, I’m sorry,” Ren groans, endlessly embarrassed not only at his haste completion, but his inability to give Hux enough time to pull off. But Hux appears to have enjoyed the mess he made of him.

“Please. It was an honor,” Hux smiles, dabbing his face with a nearby tissue. Pleasuring Ren on his knees might be a new favorite. Ren’s smell, his heat, his taste. All of Ren’s willpower and attention centered on him. It’s unbelievably intoxicating. He doesn’t have much time to spare before Ren is on him and he’s pulled from the floor and onto the bed. Devilishly, Ren tongues in his mouth, tasting himself. They feel so wild and carefree and young, just getting lost in each other.

“I may not be able to get it up for a bit, but there’s something I’ve wanted to try for ages,” Ren murmurs, hoarse with arousal, both sated and otherwise. Hux gasps at Ren’s full weight over him, his swollen hardness. Ren instructs him to lie back let him handle his pleasure.

Once Ren’s stripped Hux of his sweater and cumbersome pants, Hux sits up on his elbows to stare in adoration at his lover. He never imagined he’d feel this way again. Ren situates himself between Hux’s spread legs. He kisses Hux’s pale neck, his flat chest, the scar bisecting his panting abdomen. “Don’t be afraid to tell me if there’s anything you don’t like,” he says with assurance.

“That won’t be a problem,” Hux smirks. He loves being worshiped by Ren.

Not sparing any longer, Ren dips low for Hux’s cock, reciprocating with far more finesse that Hux would be jealous if Ren’s mouth on him wasn’t what his body’s been crying for. After a few languid, indulgent pumps, Ren graduates to lapping at his soft, pink, untouched sac, eliciting whimpers from his partner. Satisfied, Ren dares to lap at the swell of Hux’s modest ass.

Hux whines, not fully understanding what Ren’s trying to do but needlessly excited for what Ren has planned. His eyes widen to saucers when Ren’s tongue delves between his cheeks. Disgust towards the act is the farthest from his mind. All he feels is Ren’s worship and adoration from the slick persistence of his tongue.

“Oh, yes,” Hux groans, careful not to raise his voice. Ren’s ministrations grow bold from Hux’s enthusiasm. With wide hands, Ren cleaves Hux’s thighs as far as they will comfortably spread and tongues deeper into Hux’s hole, burrowing in for access. Hux’s clawed fingers against his scalp only entice him more. He focuses on a rhythm, one that keeps Hux’s thighs trembling. His own spent cock throbs. It won’t be long before he can harden again to fuck Hux like he deserves. For now, he’s content to draw out Hux’s moans and coos of pleasure.
After several minutes of lapping that’s grown far too close to teasing, Ren adds a long finger in beside his tongue, prodding and searching for the secret inside him that makes his pink cock strain with beading come. Hux still hasn’t touched himself. He wants to make this union last.

Ren can only stretch this out for so long before Hux is writhing and squirming and demanding he fill him. “Please tell me you’re ready again,” Hux groans, wriggling on Ren’s impossibly fervent licks to his hole. Ren comes up for air, his cheeks matted with damp strands of hair. Hux commits the image to memory, praying for more moments like these.

Surely enough, Ren’s cock is nearly filled like he’s unrealistically youthful again. He grins toothily and spoils Hux with a rough, sloppy kiss to his hole. Just to watch him squirm. “Been ready,” he all but winks when he parts with the mess he made between Hux’s cheeks.

“Then what are you waiting for?” Hux demands, bleary with pent up lust.

Ren shrugs as if clueless.

“Gods, just take me already,” Hux growls. He croons when Ren fulfills his demand and maneuvers him to his stomach. Oh, he can’t wait to be taken by him like this. Ren behind him, mounting him, claiming him if not for the fact they already are indebted to one another.

Hux finds Ren some hand lotion that will have to do for lubricant. He makes a note to purchase the most exquisite lube he can find in all of Greendole. Behind him, Ren laves his cock along Hux’s stretched out hole.

When Ren’s greased cock breaches him, Hux gasps like he’s been slapped, pushing back onto Ren’s enormity. A few determined thrusts later and Ren is seated inside him to his angular pelvis. Hux teethes at the pillow to keep from making loud noises.

Every fuck Ren delivers is a vow. He’ll always be with him, even when he can’t. He’ll always be the one that can carry him forward, even if he’s gone. Ren’s been with him his entire life, before he even saw his face and long after when he hadn’t recognized it. For Ren completes him in a way that nothing else can, not the tallest throne in the system nor all the power in the universe.

Ren moves inside him, deep and permanent. By now Hux’s driven himself to tears, so full of his everlasting love for Ren, of Ren’s love for him. He comes around a sob, Ren’s mouth on his throat and his fist in his hair, Ren’s cock hammering away at his resolve. When Ren comes, he does so with a whimper, hot globs pumping him full until he can’t support himself over Hux’s sweaty, fucked-out body.

Ren lays buried deep inside him, inhaling the sweat-sweet scent of Hux’s neck to catch his breath. Hux lays there basking in the glow. He hides his tear streaked face in the sheet, though he’s sure Ren already saw.

“I’ll get you cleaned up,” Ren murmurs in his ear.

He shifts his weight to the side and moves to pull out but is stopped by Hux’s plea. “Don’t be long,” he whines. As if the threat of never seeing Ren again persists even here, where nothing can touch them.

After Ren’s rummaged through the bathroom for a clean rag and mopped up the fluids painting Hux’s lax thighs and oozing from his hole, he rejoins Hux in the bed. Their bed. Hux doesn’t bother stifling his urge to be close. He scoots close over Ren’s expansive chest, burrowing his cheek in Ren’s scarred shoulder. Ren holds him, and can finally breathe again.
Ren nearly cries, he’s so relieved. Hux, so soft and pliant in his arms. An age-old grievance bubbles up. It pains him to revisit the memories he has of tormenting Hux both physically and emotionally. He wants to burn the man he used to be for harming Hux. Ren can’t say it enough. “I’m so sorry for doing—so many unspeakable things to you and Marin and the girls. If I hadn’t been so careless and selfish, I wouldn’t have lost you.”

Hux hangs onto him tighter. He’s long since accepted Ren’s faults, his shortcomings, his sins. He always had, always will. He thumbs the faint scar just above Ren’s sternum. Because of him and the timebomb connecting them, Ren will never outlive him. If something were to happen to him, their children would be left fatherless. Loathsome tears sting. How can he prop his mistakes over Ren’s? He’s already murdered him.

But Ren is here, and they’re going to begin their new lives together. “It wasn’t all bad.” Hux murmurs, letting go of his grief and self-loathing. At Ren’s confusion, he continues, speaking from the most intimate depths of his heart. “Losing you and meeting you for the first time...I got a chance to fall in love with you all over again.” How many people receive such a blessing?

Overcome with simultaneous elation and grief, Ren kisses him like it’ll be their last. “You've become such an optimist.”

Hux smirks, then grins deviously. He's so happy to be in Ren’s arms, kissing and smiling and loving. “I bet you enjoyed me as the oblivious virgin. ‘Oh, Ben. I’ve never been with a man before. I'm so inexperienced, you'll have to show me how fuck.’”

By now, Ren is full-on laughing, all teeth. He's every bit as handsome as Hux remembers him. And hells, does he remember him.

“It was novel, I can't lie,” Ren says. “But I was too far caught up in being close to you again. Even through the lie.”

Hux breathes in Ren’s scent. “I'm glad you kept up the persona. It was nice being bloody ignorant. Only somewhat,” he corrects himself. “Most of the time, I felt lost. Even...the years after Marin made us leave. I felt so lost without you, Ren. And I didn't know. I didn't have a clue.”

Ren kisses Hux’s dampened forehead. “I don't ever want to make you feel trapped like that again.”

A storm surge wells in Hux’s throat. He grimaces around the taste. He doesn't recognize the emotion until he's clawing for Ren again, wrapping his arms around his neck to ground him. He’s finally found what he's been waiting ages for. A promise of deliverance from a lifetime of hateful rule and murder and destruction, embodied by Ren’s warmth and heart. He’ll never be who he was now that Ren’s with him. They’re a matched pair. Where one falls, the other will follow.

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The Resistance’s camp isn't disturbed by the early morning visitor. It's Marin, awake before dawn. He could only manage a few hours of dreamless sleep. He aims for the sea. He wants to be alone.

Aems comes outside with some coffee. She kisses him and lets him know the Resistance will be leaving for their base soon, and that he should say his goodbyes. Marin braces through her waves of love and understanding. “We are so happy you’re home safe,” she smiles mournfully. Marin running out on them for the First Order triggered a great many old, tired scars.
“I am, too,” he says, and he means it. “I'm so sorry for putting you through this.” *Again.*

But Aems just kisses her Marin on his cheekbone, well past apologies. “We're so proud of you.”

He doesn't deserve anyone's pride. He turns to the shore. “I'd like to be alone for a while.”

Aems allows his request. She senses the Resistance will be waking soon, and readies a quick breakfast.

Down the beach, Rey emerges from the Falcon. It's almost time to say goodbye. She and Finn and General Organa had received intel that the known Stormtrooper plants have been disbanded and the younglings trapped and hosted there for conditioning have nowhere to go, and no one to stop them from leaving. It's the Resistance’s job to get them to their homeworlds safely.

But she can't leave without promising Marin they'll reconnect soon. She's determined to not once lose touch with him. The possibilities for her and her friends being a part of the twins’ lives is also enticing. She drags her eyes across the morning dusk. As a child she often dreamed of growing up in a place like this. A home.

Not for the first time today, she thinks of her mother. She has only a precious few memories of her mother. A sound, consoling and loving. Her voice. A bright beacon, her light.

Something in the air tells her to turn around. She gasps and all the breath has left her. A beautiful, unmistakable woman stands motionless. The woman is smiling in awe and reverence.

“I've been waiting for the right time I show myself to you,” Mara Jade says, watery with unfelt tears. She's never seen her daughter as a woman until Rhiannon, for her energy has been tied to Seren and Taran since their birth.

Rey doesn't need to ask her who she is, or what she's doing here. Her look says it all. “It's you,” she gasps. How can this be?

Her daughter's voice is the finest of music. Mara Jade is so grateful the Force has given her this gift. If only she could hold her like she last had, the night she passed. She kissed her little girl goodnight, promising to see her in the morning. *Goodnight Mama, love you!* were Rey’s last words to her. Luke had done to Rey what Marin had done to Hux, banishing her identity from the one she loved most. But the fight has left her, and it's a blissful feeling. Truly letting go.

All these years apart, and neither woman knows what to say. Mara finds the words shining through her open heart. “You've become such an incredible woman. I'm so proud of you. How much you're grown.”

In an action she’s only seen her aunt Leia express, Rey clutches her chest as if attempting to keep her soul from shedding her mortal form to join her mother in the Force. “I've missed you,” she says, heart in her throat.

Mara still can't believe she's allowed to feel her daughter's light, to take in her most precious loss, the galaxy's greatest gain. “I've missed you. And I would have come sooner, but the Force has given me agency only to an extent. My duty as it's been was to watch over Seren and Taran. To covet their light. If I could have seen you, I would have done anything to do so. You and your father.”

Summoned, Luke and Leia emerge from the Resistance shuttle. They gape in unadulterated awe. Could this really be? Luke takes a burdened breath. He hadn't seen Mara’s ghost since his exile but he knows this ghost is unlike his feverishly dreamt specters. The ghost is pure energy, a net of
Force in perfect balance. He can't form the words for what he's feeling.

“Stop staring. You're beginning to make me feel self-conscious,” Mara smirks. This moment, their family finally whole again, is one for the books.

“How?” Luke finally croaks, his twin metal hands fidgeting loose at his sides. Leia sighs happily. There is so much the Force has given them. Not for the first time, she feels lucky to have endured the galaxy's hardest of trials for moments like these.

“Luke, my love. Rey, my light. Leia, my dearest friend. I'm here because of you both, how you helped Ben come home to his family. The universe would be dark without you all. There'd be no hope for any of us all.” Especially the innocents, like the twins and whatever little angels the Force may bless the galaxy with next.

Rey takes her father's hand and links their hearts. It's a bond often tested but never once broken. Together, as a family, they welcome Mara's presence, tears of relief silently falling for a hole finally filled.

--

Ren wakes up with a beautiful warmth on his chest. Before his eyes fully open, he pets the soft hairs tickling his pecs, thumbs the jawline gritting against his skin.

Hux wakes up. He's never been happier to say, “Good morning.”

Grinning warmly, Ren kisses Hux's forehead. “'Morning.”

He lays there with his arm around Hux’s bare shoulders. If in his final moments he recalls one special, perfect moment, it would be waking up to find Hux in his arms, their three children home safe on the first day of their new life together.

“Do you think Marin’s still asleep?” Hux asks, after a fulfilling silence. His heart’s in one place.

Ren tightens his hold on Hux’s lax body. “I don't think so. I sense he's near.” Their son’s energy is pensive, far off. Ren’s ability to sense Marin is new. Before, he could hardly know his own feelings, let alone Hux or Marin. The Force is seeping back into his bones now that he’s home, slow and healing.

But Ren’s assurance only worsens Hux's anxiety. Wordless, Hux shoots up from the bed and beelines for Marin’s room. It's empty. Panic rises, until he peers out the window for signs his fears are merely fears, not reality. Marin’s at the shore atop a high dune. He's isolated, closed off. But he's home.

Ren’s behind him, a grounding warmth. Hux leans backwards into Ren’s solidness. “I'll never get used to this.”

“To this?”

“To not knowing if I'll never see him again,” Hux breathes. He turns around, molding himself to Ren. “Or you.”
Hux grimaces with feeling as Ren kisses him, his large hands comforting his jaw. “I'm here to stay. So is he. He knows so. And things won't be the same, but maybe that's for the better.”

“How? I've told him how I forgive him and I know he accepts it. I just...don't know if he can forgive himself.” He wants his boy to love being with him, to love Ren, not just tolerate him. He wants them to be a family. It all seems so impossible, after everything. His happy-ending is so undeserved.

Ren homes in on a treasured memory of their family in the past, however it's a memory only he experienced. He doesn't know how to explain what he's about to do, all he can do is promise Hux he has it covered. “I have an idea.”

“What is it?”

Ren grins toothily as an answer and flees from the room. He can't wait another second to execute his plan. Hux feels a bit comforted at Ren’s behavior. He trails after Ren and his confident sprint outside through the back door. He's heading for the Falcon. Hux worries his lip with his teeth. He's not particularly fond of surprises but he has faith in Ren’s ability to mend.

The morning air is crisp in his lungs. Ren approaches the Falcon, sure in his stride. He falters only for a moment when he sees Rey, Finn, Luke and his mother outside coddling the unmistakable visage of Mara Jade. Of course, Mara Jade notices him and nods in salute. Ren’s beyond relieved Rey and Luke could have this beatific moment of closure, after all he stole from them.

A few minutes later Ren emerges from the Falcon with his prize, lugging it towards the beach.

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Marin drowns his chaotic thoughts in the white noise of the sea, the violent splashing and crashing. He has half the mind to rip off his shirt and dive in. But he still can't swim. He never finished his lesson.

Thinking of Ren, Marin stares longingly at the Falcon down by the house. He wonders what piloting that ship would be like. He's never piloted anything before. Would it be difficult or come naturally to him?

He spots Ren conferring with Rey and the others. After a beat, Ren drags a large crate through the sandy grass. Towards him, up the incline. Marin stays put, not quite believing what Ren’s doing. What the hell’s in that crate that's so important?

Ren’s panting by the time he settles the military grade crate at Marin’s side. He falls to his knees and begins to unload it. He arranges the contents on the lid in the sand. Soldering tools, laser saws, sandpaper sheets. A nondescript flat case sealed by a seamless clasp.

“What's this?” Marin asks when he can no longer take the suspense.

Ren offers him a helpless smile, one that says *don't object, please.* Marin doesn't. He's so, so tired, barely has the energy to glare. Ren doesn't give an explanation and passes Marin the now opened flat case.

The wind picks up, cooling his sun-warmed skin. Wordless, Marin investigates the crystals. Some are angular, some round, some in the shape of pyramids and rectangular prisms. They're all colorless.

“Rey told me you expressed interest in resuming your training. I know that they didn't make you a lightsaber when you were younger. If you're still interested, I thought we could make one together.” Ren settles on his bottom. He can feel Hux’s eyes on them from the back porch and burns under Marin’s incredulous, fearful glare.

Overcoming his shock, Marin observes every crystal, what makes them different, notable. He knows these came from the Jedi children Ren slaughtered, and knows Ren would know that he knows. It's an offering.

Grand tragedies worth crying every night over, acts of heinous betrayal, mistakes that cannot be undone. Ren's taken so much from the people he loves. He's taken the life of so many innocents, scorched entire worlds with Hux at his side. He eviscerated his own father and depleted what was left of his humanity in the process.

Ren's first true betrayal is embodied in each unowned, anonymous crystal. Ren knows this. He's counting on Marin to understand. The travesties Ren inflicted cannot be erased. But they can be repurposed and revisited, used for the betterment of not only himself, but Marin, too. What Marin could never see before now was that for all the shit Ren’s done to him, Ren will always be the one who truly understands him.

It's as shocking as it is relieving, a swift and succinct epiphany like he finally remembers some important secret about himself. Ren understands him because he's been where he's sitting. He's scorned and betrayed and destroyed the ones he so carefully tried to protect. He let the darkness inside until there was no one left. He looked inside his heart and saw only grief, pain, regret for his selfish sins.

Marin can't speak. He doesn't know what he could possibly say, so he plucks a crystal from its padding. A pyramidal one, favoring one side. He closes the case and sets it down and places the chosen crystal on top. Waiting.

Ren's forehead pinches in bewildered shock, like every hope and wish he ever had become true. He smiles, watery and full. On the verge of tears, Ren tries to regain composure. He's a father, dammit, and it's time to start acting like one.

“We'll have to—we'll have to choose a hilt design. You have large hands so the bigger the better.” He tries and fails to temper the tremors in his voice and focuses on the tools and on Marin’s patient cooperation. He readies the laser saw, explaining that it has to charge for a moment before use. Same with the solder torch.

“Have you ever used any of these tools before?” Ren asks, organizing their workspace. Marin shakes his head. He's never done anything like this before.

“They're not too difficult. This one's for cutting, this one's for sticking things together. Why don't you take a look in the crate for a hilt you'd like.”

Hesitantly, Marin shuffles through the collection. There's one that's long and narrow, another one that's silver and smooth, one that's stumpy and black. His hands favor a charcoal grey one with a dusting of silver on the surface. It's a good size and shape, not too much going on and looks long enough for both of his hands, if he ever even uses it. He just wishes it had a clip like the long narrow one. He picks that one up, too, weighing his options.
“If you can’t decide,” Ren says, “you can pick parts of one to add onto another.” Marin still hasn’t said anything. Maybe he needs prompting. He can see Marin measure the advantages and disadvantages of both sabers. “Here, I’m sure the clip on that one can come right off. You can make it your own.”

Marin hands Ren the hilt with the clip. Ren shows him how to saw it off with the laser saw. He explains that this saw is state of the art and doesn't require eye protection, but some like it do, so he has to be careful when he uses tools like these. Marin listens on, absorbing the guidance. He doesn’t hang up on the preposterousness of listening to Ren’s patient, enthusiastic instruction. Objection never surfaces. Not once, not for a second.

Ren begins to saw the clip off, then passes it over for Marin to use. He beams as his son takes to his instructions and completes the task without issue. Ren shows him the two steps for the soldering: applying the solder and heating it for the weld. Marin listens on and focuses on what to do, what to look out for, and how to fix mistakes. Marin applies the solder and seals on the new clip with little issue. It's as if the two pieces of metal were meant to be one.

“We can set the crystal next,” Ren tells him, excitement climbing. He takes the laser across the plating around the approximate area of the setting. When the space is clear, Ren tells him how to place the crystal in its setting. Within moments the crystal is in the proper place, Ren having made a few adjustments with a pair of forceps.

Once the casing is back in place and sealed, Ren instructs him to sand down the seams and even the surface with the fine-grained sandpaper. Marin observes their handiwork. It's complete.

“Go on. Let's see it,” Ren smiles, backing up to give Marin some space. Years from now, he'll think back to this moment as one of the most inspiring, pivotal moments of his life. The tentative pride, the hope and veiled excitement glimmering in Marin’s eyes. It's the moment he knew every bit of his suffering over the years, self-inflicted and otherwise, was well worth it.

Taking a breath, Marin holds out the lightsaber in the air, hilt parallel to the ground. His heart beats five then ten then twenty times before he activates it. The space between them is illuminated by a brilliant, electric blue.

Marin gapes at the blade’s unfettered power, the weightless might of it. The blade hums with his timid swipes. He doesn't realize he's smiling until Ren is, wide and toothy and full of life.

“How's it feel?” Ren gasps, clapping his hands together. “Look at that. You did it. It's perfect,” Ren tells him, excitement climbing. He takes the laser across the plating around the approximate area of the setting. When the space is clear, Ren tells him how to place the crystal in its setting. Within moments the crystal is in the proper place, Ren having made a few adjustments with a pair of forceps.

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mistakes, he's given Marin a gift far more valuable. Ren’s now on his level that their mistakes blur together like an expressionist painting. Marin’s heaving shoulders quake.

Ren almost leaves, not wanting to cause Marin any further pain. He's done enough. But at second glance he sees not heartbreak and blame, but relief. Before he can stop himself, Ren takes his hand to Marin’s wide shoulder. It's something his father used to do to him and grounded him more than words ever could.

At the contact, Marin crumples even more severely. Disgust, contempt, anger—they're the farthest from his mind. All he feels is Ren’s hand on his shoulder, the sincerity in the act. Had it always been like this?

“Hey, it's okay. It's gonna be okay. You're home, safe, and so is Hux. It's gonna get better,” Ren urges. He'll always be on Marin’s side. Always.

“I thought—I thought,” Marin says between sobs, “That if I kept him from you that it would make me stronger.”

“I know. I understand what it’s like to tell yourself you're doing this for someone else when you're really not.” Ren carefully centers them, meeting his eyes. “No matter what you did, all that matters is that we'll be on your side.”

“Why?” Marin asks, helpless, hapless.

“You did what I couldn't do. You made the choice to save yourself. You showed Hux and I that every bit of the good in you triumphed the bad.” Ren smiles, full and bright. “And I'm your father. That's something that I've always been proud of. I always will.”

Years, decades from now when Ren is old and withered, he'll reflect on this moment as the second his life sparked and restarted like a hijacked speeder. He'll close his tired eyes, mouth upturned in remembrance of one of the fondest memories in his treasured collection.

Ren only processes what's happened when his chest is constricted not in the icy suffocation of impending death, but Marin’s warn, wide-armed, desperate embrace. The lightsaber hilt digs flatly into his spine inactivated, harmless, clenched in his son’s scrabbling fingers. The wetness seeping through his clothing is not a gaping, gushing wound, but his son’s teary face warming his shoulder.

And Ren had thought he knew true happiness.

Overcoming his stiltedness, Ren reciprocates just as tightly, nuzzling Marin’s sandy hair. Yes, this will be one of the most precious moments of his life that he'll think back on where he truly felt proud of how far he's come.

Marin squeezes his eyes shut, every inch of him crying for the same comfort that's been dormant since he was a child. It's a comfort only Ren can offer. Thankfully, Ren seems to understand that this hug is all he wants right now. So Ren cradles his skull, holding him close.

“Thank you,” Marin whispers. He thanks him for the repurposed lightsaber, the opportunities it presents, for the sincere outreach of the act extended like an olive branch. He thanks him for his empathy and for never losing faith in him, for believing he can be brave enough to defy the plaguing darkness. He thanks him for the forgiveness that radiates from the very center of him. He wouldn't be who he is if not for Ren and his open heart.

After a prized moment, Marin pulls from Ren, swabbing away the wetness from his eyes. Ren looks so happy Marin hardly recognizes him. He supposes he too has a taste for the dramatic.
“C’mon. Let’s show Hux what you made,” Ren grins. He leads them down the dune for the back porch where Hux awaits. Hux’s heart shines with joy.

“What’s all this?” Hux asks, having just witnessed their workshop and unprecedented shared embrace. Can this really be what it looks like?

Marin presents Hux his new lightsaber, a peaceful offering. Awestruck, Hux takes it, inspecting the fine craftsmanship. His eyes dampen. This saber is so special. This is something Marin and Ren made together. Elation rises high around the lump in his throat.

“It’s quite remarkable,” Hux says, and passes it back to Marin, who proudly clips it on the waist of his pants. “Marin,” Hux starts, meeting Marin’s green-blue eyes. “You have no idea how happy I am that you’re home. How happy it makes me to see this,” he chokes.

Hux’s nearly lifted off the ground from the force of Marin’s sweeping embrace. It feels so good to be home with their family finally whole.

“I’m happy, too,” Marin tells him, kissing the side of his head like Hux likes to be kissed by his boy, ever since he was small.

Ren beams, lungs filling with the fresh morning air. There’s nowhere else he’d rather be. How could he have ever wanted anything different? One of his greatest misjudgments was that it took him so long to figure this out.

Hux tells Ren and their son to go inside for breakfast. Coyly, he also tells Marin to deliver the containers of food for the Resistance that Aems prepared. Who’d have thought the great General Hux would one day be delivering fresh hot meals to the Resistance on a calm morning on his homestead? Marin obliges. This will be his time not only to say goodbye to the Resistance, that half of himself, but to apologize for trying to erase them.

“They should be leaving soon,” Ren informs them. “With the Stormtrooper plants currently managed by droids, they’ll have to liberate each one and find a home for the children.” That’ll be a monster of a task. There’s no doubt a lifetime of conditioning will be hard to demolish. But now, Ren believes anything to be possible.

Outside, Marin approaches the Falcon. He staggers when he sees the visage of Mara Jade in their cohort. He breathes a sigh of relief knowing she’s made contact with Rey and Luke. They look whole, like this. Complete. And thankfully, they don’t look the least bit upset with him.


Luke softens. What Marin did to his arm before he left was the farthest thing from his mind. He merely smiles and offers to take the tray. “I’m just glad you’re home.”

He and Luke share a great many failures. How they lied and cheated the ones they love to service themselves, and how in the end it tore them apart. It was because of the very people they betrayed that they were saved. Luke became a Jedi once more, Marin became who he was always meant to be. Not a Jedi or a mock Sith Lord, not a Soul Eater or whatever tales Snoke and his legends concocted, but Hux’s proud son. Ren’s proud son, too, in a way he never thought possible.

Marin spends the remainder of the morning swiftly absorbing everything he’d been missing out on since he left. Finn’s valor, Poe’s honor, Rey’s heart. Luke’s guidance and his grandmother’s faith--
it’s no wonder he was so lost.

After breakfast, it's time to say their goodbyes. “Your parents love you so much,” Leia beams warmly to Marin. Her eyes light up when the twins spill out of the house, eager to hug and kiss all their new friends and family goodbye. Ren, Hux, and Aems trail after them. Already their family has doubled in size.

“Will you come back to visit?” Taran asks her grandmother and uncle Luke, who they only just met. Uncle Luke is a funny fellow with metal hands like a droid and a warm smile and a big scraggly beard. On the outside, Uncle Luke and Grandma Leia don’t look to be twins, not like the girls do, but on the inside their lights are all but one. Rey, the pretty lady, is Luke’s daughter. The girls can very much see where she gets her bright light. It reminds them of the flickering air that they’d sometimes see, glowing and blue and hovering like a moon. They’ve always called the glow Mara.

“I'm counting on it,” Leia says. “We'll see what the future holds. In the meantime, I'm leaving your father with a comm unit. Feel free to call anytime you like.”

“Ben said you all are going to save everyone. You're gonna bring all the children in the plants to their families?” Ben said the Resistance is doing so much for the good of the galaxy. They're heroes. They help lifeforms who can't help themselves. As much as he'd like them to stay, their place is out there, just as Marie’s place is here.

“We will be. Take care of your brother, okay?”

“We will,” she girls nod dutifully. They hug Rey and her friends goodbye. Even Chewie lets them hug. Gods, Chewie is so much fun to hug, they hug him over and over again!

Chewie gnarrs a goodbye to the Solo boys and girls. He trusts the Force will be with them, passing along an embrace for Han to Ben and Marin, who accept the embrace unburdened. Poe shakes Ren’s hand, a man who’s seen Ren at his worst and even far, far worse than that. Ren thanks him for his help, appreciating every sacrifice Poe’s made for the greater good and the good in himself. Poe tells Marin if he ever needs anything, he’s just a comm away.

Finn and Rey encourage Marin to continue his training. When he asks them how, they smirk fondly to one another, and Marin doesn't have to look for further clarification when they flick their eyes to Ren. The future is no longer uncertain, but endless in possibilities. Luke says his final goodbyes, he, Ren and Marin sharing far more than the Skywalker blood that beats in their hearts.

Leia hugs her grandchildren one last time. “Try not to drive your parents too crazy,” she grins, full of love. She reserves her final parting words for Marin and Ren. She knows they have a long way to go, but their paths are entwined now and forever. They've come so far as father and son. “I know if Han could be here, he'd be so proud of you both.”

Swallowing his grandmother’s promise, Marin nods, understanding. Things have changed for the better. He's changed for the better, for good.

Taking a breath as she would take a leap of faith, Leia is the only one of the party who regards Hux, crowded by his mother. She thanks Aems for taking care of them, and trusts her with the pleasure and duty of doing so before and now that Ben’s become a part of their lives. From one mother to another, Aems promises her she and her friends and family are always welcome here.

She absorbs Hux’s unhinged love and joy, centered around his children and his mother and, of course, Ben, his one and only love. She doesn't doubt that it'll be near impossible for her and Hux
to forge any sort of relationship, but he's the caregiver of her grandchildren. Without Hux, there’d be no Marin or Seren or Taran, and Ben wouldn't have ever come close to returning to the light.

A vibrant, spark of light unlike all the others shines as if through Hux’s skin. She grins in awe, thanking the universe for this new gift. A promise of new beginnings. Leia retains her composure at the realization, and says what she's been meaning to say for longer than she ever thought she’d feel. “I've never been happier to be proved wrong,” she tells him.

Overcome, Hux swallows. He never expected this from Organa, of all people. She looks at him fondly, inquisitively, as if there's something about him he cannot see for himself.

The Resistance is off with several shrill shouts of ‘goodbye Grandma Leia!’ from the girls, who already miss her.

“May the Force be with you,” Ren nods as his farewell, Hux and Marin and the girls flanking either side of him, to which his mother replies with, “And may it be with you, always.”

Marin chokes down tears as the Falcon and the shuttle pull from Rhiannon’s gravity. Leaving made him realize that this place is his home. He'll protect it with his dying breath, along with everyone on it.

The Falcon’s engines aren't enough to muffle Abie’s excited bark. Marin and Ren whip around as Abie runs from the house to greet them. Her first stop is Marin. He needs the most attention. He responds so well to her licks and playful kisses. He's smiling like her other friend smiled when they first met, so she persists with her joyous greeting.

Seren squeezes her papa’s tummy, waving goodbye to the space ships. Taran’s on the other side of their papa doing the same. She smiles. She's so happy to be home. Marie, Papa, Ben, Grandma, they're all meant to be home. She buries her face in her papa's soft tummy, smelling his warm scent. Papa smells like clean clothes and warm-day smell. Taran and her have discussed their papa’s smell, as well as his light that they feel from across the yard. It's a good, home type feeling. It's one that will always be the same, even after they are separated for a long time.

At least, it has been the same warm-day smell and welcoming light that their papa is made of. Until now. Taran and Seren glare at each other in confusion. Their papa seems different. Not bad, but different than his usual self. There's something different—something else. Something more.

They gasp in shock when they pinpoint exactly what it is that's different about their papa.

“You say it, Taran. I can't.” Seren groans, clearly chagrinned about something. Hux breaks his sight line from Marin several paces away playing with the dog, Ren’s proud, glittering mirth in his direction as he confers with Aems. He looks down at his precious baby girls. They've grown up so fast. Now that Ren's here, they'll get to grow up in a full home for the first time. He mourns the time Ren and he lost with Marin, as well as the time Ren lost with the girls, but they can't focus on the past now. This is their life now, together.

“What is it, dear?”

Taran teethes her lip. “Papa, you don't know?”

“Know what?” He genuinely doesn't.

What Taran says next will go in Hux’s memory as one of the most powerful, beautiful moments of his life. “There's a baby in you.”
He’d waver if not for his anchoring hold by his girls. He gapes in shock and brings a shaky hand to his abdomen. It takes some maneuvering but there it is. The firelight life, so new and fresh of a light in this galaxy. He whimpers, face crumpling.

Utter disbelief wracks him. He can't explain how this has happened. He'd thought he lost his ability to conceive, that in one of Ren’s last acts of betrayal he'd cut out his womb like it’s existence were a burden to him. Hux feels for the light again, lips tugging into a smile as his greatest hope is confirmed once more. There's no mistaking the firelight life inside of him as his and Ren’s creation.

Seren focuses on the new lifeform. “Papa, it's a baby! You see it, right?”

“Yes, I see it,” Hux beams, heart racing erratically. “I can't explain it, but yes, it's there.” He thinks of how Organa looked at him before she left, like she knew that something was different. Hells, this is nothing short of a miracle.

“Let's tell Marie and Ben,” Taran smiles giddily.

Hux nods, he’s so happy. “Though I have half the mind to keep it secret until they figure it out. That'll show them for keeping so many secrets from us,” he jokes, smiling wider at his girls agreeing snickers at their papa’s deviousness.

Suddenly, Seren makes a face like she's just felt a great tragedy. “Oh, no. No, no, no.”

“Oh no, what? Is there something wrong?”

“Terribly wrong.”

“What?” Hux asks, panic rising.

“It's gonna be a boy.”

When he hears the girl's laughter, oblivious to the new life growing within Hux, Ren looks up from Marin’s embrace with Abie. Hux looks back at him, glowing with a warmth so rarely seen in him before now. It's a perfect moment, one Ren will keep with him forever.

Chapter End Notes

one more chapter to go!! boy i never thought this story would take itself here, but here we are! idk about you guys but this chapter had me sobbing...

ALSO NEW BABY NEW BABY HUX IS GONNA HAVE A FUCKING BABY AGAIN HAHAHAHAH IM INSANE!!!!!!!!!!!! TRY AND STOP ME OMG!!!!!!!!!!11
Taran’s tummy flutters like the wings of a fly-by bug as she and her sister fiddle with their backpacks. It's their first day of school. Papa told them if they listen to the teacher and behave, they will have lots of fun. Papa said that he'll see them after school because their medidroid put him on house-rest until the baby comes in a few months. The baby, who Seren and Taran are not looking forward to meeting. They have more fun with Papa’s droid than they ever will with the baby.

The speeder starts up, but doesn't budge. “Why the long faces?” their daddy asks from the pilot’s seat. Which is a bit funny because they've long since decided there's absolutely no face longer than their daddy’s face. Long face, big ears, wide smile. That’s their daddy, alright.

Taran groans. “It’s not a big deal.”

Ren adjusts in the pilot’s seat to get a better view of the girls before taking off. “Sounds like a big deal to me. Nervous about school?” Ren asks, concern piquing.

“The baby is taking up Papa’s time. And he's not even here yet,” Seren complains.

Ren tucks one of Seren’s errant hairs behind her ear, careful not to muss her crown of braids he carefully weaved this morning. “Papa is more upset that he can't take you both than you are. He doesn't like waddling around all alone with the midwife droid. He'd rather be with you.”

Seren sighs. “I know. He gets grumpy and in pain. We should really shut our mouths. It's not like we're doing any work.”

Ren smirks. “Nonsense. You two have extremely important jobs. Like school. Ready to go?” he asks, double checking the girls are both strapped in. When he gets confirmation, he pilots them in the direction of the schoolhouse, sun warm on his pleasantly grinning cheeks.

These last few months have without doubt been the happiest, fullest, most remarkable days of his life. When Hux had pulled him aside that first day home and told him he was with-child, Ren’s initial response was utter disbelief. He never imagined they'd have another child. The same womb Ren had implanted, he tore out years later when the twins were born alone in the cold of space. The only explanation for Hux bearing a child now is a miracle as willed by the Force. Later, upon acquisitioning a midwife droid via a very supportive and suspiciously unsurprised Leia, the medidroid offered the only explanation for Hux bearing again was a secondary womb he'd been implanted with, likely around the time the first one was. Ren dared not question it. Womb or not, this baby is a miracle as willed by the Force, just like all their children are.

Regardless, Ren could feel nothing but joy as he swept Hux in his arms. Hux kissed him and told him he loved him, without thinking, all in front of Marin. To their shock, Marin simply smiled a modest, honest smile. He was happy, too, in his reserved, pensive way. Marin still has a lot to
overcome but his tolerance and support for the new addition to their family has been spearheaded by Hux’s happiness and approval. Everything Ren had prayed for was coming true.

Since then, Ren had made a home in Rhiannon. He slept beside Hux every night, made breakfast so Aems could sleep in, and managed to convince Hux the girls were ready to attend school. Hux had always been overprotective of them so it was understandable when he had protested. It’s this precise day that Ren sing-songed their daughters good-morning, and he kissed Hux’s sleep drowsy grin and pecked his distended belly, passing silent promises of devotion and adoration.

Marin had been another case. They’d managed to reach a truce. When Hux wasn’t around, Marin’s tolerance for his presence both in the house and in their lives had grown from stale acceptance to a level understanding. Hux’s pregnancy had eased along some of the more tumultuous issues.

It’s remarkable how Marin has adapted to the new changes. He knows how important the new baby is to Hux and is determined not to act out. While Ren and he certainly have minimal interaction, they still manage to coexist. For the most part, Marin spends his days at school and at Lisbeth’s house. He even has a weekend job at the spaceport with Lis to keep his mind off the past and towards the future.

Sometimes when Marin and Hux are home at the same time, Ren can see Hux coiling as Marin moves around the house, as if he’s a heartbeat away from snapping. But despite reading the tension, Marin doesn’t waver from his determined path. Every so often Ren reminds him that he’s always there for him to talk to, but Marin assures him he’s fine, in that pensive way of his. Ren never presses. They understand each other better than most.

“Alright. We’re here,” Ren says. Seren and Taran hesitate before unlatching their belts. Ren softens. “Try to enjoy your day.”

“Daddy, we will try, at least.” Taran nods. They call Ben ‘Daddy’ now, have been for months. Daddy always likes being called that name. He smiles his goofy smile.

“Want me to walk you to your classroom?” The girls are independent but they are prideful enough to keep quiet when they’re not as confident as they’d like to be.

Their identical smiles tug on his heartstrings. “Please, it'll only take a second!” Seren calls. They know their papa is home alone since Marie left early to drive in with Lis at his school down the block. Daddy and Papa don’t like to be separated for very long. Papa is always sitting against Daddy’s side like they’re joined at the hip.

“Of course, kiddo,” Ren says, and hand in hand, they make for the schoolhouse. Ren deposits them at their classroom, wistful tears pooling in his eyes. His life now has so many amazing moments like these. He’ll never take them for granted.

“Let's get a picture before you go. For Papa.”

The girls gladly oblige, posing cutely for their shared photograph, then they urge Ren to join them for a second photo, their grinning faces crowding the frame.

“Bu-bye Daddy!” Seren says, waving goodbye. Taran is eager to start their day but she gives her daddy a wave as well.

“Bye girls,” Ren smiles and waves, and his girls shyly pick seats in the front of the brightly decorated classroom.

Ren makes it home within a few minutes. Aems is at the restaurant today. Over the past few
months, Aems had kept him on at the restaurant. She still insisted on giving him a paycheck, even though they all share the same roof after work hours. Hux should be home alone, either asleep or passively bickering with the midwife droid.

Because of the nature of Hux’s unnatural pregnancy compounded with his advancing age, the midwife droid diagnosed his pregnancy as high-risk. He’s only about halfway to term but the droid advised him that in his second trimester he should only leave the house for minor errands. No shopping or any heavy lifting, no speeder speeds higher than the minimum. Since taking leave from his job at the university, Hux would be terribly bored if he weren't already in love with the little one, and now that he has Ren, he's rarely in want of company.

Ren docks the speeder in the garage, combing his fingers through his wind tousled hair. To this day he makes every effort to look presentable to Hux. Ren slips into the house, eager to get his hands on Hux’s ever growing waist. Smiling from ear to ear, Ren pads into their bedroom. It's devoid of Seren and Taran’s beds, who had moved into the brand new spare room. Two spare rooms were another gift from Leia and her vast resources. Hux lies asleep twisted in the sheets with a used tissue in his limp hand, his long-sleeved shirt stretched across his modestly bulging abdomen.

Unfortunately, Ren’s presence disturbs Hux's much needed rest. Hux stirs and the first thing he does is rub his plump belly. He grunts and blinks awake. The baby is kicking.

“I'm sorry. I tried to be quiet,” Ren murmurs, sitting on the bed at his side. His hand finds Hux’s jaw and his lips find his forehead. Ren feels his smile under his thumb.

Hux grunts in disagreement. “He woke me up. When you're around, he squirms like he wants to pop out of me.”

“Already a troublemaker,” Ren says, palming for their son’s little movements through his shirt. He’s growing so fast. “Got the girls to school alright. Seems quiet here without them.”

“Enjoy it while it lasts. Soon there will be another loud mouth to feed. And tend to and clean, among other things.” Hux marvels how Ren's eyes light up at the prospect of caring for an infant, something he never got to do with the girls and certainly not with Marin. This new baby means so much to him. Hux will never doubt they made the right choice to stay here and raise their family together.

“I'm looking forward to it.” For the first time in a long time, Ren’s looking forward to the rest of his life.

Hux kisses him, chaste and gentle. “I'll be sure to remember that when the baby comes.”

Ren makes a face and Hux knows precisely what he's thinking. “Why are you still calling him that? His name is—”

“No,” Hux groans, smirking at their favorite topic of argument. “We didn't agree on that name.”

“Yes, we did. You said I could name him.”

Hux scoots to the edge of the bed, past Ren's keen-eyed leer. “I said you could name him but we'd have to agree on it. And I still haven't agreed.”

“I'll wait 'til you agree, then.”

Hux snorts and makes for the refresher to empty his bladder. While Ren waits for him to finish, he
starts up the medidroid for Hux’s morning check. Just a quick vitals scan, nothing invasive thanks to his mother’s help, who insisted on the top of the line equipment. Hux even admitted his graciousness for her help, which was a first.

“You and your child are in good health, Master Hux,” the droid assures him. “My only concern is that you’re maintaining your post meal walk. It’s very important you take a short walk after a large meal.”

“I’ll be sure to get him off his ass,” Ren jibes, and Hux ignores him. “Come on, let’s get some food in you.”

Hux is lead to the kitchen where Ren prepares his nutritional substitute that would taste identical to his favorite caf if Ren bought the caffeinated form. But caffeine isn’t good for the baby, so Hux must go without. Ren serves him his favorite: fresh fruit and low sodium potato hash.

“The girls are really gonna have a blast in school. Their teachers won’t know what hit ‘em.”

“I wish I could have seen them off. But I’m glad at least one of us could,” Hux says, voice low. This pregnancy has given he and Ren endless joy, but it’s also brought up age old feelings of loss and grief. For the time they let go to waste with Marin and how that lead to Ren missing out on the girls’ early lives. He’s just so incredibly happy they can seize the opportunity to be a family now. Ren rubs between his stiff shoulders, always understanding what he doesn’t speak aloud.

Ren pulls out a camera and extends the footage to Hux. “They missed you being there so we took some pictures for you. I know how much you love pictures.”

Hux beams as he admires the photographs. He already knows these will be stored in the family holo-album on the hearth. Their girls look so much like Ren when they smile. “Thank you,” he says, pecking his cheek.

He closes his eyes, absorbing the breakfast scents, Hux’s congenial warmth radiating like sunlight. Ren exhales. What he does next could be dubbed as impulsive if not for the years of fantasizing this exact moment. In his fantasies, he’d do what his heart told him over a morning just like this over a cup of caf, Hux at the table beside him leisurely finishing his meal.

“Hux,” Ren says, waiting patiently for Hux to meet his eyes. When he does, Ren gets lost in his calm seafoam stare. Sure of his reasoning, Ren takes his soft hand and kisses his knuckles. He’s not as confident as he'd like to be, but he knows what his heart wants. What he's about to ask isn't ever something they discussed, before Rhiannon or after.

“I want you to know how much you mean to me. Everything I am now is because of you. Everything. If it weren't for you or Seren, Marin, and Taran. And—” he pauses with a knowing smirk on the name of their unborn child, earning a irritated yet amused glare from Hux’s patient face. “And the little guy,” he says pointedly, “I wouldn't be—I’d have given up long ago. You've given me so much, I hope what I can give you is enough.”

Ren thumbs the woven bracelet on Hux’s slim wrist. He made the bracelet as Ben, the desperate, lonely man he became in wake of his loss. He hopes Hux will favor the gift currently burning a hole in his pocket. Ren pushes himself to make the final move. He shudders under Hux’s undying concern. Not an ounce of his love goes to waste since Hux absorbs and reflects it entirely. Ren takes out the gift.

Hux’s forehead puckers. It’s a ring.
A silver ring of soft, brushed metal. Like he and Hux, the ring has another half, an identically crafted ring fitted precisely for Ren's larger finger. A part of one whole. The dealer at the spaceport said that the pair was made from metal of the tallest spires of an ancient ecumenopolis lost between the wars. The merchant could have retrieved them from an old mouse droid for all he knows or cares. Where it came from hardly matters as much as what he’s hoping to use it for. Ren saw it one afternoon and knew it was time to show Hux how much he truly loves him.

Ren doesn’t realize he's tearing up until he sees the glassiness of Hux’s eyes. He still hasn’t said anything, but Hux already understands. “So what do you say?” Ren asks. “Marry me?”

Marriage. Ren wants his hand in marriage. Hux's heart is racing like a freighter. He never imagined he’d get the chance to do so.

“Of course I'll marry you, Ren,” Hux gasps, throat thick with elation. Ren splits into an enormous, toothy grin. They laugh, they're so happy. Eagerly, Ren slips the ring on Hux's perfect finger. Already Hux is obsessed with the weight of it, a representation of Ren’s devotion to him. Ren has a matching half of the pair, too, and Hux goes to slip it on. They gape in unfettered joy at their hands. Hux kisses him, brown knotted with fervor.

“You've really undone yourself,” Hux says, thumbing Ren’s cheekbone.

“It was about time.”

“It was long overdue. While we're working on child number four, no less,” Hux smirks.

“Better late than never.” Ren kisses him more, heated and passionate. “Being with you is my life's mission. You're my light,” he breathes, and that's all it takes for Hux to melt in his arms.

Hux wastes no time. “Ren, I want to make love right now,” he groans hurriedly. He gasps when Ren takes him in his arms and carefully carries him into their room. Ren's always been so deliciously dramatic. Of course, Ren is at his utmost gentleness when it comes to him and the baby. He places him on the bed as one would a fragile, priceless ornament.

Their union is consummated with them both on their sides, Hux’s leg hirched up by Ren’s strong arm for Ren to bury himself deep inside him from behind so there's plenty of berth for Hux’s distended belly. Ren takes every precaution despite Hux’s flippancy, easing into him with shallow thrusts, kissing his neck like he's something to be doted on all hours of the day. He murmurs praise and promise to hear the hitch in Hux’s throat and watch the hairs on his skin prickle. You're everything. You're mine and I'm yours and fuck, do I love you. I love you. I'll always love you, he whispers as Hux comes around him, trembling with need.

Ren pulls out when he comes, something they started doing after Hux confirmed the pregnancy. Ren had promised to get the medidroid to perform a vasectomy on him, but they wanted to wait until after the baby was born lest anything happen.

You're terribly virile, Hux had said back before he started showing when they could fuck athletically. A vasectomy probably wouldn't work. Your cock would find a way, he smirked against his mouth when Ren was deep, deep inside him. Or we could do it the other way around. With you on top, Ren had teased. Works for me, Hux retorted and preceded to roll Ren onto his back and ride his cock like he does it for sport. Ren had laughed, because that's clearly not what he meant. It didn't take Ren long to know how desperately Hux needs to be filled when they make love, so the vasectomy will have to be considered. After all, at their ages more pregnancies would only pose a risk on Hux's health and they already have three beautiful children with one more incubating.
After, Ren cleans Hux’s sticky backside with a wet wipe. He kisses Hux’s dampened scalp. “I'll help you to the shower.”

Sleepy-sated, Hux arches backwards to Ren’s warmth, his messy red hair falling in his eyes in a way that makes him look twenty years younger. “Is it too much to ask for you to draw us a bath?” he drawls.

“I'd be happy to.” Ren kisses Hux’s smirk. “It'll give us some time to discuss our wedding.” Speaking the words aloud bring a flush to his cheeks.

“Sounds lovely. Though I'm happy to marry you, my only request is that we schedule it for after the baby comes.”

“His name is—”

“And after the baby comes,” Hux chuckles, “my body will go back to normal and I'd be suitable for the photographs.”

“You're beautiful like this,” Ren leers, palming Hux’s bulbous abdomen. “But I know how much you love your pictures. Whenever you think is best will be perfect.”

Hux adores his pictures. Ones of Seren and Taran as little babies in their cradles, ones of ten-year-old Marin limply smiling on command. More recent ones of the whole family, Ren’s arms around either daughter, Marin kneeling dutifully at Hux’s side. He still doesn't have a photograph of just Marin and Ren, but there is time for that. Hux needs his pictures. They remind him what he has and what he had lost for so long.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Hux says when Ren helps him in the bath. He's sensitive between his legs from their lovemaking and the warm water makes him grunt from the faint sting.

“Like what?”

“Like I’m about to stumble over and break something.”

“I’m just concerned, is all. You’re all round and wet,” Ren jokes.

“I'm not that round.”

“Not yet,” Ren says, slipping in the tub behind him. Hux nestles into Ren’s broad, scarred chest, absorbing the calm. He smiles down at their ringed hands placed over one another on Hux’s abdomen.

After several minutes of relaxation, Ren’s thanking the Force for bringing them together while Hux’s lost in the memory of their first kiss in a warm spring. Back then, Hux’s belly was swollen with their firstborn, and Ren had annoyed him so thoroughly and so often and they were so young that Hux’s only instinct was to kiss his mouth shut.

Hux lolls his head backwards, melting under Ren’s abdominal massage.

“That’s what you really want to name him?” Hux asks, breaking the silence.

“I do. Only if you want it, though.”

Hux hesitates. He doesn't particularly dislike the name, but he can't quell the nagging question that’s been bothering him since Ren had shyly suggested it. “What will you tell him when he asks
about where it comes from?”

Ren holds him tighter as if he's about to shake loose from him for good. Hux didn't want to upset him with the question, but he needs to know. He doesn't want their children to be weighted by their burdens as much as Marin was, and still is.

“I'll tell him the truth. He deserves as much,” Ren murmurs. They've done enough lying for a hundred lifetimes.

Hux pets the ring on his finger, twisting the seamless metal with his thumb. He could never deny Ren something as important as this. “I'm sorry I've been putting up so much of a fight. It's just…” Hux frowns, unsure of how to phrase why he'd been so hesitant.

But of course Ren sees him. He always had. “I know.”

“I'll give the name serious consideration,” Hux decides.

“Serious consideration?” Ren parrots. “Were you previously doing it un-seriously?”

Hux can't tame his grin. Only Ren can tease him and live long enough to laugh about it. “I can take the afternoon to bring this ring back. Did you keep the receipt?”

Ren’s laughter echoes sharp and musical in their homey refresher. He precedes to get his revenge for Hux’s comment by animatedly complaining to the baby about his papa’s ungratefulness, calling him by his name. Hux smirks, endlessly infatuated with Ren’s ability to make him smile.

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Rhiannon’s sun glimmers a lively orange behind the setting clouds. The midday rain lingers enough for Lisbeth’s coat to dampen it during her speeder ride to Marin’s. Somehow Marin kept dry by holding her from behind. He hasn't been scared by her speeder piloting since they met. He just likes holding her close.

When they pull up to Marin’s house, Ren is outside hosing off one of the grills of the kitchen trash compactor. He perks up at the familiar hum of the speeder’s approach. He offers Lis and Marin a pleasant wave and hurries to clean the grill before jogging back inside. Lis makes a face and waves back as opposed to Marin’s minute nod. If Marin had waved to him or smiled, it would be like this last decade and a half never happened, and it most certainly had.

Lis makes a helpless face to her friend. “He’s so awkward.”

Marin sighs. “You want to see awkward, stay for dinner.”

“I thought things were better.”

“They are. Ren lives here now. We don't really spend lots of time together.” Their longest conversations are about the Resistance’s job repairing the disarray, parsecs away. “All that matters is that Hux and Seren and Taran are happy. I'm fine with him here,” he says honestly.

“They being happy isn't the be all and end all of your life. What makes you happy?”

“Making them happy makes me happy.” Marin frowns. “Stop laughing.”
“No, no. What really makes you happy?” Lis presses through her chuckling.

“You do,” Marin says, confident this time. “You make me happy. You always had, even when I was a total ass.”

‘Was?’” she smirks, but he can tell she's touched.

“Good point.” Marin looks back at the house, prolonging their evening. “I can feel how happy they are, with Ren here and now the new baby. It feels...natural.” Even if he and Ren don't have proper conversations like he and Hux have or the ones his sisters have with Ren, who they now easily refer to as ‘daddy’, it's a better dynamic than the previous one. It's no contest.

And Ren is all around pleasant. He always asks permission to take his sisters somewhere, never oversteps any boundaries with the house and especially Marin’s room. The most invasive thing he does is offering nuggets of wisdom about things like speeders and home appliances. Marin accepts him. It's the least he could do for the pain he's reciprocated. It makes it easier to behave within his newfound code of ethics now that he knows Ren does the same.

“I'm glad,” Lis smiles. “Man, I'd love to go inside and see how big Hux has gotten. I can't stop thinking about how cute he looks with a baby in him. Does that sound weird?”

“So weird!” Marin makes a face like he tastes something sour. “You have issues.”

“No, I just appreciate a healthy, pregnant man,” she shrugs. “Send me a picture. I'm gonna frame it.”

“Stop while you're behind, please,” Marin laughs. Deciding to call it a night, Marin pulls her in for a hug. “And remember to tell your mother what we talked about,” he says into her hair. After school at Lis’s house, they discussed their plans for after graduation. Their school offers graduation at age sixteen and they both have been excellent students and are on track to graduate next year. Today they settled that they have similar plans for their future.

“I will. If I live to tell the tale. Miss Naedie isn't the most understanding woman,” Lis groans, holding Marin tight. “Let me know what your parents say, too.”

Marin withdraws, sighing in heavy admittance. “If Hux doesn't approve, then I can't do it. I've done enough to him.”

“You're a good son. He sees that. And so does Ren.”

“I hope so,” he says. He tables the topic of his parents and takes Lis’s smaller hands in his. “Thank you for never giving up on me.”

Lis smiles, so beautiful and sincere in the orange sunset. “You know I love you, right?”

Marin swallows, a foreign but not unwelcome tingle flooding him with warmth. “Of course, Lis. I love you, too,” he says, already trying to unpack the strange feeling he's getting from Lis’s congenial smile.

He shakes it off and wordlessly helps Lis back on her speeder, even though he knows she doesn't need any assistance. When she's ready to take off, helmeted and goggled, Marin paces backwards to give her some room so she can head home like she always does.

The goggles conceal the mischief glittering in her eyes as she leers back at Marin. “Oh Marin? One more thing.”
Marin steps forward and the next thing he knows is Lis’s fist in his shirt and her mouth on his. She's kissing him. He's never been kissed before, not like this. It's not innocent or childlike at all. Lis releases him and he gets an eyeful of her smirk, and he barely registers her parting comment through the blood thudding in his ears.

“Later, Solo!” she calls, zooming home. Dazed, Marin brings his fingers to his lips, and smiles. He takes a moment to savor the feeling of youthful glee. He feels as free as a swooping bird. Eventually he goes inside, a permanent smile lighting up his face. He greets Abie with a warm pet and kiss and she wholly accepts his affection. Hux is at the table going over some of Seren and Taran’s assignments. Marin almost forgot today was their first day of school.

“Hey, Marie. Look at all the stuff we have to do,” Seren says. She tries to make it sound like it's a chore, but it's clear she's looking forward to the work.

Hux perks up at Marin’s approach, his palm idle on his belly. The baby is at his most restless when all his siblings are in the room, like he can't wait to crawl out and play with them. “How was your day?” he asks, because he always cares about what Marin has to say.

“It was good. Lis and I did lots of homework, but it was good. I trust you got them to school alright?”

Hux flicks his eyes to the kitchen where Ren is cooking dinner with Aems, side by side as always, with Abie hovering inquisitively at what Ren is doing. Aems intends on teaching Ren everything she knows about cooking. She appreciates his enthusiasm as a student.

“Your father took them,” Hux says, aware of his phrasing. “The midwife unit doesn't approve of me leaving the house.”

“For your safety,” Marin says, accepting Hux's deliberate exposure to Ren’s relationship to him. He and Ren have an understanding. It's a development he's proud of and grateful for.

Hux smiles because Marin’s pleasant conversation always makes him smile. He thumbs the ring on his finger, noting how Marin eyes it with shock. A spike of nervous tension winds Hux up in fear for Marin’s retaliation, despite his better judgment. He decides to not leave their children and his mother in further suspense.

“There's something I need to tell you all about your father and I,” he says, struggling to meet Marin’s eyes. In the background, Aems and Ren give him their attention along with Seren and Taran’s inquisitive twin brown gazes.

“We’re getting married,” Hux finally says. Immediately his mother cheers, pulling Ren in an embrace. He looks for any anger or deceit from his son’s face. There is none. Only acceptance, and possibly even gratitude. Encouraged, Hux continues. “He proposed to me this morning over breakfast. It was perfect.”

Taran and Seren look excited but they don't fully understand what getting married entails. “What does that mean?”

“Well, there's gonna be a wedding with all our family,” Ren explains. “And we'll all dress in nice clothes and celebrate us coming together.”

“Aren't we already together?” Seren asks.

“Of course, but getting married means your Papa won't be able to ditch me for a younger, handsomer, smarter daddy.”
“Ren,” Hux chides. As if the girls will forget that comment.

Taran laughs, always appreciating her daddy's humor. “Will Grandma Leia be there?” They miss Grandma Leia so much.

“Sure she will. Uncle Luke, too, and Rey and Finn. You remember them, don't you?”

“Yup,” Taran nods. “They were nice.”

Ren beams, passing Marin a fleeting look. He's congenially surprised to see him smiling at Hux, their hands subtly entwined. He hopes he's reading Marin’s projection accurately. Their eldest's approval is the most important.

Aems chats with her son about ideas for their wedding as she sets up the table. She's unfathomably excited for her Armitage to marry Ren, the father of his children, the love of his life. This union will only serve to make him his happiest, and in turn her happiness will grow to wild heights. Ren is a good man and has proved to be a great father, now that he's finally been granted the chance.

Midway through the meal, Marin’s remained awfully quiet. It's not unlike Marin to go quiet but it's the lengthy type of quiet which precedes a confession. Hux simmers down his exuberant conversation with his mother to give Marin some room to speak.

“Can I say something?” Marin asks, his fork clattering against this plate of leafy greens. Hux encourages him with a nod. “I just want you to know that I'm...very happy you’re gonna get married. I know that's what you both would have done a long time ago,” he says, a great many things left unsaid but not unrecognized. “I'm very happy,” he repeats, and he means it.

Throat thickened, Hux overcomes his sudden urge to weep at his son’s openness. “Thank you, Marin,” he says, purely relieved.

Ren, seated across from Marin, slips in his graciousness. “Thank you. Really, thank you.”

“No, I should be the one thanking you for asking him,” Marin says, very mature and humble as opposed to judgement and anger. Hux is so full, so grateful.

Their meal continues with Seren and Taran dominating the conversation, talking about every last detail of their day. Apparently, their teacher kept mixing up their names, which Seren got in trouble for asking her teacher why it's so hard for her to remember something so simple. Hux told her she shouldn't be so harsh on her teacher while Marin snickered at the colorful image she painted.

“Hopefully she'll work on improving her memory. It was embarrassing.” Taran shrugs, not phased at all by her Papa’s reprimand. At least Marie agrees. It was a mess.

Hux sighs. He'll be the one embarrassed when the teacher calls the house asking him why his little angels are behaving like harsh schoolmasters.

“Maybe tomorrow you both can wear your hair different. Or not wear matching jackets,” Ren suggests.

But this seems to make little sense to the girls. “What does that have to do with anything?” Taran asks, making a face.

Marin laughs and laughs. He's in such a great mood.

After their meal, Hux and his mother combine headspace as they normally do when they’re in
proximity to one another. They always have something to discuss and this time it’s the girls’ schooling. Hux still thinks he should have waited another year but Aems insisted that was just his paternal instincts talking. Hux palms his distended belly and jokes that she probably means maternal.

Marin takes his plate to the sink where Ren is washing dishes. The tip of his tongue lolls against his sat-upon question. Ren always greets him with a smile and a trustworthy light in his eyes. “I’ll take that,” Ren says, but Marin’s come to ask him for more than to clean his dish. Now emptyhanded, Marin leans to the counter as if this his casual hanging spot, against the counter with Ren a pace away doing the dishes.

“Everything alright?” Ren asks, rinsing a plate. It’s not often Marin interacts with him voluntarily.

Here he goes. “I’d like to start my training. In lightsaber combat, more specifically. If you’d be willing to teach me.”

Ren all but gasps in surprise. He’s sure he hadn’t misheard him. “Really?”

“Yes. Only if you want to.” He knows this is a lot for Ren to consider.

But to Ren, it isn’t. There’s only one right answer. “Of course. I’d be more than happy to.”

“To do what?” Hux asks, feigning nonchalance as if he could fool them into thinking he wasn’t dying to know what they’re talking about. He pads in the kitchen to take his evening vitamins a bit earlier than normal, just so he can pry.

Marin straightens, glad his idea is gaining traction but doesn’t know how Hux will feel about it. “Ren’s agreed to show me how to use my lightsaber.”

Hux’s brows raise, a wry smile curling his lips. “Really? That’s—that’s wonderful.” He’s so proud of his son for taking this step. It’s only a testament to how good of a man their son will be.

“We got a half hour of daylight left,” Ren says, wiping his damp hands on his sweatpants. “We can start right away. If you want to.”

Marin nods. “I’ll get my lightsaber and meet you outside.”

When Ren rushes to get his, he’s stopped with Hux’s absurdly strong grip on his arm and Hux’s grinning lips on his. “Go get him, Daddy,” Hux laughs, and laughs harder at Ren’s strange expression at him using the title.

Hux hears them both clamor outside and eagerly peeks through the windows to see where they’ll choose to train. Because of the floodlight, they choose the backyard which gives spectators in the living room a show. Seren and Taran tear themselves from their books when they see what Marie and Daddy are doing. They’re holding these blue light sticks! Sticks that glow brighter than the stars and galaxy spanning above.

“What in the world?!” Taran gasps. “What is that?”

“Those are Marin’s and Daddy’s lightsabers. They’re weapons so you both have to stay on the sidelines when they use them.”

“I want one,” Seren groans longingly, her little hands and nose smudging the glass door. To which Taran replies, “Papa said they’re weapons. We can’t have weapons. Maybe when we’re big we can.”
“Who said that?” their Papa gawks, curling on his reading chair to watch the show. “I don’t believe we ever discussed that as a possibility.”

“We discuss a lot of things. Are you sure?” Seren asks innocently, bending to hug Abie around her thick neck with her little arms.

“Very sure,” Hux sighs. Sometimes he fears he left too much of an impression on his girls.

Hux grunts when the baby squirms around. He’s so grateful for the gift the universe has given him. Ren had said it’s not just the universe, but the Force, and Hux had laughed but allowed Ren the sentiment. He rubs his belly. He can’t wait to meet this new lifeform but for now he enjoys the closeness while it lasts.


Ren shows Marin how to best swing and parry through the most basic of katatas he recalls. His muscles remember it well. Marin performs it as if he’s done it a hundred times.

“You’re a natural,” Ren beams.

“I’ve done a version of this before. Rey taught me. Only we used staffs back then.”

Ren sobers. “I’m glad she was there for you when we weren’t.” Marin nods, because he’s glad too. She could relate to him when he needed it, just as Ren gave him much needed guidance, and still is.

“She’s a good teacher. Finn, too. You should see them spar. I was waiting for them to present a marriage proposal of their own,” Marin says wryly.

Ren chuckles. “Maybe one day.”

He shows Marin a more advanced kata, one that Marin asks to see a few times. Marin’s a natural athlete and a perfectionist when it comes to physicality. It’s one of the many things he and his father have in common, as opposed to Hux’s athleticism that was born of necessity from his upbringing. Hux is far happier behind a blaster and even happier lazing on his reading chair with a cup of fresh tea imagining what color the new baby’s eyes will be.

Marin attempts the form, careful to treat his swinging saber properly to not injure himself. Ren offers constructive criticism. Marin does the kata again, much improved this time.

“That was excellent. How’s your shoulder feel?” Ren asks, arms crossed, the Skywalker lightsaber tucked in the elastic of his pants.

“Feels a little tight. But it’s the good kind of tight, like a burn.”

“We’ll be sure to stretch after this.” Ren does the form with him, a pace in front so Marin can replicate anything he’s uncertain of. Their lightsabers hum and drone with their synchronized swipes, careful stabs, and deliberate parries. After the sun’s finally sunk into the sea, Ren deactivates his saber, encouraging Marin to continue while he catches his breath. He’s glad they could enjoy lightsaber practice and hopefully sparring before Ren got too old to be of any real help.
“Mind if I ask what brought this on?” Ren asks. He’s comfortable with where they are right now, how far they’ve come.

“I’ve thought about it before but didn’t know when would be the right time. Since what happened,” Marin says lowly, “I was afraid to be rejected. Although I’d understand why you’d refuse. I haven’t exactly been the most trustworthy.” Not by any stretch of the imagination.

Ren meets his son’s eyes. Of course, he understands. “You can trust in our faith in you. I’m glad you finally asked.”

He knows Marin appreciates that. “And there’s…something else,” Marin says. “Lis and I were talking today,” he starts, and smiles at the thought of her. “When we’re done with school, we want to join the Resistance.” Ren’s clearly shocked, so he attempts to make a good case. “Not fighting. We want to help restore the Republic. And there are so many orphaned children from the liberated plants. Lis is a skilled learner and I have my healing. I feel like we could do well there.” And maybe fighting can come later, but Ren’s probably already made that connection.

Not once had Ren ever pressured Marin into living that life. But Marin wants to go and has every intention and hope of helping those who cannot help themselves. Marin wants to make a good name for himself and be his own person, to finally shed himself of the burden that’s been weighing him down.

“I’m so proud of you, you know that?” Ren commends, his heart so full.

Marin grins, so hopeful. “So, I can go?”

“I’m not the one you have to convince,” Ren shakes his head. It’s not the Resistance that Hux will have issues with, it’s the leaving indefinitely. When Marin ran away, Hux was in pieces.

By the looks of it, Marin knows exactly what it’s gonna take for him to be able to leave and follow through with his dream. “Do you think he’ll let me?”

“I think he’ll do what’s best for you. If you wanna think it over, you still have time to tell him. Get all the details sorted.”

Marin accepts this. Though he would never want to hurt Hux ever again, going off world, fighting alongside the Jedi, helping people, is what he truly wants. With Lis, especially. He wants to keep the galaxy safe from men like Ren and Hux.

“Lis, huh?” Ren says, amused. He knows Marin spends most of his time with her. He’s glad they have big dreams together. “How’s she doing?”

Marin clears his throat, not experienced in this sort of thing with Ren. Just talking. “She’s good. We’ve been friends since we came here. Always put up with my shit, too, fortunately for me.” He rests from his lunges, satisfied from the exertion. “She calls me ‘Solo’,,” he adds, and Ren hollers like this is the most entertaining thing he’s heard. Enjoying the moment, Marin confesses what’s been on his mind for the past several hours. “And she kissed me today. It was nice.”

“Wow,” Ren gasps, titillated that his son is coming of age and sharing the excitement with him. He certainly wasn’t that young when he had his first kiss, but well into his twenties when Hux first kissed him. All his firsts were with Hux.

“At dinner, all I was thinking that I’d be lucky to have what you and Hux have,” Marin confesses. Confessions like these come much easier. As fate would have it, they’ve become far easier when forwarded to Ren.
“So, it is true. You just brought me out here to get me blubbering about my feelings again,” Ren laments, overcome with emotion but trying to laugh it off.

“Guilty.”

Ren shakes his head. He’s so proud of his son.

Towards the beginning of Hux’s third trimester, Hux begins to wake up with mild cramping. The midwife droid is far more concerned about his health than he is, as is Ren. He felt these same cramps when carrying the twins and even more severe cramps when he carried Marin.

“Ren, it's nothing I'm not used to. Just focus on getting the girls up for school,” Hux groans as he finishes another set of breathing exercises.

“I'd rather have them be tardy than leave you in pain,” Ren says, fervently searching for meds in their bedside table.

But Hux doesn't approve one bit. “Tardiness is unacceptable.”

“I'm sure their teacher will understand.”

“I've been through this before. I can handle it.”

But Ren won’t quit it. “All I'm saying is—"

“Dammit, Ren. You have one job and that's to get them to school,” he snaps, Ren's noncompliance heightening the already stressful situation. Ren hurries away, submissive, and Hux instantly feels guilty. “Damn you,” he breathes to himself. He looks down at his offending stomach. “Not you, dear. Your father just has this incredible ability to arise every colorful emotion from me. He turns me into the bad guy. Apologies on his behalf.”

The baby kicks with all his might outward, a little impression poking through. “Don't try and run too far,” he chides.

An hour later when Ren’s gotten the girls up and ready and out the door to school, Hux waddles on aching ankles to the kitchen. He wishes he hasn't scolded Ren. He doesn't want that to be something he devolves to in times of stress, least of all when Ren was trying to help.

Ren returns home about twenty minutes later than he normally does. It's clear Hux had been waiting up for him at the table doing nothing but sit in silence. Ren doesn't greet him when he sets a paper bag of something that isn't groceries. It's a collection of jars of herbs and medicines he's never heard of or seen at the market. He doesn't know where Ren got them.

“I asked this pharmacist about your condition and she recommended some of these vapor pastes. It's for gastrointestinal issues. I know it must be painful,” Ren says, setting out the jars for Hux to inspect.

Hux picks one up, barely reading the label. “Thank you,” he says quietly. He loathes Ren’s passivity and how apparent the rift is between them from one bitchy comment. Hux can’t hold it in
any longer. “I'm sorry for shouting at you this morning.”

From the way Ren looks at him, eyes a bit glossier than normal and all around conflicted, Hux would shoot himself if it wouldn't hurt the baby. “No, it's not your fault. You have enough going on. I didn't mean to get in the way.”

“Ren, we’re partners. I don't want to establish a hierarchy. This isn’t a damned Star Destroyer.”

Ren’s smile flickers just barely enough to meet his eyes. Hux isn't convinced he's made things right. “Talk to me. What are you thinking?” Hux implores.

“It's not your fault. I know you've done this all before and have been there for the kids for years, way more than I have. I shouldn't forget that.”

Hux shudders, he's so distraught Ren’s been feeling this. “Ren, this is now. Not then. I'm not more of their parent just because I've done it longer. You're every bit as important to them as I am. Even the little one.” Hux finds Ren’s hand along with the finger encircled by their matching rings. “You're the one picking up my slack while I'm rolling around. You've been a great father to our children and you're gonna be a great father to this one.”

Ren’s somber smile warms with comfort at Hux’s sincerity. He kisses Hux then, reverent and meaningful. Hux loves getting lost in Ren’s kiss, and whether Ren intended it or not, Hux’s face flushes with unfettered arousal. Another side effect of his pregnancy: he's unfathomably horny at the most inappropriate of times.

His cheeks redden and his breath devolves to noisy pants at Ren’s sensual kisses. Ren’s a very passionate man, so most of his kisses are sensual. Ren normally doesn't realize how well his kisses unwind him. When Ren releases him, Hux attempts to conceal his body’s helpless reaction. He was trying to be wholesome, after all.

“You always know what to say,” Ren murmurs. When Hux doesn't reply, he searches his eyes for clues like he often does. Oh, wow, he notes at Hux’s evident arousal. That's some clue. “You okay there?” Ren smirks, clearly pleased.

“I can't explain how but I want it almost every morning. And night,” Hux groans, annoyed at himself and a bit embarrassed even if Ren is his soon to be husband.

“Want what?” Ren says, thinking he's clever.

“You're insufferable,” Hux breathes. Ren doesn't keep him in suspense and leads him to their room. Sex while pregnant is not entirely discouraged by their droid, apart from taking unnecessary risks such as being overly athletic. As long as Ren isn't too rough with him and he doesn’t exert too much, they can have as much sex as they please. To say they take advantage of this is an understatement.

Hux mewls when Ren fulfills his vocal, impatient demands from his hands and knees. Of course, Ren is gentle. He's always gentle, especially when it comes to licking him open, slicking him up, and spreading him until the burn dulls pleasantly. When Ren enters him, cock sheathed with a condom, Hux hisses like he’s been burned but Ren’s given it to him more than enough to know that Hux relishes the stretch. Ren cups his immodest, fat-padded hips and fucks him slow.

Hux's belly hangs low, just barely scraping the sheets. Normally in this position Ren would have pushed Hux face first into the bed and given him the ride of his life, but his condition calls for the posed and practiced fucking. But having to hold back is what makes them drool for it. When Hux
comes, he trembles with it, elbows buckling. Ren's arm envelopes his sweat-slick chest from
behind to keep him from collapsing, and he finishes off into the sheath with a deep groan. He eases
them to their sides, sticky and sated.

“Let me know when you're ready again,” Hux murmurs, patting his oversized stomach in delight.
At Ren’s guffaw, he laughs, infinitely pleased.

“Maybe twenty years ago, I could,” Ren says. It's a rarity that he feels content enough to bring up
the past, even vaguely.

Hux rolls on his back to find his soon-to-be husband's eyes. “I meant what I said,” he says,
resuming their interrupted conversation. “You'll be such a great father to him.”

And Hux does something Ren hadn't expected him to do. He calls the baby by his name, the name
Ren chose, the name so dear to him. The name sounds so natural when spoken with Hux's calm
cadence. Ren’s heart soars, he's so happy. Hux says the name again and again, reveling in Ren’s
unfettered joy.

Later that day, Marin picks up his sisters on his way home from school. He normally gets out two
hours before them but he was in the neighborhood and wanted to ease his parents’ load. The girls
are good about seating arrangements on his speeder, the both of them sandwiched in the back seat
so that their straps stay nice and tight. Interactions with their brother are far more enjoyable now
than before.

At home, he finds Hux on the porch swing with a cup of hot tea. Ren must either be inside or at the
restaurant. Lately he's been mostly home to watch over Hux. Hux is doing well, though. Marin
trails after the girls and greets his father and joins him on the swing, and Hux inches closer to link
their arms together. He loves being close to his children.

“I trust you had a good day,” Hux smiles, his free hand massaging his belly. He looks and feels as
if he's about to pop.

“It was fine. Glad to be home,” he says, every breath of it true.

“I'm glad, too,” Hux says, immediately followed by a grunt. The baby's kicks are getting stronger
by the day. Marin looks at him in concern. “It's alright. Your brother is just moving.”

Marin’s never seen a pregnancy as closely as he's seen Hux’s. “May I feel?”

Without warning, Hux snatches Marin’s hand and lays it on the place where the baby's kicks are.
He marvels how Marin's grown close to both Ren and his unborn brother. “He's just like you were.
Rowdy and rambunctious.”

“Feels so strange. He’s almost ready to come out, isn't he?”

“Soon. I have a week or less left before the medidroid will keep me on bed rest,” Hux grovels,
though it's clear how much he loves this baby already and no amount of uncomfortable kicks or gas
cramps could change that.

“So you can leave the house still?” Marin asks. “Maybe I could take you to the market and we can
get a late lunch. Like we used to.”

Hux’s eyes widen. “Really?”

“Yep. My treat.”
“I'd love to. But you'll have to help me into the bedroom and get some clothes on that aren't pajamas.” Hux is so grateful for his dutiful son. Inside, Ren’s setting up the baking sheets for the treats Seren and Taran begged him to help them cook. He bids Hux and Marin goodbye, a permanent smile lighting his faintly wrinkled eyes.

Marin pilots them into town with the slow speeder, Hux extending the back seat to accommodate his enormous abdomen. They’re first stop is the market. He and Marin chose a new set of disposable wipes to add to the collection of baby supplies taking up the spare room. Ren's already set up the cradle last month. Hux remembers how enamored he looked at the completion, and his heart flutters like wings at the thought of Ren holding the baby for the first time. Fatherhood. Nothing’s suited Ren more.

“You don't have to carry everything. At least let me hold the pillow,” Hux admonishes as they make their way back to the speeder, referring to the microfiber lap pillow normally used for breastfeeding, but Hux plans on using it for his formula feeding. He remembers how enamored he was when he first fed Marin, how small he was in his arms. Now his son easily has thirty pounds on him, and that's including the baby weight.

“Please, I have it. I promise to let you carry it if my arm gets tired,” he jokes, because it clearly won't. “Besides, you should save your energy. We're still having lunch.” Marin tosses Hux a reassuring smile. He's looking forward to getting some alone time with Hux. It's not the selfish, possessive barricading brand of alone time like he used to force on him, but a healthier alternative, unstressed and normal. This will be a good time to present Hux with his plans for after school ends. It saddened him to sit on it for this long, but he wanted to find the right time.

“Battered clams still your favorite?” Hux asks while Marin helps him balance as they walk in tandem up the incline to the boardwalk.


“You know me all too well,” Hux smiles. He's in good hands, as long as Marin’s at his side.

They order their food and sit at one of the picnic tables, their instinct seating them away from the crowds for privacy. Halfway through the meal, Hux notes his son’s quietness, unusual for his better moods. “Something the matter?” he asks not in fear but in careful concern.

Marin tops off his clams, licking the dipping sauce from his fingers. “There's something I've been meaning to ask you. Something important.”

“Well, don't leave me in suspense. Whatever it is, you can tell me.” They finally trust one another.

“It's about graduation. Lis and I are on track to graduate in under a year, ahead of the class. I... don't want to go to college. Not here, anyway. I know that's what you probably wanted for me.”

Hux nods, trying to guess what Marin may say next. He's not liking where this is going, but he trusts him. “I see.”

“Lis and I want to join the Resistance. We want to help them make the galaxy safer. And I've been coming Finn and Rey. Finn’s been leading the Republic’s program for the orphans from the Stormtrooper plants. They call it the Guiding Stars and they're teaching the children about freedom and democracy. And Rey said there's plenty of good I could do with my healing.” Marin inhales to compensate his spent breath. Hux hasn't said anything. He's just staring at the sea like it'll prod him in the right direction.
The baby squirms and Hux palms the soreness he elicits. It's not enough to distract him from Marin and his proposal. Marin wants to leave. To help people, to help children and restore the Republic. A lump tugs on Hux’s throat, muting him.

"I talked to Ren about it, too. He said your opinion mattered most of all," Marin adds, everything hinging on Hux's answer.

"Seems that you talked this over with everyone besides me," Hux says, wounded. It's unfair of him and he knows it. He just can't fathom parting with Marin, not again.

Marin casts his eyes low. His guilt is enough to crack Hux. “I'm...very proud you're making these decisions for yourself, Marin,” Hux begins. “I admire how you want to help people. It's something that is so foreign to me, but I know you will do so well for yourself and make a true difference.” Tears well in his eyes, threatening to fall. “And I know you can't do that here.”

Marin knew this would be rough, but he persists, even as Hux tears up. It's for the right reasons. And he's making the right choice. “Really? You mean that?”

It aches him to admit it, but yes, he means it. “I can't keep you home forever. As much as I'd like it to be just the way it is. I always knew you were meant for grand things.” Marin was always meant for more than pain and suffering, the droves of Stormtroopers fluid and dronelike under his command. He's meant to help others. To be good.

“If going is what you want, it's what I want for you,” Hux says. “Just promise me you'll take care of yourself, and visit when you can.” Time has passed so quickly. Now Marin is approaching adulthood in just a few short years. If Hux closes his eyes, he can concentrate on the breeze from the nearby sea, the flutter of his baby in his womb, the smell of fried seafood and he'll be right back to the days with Ren in exile with Marin as little more than a promise of a better future. There was nothing but hope for their futures.

“Of course I'll visit. I-I can't believe you're letting me go. I'd have thought that's the last place you'd want me to be.”

Hux snorts. “You and I both know I'm not the man who joined the First Order. And I owe a lot to the Resistance. I'm not completely dense.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, I'm serious. Had it not been for them, I'd have never met your father. Or you for that matter. They've also been kind enough to not imprison me for my countless crimes against them. Oh, and Organa has funded an addition to the house, not to mention the midwife droid.”

Marin smirks. “How have we never discussed your transition into Resistance alliance?”

“I definitely would not use the term alliance. More like...armistice.”

When Marin laughs, full and bright, he looks the most like Ren. Hux’s heart flutters in adoration for his boy. He always knew he was meant for more, just as Seren and Taran are. In no time Ren will begin teaching them how to control their powers, and after that the new baby.

“I don't suppose you know the odds of your baby brother being born a Force sensitive. Just once I'd like the scales to tip in my favor,” Hux laments.

“Sorry to break it to you, but he may just be the strongest of us all,” Marin says, voicing his very much unconfirmed opinions for no other reason than to freak Hux out.
Palming his belly, Hux groans. “I guess that's the price of being with your father. One of many,” he jokes. It's easier to joke about these types of things now that they're a family.

“Actually, Ren told me that you had the Force at one point. Probably still do, though minutely. It's not all his fault.”

“Yeah, yeah. I'm sure that's true in one of your father's many tales.”

Marin laughs once more. Hux hasn't heard how brilliant his laughter is until these days together. It pains him knowing their days as a unit are numbered. But that's just his selfishness talking. Marin isn't leaving to get away from him, but instead to head towards something greater than his life here. He deserves to grow up and be anything his youthful heart desires. He's got his whole life ahead of him.

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“Master Hux, you must stay in bed. This type of stress isn't good for the baby,” says the very knowledgeable, pesky medidroid.

Hux rolls his eyes. He's due in a few days but he hasn't lost use of his legs just yet. “How the hell am I supposed to use the refresher?”

“The bedpan, Sir.”

Unbelievable. Ren comes through the door bearing his dinner. Just in time, too.

“Ren, help me up,” Hux says, scooting to the edge of their bed, his legs comically small under his enormous abdomen. Another Ren-ling. Surely his body can't take anymore. “And turn that thing off. I need to piss.”

“That thing costs more than twenty speeders. You're supposed to be in bed. That's why I have this,” he says, punctuating with a clinking of the dishes on the tray.

“I'm not going to keel over if I walk ten feet into the refresher. Allow me the dignity of pissing in a toilet.”

“There's nothing undignified about taking care of yourself, Hux. I'll help you just the once. But after this, we listen to the droid.”

“Fine,” Hux grovels, sounding anything but fine.

After Hux's trip to the toilet and a very brief dinner that Hux apologizes profusely for being unpleasant during, Ren goes outside to turn off the annex house's floodlights that he and Marin had used during training. He receives a call on his comm from an unknown source. Ren answers it in case someone important is trying to get a hold of him from a borrowed comm. But when he answers, a holo appears of the last person he expected to hear from.

“Are you alone?” Phasma says in place of a greeting. “Is Hux around?”

“I thought you were dead.” He debates tossing the comm into the night time sea in case Phasma is tracking him and planning to kill him. But Phasma knows exactly where to find them. She would
have done it already.

“Plenty have tried to see to that.”

“What do you want?”

“To tell you you’re off the hook. And to thank you.”

To thank him? “What? What for?”

“I owe you and Hux and your little angel of a son for the data dump. I was never meant for that life, no more than you were. I’ve got a new one now.”

Ren raises his brows. This is the last thing he expected to hear. “Doing what?”

“Mostly contract work. Your data dump brought me back to my homeworld. There I found my twin sister.” She's clearly happy, as much as a contract killer could be happy.

“You have a twin sister?”

“Had it not been for the dump, I’d have never found her. Her business is highly lucrative.” She pauses. “What about you? Where’s Hux?” Ren can tell she was probably expecting to see him. They were a bit closer than she and Ren were. Ren had even heard that they plotted to kill Hux’s father, and succeeded.

“He’s indisposed.”

“That's all I get?”

Ren sighs. “He's heavily pregnant and volatile. He's due in a few days. I don't think it's best for him to hear from you. Maybe in a few weeks. I'm sure he'd love to catch up.”

Phasma’s holo gapes in bewilderment. “You two keep busy. How many is that, two?”

“Four, actually.”

“What the hell.”

Ren finds himself chuckling. He’s always proud to talk about his family. “I’ll do everything to keep them safe,” he says, a warning. He’ll also always be fiercely protective of them.

“No need for threats, Ren. I just called to tie up our loose ends. Comm me when your broodmare is able to take calls,” she says, and it would be an insult if not for the smirk gracing her lips. Ren salutes her off and before going back inside, he comms his mother to bring her the good news.

She answers after mere moments. “Good to see you, Ben.”

His mother is always glad to see him. He's so grateful for her guidance. “Hux is gonna have the baby soon. You're still coming, right? Chewie and Luke can come, too. They all can.”

“Very generous of you. Luke would be more than happy to come along with me, and Chewie was gonna come invitation or not. I'm afraid Rey and the boys won't be able to come for another few weeks, but I know she wants to meet him.”

“Perfect,” Ren beams. “I have a surprise for you. Actually, two surprises. One I can tell you now and one when you get here.”
“Something good, I'm sure.”

“Absolutely. Hux agreed to let Marin go with you all at the end of the year. He’s proud of him. And Marin said Lis’s mother finally caved. So you'll be getting two new bright-eyed Resistance fighters.”

“That's wonderful. I know she and Marin can do a lot of good here.”

“I know it, too. He's phenomenal during training. We've already gone from forms to sparring. You should see him move. Finn and Rey are gonna go nuts.”

“He's got a great teacher,” she smiles.

He smiles. He'll continue to try hard to meet that standard. “I should be going back in now. I'll see you in a few days.”

“Of course. I love you. Tell Marin and the girls I love them, too.”

“Will do. Love you, too, Ma.”

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Hux writhes on the medical spread, hair irritating his eyes, his breath short and labored from the contractions. The medical gown is far too sticky with sweat. The room is too bright. He glares as Marin and Ren fumble with the supplies. Why are they taking so long? Ren had almost nine months to set up the table of supplies for the medidroid’s procedure!

Hux is glad he has the presence of mind to keep the irrational comments to himself, because all this is happening faster than he and Ren had planned for. First the operating gurney wouldn't fit through the bedroom door so Ren and Marin were forced to set up in the living room. Which means Aems and the girls will be spending the afternoon at the park until Ren calls them and tells them it's time to meet the baby. Leia, Luke, and Chewie thought it best to spend the afternoon with them instead of crowding the house during Hux’s procedure. But despite the medidroid’s protests, Hux demanded Ren and Marin be with him.

Undeterred by the troublesome logistics of it, Hux had insisted on a home birth. He will always fear unstable surroundings. He may be sliced open six feet from the dining table but at least he knows the baby will be safe. Exhausted from the contractions, Hux wilts against the surgical bed, fondly observing Marin and Ren tie back each other’s sterile gowns and hair caps. They make such a great team.

“Almost ready,” Ren tells him, fingers easing the irritating strands from his eyes and gently placing a cap in his sweat-matted head. He tears up, emotions all over the place. Oh, he's being far too gentle and wasting his time when he could be finishing the fucking surgical tent—Gods, how he loves Ren and their family they made together. He loves them all so much.

“Then we'll be sure to get the droid to pump you full of those nice drugs,” comes Ren’s calming voice.

How the bloody hell is he so calm? Just once he'd like to see how well Ren would manage wrestling with one of his enormous children in his gut. “Don't say it, just do it,” Hux growls,
furious and spiteful, immediately coupled with a softer, far guiltier, “I'm sorry, I'm just—”

“Hux. Just breathe. Marin’s almost got the curtains up. Then I'm gonna wheel you in.”

Hux groans around another spasm. “Don't just stand there, you cock! Go and help him—I’m sorry, I didn't mean that.”

“Ready,” Marin alerts them, and the droid rolls over to the erected surgical tent.

Ren kisses Hux’s temple. It's finally time. He instructs Hux to lie back while he and Marin wheel him to the tent. Ren readies the cesarean curtain and pulls up a stool to hold Hux’s hand. Marin’s on the other side, dabbing the sweat from Hux’s puckered brow.

“Please clear the operating tent. Preparing anesthesia,” the droid informs them.

Hux’s eyes widen in terror at the order, and Ren’s hand somehow gets smaller in his grip from the ferocity of his clench. He fully expected to be awake during the procedure, but the droid has other plans. Last time he was under anesthesia, his babies were taken from him. Ren understands, because Ren always understands.

“Why can't we leave him awake? Surely there's another option,” Ren begs. He loathes how he did this to Hux, made him afraid to deliver at a hospital and go under like a normal patient.

“Had I been a human surgeon, perhaps. But my programming forbids me to operate without anesthesia. I assure you all it's completely harmless.”

“Do it. It's fine,” Hux nods. His fears are completely misplaced. There's no one he'd rather have bring his baby into the universe with than Ren.

Brow furrowing, Ren finds his eyes. “Are you sure?”

“Of course I'm sure,” Hux says, lip turning up. His heart floods with joy. They're about to have another baby, and Ren will be with him every step of the way this time.

The droid positions one of its many sensors over Hux’s belly. “Please clear the operating tent. The baby's in position.”

“We'll be outside. See you soon,” Marin says. The procedure will take no more than twenty minutes, but Hux's anesthesia will no doubt keep him out for longer. When Hux is awake, Ren will call his mother and Aems to meet the baby. They all agreed Hux's health is the most important.

Hux earnestly finds Marin’s eyes, then Ren’s. “I love you both. So much,” Hux says, the medidroid's painless injection taking effect. Hux’s eyes stay open just long enough to hear them promise the same in return.

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Ren chugs his second glass of water, heart thudding wildly in his chest. He and Marin kept the medical scrubs on just in case they need to pop back in the tent for whatever reason. But there's been little noise from the tent other than the faint noises of careful testing and snipping. Surely the baby should have been here by now, but Ren doesn't voice his concerns to Marin. He doesn't want
“Any more water and you might miss the baby's birth from the refresher,” Marin quips. It's gotten easier to joke with Ren since he let his walls down.

Ren sets the cup down. “This is just...I've never gotten the chance to do it like this, you know?” He never sugarcoats their past. None of them do. If what had happened never happened, they'd never have ended up where they are now.

“Well, barring…some things. You did a pretty good job with me,” Marin says, playfulness coloring his voice. Ren gives him a helpless smile. “Look how I turned out,” Marin adds, which gets a laugh out of Ren. And a sincere nod that says, yes, you truly had received all the best parts of me and more.

A shrill, unmistakable cry of a newborn emanates from the tent. Ren gapes to Marin for confirmation he hadn't misheard. At Marin’s nod, Ren moves to the tent, towards the little cries.

After several moments, the cries taper to little hums and gurgles. Ren’s throat knots. The curtain eases to one side, just enough for Marin and Ren to see Hux’s slackened feet. The midwife medidroid wheels out toting a ruddy-skinned bundle in its appendages.

“I'll need to complete the sutures for Master Hux. Please welcome the infant into our world.”

Ren buckles, overcome with awe. Before he knows it, he medidroid is passing him his son. Once he's in his arms, Ren’s in love. The baby has fine wisps of red hair on his tiny head. He's so beautiful. So perfect.

Tears blur, and Ren reels on a tangent of emotions. He can almost believe that this is Marin, who he only held as a baby out of necessity or to deposit on a cluster of cold caretaker droids. He can nearly feel Seren and Taran’s miniscule weight in his arms as he steals them from Hux and deposits them in the Falcon to die. Ren weeps, lost in a tempest of grief and regret.

Marin’s hand on his shoulder reigns him back to the earth. He shouldn't be mourning. There's no reason to. Their children are alive and well, the youngest of them a new, brilliant source of light that ties them to a new center of gravity. Marin soothes Ren’s back, their hearts connected on this level. Their heartbreaking losses and unparalleled moments of hope are what makes their story theirs.

“Hell, I'm a mess,” Ren murmurs against his now clogged sinuses. The very sight of their newborn only worsens his tears but Ren powers through it. His little eyes are still closed, his arms cocooned against his chest, and it seems that everything about him makes Ren lose what's left of his control.

Ren prepares what he wishes he could have said to all their children. “I'm sorry to break it to you, but I'm your dad. I know. A little disappointing,” he sniffs. “But on my side of things, you being mine...is the best thing I could have ever asked for. I'm always gonna be there for you, and fight for you and never do a thing to make you doubt how much I love you,” Ren says to the baby, to Seren and to Taran and Marin.

Their little baby opens his eyes, blinking inquisitively at the new noise. Ren smiles, chest full. “Hey there.”

Marin’s chest bumps Ren’s arm in his curiosity to see the baby while it's alert. “Oh, well enough about me. Meet your brother Marin. You think my ears are big, you should see this kid’s.”

Marin chuckles and very carefully takes his little brother into his arms. “Hey, little guy,” Marin
coos. He’s so tiny. Hux looked huge, he’s almost afraid they missed something. “What are we gonna call him? You and Hux decide yet?” he asks Ren, not taking his eyes off the little newborn.

“Yeah, we did,” Ren smiles. When Ren tells him the baby’s name, the sheer wonder in Marin’s eyes is enough to squander the remainder of his grief from ever resurfacing in his heart again today. Marin’s the first to call the baby by his name and Ren can’t picture a more perfect moment.

With the help of Marin’s Force powers, Hux wakes refreshed and healed. Before he opens his eyes, Ren’s at his side. He's the first thing he sees upon waking. Ren and his loving smile and the bundle in his arms. And not only had Marin accelerated Hux’s healing, but he’s off stowing away the medical tent to make room for their family’s return.

“Hey. He's been waiting to meet you,” Ren says, his eyes rimmed red. Hux squirms on the gurney, so eager to meet their son. Ren places the humming, twitching baby into Hux’s waiting arms and relishes the unencumbered awe blooming over Hux’s features.

“Oh,” Hux gasps. His baby boy gapes up at him with wide, inquisitive eyes, already trying to study his family. A little finger prods at the air. Hux melts, tipping to kiss his baby’s red dusted head. He's so warm and bright. He can't get enough of him. “Ren, he's perfect. Look at him.”

“He is,” Ren smiles. “He's incredible. He's even got red hair.”

Hux laughs, so, so happy. Overwhelmed, Hux begins to sob. “He's ours. They're all ours, Ren.”

Ren kisses him then, brow puckered with fervent adoration. “I love you,” he promises, to which Hux replies without hesitation, “I love you.”

“He's got your eyes,” Ren adds, absolutely eating up Hux's infatuation with their son. He could have told Hux the backyard sea was on fire and Hux would have just cooed in delight at the weight of their boy in his arms.

“We need to get our mothers and the girls home so they can meet him,” Hux professes.

“I've already called them. They're on their way home,” Marin says, taking a seat on the bed by Hux’s feet. Hux looks at him, and from the healing comfort Marin’s projecting, there's no doubt his miraculously healed and nearly normal state of his abdomen is Marin’s help. His eldest is so incredibly gifted.

“Here, Marin. I want a picture of you two together. Please,” Hux all but begs. He wants to capture this moment forever. Instead of Marin’s usual reluctance towards taking pictures, Marin takes his little brother without objection. The baby winces at his father’s pleasant noises and doesn't disagree when being passed along to the next pair of arms. Excitedly, Hux takes one or ten photos of Marin and the baby for his treasured albums, already planning on taking even more of all his children together.

Hux longs to ask for the picture he couldn't ask for, one with Marin and Ren together. Until Marin is the one to suggest it and sits beside Ren, positioning the baby between them. Hux’s heart soars to unprecedented heights, shakily capturing a picture of all his boys. He’ll never forget how magical this day has been.

When Leia, Luke, Chewie, Aems and the girls come home, Ren rushes to greet them all at the door. He warns the twins to try to be calm, though he knows that’s a near impossible request to fill. Taran and Seren are already stumbling over each other and bickering at one another’s ruckus around the new baby. Ren lets them go into the bedroom where Hux is resting with the baby,
Marin at his side preparing the formula like Hux taught him ages ago when Seren and Taran were barely any bigger than their little brother.

Ren embraces his mother. He can’t wait for her to meet the baby. For Luke and Chewie, too, because he has a surprise for all of them. “This way. While Hux is still awake,” he says. They enter the room to Seren and Taran cooing and gasping at their tiny brother. Hux positions the baby so that the girls can get better acquainted.

“He’s so small, Papa,” Taran says, astonished at her brother’s energy. Why were they concerned about the baby, again?

“So small,” Seren agrees, and she lays a kiss to her baby brother’s soft head.

“He’s so special. You all are,” Hux says. His children are his greatest achievements. He feels nothing but joy welcoming Ren’s family into the room. He knows they want to meet the newest addition to their family. Because that’s what they are, family. By blood and otherwise. Ren carefully takes their son from his arms to show them just how beautiful he is.

Immediately, Leia and Aems are entranced, Luke and Chewie, too. Aems encourages Leia to take the baby first. She knows how much Leia missed in her son’s life as well as her grandchildren’s lives, how important this is to her.

“He’s incredible,” Leia smiles, absorbing his pure-light aura. He’ll no doubt be powerful one day. He’s got his whole life before him, and already he’s so loved. “Have you chosen a name yet?”

Ren breathes in, so full on the tremendousness of this moment. “That’s my surprise.” Ren finds Hux, who nods, permitting Ren and his family this gift. He meets his mother’s eyes. She’s so happy.

“Meet your grandson, Han,” Ren says, and he’d cry if he weren’t already fresh out of tears. The unadulterated awe his mother gives him in return is so powerful, he’ll treasure it forever.

Chewie expels a soft whir at the news, and Luke gratefully palms Ren’s arm. Leia can’t take her eyes off the little one, little Han. The Force around them thrums with life, and Leia can feel the energy of those since passed welcoming this miracle-child into the universe. Yes, she wishes Han, the little one’s namesake, were here. But in her heart, she can feel the fibers within her that’s kept Han alive, now extended into Ben and his children who will carry on that legacy.

Hux takes Marin’s hands, his smooth ones between his son’s scarred ones. “How’s it feel, big brother?” he asks, void of a lifetime of emotional inhibitions.

“It’s a bit intimidating. But I know Han will be happy here,” Marin answers honestly.

“I’ve never lost faith in you. Not for a second.”

The room is centered on little Han and Marin is so appreciative of the fact he gets to see them all like this. Aems is now passing Han to Luke, who cradles the baby assuredly despite his concerns for his two metal arms. After Ren’s encouragement, Chewie’s next. Chewie lets out a soft, tearful hum at the miniscule weight of little Han in his arms. Marin’s so happy. Hux, having always trusted Ren’s judgment, isn’t concerned in the least at Han getting passed around. He’s proud to share his and Ren’s accomplishments even if it’s with Ren’s family, the dreaded Resistance.

The front door chimes and Marin goes to answer it, Abie trotting along to greet the new visitors. He knows who it is before he opens the door.
Marin gets a flash of Rey’s smiling face before he’s swooped into an embrace. Marin hugs Poe next, then Finn the hardest, lifting him from the ground with his ferocity. “I thought you guys weren’t coming for another few weeks,” Marin says once he’s set Finn down.

“We weren’t planning on it, but we knew we had to come see you guys. And to meet the little guy,” Finn says. “Is he awake? Can we see him? I brought gifts.” Finn holds out a bag filled with goodies from the Core worlds. Candies, little toys, stuffed animals, and even treats for Abie.

“Thank you, and yes,” Marin says, taking the bag graciously. “But I think the bedroom is full. I’ll have Ren bring him out here.”

Rey laughs, flying higher than the Falcon ever had when Ren comes out with the baby, the biggest smile on his face. Rey takes the baby, and although he’s so small and so young she’s in awe of his tremendousness in the Force. Ren tells her his name and she nearly breaks into tears. Over the years, Ren’s come so far as a man. Marin, too, who’s currently guiding Hux to the sofa on his tired legs with a secure arm around his waist, the twins crowding around them, clingy with contentment. Seeing them like this, so full of life and boundlessly happy now that little Han is home and here to stay, gives her hope that anything’s possible. The universe is a brighter place now that they’re together.

“He’s brilliant,” Rey smiles. Han looks up at her with wide, inquisitive eyes, already forging an instant connection. Gently, she hands him off to Finn, adoring how naturally Finn takes to children. At the ex-Stormtrooper Guiding Stars program, Finn’s by far the biggest hit among the children of all ages, even with the shy ones. They look to him and see a greater purpose in this life than war, that they can and will become more. Who they were always meant to be.

“That brilliance skips a generation, that’s for sure,” Ren says, aiming for a joke.

But Rey regards him. She’ll never again discount what he’s fought for and what he’s sacrificed. “I’m not so sure,” she assures him, and she means it.

From the sofa, Hux’s eyes dance over Ren communing with his family, laughing and smiling with the Jedi. It’s not an unexpected picture but it’s pleasantly jarring none the less.

“Go on. You and your sisters should help set the table,” Hux tells Marin as he arranges his tired yet healed body on the sofa. They’ll likely have to set some extra spaces around the living room couches, but they’ll make do. Marin complies without a hitch and gathers his sisters. “I love you all,” Hux says. Because he can. He’s in no rush nor worry to get the words out, for he has the rest of his life to remind them.

“Love you, too, Papa,” his girls say, always sincere. They gave him the precious spark of hope when he had none. Seren and her unmatched wit and lively spark, Taran and her creativity and grounding nature, both perfect foils. His two little glimmers of limitless light, only just beginning to bud into more. They skip to weave through the rest of their family towards the kitchen.

Marin smiles down at him, and from his recline Marin looks so grown it makes Hux’s heart ache. Not with dread or regret but with appreciativeness that his son’s now has the chance to mature into a far more noble, tolerant, generous man than he could ever be. His son is a hero and he’s so proud of him for it.

Not much later, Leia’s found her seat coveting little Han with Seren and Taran as her dutiful satellites. Marin shares a private conversation with Aems and later with the two final houseguests, Naedie and Lisbeth, whom he greets with an embrace not quite like the others they’ve shared, Hux notes wryly. He’ll be sure to inquire to Marin about that later. But in the meantime, he enjoys how
enamored Lis and her mother are with the newest addition to their family. They're especially fond of his apparently infamous name.

The Jedi are a close-knit bunch, but are no doubt enjoying themselves. Rey and Luke Skywalker all smiles at the table, as Finn entertains Abie and in turn draws the curiosity of the twins. Hux also notes how Poe Dameron is so bold to assist his mother in the kitchen to give Ren a break, of which both Ren and Aems are grateful for. Aems, probably for more selfish reasons, who is doing a poor job of hiding just how wonderfully charmed she is by the admittedly charming Dameron.

Ren breaks from a seemingly intelligible conversation with his Wookie friend to comment on something to Luke about something that Hux doesn’t catch, but whatever it is, it’s important to them both from their mirrored enthusiasm. Hux smiles, too, for he’s so happy to see Ren get along with his family so fluidly. Ren parts from the group but not without kissing Leia's temple, who cradles little Han so close, keeping him warm. There’s something so pleasing about seeing Ren interact with his mother.

When Ren’s mirthful eyes find his from across the room, Hux flushes like he’s been caught spying on all the guests in his home. Unbothered, Hux slides to the side to make room for Ren.

“How are you feeling?” Ren asks him, colored with concern.

“Fine. Same as the last several times you’ve asked me,” Hux smirks. He’ll always enjoy being doted on.

Uncaring of the full house just a few paces away, Ren kisses Hux on the corner of his mouth. “Thank you. For letting them all in,” he says, and he means so much more than just letting the entire Resistance into his home.

“It’s important they grow up knowing who they are.” Hux meets his eyes. “And when the time comes, they should know who we are, too.”

Ren nods, because he’ll never again fool himself into lying to their children or tampering with their freewill to branch off and pave their own paths. He doesn’t want who they were and who they are now to ever compromise that. Never again.

“Have I ever told you how much you mean to me?” Ren murmurs, just to see Hux’s incredulous smile, the one his beautiful face lights up with when Ren’s being achingly, embarrassingly sappy and dramatic. Ren’s eyes dance. There it is. He can read how much Hux loves being reminded of what they have. He doesn’t want to lose that, not now, not ever.

“Only always,” Hux scoffs, playing along. “Tell me again.”

Ren obliges, petting his soon-to-be husband’s ringed finger. Soon, Marin will join the Jedi and their knit group of Resistance bred heroes. Yes, Marin will leave and spend weeks if not years away from him on assignment. As will Seren and Taran, and one day little Han will follow in suit. Instead of condemning loss, he feels only gratitude. His children are safe, happy, loved. And most importantly, his children as well as his life are shared with Ren, the man he’ll forever be united with. From his most shameful regrets and his greatest achievements, Ren meets him at every end.
Chapter End Notes

I really hope you guys enjoyed the ending! This fic, not to mention this entire verse, has been such a ride. Thank you all so fucking much for all the encouragement and feedback. Without it, I probably would have never been motivated to finish!

If you all are interested, I am planning some bonus scenes for this verse, so I encourage you to subscribe to the series for more in the future.

Again, thank you guys so much for reading and sticking with me from the beginning, the middle, or if you read this in one fell swoop. I look forward to revisiting this AU soon!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!