Bleeding Heart

by keelahselai

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 xibgar thinks it's the funniest thing in the world

See the end of the work for more notes
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.

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, ☐☐☐☐.

"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 ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐- you're on."

"That's what I like to hear! My ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ 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.
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,
one 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. "As your flesh bears the sigil, so your name will be known as that of a recusant."

"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."
Les Mémoires d'Eraqus

Chapter Summary

xigbar is the MoM
(master of miscommunication)

Chapter Notes

miscommunication as a plot device
but in a way thats understandable bc the plot of these hell games is so convoluted and confusing even the characters have no idea whats going on
also not to be 2013 but sayakas themes (conturbatio, decretum, symposium magarum) from madoka magica? perfect to listen to while writing terra/xemnas because the violins sound vaguely bbs and also (cue same hat comic) same fate! same fate!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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 unbecomingly 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]
Prélude à Dies Irae

Chapter Summary

hey we're almost to chain of memories how fun have some big sexy foreshadowing with subtlety on par with david cage

Chapter Notes

tw for gaslighting, implied child abuse, + emotional abuse in this chapter. just because xemnas is the pov character and protagonist here doesn't mean he's like a good person who does good things, he's not a hero. terra was, but xemnas is pretty damn far down that other path. as for the child abuse, a character is shown to be triggered by events similar to what likely happened with his abuse. it isn't explicitly shown or discussed in this chapter, only the effects are seen and no present character was the abuser.

this isn't the darkest fic out there by any means, but pls don't think I'm romanticizing him by any means id kick xemnas firmly in the nuts if given the chance

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Despite everything, despite Ventus being back and being there and present, not much changed besides the fact of having a full thirteen Nobodies in the Organization. Rather, Roxas’ joining changed little besides the fact that Saïx now had the pleasure of adding babysitter to the roulette of daily tasks within the Organization, much to the others’ chagrin.

Especially Axel. Saïx seemed especially sadistic in assigning him to join Roxas on his missions in addition to him already being assigned to show him the ropes of nonexistence, and Xemnas saw no better use for him at the moment.

Of course, Axel and Saïx’s scheming was less subtle than they thought, although less eye-rollingly obvious than Marluxia’s impending treachery.

“Superior,” he said, addressing Xemnas with biting sarcasm dripping from the title.

“Number XI,” Xemnas responded with equal disrespect in his voice, gloved hands tightening ever-so-slightly on the armrests of his throne. Marluxia was a continuous thorn in his side, only worth keeping around for his strategic mind (when he saw fit to actually help the Organization) and frankly astounding talent with his scythe. Sometimes, he idly considered sharing his insight with him; after all, it worked with Saïx.

Marluxia would only be more of an asset to them if he succeeded, but it could backfire and only cement his resolve in overthrowing him. Ergo, Xemnas continued to entertain the idea that Marluxia assumed he didn’t know of his carefully planned revolt.

“I was assigned to Roxas today.” He crossed his arms, slight frown marring his angelic face. Had it not been for his cool cerulean stare, he would have seemed like a pouty child angry about naptime. “Have you not seen my requests for my experiment mission?”
“No.” Saïx had most definitely given them to him, pages and pages of hypothesis and potential experiments to test his ideas off-location. All eight versions of them, in fact. “Did Vexen approve them for submission?”

Marluxia glowered up at him. "Yes," he said tightly, “Vexen not only approved them, but noted interest in pursuing them himself if given approval from the Superior. So here I am.”

“Then persuade me to approve.” Xemnas shifted in his seat, resting his cheek on his palm with his head canted at an angle suggesting boredom. “How would you accomplish your goals, what would you research, and what resources would you need from the Organization?”

“If your lapdog bothered to do his job and pass relevant information to you, you’d know.” Marluxia had a pleasant smile on his face, a beautiful mask for the poison in his words. He tilted his head as well, mirroring Xemnas. “We would study the shape of memories and use that data to attempt to create physical replicas of those memories. The main goal would be to create alternate versions of key individuals if enough memories are sampled. As for resources...”

That grabbed Xemnas’ attention. “How would you accomplish this?”

“How would you acquire these memories to sample?”

“Oh.” Something in his smile turned devilish. “We would use Naminé, of course.”

The witch.

“Is she skilled enough in her ability to carry out the mission?” His tone was disinterested, as if asking something as mundane as what time of day it was. As if something in his throat was suddenly hard to swallow, as if Xemnas wasn’t suddenly acutely aware of each tiny movement he made.

“She was created from a Princess of Heart, of course she’s capable.” Marluxia waved him away, self-assuredness oozing off him like a smug cat. “We would perform the experiment off-site, lure Riku to gather his data without the witch, then bring her in for the real test.”

“Who would join your team?”

“Vexen and Larxene.”

Vexen was an obvious pick, but... “Why Larxene?” Xemnas asked in that same dull tone. He’d rather perfected the art of feigning disinterest, all things considered.

“She would use her charms to lure our subjects of research, of course.”

His honey eyes narrowed. “She has no charm to speak of.”

That catlike expression never left Marluxia’s face, unintentionally antagonizing Xemnas all the more for it. Or maybe it was intentional. Saïx was more agitated than anyone about faking emotions, but that thing he hated to acknowledge deep inside him was glowering at XI.

He didn’t have emotions, none of them did without hearts, but something in his very being dictated how he should react emotionally to various stimuli. Right now, the emotional reaction demanded - and being consequently repressed, as had been the case for the past however many years - in response to Marluxia’s calm disrespect was anger.
“She’s more capable than you’d expect,” Marluxia replied, “I trust her to perform her job well.”

“If I see fit to approve your plan.” Xemnas’ voice rang clear and cold between them. “I expect a better explanation of exactly how smoothly this mission will go in further applications.” And with that, he was gone.

He had a lot to consider.

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Xemnas was found gazing at Kingdom Hearts. Specks of light like distant stars flowed up to join the growing cluster of freed hearts, courtesy of Sora’s unwitting assistance to their cause. It was a point of solace in its own right; the Chamber of Repose was his escape into the past, the observatory deck of the castle was his glimpse into the future.

There’s a vague bit of deja vu in the way he stood gazing at the sky, that he understands unconsciously. He’d stood with others then, something in his hand dangling from a leather tie. He couldn’t quite recall what exactly it had been, but he knew it had been important at the time. He didn’t dwell on it.

Quiet, familiar footsteps approached without their owner announcing himself. There was no need to. “Did you read Marluxia’s reports?” Xemnas asked without prompt, without looking away from the glacially growing moon.

“I did,” Saïx replied, “All eight.”

“And your thoughts?”

Saïx was quiet for a heartbeat. “His idea is worth pursuing, but he barely bothered to hide his ulterior motives. He wouldn’t need Naminé with the resources we already have for data sampling.”

Xemnas turned to face him. Illuminated by the soft light of Kingdom Hearts, Saïx wore his uniform neutral expression that walked a narrow tightrope between stress and displeasure. “Agreed.”

The younger man didn’t say anything for a moment, studying his Superior’s face. “You can’t seriously be considering approving it,” he said, tone aghast. He even made a face, looking something between surprised and disappointed.

“It’s an interesting proposal,” Xemnas said. Not defensively, but his lips curled up into a quiet, traitorous smile before he added, “We only have everything to gain from it if I assign Axel to the mission as well.”

“You would assign Axel to a suicide mission.” It was said flatly, without emotion. Nothing in his face betrayed any semblance of the bond Xemnas knew had been shared with him.

“I would assign him to keep watch of Marluxia and to smother a revolt if necessary.” He straightened his already proper posture, clasping his hands behind his back out of habit. “He has a certain talent for acting, I’ve noticed.”

Something in Saïx’s expression tightens at that. “He certainly does,” he agreed, a twinge of bitterness escaping into his voice.

*Perfect.* Their sham of a friendship had been a steadily growing thorn in his side that only loomed more as a sleeping threat by the day. Assigning Axel to Roxas duty was easily the best decision he
had made in recent memory, judging by the discord that had been sewn between him and Saïx.

Better yet, it was Saïx who had officially given that job to Axel.

It was high time for them to stop pretending to be friends, it was simply pathetic by that point. It had been ten years since Lea and Isa had died, and the relationship they had insisted on pretending still existed as Axel and Saïx was nothing more than a pale mimicry of what once was and never could be again.

“He or Xigbar would be a sleeper agent and prune certain insurrectionary members if needed,” Xemnas elaborated, “Both are qualified enough for the mission.”

“Superior, permission to be insubordinate?”

He gave him a long, feline look before giving a slow nod to continue. *Speak, but watch yourself,* it said.

Still. Years of familiarity and hard opinions left little barrier between Saïx and honest communication, if less than flowery.

“Xemnas, playing into Marluxia’s hand is stupid beyond belief. We’re all aware of what he means to do, and you’re really considering giving him what he wants because you trust Xigbar to do your dirty work for you,” he said it bluntly, painting his nascent plan with shades of reality. “And I say Xigbar because you really can’t mean that you’d send Axel on this and leave Roxas to his missions alone, and I refuse to be assigned to babysit the toddler you saw fit to allow into the Organization.”

“That toddler,” Xemnas shot back, eyes narrow, “Is Sora’s Nobody and shares the same power of releasing hearts as him.”

“And yet we have *Kairi’s* Nobody and you’d rather induct a practical zombie into the Organization than her,” Saïx practically hissed, “I don’t understand your fixation on Roxas when Naminé is fully capable of her own power and has the potential to wield a keyblade just as well as Roxas could. And you would send her with Marluxia?”

The eleventh member’s name hung between them after Saïx finished speaking, unspoken implication obvious.

“You raise good points,” Xemnas said after a heavy moment of dead air, “But the moon is influencing you.”

A hint of something - fear, maybe? - twinged in Saïx’s gilded eyes as they flicked to Kingdom Hearts behind him for a split second. “You truly believe Naminé has the potential to be a viable member?” Xemnas asked, more coaxing the conviction from the other man than anything.

“More than that,” Saïx responded firmly, “She would be more effective than half our current members if given real training.”

“If Marluxia’s assignment is approved, I’ll send Naminé along with him.”

Saïx opened his mouth to object.

“And when she returns after a successful mission, she will be officially inundated as a member of the Organization,” Xemnas finished.

“An entrance exam.” Saïx lightly rubbed his chin in thought. “She’s capable, but you want to see
just how capable she is.”

“Precisely.”

An unexpected chill of wind gusted lightly in the World That Never Was, slithering through Saïx’s long hair as his attention was drawn once more to the moon. “It’ll be over soon.”

Xemnas turned partially, just enough to be able to see Kingdom Hearts. “Soon enough,” he agreed, honey eyes intent on the sky.

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It was only logical, after both Saïx and Marluxia insisted so, that he gauge Naminé’s ability himself rather than rely on word of mouth and scattered reports.

Not to say that he was rushing to her for his mind to be meddled with; Xemnas wasn’t a fool. He had to be careful, very careful, in his own determining of the situation.

Naminé was an enigma, an outlier such as Roxas and himself. She was unlike any other Nobody they’d encountered, and was promptly welcomed to their midst when she was discovered. Not as a member, more of a curiosity. A puzzle to discover the solution to rather than truly completed.

Zexion looked surprised to see Xemnas thumbing through his reports in the archive, though seemed less concerned with their leader’s unannounced presence than what he was doing with his unannounced presence.

“I sincerely hope you’re going to put those back where you found them,” he commented as he passed by in the narrow walkway with a moderately sized stack of mission and research reports neatly filed into individual folders.

Xemnas didn’t acknowledge the snide remark, only turning the page on the synopsis of the extent of her abilities. Memory alteration during transcription via-

Zexion sighed conspicuously. “I know we don’t truly exist, but would it kill anyone around here to have some manners every once in a while to just say hi?” He squinted at the label on the partially destroyed folder he was holding, angling the sad-looking thing to try and discern what was seemingly scratched into the surface of it. “And would it kill Demyx to have neater writing?” he muttered under his breath, striding down the aisle to where the Kingdom of Corona’s data was stored.

Xemnas ignored him again. -only able to affect memories of those connected to Sora’s h-

“Superior, where did you get those from, in case you don’t think and leave them out?” Zexion peeped around him, trying to glimpse a paragraph for an idea. Despite his irritation with Marluxia for the same sort of barbed words earlier, he simply batted Zexion away without any real malice, like shooing a fly.

“What do you want, VI?” Xemnas finally asked, giving in and giving him a scrutinizing stare even a Nobody like Zexion shrunk a bit at. “I don’t recall assigning you to being a librarian.”

“I don’t recall you assigning much of anything lately,” he retorted, arms crossed like a child. “Ever since Roxas joined, it’s like dad’s been out of town and left mom and the stick up her ass in charge.”

His upper lip twitched at that. “You’ve been spending too much time with Xigbar.”
“Maybe so. Doesn’t change the fact that you’ve been doing a distinct lack of truly leading the Organization lately.” The teenager settled back, leaning against a cabinet. He eyed Xemnas, single visible eye as scathing as he imagined his own glare had been.

“And what have I been doing in place of leadership?” He cocked an eyebrow, only really half-interested in what he was saying.

Zexion’s look was positively withering. “Reminiscing.”

“Reminiscing,” Xemnas repeated flatly.

Zexion glanced furtively to the entrance, and upon seeing that they were still alone, spoke in a low voice. “I always a good memory,” he began, “I still do. And I’m fairly certain you remember what I do. Likely more.”

Once again, there was that sensation of ice in his veins. Xemnas’ heart thudded loud enough he was certain Zexion could hear it, caught in his throat. “And what makes you think that?” he asked, voice strangely even and unbothered despite being on red alert.

“I suspected for years,” he said nonchalantly, “But Roxas being here makes it obvious. To me, at least.”

Zexion glanced at the door again. “I have a good memory and I pay attention. I have to, if I want my illusions to be convincing. I’m certain I’m not fabricating seeing someone who looked very much like Roxas asking around for someone that fit what you looked like when you first joined us before everything. Tell me if I’m wrong.”

He didn’t say anything.

“Ventus, he said his name was.”

A traitorous breath caught in his throat at hearing the name spoken aloud by someone else.

A pitying half-smirk appeared on Zexion’s face. “He wouldn’t have said that,” Xemnas finally said, words tasting bitter.

“Huh?”

Something squeezed inside him and it ached. “He would have told you to call him Ven.”

Before Zexion could respond, the contours of his face were lit from beneath with a soft red glow and whatever he had intended to say was cut off by his sheer panic.

He had been there, years before, when Xemnas had branded Saïx. He hadn’t been fazed then, watching on over the scarification with all the interest of a child watching his parents talk with a friend they’d run into at the store. Something in both of them had changed since then; Xemnas was more paranoid over keeping his very near complete recollection of his past from the Organization, and Zexion had

“Nobody else knows!” His voice broke and pitched high in a distinctly un-Zexion way. He had always prided himself on his coolheaded maturity; growing up as a Nobody had made him cling to whatever he could gleam from others. His ability to remain as collected as possible in any situation was a point of pride in what little he could cling to from being Ienzo. Without it, he truly was without anything marking Ienzo as having existed in the first place. “Nobody suspects, and I haven’t told!”
“I doubt so.” Xemnas advanced, ethereal blades humming to the pulse of his internal compartmentalized panic.

“Oh, Xigbar suspects, but I ignore him every time he asks me about you!” He clung to the cabinet, practically on top of it. “I’ll be good, please don’t…” he was practically wailing, and he looked as if he were on the verge of passing out from terror.

Xemnas paused, if only out of morbid curiosity. “What are you doing?” he asked, befuddled at the display before him.

“I… I…” he struggled to take a shuddering breath, breaking into a coughing fit instead.

“What are you doing?” he repeated, more authoritatively cold.

Zexion forced himself to breathe steadily, breaking into short, panicked breaths every few moments. “Please,” he warbled pathetically between breaths, unable to say any more. “Please.”

*Reduce him to nothing, he’s a failure and will only reveal you,* the cold, analytic side of him commanded.

His blades hummed what seemed impossibly loud, maybe some of that was blood rushing in his ears and he hesitated.

*He’s just a kid who did nothing wrong, help him!* another part urged, quieter but still present.

He saw Zexion and he remembered Ienzo. He remembered waking up in Ansem’s study for the first time with a youthful face staring him down while eating an ice cream bar. He remembered how he used to bite his nails when he was scared, how he would refuse to let anyone near his hair or that side of his face, the dimples that would show with each rare smile. He remembered the day he started speaking again, remembered comforting him during storms, remembered his adamant defense from Ansem’s harsh critiques. He remembered Ienzo’s last smile, bright and brave, on the day of the experiment and he wavered.

The blades vanished from his palms.

“VI.”

A semblance of normality seemed to have returned to Zexion, at least. He was able to breathe normally again, it appeared, but he still looked almost pained as he tried to calm himself. “Superior,” he said when he was able to look up at him. He flinched almost imperceptibly at the expression on his face. “With all due respect, you’re a fool.”

Xemnas was taken aback. “You call me a fool for sparing your life,” he said flatly. “After an unnecessary show of false emotions.”

He took another deep breath and swallowed before continuing. “You know as well as I do that these attacks are pathetic conditioned responses,” Zexion said bitterly, “Not just playing Somebody for a scrap of pity.”

“It’s been quite some time since your last attack,” he noted.

“It’s been quite some time since I’ve been scared for my life,” he shot back, razors embedded in his voice rough with residual anxiety.

They had a silent contest of wills, Zexion glaring down Xemnas in a way that reminds him of when Ven wanted to come with to-
“Perhaps I acted too rashly,” he said, cutting off that line of thought.

“Perhaps,” he echoed, scoffing and shaking his head, “Not even a real apology after an attempted murder. I tell you, no one around here has any manners anymore.”

Behind his sarcasm, he was obviously still shaken from the incident. “Is it truly murder if you don’t truly exist?” Xemnas mused.

“The answer is yes, because I’m sentient and would rather be like this than not be at all.” Zexion slid off the cabinet and straightened his coat, doing his best to act as though nothing strange had happened. “I’ll recover. Not that it matters to you.”

The atmosphere was heavy, wary apprehension thick enough Roxas could cut it with his keyblade. Xemnas’ eyes slid from Zexion to the files he’d left spread on the desk next to him.

A witch with the power to manipulate memories of those connected with Sora’s heart.

“What does Xigbar know?” he asked idly.

“Not even going to acknowledge what I said. Ouch. That really hurts me where it matters.” Zexion patted his chest ironically.

“Only one thing truly matters to the Organization.”

“Are you talking about Roxas or Kingdom Hearts?” he snipped.

Xemnas gave him a caustic glare. “Roxas is the key to unlocking the potential of Kingdom Hearts.”

“I’m sure there’s some psychological profiles around here that could help you out with that,” Zexion retorted, though his expression seemed a bit hurt. Merely ridiculous overacting of course, trying to guilt him into admitting things he’d rather not. They both know neither can actually feel anything.

“I don’t need to study psychological texts to understand my place in the worlds,” he said, a warning hidden in the baritone of his voice. “And you don’t need to question what I deem important or myself.”

Zexion’s face pinched, looking like he wanted to snap back, but sighed in resignation. “Yes, Superior.”

“Did Vexen assign you to archive duty?”

“Yes.”

“Is this all the data we’ve collected on Naminé?” He stepped back, head tilted at the desk he’d abandoned.

Zexion’s eyes slid to the desk, brows knitting. “You’re here for her?” he asked, confused.

“Evidently.”

His coat swished as he walked over, spreading the reports across the desk. “This really is all we have on her at the moment,” he said after skimming over each short report briefly, “Vexen tested her ability regarding memory alteration and found it somewhat similar to how my illusory attribute is structured.”
“Rather limited if she can only affect those connected to Sora’s heart.”

“That’s the current hypothesis,” Zexion furtively glanced up from the papers only to inadvertently meet Xemnas’ eyes. He averted his gaze back down to the desk corner near the Superior instead. “We haven’t exactly had the right amount of testing to nail it down, but that’s the theory Vexen and I settled on as of now.”

“Interesting,” Xemnas mused, drawing the word out languidly.

“Yes,” Zexion agreed, looking uncomfortable. He shifted his weight nervously for a moment, evidently waiting for dismissal that the Superior didn’t give. He held anxious position for a few weighty moments before edging away.

“I need to return to Vexen, he’ll be wondering where I am; we need to discuss retrofitting Lexaeus’ axe sword before his next mission.”

With no objection, the teenager took it as dismissal and hastily made his leave. Something in him half-heartedly wanted to call out an apology for his actions as he left, but Xemnas simply watched his back recede until he was crossing the threshold of the archive into the corridor.

“Number VI,” he spoke, and Zexion stopped stiffly without turning around.

“I won’t be so kind again. I understand we were close before the Organization, but my remaining patience with your attitude is waning.”

Zexion wilted almost imperceptibly at the words. “I understand, Superior. It won’t happen again.” His words were hollow

“See to it that it doesn’t.”

The door shut between them and Xemnas returned his attention to the reports littering the desk. If Naminé’s power was as theorized, Kingdom Hearts was as good as theirs.

He tucked the reports safely into the crook of his elbow after thumbing to the personnel report. She hadn’t been given any other clothing than what she’d been discovered wearing, which was far from protocol regarding stronger Nobodies. He’d have to rectify that soon; Xemnas made a mental note to order a new cloak be tailored for her. Small and feminine happened to be the natural opposite of the majority of the members, and a uniform customized to fit would be only proper for her.

Before he made his exit, he made certain to tidy the area as Zexion had so rudely asked.

Chapter End Notes

i really have no excuse for not updating for so long oops

yell at me for updates here
End Notes

pls know this isn’t me trying to make xem out to be some tragic antihero. he’s the fuckin worst and i love him

come yell at me

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