**Bleeding Heart**

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**Summary**

Xemnas was fundamentally a bad person. Born from the fracture of Xehanort's heart, he had only caused pain to those he banded together with under the promise of finding a way to return all their hearts. He shattered the Organization he'd founded for his own gain, and he understood this with cool indifference.

But beneath everything, carefully kept folded away and hidden from Xigbar's prying eye, he was also made from the other inhabitant of Apprentice Xehanort's body. And as troubling as it could be to their plan, he kept it hidden from all.

(Or, how Terra managed to keep his head above the water for thirteen years)

**Notes**

xemnas is a raging dumpster fire of a person but hes also technically half terra in MY heart so im putting some of my thoughts on him here uwu

super quick science thing that insp'd this: emotional input tends to stir memories better than trying to remember the actual memories themselves. think like how a song that played during ur first kiss coming on instantly reminds you of that moment. that.

oh, and this is the timeline before y. xehanort picked xem up so he has no fucking clue
who xehanort is and xigbar thinks it's the funniest thing in the world

See the end of the work for more notes.
Les Mémoires d'Aqua

Most of the others had memories, personalities. He hadn't accounted for that.

Number VIII and VII had a bond before, when they were people. Their closeness in non-existence reflected this.

IX was obnoxious and lazy, forever plucking away at that *instrument* of his. He claimed he needed it for his work, only able to control his water clones like the pied piper, their forms dancing madly to the... "music." Begrudgingly, it was allowed.

It hadn't been long since the fateful experiment that created them. He still hadn't memorized all their new names, preoccupied with establishing the Organization and more pitifully, himself. Rather, his lack thereof.

The others had *personalities*, despite lack of emotion and heart. They had memories.

Why not himself?

All he knew for certain was that he was Xemnas, he was the de facto leader of Organization XIII, and numbers II and VI knew more than they let on.

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Had Xemnas been able to feel when he found it, he surely would have felt *something* beyond his organs tying themselves in knots staring blankly at the empty armor in his former master's office in Hollow Bastion.

Zexion had reported the world to be especially anomalous compared to the others, but it had been that way since the Organization was founded. Since...

He only knew what he was told happened, beyond the few bare scraps of memory he had. He remembered staggering to his feet, head feeling like it was being split open; remembered Xigbar - rather, Braig - shouting at him, calling him a name that made him feel for one fleeting instant. He hypothesized the last scrap of his heart hadn't yet left his body, marking the first and last thing he felt in his short nonexistence - Nobodies can't feel, and he hadn't felt anything since. But he clung to the memory of blind, raw rage at Braig in that moment, the natural extension of his arm in summoning a keyblade and running it straight into his heart.

He remembered opening his mouth to say his name - his *real* name, but his migraine spiked to a blinding point when he tried to think of what it could be. "My name is Ansem," he ended up murmuring over Braig's heartless husk and it felt somewhat right. It was the only name he could remember, there was an association with 'Ansem' he knew was there but couldn't place. Ansem would do fine, for the time being.

He didn't know who Xehanort was, but one thing for certain was that under no circumstances was he to be called by that name.

There were other memories too, likely, but Xemnas only came up blank when grasping for anything else from his past. Even trying to summon a keyblade after that moment proved fruitless, with countless hours spent attempting to call it back to his hand. They needed a keyblade wielder for their cause, and were eyeing the young boys from the islands as potential pieces to their puzzle in lieu of himself. He hadn't spoken of using a keyblade himself to the others and if Xigbar remembered the incident as well, he never announced it.
But that was there, and this was here.

Xemnas knew these... things, undoubtedly. He had to. Especially considering the way his mouth dried noticing the discarded keyblade mounted on the wall next to the armor display. A pinhole was poked in his mind, and–

"Up to spar again?"

"How you're not tired yet, I have no clue. You're a machine, [REDACTED]."

"How about a bet? You win, I do whatever you ask. I win, you do whatever I ask."

"...But you always win."

"Oh, so you're admitting I'm the best?"

"Not for as long as I can [REDACTED] - you're on."

"That's what I like to hear! My [REDACTED] never stops fighting."

"Oh, shut up."

–Xemnas stiffened as if struck by lightning, half-outstretched hand frozen in place as he attempted to process whatever just happened.

It was hard to breathe. His lungs felt as if they were constricted, despite no emotion stirring within him to cause such a reaction.

This... this was unprecedented.

The scene kept replaying itself over and over in his mind, an echo chamber of a moment that couldn't be his.

It wasn't a detailed... recollection. He refuses to consider memory, because he only had one from before everything and it wasn't anything like this. He knew exactly what happened with Braig, what he was thinking at the time. This wasn't anything like that.

It was a blurry something. The woman's voice was infuriatingly familiar, though what he recalled of her appearance was like nobody he'd ever met. She was significantly shorter and... blue. They had been fighting, friendly sparring but with what, Xemnas couldn't place. No matter how much he tried, he simply could not picture her face. He needed to know, had to know what she looked like. She was... she was something. Something to hi- someone.

He stared at the armor, scouring it as if it could give him answers. Without realizing it, his hand had outstretched to touch where the cheek would be on the armor's helmet. Xemnas withdrew his hand like he was touching hot iron.

He may not have the answers now. But he will, eventually.

Xemnas opened a portal.

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From the moment he first laid eyes on the armor - Aqua's, he eventually recalled - his mind as he knew it had been fraying at the seams. The tiny pinholes that had been poked in his mind ripped at whatever wall held his memories at bay, spilling more and more similar scenarios to that - and
some entirely dissimilar to those involving her and that other boy, which he knew solidly were of his days as Master Ansem's apprentice. Rejection of his proposal for the experiment which would ultimately lead to the loss of their hearts, waking up in the square of Hollow Bastion outside the castle. Most curiously, the memory of Braig's arm slung around his shoulder as the man's usually carefree tone dipped into seriousness to ask if he wasn't actually... someone, and it nearly drove him mad trying to remember what he said in that moment.

It's not like he could ask. The others were under the impression he was free of any ties to any life he may have had before, and something in him warned to preserve that lie at all costs.

So Xemnas ignored the fact he was practically being driven insane by memories that may or may not be his - or even happened at all - and focus on the irritating present.

"Zexion's been keeping him busy since we found him," Xigbar said, striding alongside him. "The little sneak somehow slipped his Recusant and was halfway-"

"How?" Xemnas asked sharply.

"Zexion said he might've stopped identifying with his name. Might not've been intentional since he hurts the most for a heart, but he had to have realized what he was doing and kept at it."

Xemnas stopped, with Xigbar following suit. "How did he get this far, number two?" he hissed, eyes narrowed ever-so-slightly.

His subordinate gave him a long, one-eyed stare that would've been intimidating if he had the capacity to be intimidated.

"That wasn't a request, Xigbar."

Xigbar shook his head as if clearing his thoughts. "Right, sorry. You... didn't look like yourself for a second there, had to make sure." He jerked his head to motion to keep walking. "He's in one of the cells around the corner here."

Once Xemnas begrudgingly followed him, he continued. "It wasn't like he had Axel calling him Isa again. It was more like... ah, how the hell did he phrase it- 'disassociation from his true identity' or something like that. He wants to be Isa again so bad, he forgot that's not who he is anymore."

"I see," he said curtly.

"And I get not having a heart sucks, we're all Nobodies here, but you don't see me pretending I have a heart and calling myself Braig."

A muffled cry from down the hall drew their attention to Zexion, who was standing outside a cell with his hand hovering over his lexicon.

"I hope you had a nice chat," Zexion deadpanned without looking away from his illusions. The closer they grew, the more it was obvious that the occupant of the cell was obviously in pain, with labored breathing amidst poorly disguised cries of pain. "His Recusant's Sigil-"

"-Had been shed, yes," Xemnas finished, clasping his hands behind his back as he rounded to survey their traitor.

The boy was curled in a fetal position on the floor of the open cell, hands forming claws clasping his face as ragged breaths escaped his shaking form. He was wearing a blue zippered sweatshirt and casual khaki pants, along with an inordinate amount of belts. The only trace of the Organization's uniform left on Saïx was the gloves; even his shoes had clearly been bought
somewhere in Twilight Town. He made a choked sob at whatever happened in the illusion he was trapped in.

"It would have just been easier to kill him, but Xigbar said it was 'your call.'" Zexion spoke in his usual withering tone, but something dangerous was lurking beneath his usual snarky veneer.

"Lea," Saïx whimpered.

"Release him," Xemnas ordered, looking away from the illusory master and down at the boy having fits on the floor.

"That's your call?"

"Do as I ask."

"Alright." Zexion flipped to another page in his lexicon and after a moment, Saïx was gasping for breath, but recovering from whatever nightmare had been inflicted on him.

He coughed and curled up more, visibly shaking as he recovered. Xemnas tilted his head at him and despite being wordless, Xigbar obeyed with his usual roguish grin and circled around to grab Saïx by the hair and dragged him up to his knees to face his superior. His face was dirty and streaked with tears, teal eyes puffy and red; but as soon as he realized the gravity of the situation, his face steeled the best as a seventeen year old could.

"Number seven."

Saïx didn't respond, only tipping his head back thanks to Xigbar's tight grip with a rebellious look on his face.

"Since our first day, I've tolerated your childish actions but it seems like entertaining that was nothing but a mistake," Xemnas said, carefully examining any trace of reaction in the younger boy's face. "It's time you learn the truth of our existence."

He slightly leaned down closer to Saïx's face and spoke, enunciating as clearly as he could. "We. Have. No. Hearts. All we have are memories of when we did, and pretend we're who we used to be. You are not Isa. You are Saïx, you're a Nobody."

"I am myself," Saïx finally spoke, venom in his voice. "And I have no obligation to involve myself in this Organization."

"Your obligation is the emptiness in you," Xemnas said, "And you are nothing. I am nothing, none of us truly exist."

"And how exactly are we supposed to change that?!" Saïx struggled against Xigbar, trying to lean forward. "We have no plan, we have no way to get our hearts back! If I have to live like this, I want to go home and try my own methods to get my heart back."

Xemnas froze, but Saïx continued without noticing anything was off with him. "And you really have no way to keep us besides this mark in our names, do you? It's just a way to keep us under your thumb while you stall because you have absolutely no idea what you're doing! And you know I'm right, don't you?!"

He was seeing double, like a crocodile seeing both above and below a river's surface. Saïx was there, shouting at him, but so was she - Aqua - shouting at him to return what he'd taken. They were uncannily similar in that moment - blue hair in a wild halo with righteous fury written across their faces, blue eyes alight with intention to follow up on their words.
"My name is Isa, and no amount of being called Saïx or your little friend's nightmares are going to change who I am!"

Something in the way he said it was just reminiscent enough to snap two pieces into one, and something in him recognized the turning point before him.

But he had no heart, and thus had no reason to hold himself back.

"You may be right, in your case," Xemnas murmured, and he saw Xigbar cock an eyebrow in the edges of his vision. He ignored him in favor of Saïx. "You'll learn to accept your name and your place in the Organization. But until then and after, we'll have to settle with a physical reminder of what we are and what we do."

He summoned his ethereal blades, glowing with a soft blue light and quietly humming with barely-contained energy - and it was clear that all present understood his intention. Zexion, though hardly twelve, barely reacted; but Xigbar's smile grew wide in anticipation, jerking Saïx's head up further for a clearer target as the younger boy struggled against him.

"Just who were you before?" Saïx made out, struggling to speak with the angle his head was held at, terrified teal eyes never leaving the blades. "Who were you that makes this an easy conclusion to make?!"

"Why don't you find out?"

And then he was screaming.

Xigbar held him there for a moment before letting the boy fall to the ground and stepping around the writhing body of the teenager they'd just maimed. "Did you-"

"No." Xemnas watched Saïx, screams echoing in his ears. "I don't know why I said it."

"Ah, right," Xigbar fell quiet for a moment. "You know, before all this you showed me a good way of uh, getting people to agree with our ideals. I could change his mind that way, if you want."

"Do it." Xemnas turned away and began walking back the way he came, his duty over and visions of a screaming woman plaguing his mind. "Make sure he never leaves again."

He couldn't see his face, but he was sure Xigbar was grinning.

"Can do, boss."
Xemnas had long since come to the conclusion whoever he was before, whoever he had been, was dead.

Maybe not physically, since he technically was there, but his Nobody bore so little in common with him beyond the memories.

In his memories, he was a naive, empathetic, stubborn, caring fool of a man. He was fiercely devoted to what he loved and he knows if the time had come, he would have died to protect the ones he cared about.

In present day, Xemnas couldn't be farther from that.

Although certain aspects did linger, that was undeniable. As much of a blank slate as he was in the beginning, years of memories resurfacing as frequently as waves breaking on shore had rendered him with slightly less memories to fall back on than the others. The more he recalled from his dead self, the more mannerisms like his rose to the surface - he'd occasionally be caught with the urge to ruffle Zexion's hair as he passed; to hum along to music he might hear on a mission; and most grievous of all, to crave approval from Xigbar, of all people.

It was ridiculous, frankly. Yes, he trusted Xigbar, but not really. As surprising as it might have been after the incident, Saïx had proved to be his most trustworthy confidant in the following years. It had taken a few weeks for him to come around completely - he fought the whole process, and Xigbar did comment on his inexperience with it other than seeing it happen "once or twice."

And therein lied his dilemma with Xigbar. There was no doubt he was loyal to Xemnas, but there was no gauging how much he knew that wasn't revealed to him.

It had been just under eight years since he first found Aqua's armor, eight years since his memories began pouring back. In the beginning, vague recollections of someone important and similar to Xigbar plagued him and he blames his continued reliance on him on the early days of confusion.
He now understood that in the worst of his identity crisis, he reached for anything and anyone similar to what he could remember and after years of repressed memories returning, understood much of his past was entangled with both Braig and the other man.

If he was brutally honest with himself, he still didn't understand who he was.

He knew of his life with Aqua and the others, but there was a double layer that was hard to understand. He remembered fighting Braig, being mocked for his lack of skill, and the rage he felt in that moment fed the bolts of darkness he sent that scarred his face. But simultaneously, he recalled a serious fight with the man who was his former master that happened in almost the exact same way; though instead of being belittled by the man he trusted, he was being pleaded with to go home. He had wanted him to turn back from the path he was on, that their master had trusted him with his own keyblade and expected him to do right, but he instead chose to maim his own best friend's - master's? - face with darkness.

If there weren't the ridiculous dual memories of two lives, he would have had everything sorted by now but the more he thought he understood his past, something would come screaming at him out of the blue and make him realize just how confused he continued to be.

If he were a less in-control person, he would have slipped up. As integral Xigbar's support was to their goal, he simply couldn't trust him beyond a professional level as evidenced by the fact he'd been following Xemnas to the Chamber of Repose.

"I don't remember inviting you to follow me," he spoke aloud, not bothering to slow his pace. "Or is my memory going?"

"You say that like you had one to begin with," Xigbar blinked into existence at his side, matching his walking speed. "How'd you figure it out?"

"Only Demyx is less subtle."

"Hey, I'll sue for workplace harassment," he sounded offended, over exaggerating his body language to go with the act. Beyond that, he didn't seem surprised that he'd been found out.

"What's your deal with the Chamber of Repose anyway? The others have been starting to talk, y'know." Xigbar's light tone was belied by the abruptly keen look in his good eye. "Not telling Saïx I can get, the guy might as well keep his claymore wedged up-"

"Cut to the point already," Xemnas interrupted.

"What I'm saying is I've been your number two for way longer than the Organization's been around, we've been neck deep in crap a million times worse than whatever this is all about." He made eye contact with Xemnas then, like he was trying to remind him of something. "And I gotta say, it's a little hurtful you've been keeping me in the dark lately."

"You say that, but how do I know you haven't just been taking advantage of me not having memories from before?" Xemnas stopped then with a definitive click of his heel on the floor, rounding on the sharpshooter, the lie slipping easily off his tongue without even thinking. "I've been blindly trusting you as my second for ten years and the one reprieve I have-"

"I'm just worried you're forgetting our goal." A hint of malice had slipped into his tone, betraying just how serious Xigbar was.

There seemed to be an unspoken staring contest at that, gold matching gold. The shorter man's face proved just how serious he was - not a hint of humor in his expression.
Xemnas refused to look away, only speaking when Xigbar submitted, glancing to the side with a disgruntled expression. He was the Superior, regardless of Xigbar's concerns and he was to be treated as such. "Kingdom Hearts," he said, "We need the keyblade to open Kingdom Hearts and rekindle the connection with our other selves."

Xigbar looked surprised, eyebrows shooting to his forehead. "You remember all that?"

"The fact you even consider that I'd forgotten is an insult," Xemnas said, eyes narrowed. He began to walk again, down the lazily winding staircase. Xigbar moved to catch up, walking beside him once again.

"No, I- I'm just surprised, is all. How long did you know?"

He looked at him from the corner of his eyes. Lesser men would've immediately been prostrating themselves but it was like Xigbar had said. Even if he were capable of being intimidated, they were in far too deep together to be daunted by the other. "It's been our mission from the start. I don't forget my motivations so easily."

"Right, right." Xigbar looked like he was still processing the information he'd been giving, face pensive. "So since you remember, do you have any suggestions for the thirteenth member?"

"Why?"

"We're still short one, 's far as I know and we can't crack Kingdom Hearts without the X-blade. It's still a ways away from being set to go but since you remember, what d'you think?"

Xemnas was quiet. "Of the two we've been observing, I'm most impressed with Sora's capabilities. Riku has been nothing but a disappointment since their departure from the islands."

When the Organization first began watching the two boys, he'd personally been most interested in Riku of the two. Sora seemed weak in comparison, though both paled in to Kairi's importance to their plans. He'd been certain that Riku would be more than capable of carrying out the Organization's needs, having a certain amount of pride when he would best Sora in their mock swordfights on the beach. However, when darkness consumed Destiny Islands, they weren't swift enough to secure Riku before he fell into Maleficent's manipulations and weak little Sora unwittingly stepped up to take the place meant for Riku to combat the heartless. Riku's hesitation throughout the matter thus far had caused Xemnas' interest to wane; his conflict with Sora garnered no sympathy from him.

He'd had his friends and he hadn't wavered, yet in the end he still lost his family.

Sora, on the other hand, was both simple and capable. His singular drive to find the Princess would be easier to harness than Riku's nebulous inner conflict, all they'd have to do is employ a bit of carrot-and-stick measures to keep him along the path of freeing hearts.

"Huh? Really? I'd think it'd be easier to nab Riku now, he'd probably be more, uh... pliable than Sora."

Xemnas' brow creased. What was that supposed to mean? "It would be easier to manipulate him to serve our cause, but he's a fool who would fail us like." He cut himself off there. He was unsure where he was going with that line of thought, but he knew it tread dangerously close to his secret cache of memories. But he knew he had to continue the statement lest he not rouse Xigbar's suspicion again. "the keyblade wielders before him."

The Keyblade War was common enough knowledge, for them at least. The initial conflict over Kingdom Hearts and what lay beyond was the foundation for their plans, they all knew this.
Xigbar nodded sagely, smirking at that. "Like we'll get a batch that stupid again, as if. Man, sometimes I wish we had Terra again; he was dumb enough to do anything you'd say to him right up 'til the end."

He felt like all the blood left his body, leaving only ice in his veins. "What?"

"Y'know, Te-" Xigbar glanced back up, eye widening when he saw Xemnas' pale expression. "Terra? The idiot who did everything you said without questioning like... anything? Do you seriously remember our goal but not the first time we took a go at it?"

He was frozen for just a moment longer, heart in his throat. He was hyper aware of himself; the blood roaring in his ears, the loudness of each breath he would take, the pounding of his heart. "I'm afraid not," he said coldly. Xemnas turned away facing forward once again, any pretense of camaraderie between them gone and the figurative wall of ice back up between them. "If I catch you eavesdropping or following me here again, I don't care how important you are to the Organization. You'll be made an example for our would-be traitors."

He didn't say anything, but Xemnas could feel his single shrewd eye burning a hole in the back of his head.

"...Right," he eventually said in a strange voice. Not sounding threatened, no; more like he'd stumbled on a puzzle he didn't know needed solving. "Being turned into a dusk would really ruin my week for sure."

That struck a chord of familiarity, but he ignored it until a barely audible *fwip* indicated that Xigbar had warped away.

Terra. Terra, Terra, Terra.

The door opened and in a rare moment of weakness, Xemnas collapsed in the chair within the Chamber of Repose.

He covered his eyes with his hand, lump in his throat. Was this grief? Was this emotion? "Terra," he said, "Terra was my name."

As usual, Aqua's armor didn't answer.

Chapter End Notes

abridged convo between xig and xem for those who are confused:

xemnas: i want to use the keyblade to open kingdom hearts and get our hearts back
xigbar: oh you mean the x-blade we need to open kingdom hearts with all 11 of our other selves
xemnas: yes. there is in no way a miscommunication.
xigbar: neat we just need one person to use the x-blade to open kingdom hearts
xemnas: ??soras the one with the keyblade now??? because im disappointed in riku cuz hes my legacy wielder he sucks like the wielders before him (read: keyblade war kids)
xigbar: haha yeah terra sucked thats tru
xem: wh
xem: what
click to send me approximately 80 eels
Xigbar had suggested that someone else be the one to do the legwork, that there were things that needed his attention at their headquarters. Xemnas had shot down his offers to do it instead, to assign someone else to sample. Saïx or Xaldin could do the job just fine, or Lexaeus would be more than capable of it himself. He wasn't wrong; he had utmost faith that any of them (save for Marluxia and Larxene) could do it well. But it struck him as something he had to do himself, to see for himself that his choice was right.

He had to know if Sora was ready for their project.

He lay in wait for him to appear, contemplating. In their observations of his journey through the worlds, Sora had far and away exceeded their expectations. Save for when Riku defeated him and took the keyblade, he had done nothing but succeed. Even then, conversely, Xemnas had felt - yes, an unfortunate side effect of memories is kneejerk reactions based on past events - a note of triumph despite the overall loss. He couldn't say why - though he had a suspicious inkling he had absolutely no desire to pursue; he didn't want yet another useless attachment to bind him down - but Riku finally holding the keyblade meant for him-

Xemnas abruptly closed off that line of thought. He had grown adept at it over the years, with a few minor exceptions. Most of the time it was easier to simply acknowledge the elephant in the
room - his half-emerged memories - and nothing more. Suppressing them, he had annoyingly found out, only caused the illusion of emotions and ties associated with the memory to strengthen. He had learned the hard way with Xigbar and had no intention of letting such attachment get in his way again.

And with that, he acknowledged the barely perceptible murmur of something in him when Sora entered the room he was awaiting him in, tight and hopeful expression on his face.

"Riku?" he tentatively called out, looking around. "Kairi?"

That was his signal. Xemnas stood, looking down at Sora for another moment before suddenly-

He was down now, behind the group as they ventured further into the room. He strode through Sora, sampling his data for Zexion and Vexen to analyze later for a plan Marluxia had proposed regarding Sora's memories. The boy gasped at what must have been a strange sensation as he passed through, hand immediately on his chest. Xemnas didn't falter in his step, striding forward until he stopped in the center of the room.

"Who are you?" Sora's voice, still high-pitched with youth, asked. It wasn't accusatory or fearful, no; simply confused. Perfect.

"You're special, I see," he said, back still to Sora. Even if he were facing him, the hood over his head would have hid the sly smile curving on his lips.

"...Ansem?" Goofy asked now, confused as well.

He did turn at that, giving the trio a cold glare that would have frozen any living being in their tracks, had they been able to see it.

Yes, he still assumed the name of Xemnas, but he had long since known his true, deceased identity before he was a Nobody. He understood the nature of his existence and had long since come to terms with it, but that far from meant he accepted that the maniac who called himself Ansem was himself.

"That name rings familiar," he said frigidly, not offering any more answer beyond the cold words.

He'd only observed Sora from afar, only studied his behavior as recorded by the field members. He understood the familiarity of Riku, he understood that Sora was entwined with the other boy's fate. Yet meeting him in person for the first time turned something uncomfortable in his stomach. There was something very, very off about him. Something unlike anything he'd seen in his ten years since Terra had died and Xemnas was born, something imperceptible from a distance but too overpoweringly present in person.

Those blue eyes were all too similar.

"You remind me of him," he found himself saying, energy already pooling and growing in his gloved hand. Ventus...

"What's that supposed to mean?" Sora asked, perplexed. Moment by moment, the unease - not distress, absolutely not - grew within him. He felt claustrophobic, like he was being boxed into a corner with just a look.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ven had asked, looking disgruntled.

"You'll find out eventually, I'm sure," he had replied teasingly, ruffling Ven's hair as he approached. Ven brushed him off, looking like an annoyed kitten.
"I wanna know now!" Ven whined. Aqua burst out laughing, and--

Xemnas arced the energy in his hand at Sora, the wielder instantly summoning his keyblade to block the attack. His heart - the physical organ, not the soul he lacked - was racing in his throat and damn it, he was shaking. He was lucky he had come alone.

Sora slashed his keyblade from where he had held it to block, sending the arc soaring upward into a corner of the ceiling. He stood ready now, prepared for another attack. His stance was far different, standing as tall as his short stature allowed, keyblade held in front of himself. Far different from the low, defensive stance he knew, keyblade held in a reverse hold behind his back.

"I wonder," he mused aloud, air around him crackling with ozone as his blades were summoned in his palms. "Is your strength equal to his?"

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"Xemnas."

Saïx was awaiting him when he returned, turning away from the window to face him. A cursory look showed that hearts were once again flowing to join with Kingdom Hearts. Saïx's hand lingered where he'd been resting it on the sill before reluctantly dropping it to his side.

Something in Xemnas stirred at that, despite his poor mood after fighting Sora. Saïx's devotion to Kingdom Hearts was unmatched, but his subservience to him was a close second. He'd been nothing short of loyal to him for the past six years and had grown comfortable enough around him to be confident enough to give his own honest advice and opinions on Xemnas' plans. He was the closest thing he had to a companion, considering his constant, bluntly honest presence by his side.

That, and the fact he reminds Xemnas of someone else sometimes.

He didn't respond, only acknowledging Saïx's presence with a tight nod before attempting to move past him into his quarters. The blue-haired man passively stopped him with a hand on his chest.

"I am not in the mood right now, Saïx," Xemnas said flatly, irritation flaring. His head was already spinning with memories of a person in his past life once again, temples throbbing as the precursor to a migraine; he wasn't going to entertain the fiction of his reminder of someone else in Terra's life.

"Don't flatter yourself," he replied sarcastically and only then did Xemnas realize his intent. Since his Recusant scarring, he'd stopped bothering to pretend he had emotions and was more difficult to read than others who still kept up the charade. Giving more than a passing glance at his expression proved the levity in his expression. Some of Xemnas' annoyance faded. "I've located our thirteenth member."

"Where." It wasn't a question.

"Outside the mansion in Twilight Town," he said, "Zexion and I isolated him for the time being, but time waits for no one."

A dark corridor was already open and despite his battle-weary self, Xemnas was already stepping into it.

"Xemnas," Saïx called once more, unmoving from where he stood. Xemnas paused, slightly turning his head to cue him to continue.
"There's something off about him." His tone was cautious. "He reminds me of you in the beginning. Precursory data suggests-"

"-No memories," Xemnas finished, similar cold feeling from when he faced Sora returning and coiling over him heavily like a fat python. "I see," he said curtly.

"Right."

"Prepare the other members for the induction of XIII."

"Right away, sir."

He stepped into darkness.

The portal closed behind him and he began to make his way through the corridor, taking long, purposeful strides.

Ventus. Aqua. Eraqus. He'd ignored it before, pushed it aside for as long as he could, but seeing Sora and fighting him - losing to him - only forced the subject into the foreground. He had to face the fact that everyone he'd known and loved as Terra were dead and gone.

Not that he knew what happened to them, or himself for that matter. Xemnas still only had a fractured sense of events before the Organization - he remembered his friendship with Ven and Aqua, he remembered his loyalty to his adopted father. He had plenty of memories from long ago, long before his apprenticeship with Ansem. His peaceful life living in that place he irritatingly couldn't recall any specific details about with Aqua and Eraqus, the arrival of Ven he again couldn't seem to call to mind much detail on, the life they had together. He remembered everything up to the night before he and Aqua were to take the Mark of Mastery exam, but there was a gaping void from that until his time in Radiant Garden.

But a lack of memories has no correlation to a lack of gut feelings. He knew from the time he first laid eyes on Aqua's armor in their former master's office, from his first memory of the past, that something terrible had befallen them, and that he was all that was left of their legacy. A pathetic imitation of loss and guilt flared inside him at the thought. Aqua was lost, Ven was gone, Eraqus was gone, and all that remained of Terra was him. Even for a Nobody, a shell by nature, he was a husk of a husk of who he used to be and couldn't understand why. As much as he researched his own phenomenon, every potential lead he had only turned out to be a dead end.

It was strange, mourning yourself. He acknowledged the loss of himself, but felt no compulsion to change himself to mimic the lost wielder in some sad attempt to carry on the legacy of the people he had loved. He was Xemnas now, he was himself. And there was no turning back from who he had become, and no reason to.

There was nothing in the present for Terra. His family, his home, everything he cared for had turned to ash. It was best to let sleeping dogs lie.

He exited the dark corridor. He had a job to do.

His headache worsened as soon as he stepped into the light out of the corridor, but it wasn't the light that triggered it.

There was Ventus, standing plain as day in front of the mansion gates.

He felt paralyzed, frozen. Ven was staring up at the mansion, arms limply hanging at his sides. The slight wind disturbed the perpetual rat's nest on his head he called hair and Xemnas was a statue gaping at him.
Damn it, he was shaking again. He slowly lowered his hood, unmoving from where he was seemingly rooted in the ground. He couldn't think, couldn't process it, and something deep within him he'd never realized was there stirred.

"Ven?" Xemnas said in a small voice, tone unlike anything he'd heard himself utter before. It was tentative and hopeful, not like his usual smooth monotone.

Ven didn't seem to register he had spoken. He simply continued staring at the mansion.

Xemnas finally found it in him to move from his spot, striding toward Ven with some sort of frantic purpose. Still dignified, of course, but that didn't discredit the urgency in his step. "Ven, it's-"

He couldn't say it. He couldn't say it, he wasn't that person anymore, and Ven would know right away he wasn't.

Good thing it wasn't Ven.

When he was close enough he took him by the shoulder and turned him to look at him. "Ven?"

His face was undeniably Ventus, but his blue stare was blank. Like when he first appeared in the Land-

Migraine spike, Xemnas winced and rubbed his forehead in attempts to force the spike in pain to disperse.

"You're not fully Ventus. You're not fully anyone else. You're merely a shell." Xemnas removed his hand from his shoulder, forcing his composure back. "You're nothing."

The boy's expression didn't register any emotion, but he looked down at the words and nodded slightly.

"I am nothing as well. I am not who I used to be, I am a husk of who you knew me to be." He crossed his arms behind his back, finding some comfort in that. His pulse quickened, a strange urgency setting in. "Neither of us are real anymore. But in nothingness, I found purpose."

His mind was racing a thousand miles an hour on a million different things. He had been alone in his existence, but now that Ven was here and seemed to share the same purgatory of both being and not being himself, maybe there could be some conclusion to his ever-expanding identity crisis. Maybe he could finally have some solace in his friend. "I can give you purpose."

The blond nodded again, and he took that as agreement.

He didn't smile. He didn't hug him, he didn't mimic happiness with his amber eyes, he didn't suddenly revert to being Terra again. He simply raised his arm and summoned his true name to mark with Recusancy.

**SORA**

He faltered.

Beyond his initial shock, the analytic mind he had beneath whatever had possessed him to behave so unbekomingly around him had already reached a hypothesis based on what limited data he had. Going off of his... gut reactions... when faced with similar instances there was a very slim likelihood that what he may be considering could have happened.
Regardless, Xemnas sent the letters whirling around Ven- rather, not Ven. He hadn't reached a conclusion on his hunch.

*Was that what I was like?* The boy was more like a zombie than a cognizant person, hardly seeming to register what was happening. Saïx had been right; he clearly didn't have memories. Maybe in time, they'd resurface like his had.

**X**

He stopped the whirling, marring the original name. A new name for a new life.

"Roxas," the boy finally spoke, voice fractured from disuse, but there was no denying it.

*Ventus.*

"The new you," Xemnas said, and this time he was smiling.

**Chapter End Notes**

1.) xehanort and terra are still fighting in him, xemnas just. has no fucking clue. my concept is that the split of the nobody experiment wasn't equal - ansem is just xehanort with a terra way of doing things, xemnas is just a super fucked up terra with a xehanort way of doing things. like 2/3 of xeh is in ansem and 1/3 terra, so he's naturally way more norty (im american thats not supposed to sound like naughty you animals) than xemnas, who only got the last 1/3 of xeh and the rest of terra stayed in him. so it's easier for a more terra way of handling things to be seen in xem since there's less of xehanort there to fight back. so when he found roxas, that was terras first major victory since xehanort fought aqua in the very end of bbs except through the xemnas filter so he boiled more to the surface in that instance bc for all he knew, it really *was* ven

2.) ansem also had no memories when he was created but doesn't care bc there was nothing hes seen that would trigger any in the first place and he'd just realize hes xehanort and nothing interesting would happen there. im only putting that out there so yall know im not just winging this whole thing and have like thought it out. im only winging part of it.

3.) this dumb bitch still thinks he doesn't have emotions or anything lmao

[click to send xemnas some goddamn ibuprofen](#)

**End Notes**

pls know this isn't me trying to make xem out to be some tragic antihero. hes the fuckin worst and i love him
come yell at me

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