

His body is ripped open and torn.

There's *so much blood*. He didn't know people had that much blood, how it all fit inside them, how they didn't just burst. But the body in his arms had burst; it burst and sprayed open and now all the insides seemed to be on the outside and *what*.

He couldn't register anything past the slip of his fingers and the bile choking his throat. He was trying to hold shredded pieces of skin closed but blood just kept leaking out of them and his hands kept slipping and sliding and scrambling to find purchase, accidentally and so easily slipping even more inside, feeling the strange, soft squish of intestines going cool. There was an arm missing, an *arm*. There were green *fingers* lying next to him on the durasteel. One had a ring falling off of it. The body he held was *missing an arm* and basically cut open *all over* and it kept making wet sucking noises and bleeding and he couldn't breathe.

"Open your eyes," he was saying, and why would he say that? Why would he want anyone else to see this? Oh, Ashla. But he couldn't stop saying it either, couldn't stop begging the bones and meat in his hold to turn back into the person he loved most in the world. "Open your eyes, please, open your eyes..."

A hand touched his gore-covered shoulder. Medics. Trying to get the body from him.

"He needs help," he says. "Help him!"

They look at him like they think he's crazy. It's a sad look. One that begs — don't make us say it. Come on, kid. And it ignites something in his chest, shakes the numbness from his legs.

"HELP HIM!" he snarls at them, a scream that tears his throat, and he doesn't care, doesn't pay any attention to the debris that rise to float around them or the way the air crackles. "He's still alive and you are going to save him! Get bacta! NOW."

It doesn't feel like it's him speaking but he knows, just like earlier, that there are words in a language and they are coming from his mouth. He clutches the body and sobs into its shoulder, rocking and whispering, "Open your eyes." The medics listen. They pry him away and do... Things. He feels numb again, all over this time, as soon as he's not holding the body. He needs to be holding the body.

They pick up the arm and the fingers too, so that, part of him thinks, is a good thing.

Distantly, he feels like he needs something to eat. A candy bar might be nice. Ruka would have had one in his belt pouches for him, because he was sweet like that. It was probably blown up now.

What a shame.

His feet moved and he followed. Got in the medevac, sat motionless while they got back and went to medical and put the body and the pieces together and then in a bacta tank because Turel told them to. He didn't know when Turel had gotten there and was, vaguely, somewhere, surprised to see him. Turel makes him sit down and get looked over, but lets him stay by the tank. Turel brings him something to drink and eat. He doesn't taste it or remember after.

He just leans against the glass and looks up at the body floating in the gooey violet liquid and whispers, "Please open your eyes. I need you, angel. Please."

He keeps saying it until unconsciousness claims him, at some point.

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"What are you thinking about, love? I can hear it from here, *ay*."

Cora shifted, feeling his cheek unstick from the bare skin warm beneath it. The Pantoran glanced up at his husband, giving a small smile of reassurance at the concerned expression on the Mirialan's face.

"The war," the young Jedi answered honestly, trailing the pads of his fingers over his lover's scarred skin. The particularly bad patch in his side, where his viscera had hung out. The slashes of his shredded arm and the pucker at his shoulder where it had needed to be reattached. His touch trailed up, to the stubby tatters that remained of a left ear, all but completely gone; at least he could hear out of it. He could move. Breathe. Laugh. Smile. Kiss Cora. He was alive and here. And he almost hadn't been.

"What about it?"

"You getting hurt."

Ruka's arms circled around him and tightened. The tattooed hand that had been buried snugly in pink locks pet lightly. He kissed his forehead.

"I'm right here, *mni ahmiaa*. We're okay."

"I know," murmured Cora, nuzzling closer to melt into the touch, to let himself feel safe and brave and loved. Ruka's grip just got tighter, and he shifted, pulling Cora over him so that every long line of their bare bodies could be pressed together. It wasn't sexual; they'd already satiated that urge not much earlier, between the rasp of tongue and gasps against skin. Here, they just

pressed close, and Ruka lifted his chin to kiss him, their open mouths shunting warmly together, all lazy movement and whispered promises. One of the hands sweeping down the Pantoran's back dragged the blankets up over them, over head, until that were swaddled in each other and a cozy, dark heat.

Cora had never told Ruka the exact details of what he'd seen that day, how bad it had been; he'd never wanted to or felt the need. Ruka knew enough, knew his nightmares and fears and loss, knew the Jedi had changed fundamentally. But so had Ruka. The memories the Mirialan had shared with him, on Dathomir...there was no doubt they'd saved each other, and both bore scars, seen or unseen.

"I can't let it go," Cora murmured onto the column of a hot throat. "I'm going to think of it."

"I know," muttered his husband. "I'm not asking you to, my love. Never will. I'm just here for you."

"I know." Cora kissed him again, sweet and slow. Ruka gladly pressed back, and if there were tears in between them, it was only a few, and they were just part of the small, shaken smiles they kissed back into life, just as precious.

"I love you. So much."

"I love you too, *mni ahmiaa*. So, so kriffing much."

They stayed close. Eventually, they fell asleep. Tangled together, one ending only where the other began. They weren't completely okay. Not anymore.

But together... Together, they were whole anyway.