

Family

#13486

His big brother left in the morning.

Clear skies, sunny. Good Kiast weather. Apple slices cut in fours and peeled right like usual for them to take to lunch.

He didn't come back.

That wasn't weird, really. Ruka didn't come back lots of times, not when he was working, and he was always working. It just changed on whether or not he didn't come back for a day, or three. There was always enough food crammed somewhere in the cryo for them to snack on that long and they weren't allowed to go past Hallandrel District without him and if they needed a ride they went and told Grandpa Keeno and Ruka would fix him up when he got back.

This time, though, Ruka sat them down and he said, "I'm going away for awhile but I'll be back, okay?"

"How long's awhile?" Noga asked, then, "Where ya goin'?" then, "why?" and "is Caramel going?" — the last because if his big brother's boyfriend Cora goes, then it's something with his big brother's Jedi people stuff, and that's supposed to be worse than just *work*.

Leda doesn't ask anything because he never does and he's dumb and it's Noga's job. Noga elbows him and Leda shoves back. It's good as a hug.

"Ay, ay, ay, you two, be good," Ruka huffs. He rubs at his nose, then says, "You know there's the war on, right?"

"S'not our war."

"Yeah, but it's their war, and that means I'm goin' too. You know the rule."

"Cora *is* going," Leda mutters, and Noga crosses his arms.

"Stupid nerf-spew eater," Noga calls him, and his big brother rubs his knuckles to the top of his head.

"Ay! You don't say that. You hear me?"

"Don't go," Noga says. "Don't get shot. Screw them."

"You don't even know who you're tellin' to kriff off, Noga."

"Who cares? It's them's war. Jedi stuff. Jedi fight it. You're not one, right? You don't gotta, so don't."

"Their," Ruka corrects, ruffling his hair again. "And I kinda am, and it's important, guys, ay? Look, we're goin' for a walk, and I'll try and explain, ay? We can get sodas."

Later, before he goes, the night before, they crowd on his bedroom floor because the mattress won't fit them all and Ruka says, "It'll be okay, promise."

Sometimes, Ruka said things that were good as fact, sometimes better than it. Things that just *were*. Things like, "If Glava comes around," — he didn't call him "my dad" — "don't let him in and don't talk to him, okay? Just lock up, stay away from the door an' windows, and call me. I don't care what he says or does, you don't go by him, ay?" or "You can go to East if you want but don't go to Bacaat or Burradows. And don't you ever leave your asses out there after seven, you hear me? Especially not up Bacaat. Just don't go anywhere near Bacaat," or "Some rich Sephi ever tries to give you something, they're playing you. Just ignore 'em and keep walking 'less it's a hiring sign," or "I'll get you guys ice cream next time, okay? Promise, swears it."

He never doesn't get them ice cream next time, even though all his ribs and collarbones are showing bright and like crooked apple branch sticks inside him when he goes to sleep and doesn't leave a shirt on because who the frang needs to sleep in a shirt when it's not winter and they're not busy freezing their asses off.

Other stuff he says is sithspit. Things like, "I'm not hungry, you twerps, go eat your frangin' food," or "Ma will call back later. She's gonna be home, you'll see," or "I do *not* like him, okay, we're just friends." Some of it is just lying but it's nice lying and they all know it, and some of it is just his big brother being gross and in love or whatever. Cora is okay though, so when Ruka flops face down on the floor one day and groans, "Okay, okay, ay ay ay, I don't like him, I love him," and hands them each a cred for winning the bet, they're both pretty okay with it. Cora makes Ruka happier, and there's no sithspit in that. Even if the blue dummy does like Sephis and gives them money and won't even say ass, just butt.

And then sometimes there's the stuff that Noga doesn't always believe and sometimes does. It changes, but then, so does how many people got shot the week before and whether or not the hutball team sucks. It's usually not so bad.

When his big brother said it would be okay and then left the next morning before he even woke up, Noga didn't believe him.

And Ruka didn't come back.

70255501: Noga, Leda, it's Ruka

4513216341: i'm not supposed to answer comms i don't know go away wrong ident

70255501: no it's really me
good job saying what i told you to though
i'll prove it, ask me something only Ruka would know

4513216341: ...fine
my REAL big brother once ate underwear soup
true or not?

70255501: you know that's not a good way to ask a secret question like
i could just guess and have a good chance here
BUT
it was not underwear soup, you punk. it was just wash water

4513216341: nope, don't believe you
bye

70255501: NOGA stop it
you know it's me
im trying to talk to you

4513216341: that's not how i remember that going

70255501: oh my frang you punk
FINE
call it underwear soup
the washer unit broke and i couldn't afford the part to fix it for like a month so i was boiling water on the stove and washing our clothes that way
and all our underwear were all in one of the pots one time and it was after a triple shift and i was 17 AND TIRED THANK YOU so i like
went to get food and scooped out of the wrong pot and ate some of it
BUT i realized pretty quick

4513216341: you had TWO bowls before you noticed don't lie

70255501: oh my gods
shut up
we promised not to talk about this

4513216341: haha you ate underwear
i'm telling caramel

70255501: DO NOT TELL CORA
you dont even have his comm so
there
am I cool now? Ruka and not some stranger sleemo?

4513216341: okay fine

70255501: thank you

4513216341: thot you said you couldnt talk

70255501: thought. And yeah I thought so to but Turel and Satsi have these fancy consul comm channels or something they let me and Cor use. so I'm usin them for you guys to

4513216341: nice

70255501: yeah
better right?

4513216341: yeah

70255501: I missed you guys

4513216341: missed you to. were are you?

70255501: can't say. some planet
there's lots of people
these guys are crazy. like the clans are huge but then these people we're fighting are like
combine ALL the gangs and the cops and guards military stuff and like, times a hundred

4513216341: WWHAT
thats crazy

70255501: i know, right?

4513216341: like Captain Starburn and Doom Star's army?

70255501: issue 6 or 58?

4513216341: the one with the spiky alien guys that ate the buildings and remade them

70255501: that's 58

4513216341: that one

70255501: even worse than that

4513216341: don't get shot

70255501: I won't
I'm a Jedi now
kinda
like Doctor Dimension

4513216341: he was LAME

70255501: GASP
you take that back

4513216341: no.

70255501: he was the best, Silver Warrior was lame

4513216341: nO
HES the best

70255501: go ask Leda
I'm telling you
DD is way better than SW

4513216341: your wrong

70255501: ask
and you're

4513216341: fine
Leda says Fury Ears is best

70255501: WHAT

4513216341: I KNOW
ARE YOU SURE WERE BROTHERS?

70255501: I don't know anything anymore
like
Ears is soooooo lame
can't stand how she talks

4513216341: she looks dumb
her ears are dumb

70255501: Gungans just
they just look funny yknow
she's cool i guess like her fighting is okay
but

UGH

4513216341: can we give Leda back?

70255501: one, no
two, to who??!

4513216341: the hospital!

70255501: NOo that's not how this works
we can't give your brother back ay
what do i tell you
he's your little brother

4513216341: yeah i know but
ruKA
FURY EARS RUKA

70255501: I know i know
look just
we're family so we stick by each other yeah? no matter what ay

4513216341: fine. still stupid though.
whats Cora like?

70255501: Cor doesn't really know holoheroes stuff
i'll ask though

...

70255501: we got busy he had a mission thing
but
he says he likes Satele Shan and Nomi Sunrider and Ulic Qel-Droma
i copied those
think they were in our history holos?
doesn't read any heroes stuff
ill give him some when we get back

...

4513216341: don't get shot. and give him Silver warrior 1

70255501: I won't and no. lame.

4513216341: i'm sending him silver

70255501: not fair he'll read yours first just cause youre a kid

4513216341: sucker. i win

70255501: punk.

4513216341: we need codenames

70255501: what??
why?

4513216341: cause you said this channel was secret
so we should have codenames
plus i don't like just looking at the code and this is better
super secret

70255501: we don't need them though
it's secure and stuff. and we'd have more to worry about than our names if it wasn't

4513216341: but it would be cool!

70255501: fine
what's your codename?

4513216341: something awesome
like
SUPERVORNSEER
or uhm GREENSKYWALKER

70255501: i don't think that's how you spell vornsker

4513216341: ill look on the holonet later
geez
WHO CARES ABOUT SPELLING

70255501: ay now, no superspys or heroes are gonna be messing their names up
you wanna be a Sentinel spy too with me?

4513216341: duhyeah

70255501: then you gotta be smart. like really smart
way smarter than me
spies care about spelling. it's like, life or death to them

4513216341: that sounds dumb

70255501: totally true. I know i've met some here

4513216341: really??

70255501: really. me and Cor's masters are ones

4513216341: Turel and Satsi don't seem like spys

70255501: that's cause they're good spies, DUH

4513216341: ...whooha

70255501: yeah. so, look up whatever you want and then spell it right yeah?
and I'll be...something

4513216341: LET US PICK

70255501: fine. but only if you make sure you actually eat food
real food not just snacks
and your vegetables. even if they're mushy

4513216341: fine FINE

70255501: what's Leda say

4513216341: Leda says fine to

70255501: okay you can pick

...

4513216341: we picked

70255501: about time
what am i spyguys?

4513216341: your carmellbut

70255501: you're. and carmellbut?
??
like caramel butt?

4513216341: yeah that

70255501: why am I caramelbutt?

4513216341: cause Cora is Caramel and you like eating cora's so much

70255501: NOGA. don't say kriff like that you punk

4513216341: why not it's true

70255501: yeah but i don't want to hear it from *you*, Bogan
and quit watching so much holonet porn it's running up the data bill
there's holozines under my mattress and if you go to the speeder station on Jubilent Grand, Vekku will give you some
new ones if you say i told you could

4513216341: shut up

70255501: See? IT'S WEIRD twerp.
and you know, Cora doesn't taste like candy

4513216341: EW RUKA

70255501: or caramel neither. it's actually more like, HMM, youknow...

4513216341: ST
STOP
DONT TEL ME

70255501: that's what I thought, punk. Go to bed.

4513216341: you suck

70255501: that doesn't taste like candy either

4513216341: RUEKA1!

70255501: Night, spyguys.
Don't forget your names too.

4513216341: okay we talked and
your still caramelbutt because you suck
and i'm Green Nightburner and leda is Lady Lasereclipse

70255501: those are mouthfuls
but whatever you guys want
i'm calling you nightburn and laserlady for short
k?

4513216341: deal, Spy Butt

70255501: spies don't have spy as a title thatd be dumb
it'd give them away

4513216341: what then

70255501: say like, agent or something
Agent Nightburn

4513216341: agent BUTT

70255501: you're such twerps
did you eat your food

4513216341: yes
even the gross parts

70255501: good
do your homework
and SHOWER
no not showering you stinkbombs

4513216341: says THE BUTT

70255501: ugh
I've gotta go do stuff
over and out, Nightburn

4513216341: over and out, caramelButt

caramelbutt: you got me thinking about that yknow

When Leda was born. When you were to.

It wasn't at the hospital yknow. Both of you weren't. Ma had you at home and Leda outside a cantina. I had to help both times. Like I pretty much born Leda. Birthed? Look that up in your dictionary. Anyway, Ma was to sloshed to see straight, forget push. So I was practically squishing her stomach and pulling on his face and stuff. I yelled at her a lot.

You weren't as bad but still bad. It was gross. And screaming. Ma was all sitting like she was gonna shit herself. I thought she was gonna shit on me. But you came out instead. I mean there was shit to but you were the important part.

You were so kriffing slimey and smelly and it was WEIRD.

Not weird now yknow cause I was like 10 then but still yknow.

And the cord. Like. You were both still tied to INSIDE Ma.

Picture that.

Frang, right?

But you were both okay. Breathing and stuff. Shitting. Eating when I feed ya. Pretty much just like now yknow. Cept I taught you to talk.

Shoulda never done that

Punks

nightburn: no body shoulda tot you to talk so you couldn't say all that stupid gross mushy stuff eww ruka

caramelbutt: sweet dreams to you to, crybaby

nightburn: what's it like there?

caramelbutt: you remember when you were like eight and the Krayats moved up from Bacaat and Shannii's cousin and cousin's cousins got shot and Granny Jekl got shot and the whole half of East got shot and we had to go help fix Shannii's roof cause everybody else had got shot too and it was just her and her ma?

nightburn: yeah

caramelbutt: it's like that but worse. and all lasers. and in space. like, if somebody shoots through the ship hull then EVERYBODY is frakked

nightburn: Cool

caramelbutt: franging scary.

nightburn: Don't get shot

caramelbutt: I won't get shot

nightburn: Don't get lasered shot

caramelbutt: I won't. I promised

nightburn: okay. where's cora?

caramelbutt: sleeping. you can say hi tomorrow. where's Leda?

nightburn: reading over my shoulder. here.

nightburn: this is ladylasers

caramelbutt: hey, lady. you doing okay?
your brother actually being good?

nightburn: yeah

caramelbutt: okay. i love you. do you need anything
do you still have your medicine
I told nanny about your asthma and she said she would make sure the script got covered

nightburn: i'm okay. i have stuff. Nanny is nice mostly. she cooks a lot
not as good as you but i still like all of it its yummy
and she smells good and her hair is pretty even though she's old because its shiny
tell cora thank you please

caramelbutt: haha okay good. that's my polite lady. get some sleep okay

nightburn: okay. should i put noga back on?

caramelbutt: nah you two rest up. night

nightburn: night ruka

caramelbutt: i checked in with nanny and she said you two are only talking Mirialan in front of her. Stop it. What did I tell you? It's rude.

nightburn: who cares. She doesn't know what we're saying

caramelbutt: that's why it's rude. What if someone was only talking around you in some language you didn't understand.

nightburn: so,?

caramelbutt: so you'd feel real alone right. If you couldn't talk to nobody. If just me and Leda talked Mirialan over your head and I never taught you. That sucks

nightburn: but I know

caramelbutt: and she doesn't. Just try to think about things from her side Noga. Plus it's rude to talk about people behind there backs

nightburn: we're talking right in front of her

caramelbutt: if she doesn't know what you're saying and you're calling her name's to her face, it's mean. Are the Tenbriss boys mean rude jerks?

nightburn: no

caramelbutt: that's damn right so quit acting like it. You don't disrespect each other or me or Ma or Nanny or Corazon by being rude to the lady he was nice enough to make sure could take care of you when I was gone

nightburn: but she's not even doing that

caramelbutt: what do you mean ?

nightburn: she's not

caramelbutt: taking care of you???
Your being fed right? And taken to school? She stays with you guys?

nightburn: yeah I guess

caramelbutt: then what's wrong??
Did she lay hands on you???

nightburn: n0
No
Just
She does stuff wrong

caramelbutt: how?

nightburn: like makes lunch wrong
Leda won't eat it

caramelbutt: he said he was fine the other day. how can she make lunch wrong!? Noga you guys have eaten like way worse you know we gotta eat when we got food to eat at all

nightburn: no but
She
She does it wrong okay!! she lesves crusts on bred and gave me berries and put cheez in Leda's eggs.
CHEEZ. He can't eat cheez duh

caramelbutt: well I'll tell her THAT. But the other stuff, it's not that big a deal, Noga. You like berries.

nightburn: but she doesn't peel them
Like you do
So I can't eat them and Leda can't eat his brekfest and you have to come back
She's doing it wrong
So
You HAVE to come back.

caramelbutt: ...
Noga. Go get your brother.

nightburn: y

caramelbutt: because I wanna talk to both of you comeon already
I don't have long for a call

nightburn: okay.
...
We're here

caramelbutt: im comming

...

caramelbutt: okay. we good?

nightburn: yeah
okay. we're good

caramelbutt: good. be kind to nanny okay. I have to go. love you and bye, agents

nightburn: bye, agent

nightburn: hey ruka?

caramelbutt: yeah?

nightburn: did you kill anybody yet?

caramelbutt: ...
I dunno, Noga.

nightburn: how?

caramelbutt: they tell us not to think about it. Satsi tells me not to.

nightburn: what's caramel's teacher say?

caramelbutt: Turel? He says not to think about it too, but he's a franger, pretty sure he thinks about it all the time and never stops.

nightburn: did Cora kill anybody?

caramelbutt: I dunno, Noga. I don't think about it. Don't think so.

nightburn: how do you know?

caramelbutt: just think I'd know anyway. It's Cor

nightburn: but did you?

caramelbutt: maybe, okay? Yeah. Pretty sure. I dunno.

nightburn: Don't get shot

caramelbutt: I won't. Go to bed.

nightburn: It's morning

caramelbutt: go to school.

nightburn: Big bro?

caramelbutt: Yeah?

nightburn: i think it's okay if you shotted them just don't get shot, okay?

caramelbutt: I won't. Don't think about it, ay? Your 12, think about school and girls or boys and stuff.
Night, lil brother

nightburn: Night

caramelbutt: guys. Nanny said I need to talk to you. what's up

nightburn: nothing

caramelbutt: something
spill it, punks. what's wrong? anybody hurt? you fail a test? is ma okay?

nightburn: Ma's ma. she's out. fine probably.
nothing wrong we're fine school's fine

caramelbutt: Noga, Leda, you don't lie to me.
What's up?

nightburn: NOTHING
just some kids at school

caramelbutt: what about them?

nightburn: they were being mean. it's not a big deal okay

caramelbutt: what were they doing?

nightburn: stuff
jerk stuff
it's fine

caramelbutt: If you don't tell me what happened I'm gonna get it from Nanny and I don't wanna haev to do that.
don't make me go around you, guys you're better than that i taught you better

nightburn: we fot okay

caramelbutt: fot? wait faught??
you got in a fight?!

nightburn: not a big deal

caramelbutt: yes a big deal. what do you mean you faught. who what where why talk

nightburn: IT'S FINE

caramelbutt: This is not fine. you are in so much trouble. tell me what happened right now
did you hurt the others
are you hurt
are you in trouble do the cops know

nightburn: no no and no stop it's fine
they're stupid it's over we're FINE
stop yelling at me

caramelbutt: You got in a fight that's serious i need yu to understand that
you two are grounded until you tell me what happened yourselves
im going to tell nanny

nightburn: NO
THAT'S NOT FAIR
RUKA

caramelbutt: Then talk

nightburn: Noojdkr

caramelbutt: I'm messaging Nanny. You go to school you come home, have dinner then you go to your room and that's it. you own up when you do something, guys.

nightburn: STOP IT
being an ASS

caramelbutt: Watch your mouth youre not allowed to swear. Grounded and NO datapads except for homework or to talk to me. They go with Nanny.

nightburn: jfefbrmm; SUCK

"Hey, Green, c'mon. Off the pad, we gotta move."

A strong elbow jabbed him *hard* in the arm and Ruka winced. "Yeah, sorry, coach," the Mirialan said, looking up from his datapad and pushing his hair out of his eyes. "You say something?"

"Yeah, I said we gotta move. What's wrong?" Satsi questioned as she finished zipping up her combat suit and reached for one of her hundred-something holsters. "Yah been stuck on that thing all day."

Ruka sighed, jittering his knee, fingers tightening on the datapad. Finally, he set it down with another groan, feeling like he was cutting his own arm off. The phantom feeling was immediate, swirling in his gut and crawling under his skin. He shivered, then forced himself away, shoving off of the crate he sat on and approaching his Master.

"Noga and Leda. Some *sleemoes* at school are pickin' on them and they dunno what to do about it."

The Knight took his own gear as Satsi shoved it into his chest, nearly dropping the heavier magboots. He dropped it on the bench and started stripping, chucking his shirt and pants off.

"They get into a fight?"

"Noga's got a black eye. Won't tell me what happened, but the sitter's a miracle and dished."

"Bigger kids?"

"Teens."

"Tch, figures. I'm familiar." She finished clasping all her holsters, belts, and weapons in place, yanking her suit up and on over the rest. "Look. These kids botherin' 'em, yeah? Tell the boys that next time it happens, they just go right up to the biggest, baddest kid in the group, yeah, the *biggest*, and punch him right in the nose. Straight on, hard as they frakking can. It'll break, and it'll blind 'em. Hurts worse than anybody ain't had their nose broke knows."

"Yeah it does," Ruka grumbled. "But I don't want them fighting."

"Don't be stupid, Green. These kids messin' with them, that kark don't just stop. You gotta *make 'em*. If Noga and Leda beat up the baddest of the bunch, they'll all back off. S'how folks work, little banthafrakkers like them."

"No, Satsi," the Mirialan snapped, turning to her with a glare. She glared levelly right back. "I don't want them fighting, and I'm not gonna tell them to. They're not gonna be like me."

"Then what are they gonna do, huh? Get the shit kicked out of them all their lives? Turn the other cheek and frak? You want that for them?"

"*No!*" growled the Knight, electricity sparking along his fingertips as his eyes flashed gold.

A hand snapped out, lightning-fast, gloved palm stinging across his cheek. Satsi followed the slap by shoving him back into the lockers, stepping close.

"Don't lose your cool, Ruka," she murmured fiercely, nose to nose as he bared his teeth and hissed out a breath. He closed his eyes, sucking in deep through his nose. "You put that anger in the right place. You save it for all these frakkers trying to kill us. Be mad at them. They're the only thing 'tween you and your boys."

Ruka closed his eyes and growled again, but his fists uncurled. Satisfied, Satsi shifted back, away from him.

"Sorry," he spat, and she nodded when he looked again.

"I understand," she replied, and he knew she did. It was the biggest reason he listened to half of anything she said.

"I just...I don't want them to be like me, Satsi, and I don't want them hurt either. They don't fight, okay, *I* do, I'm supposed to be taking care of frangers like that messing with them, I— I should *be there.*"

"Well you're not, Ruka. You're here. And that frakking *hurts*. I know it. You think I wanna be here? I wanna be home holdin' Sammy, knowin' she's safe. But she ain't. None of us are. She's just a baby and these frakkers wanna kill her just for, fer what, who her mama and daddy is? Who she might be?" Satsi's face curled in a blood-chilling snarl. "I'm gonna kill them all. I'm gonna hunt them to the end of the galaxy and kill them all. Cause you know what? Ain't nobody going to hurt my daughter just 'cause she was born, not fer anything. And that goes for your brothers too. They might get powers like you did. Or they might just be in the way, like the rest o' Kias't an' the clans. Just by proxy."

"I *know*," Ruka spat raggedly, fingernails digging into his palms. "That's why—"

Satsi dropped his exosuit helmet into his hands, and he fumbled to catch it.

"That's why we're gonna do this run, and stop these frakkers, and go home. You can talk to Noga and Leda again when we get back, savvy? Can tell them to fight for themselves or...whatever you wanna tell them. But put it on your secondary thrusters for now and focus. Got me?"

"Yeah, coach."

"Good. C'mon. You're gonna be okay and so are they. We get in, we get out, you go make out with Cora when it's done. Kay?"

The Mirialan looked from the headgear to the datapad sitting there next to his bag, swallowed, and nodded. His violet eyes were hard when he glanced up again.

"Let's go."

nightburn: are you still mad
it's not our fault
they were being jerks

...

nightburn: ruka
seriously. they said you weren't coming back
your brother left you and kriff
like not even for war
just
like dad or something or to go do death sticks
they DESERVED it

...

nightburn: Leda hit first anyway
not my fault
i had to back hm up!
CAMELBUTT

...

nightburn: this isn't fair stop being mad
it's not our fault they were sleemoes

...

nightburn: I said THEY WERE SLEEMOES

...

nightburn: guess i'm allowde to swear now
awesome
kriff sleemo schutta frang kark frag poodoo banthabrain buckethead knife-ear
SLEEMOOOOO agent Butt

...

nightburn: are you ignoring me

Leda thinks your ignoring us
stop
okay?? stop!

...

nightburn: stop being mad please
we're sorry we got in a fight okay
just stop ignoring us

...

nightburn: YOUR A JERK

...

nightburn: ruka
rUka did you get shot?

...

nightburn: please dont be shot

"Erinos, get us out of here, now!" Satsi screeched as the shuttle rocked. The man in the cockpit, Rayze, gave an affirmation and yanked on his controls. Ruka didn't know much about the guy except that Satsi had specifically assigned a Force-sensitive pilot for the job.

"One of you," she'd told Ruka, poking him hard in the chest, "is worth ten of me. Every time. We gotta divvy that up best we can."

His Master yanking him up and shoving him into a seat snapped him back into the present as another *something* slammed into them, shuddering over their minimal shields. "...ra, give me the other detonator!" she was snapping.

Derra handed her a large box device with seven switches on one side and an eighth on the other. Satsi muttered to herself, looking around the cabin, and began flicking up some of the triggers.

"Where did Leroy go down?"

"Corridor Cresh-Nine, ma'am."

"Did you have eyes on T'pat?"

"Negative."

"Did anyone see T'pat?"

"...out the dock," Ruka finally croaked, glancing up. "She got hit right after we boarded."

"Frak. Okay. And Jen in the reactor room. We'll have to hope that's close enough. We out of range, Erinosa?!"

"We're clear, light 'em up!"

"Close enough for what?" the Mirialan asked, confused.

"When all else fails, Green, you use fire," the Consul said grimly, flicking a last switch and then slamming her finger on the largest one. A heartbeat passed, and then—

The shuttle rocked *sideways*, full on sideways, throwing gear across it when the dampeners couldn't compensate and nearly tearing Ruka's legs out of their joints as his body jolted towards the ceiling. The comms in the pilot console lit up with all sorts of chatter

"Woo, felt that! Eat it, you *shabuirs!* We got a good hit, Tameike."

"What was that?!" Ruka gasped, staring at his Master as she righted herself, hissing in pain and rolling her shoulder.

"That was the *Braga* getting its heart cut out, hon."

"But we didn't plant enough charges..."

"We were carrying a lot more than just the few packs, Ruka."

"Wha—" the Mirialan began, when his jaw went slack and his eyes widened. The suits. The suits being heavier than he'd thought. And she'd been checking *where* everybody had died, not who or, or...

"...took a line from that damn Sparks lady and her tugs, lined our gear with detonite charges. Any body left behind is mined."

"You...we...there's bombs in my suit?" Ruka whispered.

"They're not active right now, Green. Don't freak out."

"That...that's not the point, Satsi, holy KRIFF, what is *wrong* with you?" the Knight demanded, tearing out of his harness and stalking over to her. "YOU PUT BOMBS IN US AND DIDN'T EVEN SAY SO?"

"You didn't need to know. Would have only been useful if you were already dead, and what good does the info do you then?"

"Of course I need to know! I should know when I'm on a SUICIDE mission, that I'm a kriffing suicide bomber, for Bogan's sake!"

"It's not a suicide run, kid, not yet, it's a *backup*. If we all died before we could get those charges to the core, then at least we'd still cause some damage. The main objective was to get there and plant them, yeah, but the secondary one was to get as close as possible."

"This is kriffing insane. You're, you're *copying* these people?! What happened to all that kark about killing them all?! What happened to, to Sammy and Noga and Leda?! You're being LIKE THEM?! They're evil!"

"Cool it, Ruka. Whatever it takes means whatever it takes. This frak is effective. It'd be stupid to stick yer head up an exhaust port and pretend it's not. These Techofraks aren't *evil*, Green. That don't exist. People ain't onions or sugah or whatevah frakkin' metaphor you wanna use. They're bastards, with bastard outsides and bastard insides and they die bastards too. There's no good or bad guys here. There's just who gets to live at the end of it. And it's gonna be us. Now sit the frak down and get out of my face 'fore I *put you down*."

The Mirialan nearly snarled, "*Try me*." He nearly took a swing at her. But as he tightened his fist to do so, his glance skirted over the lightsaber still in his grip — he hadn't realized he was even still holding it — and its blue glow flashed in his mind, reminding him of equally blue skin and gold eyes and a heart too good for any galaxy.

Cora wouldn't want this...nagged his brain. He growled and turned around, stomping away, over to the back of the ship.

"Where do you think yer going?" snapped Satsi as he tore open his pack and pulled out his datapad. "Yo— you brought that with you?! What did I say? What do you think yer doing?!"

"I'm calling Cora!" shouted Ruka, and he couldn't stop his voice from breaking. "Bogan only knows what you're having HIM do! I'm telling him to get out before you blow him up!"

"Oh, for the love of— Cora is fine, Ruka. He's on a reserve support squad with the Odanite flank right now, he'll only go out if things go to shit."

"So you're throwing him right into trouble? GREAT! THAT MAKES IT ALL BETTER!"

"It's necessary, Ruka! So was this! You need to pull your head out of your ass and start listening to me before you get you or one of your teammates killed! You should have left Reeks there. You straight up disobeyed an order and jeopardized this whole thing!"

"Kriff off! You would have gone back without giving a single kriffin' damn about a job or anything if it was Uji!"

"Yer damn right, and I might have frakkin' sympathized if it was Cora! But it wasn't! You don't even have a REASON for being stupid, you're just acting like a damn fool. You can't save everyone, Ruka. This ain't puttin' food on the table, it ain't the street. This is war. People frakking die by hundreds and you've got to let them."

"NO!" the Mirialan yelled, not caring that he felt electricity running up and down his arms again. The datapad he held sparked and popped. "I can't just leave people behind, Satsi, not when there's a chance, that's not okay. Cora would—"

"—Blue don't know any better either."

"—Cora would *never* turn his back on people who needed him!" Ruka asserted, eyes burning and voice cracking again. He could see the Pantoran in the back of his head, saying exactly those words when he'd explained to Ruka why he *had* to follow the Jedi, *had* to join in this good fight. "And I won't either!"

"You damn frakkin' fool boys, the both of you idiots! Shadows! I can't deal with you right now."

At that, Satsi spun away and marched up to the cockpit, taking the copilot's seat now that it was empty. Its former occupant had died right in front of him. Their blood — he couldn't remember who it had been exactly — was on his boots.

Ruka slumped over, breathing hard, and looked at the datapad in his hands, blackened and cracked.

He wanted to cry.

Booted feet stepped over. The Mirialan glanced up through the sweaty strands sticking to his forehead. Reeks stared back at him. The Togruta gave him a bruised half-smile and clapped his shoulder, mumbling in thanks about seeing his own girls again, then retreated. Ruka belatedly, numbly nodded back.

Then he sat down where he was, on the floor, and waited, feeling the shuttle vibrate all through his bones as he stared unblinking at the stains and burns on his suit and imagined the feeling of blowing to bits.

nightburn: ruka

it's been forever are you still mad

we got in a fight again

they took Leda's shoes while we were at gym

i know it was them

they put them on the big sign by Grecka's

Nanny says my nose isn't broke but she made us go to some doctor with Cora's sister

she's really pretty by the way

i'm gonna ask her out when my face is less puffy

the doctor gave Leda ice cream cause he lost a tooth.

didn't make us pay or anything

tell Cora thank you okay

...

nightburn: ruka

you didn't get shot right?

you didn't leave us to right?

...

nightburn: please don't leave us we said we were REALLY SORRY okay really really sorry and we stopped talking mirialan with nanny and we ate all our veggytables even the seeds you KNOW i hate seeds

ruka please wer'e sorry

im sorry

come back

don't leave us please please pelase

...

nightburn: stop being mad please

we're sorry we got in a fight okay

just stop ignoring us

...

nightburn: if you left i hope you get shot. get shot dead. stupid.

...

nightburn: don't come back

we don't need yo anyway.

...

nightburn: Leda says i dindt mean it and he's right
for once
please just
please?
do'nt leav.e
you promised.

If he wasn't so used to working crazy-long shifts, Ruka would have fallen asleep standing up in the turbolift. As it was, he just felt himself drifting in and out while the ship hummed around him.

*Screams, smoke. Droids screamed different than people but they still screamed. And people screamed **bad** when they were suddenly in two halves. The smoke is choking. Everything rumbles and shakes.*

He jerked upright, shaking himself and slapping his cheek. The motion caused him to wince and spit a string of curses. Damn, but his arm *hurt* where that blaster bolt had melted his suit and his skin together.

Molten platisteel stunk just like any other plastic melting on the stove. Chemical-y and wrong. He struggled to cough around it and kept running.

The lift jolted to a halt and Ruka swore again, not out of shock or pain but for the way it made his stomach flip in unease. He had to remind himself that he was on the *Invicta II* and not the *Braga*, that he wasn't literally trapped in a tin can floating in a bunch of freezing empty nothing with barely anything between him and some really kriffing horrible death. One little poke through the hull and *woop*, dead. Suffocated, or exploded, or decompressed, or maybe sucked out by the pressure except he'd be bigger than the hole and it would just keep pulling on him until all his bones broke and he got squished through like a zit popping or something. This ship was intact. He was going back to his little crew cabin. He wasn't trying to blow it up without even knowing he was also *a frang-faced bomb*.

He was so not letting that go with Satsi, not at all. But he felt *leagues* better knowing that Cora was okay, after they'd actually gotten to talk. If Cora was okay, then everything would be alright.

"Don't look, ay ay? D-don't look. Just. Just close, close your eyes, ay, it'll be alright. We'll be alright. We'll be alright." He rocked the other man's body back and forth, trying to repress the urge to vomit. It wasn't working. But there wasn't time. The others were moving, and the blasters were still firing. Satsi screamed at him to move. Eyes stared back at him accusingly when he mumbled choked apologies and left Leroy on the deck to finish bleeding out by himself, alone.

The Mirialan stumbled out into the hall and accidentally shoulder-checked some technician waiting for the lift. She glared at him, but then her look turned sympathetic, and she waved off his apology as she hustled into the elevator, gone before he could even get half a word out. He was just too tired.

"Bed," Ruka muttered to himself, eyelids sagging. "Bed, and sleep."

Destination firmly in mind, the Knight trudged down the wide hallway, dodging other crew compliments all heading out for the next rotation or reporting for rest like he was. The numbered panels and letters emblazoned on the durasteel walls blurred in and out of focus, and he rubbed his eyes. Had he lost a contact somewhere? Probably. He dried squinting through one eye and a time and just made it worse on himself.

"Figure it out later," he huffed, turning left and shuffling down to Esk section where he'd been assigned and pushing into his single room. Thankfully, at least, he wasn't sharing quarters; a small gift from his Master.

"WE'RE NOT GONNA MAKE IT," T'pat had shouted right before some alien he didn't know the name of punched an arm through the back of her skull and out her helmet's face mask. His full arm. There was a blade extension built into the top, made of the same sleek metal as the rest of the cybernetic and buzzing like a vibroblade. It looked like an explosion of jelly or paint of something when he pulled back and swung for another of the infiltration team. Satsi came barreling over with lightsaber lit and sliced at the man, severing his freakish limb. It flopped and clanged to the floor right under Ruka's boot as he stretched out his hands and screamed, lightning flying from his fingertips. All he could see was was might have been a tooth or an eye lodged under a panel between cybernetic fingers.

"ABORT, ABORT!" Satsi was shoving him, and he was too busy running then to take in the smell of meat burning. They turned back and scrambled back the way they'd come, klaxons blaring all over. More streaks of plasma than he'd ever seen before chased after them, the solid line company of guards and guardian droids making a wall between them and the reactor proper. He ducked around the secondary blast doors of the reactor chamber just in time to feel something bite into his arm and hear air hissing briefly before the pain became blinding.

But Satsi yelled at him to run so he ran anyway.

Ruka didn't bother to kick off his shoes or any other bit of his remaining gear. He let the door slide shut, took the two steps of clearance between him and his cot, and flopped face-first onto it with an *oomph*. His arm and shoulder throbbed. His head throbbed. He closed his eyes.

But for however much his body ached, his mind didn't want to *shut the kriff up*.

"There you are! Bogan, why haven't you been answerin' me, ay? Ay?! Don't you kriffing know how worried I was about you!? Corazon!"

The Pantoran just stared at him with watery eyes, having slowly backed up with every word until he hit the edge of his own bunk. His face flushed and he looked down and away, hugging himself, and Ruka only felt angrier.

"Cora! Seriously, what the hell?! I have to come all the way over here in a kriffing cargo shuttle hopin' not to get shot down just to KNOW YOU'RE ALIVE? I've been trying to comm you for hours! I got in touch with Turel like, on my first try, and he said you weren't even on duty! Why you ignoring me, huh?"

His boyfriend still wasn't answering, just shrinking down further against the wall. He gestured weakly. "I'm...I'm sorry, angel, I didn't mean to—"

"Didn't mean to what? WORRY ME HALF TO DEATH?! I already got shot at today, highness, I don't need this frang too—"

"What!" the Pantoran gasped, rocketing to his feet. His hands fluttered all over the Mirialan. "Are you okay?! A-are you h-hurt, or...?"

"Now you care?" snapped Ruka, grinding his teeth. He was mad, and tired, and in pain, and everything was wrong. The mission had gone wrong and Satsi was wrong and he was wrong wrong wrong— "Don't tell me you SLEPT through all my kriffin' calls, we both know you're like a freaking gizka on sugar you sleep so light—"

"I saw someone die!" Cora broke in, and his voice broke too. Ruka balked as the Pantoran's lip wobbled violently and he suddenly let out a sob, half-turning away. "Okay?! I saw somebody die today and I, I just— I wasn't ignoring you, sweetie, no, honey, no, I wasn't, I didn't mean to, I just didn't wanna talk about it yet and I...she just, it was like her mouth and eyes went all black and empty and that's not supposed to happen and she was there and just gone! I was taking her vitals for the medics and I, I had just checked her oxygen levels and it was low but she was stable and then she was just— gone, and I—"

He was cut off as the Mirialan yanked him into a crushing hug, burying his face in the smaller man's pink hair and chanting apologies as his own eyes watered. "I...I'm sorry. Cor. Frang, I'm so sorry I...I didn't mean to yell at you, I'm an ass. I was just. I was so scared you were hurt and I— Gods I'm so sorry."

Corazon didn't say anything else. He clung onto Ruka and sobbed until he just about fell asleep standing there. The older boy put him in bed and petted his hair, murmuring lullabies in Mirialan and apologizing every other breath. The anger was gone. The sickness with himself was the only thing left.

Ruka groaned. His brain felt fuzzy and his eyeballs were pulsing behind his closed eyelids but he couldn't stop thinking about it; the last he didn't know how many hours — days? — had been too much of a frang up. The Mirialan slid his bruised hands under him, and pushed himself up, trying to pace the whole three-by-eight square feet of space and finding it as unsuccessful as the rest of it all had been.

He didn't know *how* it was possible to be numb, disappointed, and seethingly, bleakly angry all at the same time, but he was. The feeling was white in his chest. White blank page. White hot rage. White wide nothing. It made him sick. Sicker than that first time Cor had made a roast without setting the kitchen on fire. Like his guts were either going to dissolve or forcibly turn him inside out.

It made him hollow. It made him too tired to move and too restless to stay at the same time, until he was trapped screaming in his own skin, black nails digging into his arms and under his eye sockets and he didn't want anything so badly right then as he wanted to rip his kriffing face off. But it hurt, a lot, and because he was pathetic or stupid or sane and he wasn't exactly fond of that pain on top of everything else, his fingers fell away with nothing more than crescent-moon indents.

Part of him just wanted to curl up and cry in a corner. No, not a corner. In Cor's arms, under his blanket on his bed back at home on Kiast, whether or not he fussed about Ruka messing up the nicely tucked in corners at the bottom. But even as his legs and arms shook, he was too close to the edge of numb to do any of that, to scream or growl or tear or curl. Instead, he just stopped where he stood in the crook of a street corner, fell to his knees, and stared blankly with fiddling, fidgeting fingers. The thick ring on his middle finger was heavy over the gauze taped there. Gold, gem blue. Cor's grandfather's. He'd given it to *him*, despite his mom losing her shit over it, for their six month anniversary.

Ruka wasn't exactly one with a lot of experience in this serious sort of business, but even he'd thought something like that seemed a little...early.

"Are you...sure, Cor? I mean, this thing's kinda important."

"So are you," the Pantoran had asserted in the bright damn way he did everything, with bright gold eyes and a bright smile more confident and certain than the next freaking sunrise. *"And I want you to have it. Please, Ru?"*

He hadn't taken it off in the two years since, not even to shower, which seemed to please Cora more than it rustled the stick up his ass he had about 'properly' caring for one's possessions. He hadn't taken it off for a totally-suicide mission or for cutting people apart either, apparently.

Ruka stared down at the band, thumbing it in small circles that dragged at his skin, and felt something deep and ugly ignite in his chest.

Dammit, he thought. *Dammit. Dammit. Goddammit. GODS. DAMN. IT. THE FORCE TAKE YOU ALL!*

He didn't even realize he'd started shouting until someone banged on the wall and shouted back about shutting up. Ruka bit on his molars.

"Dammit," growled the young Mirialan, chambered fist punching into the floor as his head bowed and his eyes stung. It *hurt*, sending burning knives clamoring from his wound. The Force clamored in his skull, whispering as wicked as his thoughts did, but whispering something else entirely: promises, not pains. He clung to that, wrapped himself up in it like a cloak because he couldn't collapse into Cor's clean-smelling chest right then. Stupid war and stupid Satsi and these stupid people and Cora's stupid damned ideals and Ruka being so stupid stupid stupid—

He exhaled shakily, the freezing cold, molten tide of dark murmurs pooling in his ears and chest and sinking to steady his feet. His thumb found Cora's ring again, and he tried to picture the Pantoran laughing, his sleepy face, the way he looked at every pepper shaker like it was going to grow two nexu heads and bite him.

Angry was easy and he could breathe that. Cora was even easier. He was his reason for... For everything, maybe. Ruka took a few breaths, picturing him. Not crying, not in pain, not mourning, but happy. Dancing. Training. In the kitchen with Noga and Leda—

Noga and Leda.

"Oh, *frang, frang, frang,*" the Mirialan gasped to himself, standing bolt upright. The sudden motion made his head spin, vision fuzzing black, and he caught himself on the bed, falling onto it. When he felt like he could stand again, he reached for his issued footlocker and threw it open, retrieving the spare datapad there. He felt, briefly, so blindingly grateful for Satsi and her gift that he forgot how upset he'd been with her not moments before. The screen flicked to life. The number of unread messages mocked him. *Three hundred, just from the boys.*

He didn't stop to look to see if they were okay or not — Nanny Shiva would have contacted him if so — and just grabbed his comm and jammed his fingers down on the buttons, connecting to the right frequency. The connection picked up, and the device chimed repeatedly. Once. Twice. Three times.

"Pick up, kiddos," he mumbled, bouncing in place. "C'mon—"

It kept trying to connect. Four, five, six.

"Come on!"

The prompt to record a message answered him. Ruka swore.

"What the hell, guys, I—" his gaze snapped to his wrist, looking for his chrono, and he realized it wasn't there. Just the bandages on his arm. The medic had taken it when she was busy cutting his suit off.

He snatched up his datapad again, squinting at the screen, and then just sort of...sat still, his legs and spine and maybe brain giving out at last.

It was "midday" here in nearby Nancora orbit, meaning it was late, back on Kiast. They would be asleep. Hell, if he kept calling, he'd probably wake them up.

Ruka hadn't thought he could feel more like a giant piece of trash, but he did then.

The message receiver had timed out, so he commed again and directed it straight to recording instead of trying to call. When the tiny hololens flickered to life, he rushed to speak, tripping over his words.

"Hey, guys, look...I know I'm really, *really* late checking in, I'm *SO* sorry, guys, ay. But I'm okay, alright, me and Cor are okay. Not shot. Not dead. Right here. It had nothing to do with you two or us fighting, I swear to you on pappi's grave, okay, it didn't. I'm not mad, not ignoring you. Something just... something came up. We had a mission and got busy and stuff and I couldn't talk until after. That's all, okay? I'm not shot, I'm not going anywhere, and I will never NEVER leave you two. I'm never gonna leave you. I'm coming back. I promised. Okay? I love you guys."

Ruka sighed. Pushed his hair back and then dragged a hand down his face. Shook his head. "Ay, ay, ay...I'm *sorry*. It's just, it was a really bad couple of days, okay? And I didn't have time to stop and some other frang happened and I forgot and I just— I mean, I'm never going to forget you guys! You hear me? Never. But you know what I mean. I was distracted is all. I got mad, and I lost my temper, and the job was bad, and, and..." The words kept coming as his mouth ran away from him, everything pouring out, "Cora saw somebody die today. Yesterday? Whatever. He never had before. Like, I mean, his grandpappi when he was a kid but he doesn't remember so it doesn't count, you know? And it was really bad. He was really bad. And I was mad at him cause he wasn't talking to me and I got really worried and I thought he wanted to break up cause he was sick of me or disappointed or or something and I yelled at him and then he just started crying, he was crying so bad, and it was cause of the dead chick that he saw and watched and— I was such a jerk and Gods, guys, it hurt so bad seeing him like that, *SO BAD*. I couldn't stand it."

His voice began to crack. "...I saw people die too. I mean. You know. It wasn't like before or the other times with the gangs and stuff. It...I...I killed people today. I— I killed people. I...There was

this guy and then he was just in half, like, that's what lightsabers do they just, just cut people in half and he was just dead and I did that. And this other guy, like, I *fried him*. To death. Like, electric and stuff. I can do that. That's a thing and I did it and, and all my teammates still died except the *one*, the one and Satsi yelled at me for saving him like, what else was I supposed to DO, how do yuo just leave somebody like that when they're all dying? I thought I did *good*—" he sobbed, "that one thing was good but she yelled at me and then everything else with the bombs and these collective guys and I WAS WEARING A BOMB VEST. How frakked up is that? Like. KRIFFF!"

It was no use. The Mirialan couldn't get enough air, and when he tried, the gasps turned to hiccups, and the hiccups hurt, and he was crying, and he didn't want to be but it hurt so he did.

Ruka cried for a good few minutes, wiping his nose on his hand and his hand on his blanket, before he got enough control of himself to calm down. When he did, he croaked out a command, "Menu access. Delete recording. Confirm."

The comm beeped at him in affirmation, and he took a few, slow breaths. When he felt ready, he said, "New message," and waited for the chime. "Hey, guys. I know I'm really, *really* late checking in, I'm sorry. But I'm okay, I promise, and I'm right here. I'm not going anywhere. It had nothing to do with you two, I just had a mission and couldn't talk until after. That's all, okay? I'm not hurt or I'm going anywhere and I will never leave you two. I promised I'd be back soon and I mean it. Okay? I love you guys. Message me as soon as you get this. I'm gonna wait up. Bye."

The Mirialan sent the transmission, then set his comm down, clutched the datapad to his chest, curled up, and tried to plan all the desserts he could make to make up for being the biggest ass in the galaxy.

nightburn: RUKAYOUR OKANYYY

caramelbutt: Hey!
Noga ohb thank rbp
thnk gods
i'm okay im okay i promise im' not leaving you i promise

nightburn: we go t your message im
we're sorr
Leda says WE'RE happy
YOUR OKAY

caramelbutt: you're
and i'm okay it's okay i promise
I'm so so sorry I scared you guys

forgive me? i'll get you like, all the ice cream you want when i'm home, I promise
we'll go in the morning and you can have ice cream for breakfast and lunch and dinner and I won't say ANYTHING

nightburn: we want that every weekend
then MAYBE

caramelbutt: i said I was sorry, lil bro, not rich

nightburn: marry Cora and take his money

caramelbutt: OHmyGods
youcan'tjust
say kriff the lke nagfnrh
h6il

nightburn: haha
we like cora tho so it's okay

caramelbutt: don't give me a heart attack you brats

nightburn: OLD MAN.

caramelbutt: I'M 22

nightburn: oooold

caramelbutt: you're just babies

nightburn: are NOT

caramelbutt: are to

nightburn: not

caramelbutt: to! who is even teaching you this frang where did you get the idea to marry somebody for creds frang's sake

nightburn: holonet

caramelbutt: Noga Leda
please
just remember this for me okay
NOT EVERYTHING ON THE HOLONET IS RIGHT
in fact most of it's wrong
don't just do stuff cause it says so that's bad

nightburn: you tell us to do stuff cause you said so

caramelbutt: yeah but i'm you're big brother I get to and i'm not telling you stupid kriff like to take people's money oh my Bogan.
and when did you get so kriffing smug
who taught you to argue

nightburn: nanny has been making us practice some dumb stuff called rederik.

caramelbutt: what the hell is rederik??

nightburn: I dunno but she says it's for arguing
so hah
we win

caramelbutt: YOU DO NOT WIN
but hey
guess what

nightburn: what?

caramelbutt: I missed you guys so kriffing much
it's gonna be okay I promise. I promised I'd come back and I meant it. I'm never leaving you, okay?
I might go quiet for a little bit while I'm out here but i am NEVER leaving you
we're the Tenbriss boys we stick together ay?

nightburn: yeah
missed you to

caramelbutt: it's early there right? get to school
and about those kids messing with you?

nightburn: yeah?

caramelbutt: tell the office about it okay. i'm gonna have nanny go with you to report it.
we'll try talking first yeah? just. talking to them. I think that's what Cor would do
and if that doesn't work i'll kick their kriffing asses when i get back

nightburn: okay. promise?

caramelbutt: promise. I'll talk to you later

nightburn: okay
love you Ruka

caramelbutt: love you to. I feel so much better just taling to you. Miss you. Now go on. bye.
FOR NOW.

nightburn: bye talk to you later!

caramelbutt: Hey, guys, I know you're still in classes so don't you dare answer this but i don't want you to be scared again so just so you know i'm running out to another mission
there's a ship here that's hurt real bad and going down and we gotta get those people outta there
me and cora are in the hangar like RIGHT NOW i don't have time but
wanted you to know
love you guys lots talk tonight

caramelbutt: Noga, Leda, are you there? It's Corazon. I need to speak to you two as soon as you can, alright? I'm going to keep this line on all day and night so you can reach me at any time. All our best. -Ya-ir, Corazon

...

nightburn: your not supposed to sine your name Caramel, that's doing the spy stuff wrong

caramelbutt: Oh, my bad! I didn't mean to break the Sentinel Network protocols here. How should I sign my name?

nightburn: your supposed to use a spy name. ruka is alrely caramelbutt so if your caramel that'd just be dumb
we'll give you one later
Blue Dancer or something

caramelbutt: That sounds lovely! I would like that very much, boys, thank you kindly. We can do that later though, as you said. First I need to talk to both of you. Are you able to facilitate a call right now?

nightburn: fawhat?

caramelbutt: Er, take a call, that is. Can I call you?

nightburn: Mama is still sleeping and Nanny went to have her nap
just txt its cool

caramelbutt: This really isn't a conversation I wanted to have with the two of you over text, but I suppose if it is the best we can do...

nightburn: what's up
were's ruka
he said he had a thing with you but that was like
last week or something

caramelbutt: Well, that's what this is about, actually, boys. You see, there was a bit of an incident during our mission and, well...Ruka got a little hurt protecting me. But the doctors are optimistic for his prognosis! They cleared him of

critical condition this morning so he should be, uh, out of the woods, you see. It's very likely he'll recover if he does wake up.

I mean when. When he wakes up, of course. It will be alright, boys, but I wanted you to be aware, just to keep you updated.

nightburn: WHAT are you

what do you mean hurt did he get shot

what r u even talking abot whats pigois, whats critical mean whats wrong wth him CORA

caramelbutt: It's okay, it's okay, really. I'm sorry, boys, I'm...I'm not really very good at this, you'll have to forgive me. This is really Ru's department, haha...It's— he's going to be okay, they said so.

nightburn: Y R U LAFING it's not okay

is he shot CORANJ what happened

...

this is leda noga can't type rite now

can you tell us any thing please thank you cora

caramelbutt: I'm not laughing, I swear, dears, I...

I'm just trying to be positive for you, alright?

nightburn: ruka says that means acting happy

caramelbutt: That is somewhat correct, I suppose, yes. Being positive means being hopeful and happy.

nightburn: why are you acting cora

its okay if your sad

you love him to its okay

caramelbutt: ...

You're very wonderful, Leda, do you realize that? He did such an amazing job with you. I'm supposed to be the one comforting you.

nightburn: were the tenbriss boys. family means stick together no matter what. rite? and ruka loves you lots so your family to

caramelbutt: Thank you, Leda. And Noga too. Really.

nightburn: is he really gonna be okay?

caramelbutt: ...I don't know, honey.

I'm sorry. I don't know. He was really hurt in the explosion and I don't know, I'm so, so sorry, I—

...

We just have to have a little faith, okay? Like Ru always says in Mirialan. I'm praying for him since he can't right now. Do you want to too?

nightburn: okay.

caramelbutt: Patron mine, who illuminates all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return; I am one with thee. To all of me and all under the divine sun, to whom love commits me here; I am guardian to thee as thee are my guardian dear, ever this day at my side, to light and guard, rule and guide. Bless the gods and Ashla and Bogan.

nightburn: we said bless them
noga is coming back okay. can you please tell us how ruka is please.

caramelbutt: I will keep you updated every day, I promise. Even more if you like. Things are...stressful right now, but I will check in. If Ruka becomes stable enough, we are going to be sent home along with some of the other wounded and rotating troops.

nightburn: okay. thanks Cora.
Noga again. sorry.

caramelbutt: Oh sweetheart, you don't have to apologize to me at all. I am sorry I upset you. I'm not very good at this, I'm afraid.

nightburn: your fine
cora?

caramelbutt: Yes, Noga?

nightburn: stay with him for us okay
he is a way bigger butt when he's sick cause he won't tell no body.

caramelbutt: I'm familiar with the habit, yes. Don't worry. I'll even make sure no one tries to feed him chicken soup, okay? He's my boyfriend, I'll protect him, just like he did me.

nightburn: okay. talk soon?

caramelbutt: Of course. I am going to go back to sitting with him, but I will keep his comm with me, and I have mine too. I'll send you my code.

nightburn: bye cora
don't get shot
come back
he promised and he broke it so don't you to

caramelbutt: ...I'll try, boys. I'll try. We'll speak again soon. -Cora

...

<Connection Terminated>