

## Kamino lost, family found

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# **Kamino lost, family found**

by [Darth\\_Nil](#)

## Summary

Crosshair is left behind on Kamino, the Batch left, the Empire left but a new family returned for him.

## Notes

An extension of a short I wrote, where I get to indulge myself in some found family, where everyone's favourite angry noodle gets adopted by Stitches and Sawbones.

The rest of the Batch might show up, depending on if they play nice and Crosshair wants that.

## Kamino Lost

“Stitches, explain again why we’re going to Kamino?” He looked to Sawbones, who was in the co-pilot’s seat as they flew to Kamino.

“Because I picked up a distress call from a trooper.” He replied, “And my gut is telling me we have to go.” He hated trying to explain his gut feelings, even to Sawbones, they came and went of their own volition but he always tried to listen to them when they happened.

“It could be a trap cyar’ika.” Sawbones reached over and put a warm hand on his, which were gripping the steering yolk in a white-knuckle grip, “This is Kamino, we escaped Kamino... remember?”

“I remember...” He sighed, “But something is telling me we have to go...”

“We bail at the first sign of a trap, okay?” He asked and Stitches nodded, “Okay, exiting hyperspace.”

He felt his stomach hit the floor when he saw it, an Imperial Star Destroyer jumping to hyperspace, there was a clear patch... free from clouds but the sight of smoke greeted them as they broke atmosphere, “There... that’s a platform.” He said, pointing to a small platform out in the middle of the sea, far away from the smouldering ruins of what was Tipoca, “They destroyed it...”

“Tipoca... Tipoca is gone.” Sawbones said breathlessly, almost every clone despised Tipoca, despised Kamino... but it was their home, where they were decanted and raised, they defended it from the Separatists when they invaded but... they couldn’t save it from the Empire, “Wait, there’s someone on the platform!”

“What?” Stitches looked out Sawbones’ viewport as the swung around to come in for a landing, it was a person but they were lying on the ground of the sun-baked platform, “Get the kit ready, possible heatstroke and dehydration.” He said as they touched down and Sawbones nodded, they both moved quickly and Stitches made it down the ramp in record time before speed walking over to the person. He stopped short when he saw it was one of the enhanced clones, he’d taught this one to sew... “Crosshair...” He hadn’t failed to notice the boy’s black armour, “Hm.” He broke his hesitation and knelt down beside the young clone, who was muttering incoherently passed dry, chapped lips, his skin felt dry despite the sweat pouring down his face. “Okay. Up you get.” He hoisted the youth up and slung his thin arm around his shoulders, “Hyperthermia, not sure how bad.”

“We need to lower his body heat.” Sawbones said as the beep of the thermometer confirmed his beliefs, they quickly eased the young clone out of his armour, revealing sweat-soaked blacks that clung to a thin body, “Inserting cannula.” Sawbones said once they removed the blacks.

“Cold I.V bag.” He replied as he arrived back from the cold storage, he placed a cold pack on Crosshair’s chest, one under his neck and one on his forehead.

He stopped mid-motion when a thin hand grabbed his wrist, “W... who...?”

“You can ask questions later, right now we need to get your temperature down, do you understand trooper?” He met Crosshair’s gaze and after a second the boy nodded as he closed his eyes again, Stitches looked to Sawbones, “We need to get him back home.”

“Agreed, get us out of here, I’ll do this.” Sawbones nodded to him.

“Affirmative.” He moved to the cockpit, depending on how bad it was, if they didn’t get his temperature down then they didn’t have much time before Crosshair’s organs started failing, he was able to form words and understand what was being said to him, so that was a plus, “Jumping to hyperspace.” He called back as the star lights blurred together. He stood quickly once in hyperspace and went back to them, “Anything?”

“His temperature is dropping, not as fast as I would like though, I hooked up monitoring equipment and everything seems to be working, his heart rate is fast but that’s to be expected.” Sawbones explained as he came to stand beside him.

“Okay... that’s some good news.” He sighed, “He was wearing Imperial armour...”

“They left him behind?” Sawbones asked gently, then sighed also, “They don’t care about our kind.”

“No... but what about the rest of the enhanced clones?” He ran his hand through his hair, “There were four of them...”

“Left... b... behind...” Crosshair muttered as he shivered, “A...”

“Easy vod, you’re okay.” Sawbones said gently as he moved to smooth the lines of pain from the young man’s face, soft and gentle fingers making easy work of it, “You’re okay.” Stitches hadn’t failed to notice the horrific scar on the side of Crosshair’s head, he wasn’t sure what hit him but whoever treated it was useless at their job. He looked at the monitoring system, Crosshair’s temperature was slowly creeping back down from life threatening, his heart rate was still fast but that would stay an issue as long as the temperature was high, “There we go, you’re safe.” He looked to Sawbones again and noticed Crosshair had relaxed enough to slip into sleep.

“Glad to know that works on people other than me.” He smiled to his cyar’ika.

“It’s because I know it works on you that I can use it with confidence.” Sawbones chuckled, earning a chuckle from Stitches, “Should we try get in contact with the other enhanced?”

“I don’t know...” He sighed, “If they left him behind like he said they did, then it could be that they didn’t want him with them.”

“Oh... oh dear...” Sawbones looked so sad at the thought.

“Until he’s back on his feet, however, he will stay with us.” He put his hand on Sawbones’ shoulder, “We’ll help him cyar’ika.”

“Of course we will.” He replied with a smile, then looked back to Crosshair, “We should cover him, don’t want to swing him too far the other way.”

“I’ll go find one.” He nodded and kissed Sawbones’ forehead, “Keep an eye on him.”

“Of course!” Sawbones smiled warmly.

He moved to go find one of the blankets, he wasn’t sure if getting in contact with the rest of the Enhanced Clones was a good idea, Crosshair didn’t have anything with him when they arrived, no helmet, no weapon and no pack... that was either because he lost them in Tipoca or they were taken by the rest of his enhanced brothers, he bit his lip at the thought of them abandoning their brother to die on that platform. He didn’t know the circumstances leading up to it, maybe they thought the Empire would return for him? Not likely, given how the Empire was trying to phase out Clones and if the Empire was the one to destroy Tipoca, then they were intent on killing Crosshair along with it... “Here we are.” He arrived back and carefully wrapped the youth in the blanket.

“Not too tight cyar’ika, he still needs to breathe.” Sawbones chuckled as he loosened the blanket a little after Stitches was done but the mere action of what equated to swaddling Crosshair, seemed to calm his heartrate right down but it had that effect on a lot of clones to be fair, it simulated something they never got as beings grown in tubes and decanted, the warmth and hold of a mother.

He smiled a little, “Good to know that works still.” He said, watching as Crosshair’s other readings evened out as well, save his temperature but that would take time to come down.

“If it works on you, cyar’ika, it will work on anyone.” Sawbones chuckled as he nudged him.

“So I’m basically the base line for comfort methods?” He asked, “If it works on me then it works on everyone?”

“Exactly.” Sawbones smiled as he cupped Stitches’ cheek, “You need to shave.”

“I thought you liked the bush growing on my face.” He grinned.

“A bush? Cyar’ika, please, this is a hedge.” Sawbones tapped his cheek, “I’ll break out the hedge trimmers when we get back.”

“Fine.” He sighed dramatically, he wasn’t sure what led up to Crosshair’s abandonment, to him being left to die in the sun so rare to Kamino... but they would help him.

“Good, his temperature is getting to normal levels.” Sawbones looked to the equipment when it beeped at them.

“His breathing and heartrate have stabilized.” He said, examining each and every reading, “Once he’s stable and awake, we should get him to drink something.”

“Agreed.” Was the reply as Sawbones leaned over and put his hand against Crosshair’s forehead, then then reached under the blanket to check his chest, “He isn’t sweating as profusely, still a bit damp but the packs are helping.”

“Good.” Stitches sighed, he wasn’t in the danger zone anymore, now they just had to make it to Naboo and make sure there wasn’t any organ damage from the hyperthermia or dehydration, make sure the boy didn’t have a chip... but judging by the scar dominating the right side of his head?

It probably wasn’t there.

Hopefully.

## Questions

Crosshair didn't know where he was when he woke up but what he did know was that he wasn't on Kamino and he wasn't back with the fleet... his eyes shot open and he looked around the sun warmed room, "Welcome back to the land of the living." He looked quickly to the man beside the bed he was lying in, it was a reg but... "Keep staring and I will be forced to knock you out again." He averted his gaze quickly.

Wait a minute...

Why was he doing that? He wasn't afraid of this reg! Wasn't he? He shouldn't be afraid of this reg but he just couldn't stop himself from obeying, "Where am I?" He asked as he gently touched his head, trying to massage the dull pain there, "What...?"

"That would be the heat headache." The man replied, "Here." He blinked at the suddenly in his vision tumbler of water, "Sit up and drink this slowly." Crosshair looked at it but didn't chance looking at the Reg, he only hesitated for a brief second before slowly pulling himself into a seated position and taking the tumbler, "You are very lucky Crosshair, if we had been any later you would have died to organ failure, heat is no joke and is worse than cold in so many ways."

"Wait... how do you know my name?" He asked quickly and finally beat down his unwarranted fear of the man, his gaze landing on a reg with very non-regulation hair, a beard and a massive scar running at an angle across his face.

"Ah, I suppose all of us regs look the same to you, that makes sense." The man shrugged, "CT-8434, Stitches, was a medic on Kamino."

"S... Stitches?" He blinked, he had a vague memory of that name, he touched the scar on his head.

"Taught you how to sew when the bone in your leg was shattered into shrapnel, first time using the citadel if I remember correctly." The man, Stitches, said as he checked a datapad, "You haven't suffered any ill effects of your prolonged stint in direct sunlight on an unprotected slab of platform, well, no physical effects in any case."

"What... what do you mean?" Crosshair narrowed his eyes but averted them quickly when Stitches met his gaze with a stern frown.

"Well, as you told us, you were left behind." Stitches shrugged, "Speaking of which..." He heard a comm activate, "Sawbones, he's awake."

He was about to question the man but the door to the room opened and another reg entered, "Thank the maker, we were very worried about you Crosshair." The man looked and felt so much softer than Stitches, kinder... "Oh, where are my manners, I'm CT-1901, Sawbones." Sawbones held his hand out for Crosshair to shake.

“C... Crosshair.” He nodded and he shook the man’s hand.

“I do hope Stitches isn’t being to mean.” Sawbones smiled and Crosshair couldn’t stop the blush creeping onto his face, “Oh dear, cyar’ika I thought I told you not to bully the poor boy!”

“I did no such thing.” Stitches replied easily.

“What happened? Where am I? And... and why did you help me?” He finally managed to get his questions out, who were these regs and why did they help him?

“We are on Naboo, we found you on that platform on Kamino suffering from hyperthermia, if we hadn’t gotten to you when we did you might have died due to organ failure.” Sawbones replied gently and sat down on the side of the cot, “And no, we are not part of the Empire.”

“Then... why did you help me?” Crosshair was really confused now, “I...”

“Because you needed help.” Sawbones smiled, “And you deserve better than dying alone.”

“You... you don’t know me or...” He started to hiss but was cut off by Stitches.

“Actually we do.” The man replied, “So stow your hissing.”

“Easy cyar’ika.” Sawbones said gently, “We won’t force you to stay once you are back on your feet but all we ask is that if you do go back to the Empire, please don’t tell them about us.”

“Wait... you... won’t stop me?” He looked between the two of them.

“That wouldn’t be fair to you, though I would prefer it if you didn’t, given how they wilfully left you behind, they fired on Tipoca with you still inside, I just don’t think they wanted you back.” Sawbones sighed softly.

“I...” He didn’t know why his words were leaving him.

“We also thought about getting in contact with your enhanced brothers but I doubted you would want to do that.” Stitches said, “Seeing as they also left you behind.”

Crosshair looked between them again, “So, anything you feel is right for you, we will let you do it, as long as there is no threat to us.” Sawbones explained, “We are just trying to live our lives here, we aren’t fighting the Empire, my brothers are simple haulers now, we own this clinic, we are not an enemy to the Empire.”

“What would happen if I didn’t... go back to the Empire?” He asked carefully.

“Well, that depends.” Sawbones smiled, “You could do anything you like! Explore the galaxy, find some place to settle down, find a companion.”

“We have an extra room if you wish to stay here.” He looked to Stitches quickly, “We live a simple life here, if you are inclined to seek one.”



“Oh! I didn’t even think about our spare room!” Sawbones said excitedly, “It is an attic room, I hope you aren’t scared of heights.”

“I... I like heights.” He replied, he was a sniper, he sought the highest position possible in order to get the best shot... wait... why was he even thinking that? He was part of the Empire!

He...

“You don’t have to make a decision just yet, we want to keep you here for a little longer, just to make sure we didn’t miss anything detrimental to your continued health.” Sawbones’ hand appeared on Crosshair’s knee, it was kind and warm.

“We have a small enclosed garden here, if you so wish to take in the air.” Stitches said, “Sawbones is quite proud of it.”

“One of our nurses has quite the green thumb.” Sawbones chuckled gently, “You, cyar’ika, couldn’t grow rocks.”

“I’ll have you know, cyar’ika, my garden rock growing skills are quite good.” Stitches huffed.

“Why... do you call each other cyar’ika?” He asked, “Are you... together?”

“Not in the physical sense you’re probably thinking of.” He looked to Sawbones, “We don’t and have never wanted a physical relationship, we just want love and comfort and someone to grow old with, it’s what most people want, physical intimacy is just an added benefit.”

“O... oh.” He nodded.

“Don’t worry Crosshair, as long as you are here, you are safe and we will help make your stay as comfortable and kind as we can, okay?” He liked this Sawbones, he just radiated kind... almost parental energies? Was that a thing?

“Okay.” He nodded again.

“Now, are you hungry? You’re skin and bones!” Sawbones chuckled, “I’ve seen more meat on a butcher’s apron!”

“Which is either a bi-product of your mutation or you haven’t been eating in healthy amounts.” Stitches said, “Seeing as you were thin when I met you first, I would like to think it’s the former but seeing how bad the Empire is with supplying ample food rations to its troopers, it might be that either.” He felt the older clone’s gaze land on him and he suddenly felt naked, he probably wouldn’t feel this naked if he actually wasn’t wearing any clothes, “Or, you just haven’t been eating, seeing as the scar on your head would have come from a massive physical trauma, it might have knocked an already terrible eating habit into non-existence.”

“Can I ask what happened to your head?” Sawbones asked gently.

“Ion... engine.” He replied, should he tell them exactly why he was hit by the explosive, burning force of an ion exhaust?

“Oh dear, I can’t even imagine how painful that must have been.” Sawbones sounded so sad and he felt kind fingers touch the scar but he didn’t feel afraid or in danger, he looked to Sawbones and saw the devastated look on his face.

“Well, whoever treated it was completely incompetent.” Stitches didn’t mince his words apparently, “Anyways...” The man sighed, “Would you like some food? Unlike the military, we can provide actual food, with actual flavour.”

“Even Stitches eats it.” Sawbones chuckled.

“What?” He blinked and looked at Stitches.

“He has an eating disorder.” Sawbones explained, “We will forever be surprised you are standard clone size, cyar’ika.”

“I appear to be an anomaly apparently.” The other medic shrugged and Sawbones chuckled.

“We’ll bring you something and you can eat it when you feel hungry, how about that?” Sawbones asked him and he nodded slowly, he wasn’t sure about eating...

But he felt safe here.

Warm...?

## Garden talks

“He seems to be doing better.” Sawbones said to him as they looked to Crosshair, who was sitting on the bench in the enclosed garden.

“Should be safe enough to discharge him.” He looked to Sawbones, who smiled to him, “What?”

“Are we going to offer again?” He smiled to Stitches, “Let him stay with us? I talked to my brothers, they said that if he stays they can help get him work.”

“That’s nice of them.” Grim was as kind and as gentle as Sawbones but he looked exactly like his namesake, the hyper duo just wanted to help everyone, “How about you talk to him, he seems to have gravitated to you.” To be fair, Sawbones just exuded ‘Mom’ energies, so it was only natural for a personality such as Crosshair’s to do so.

“Why do you think he left his brothers?” Sawbones looked to him again, “Could it have been his chip activating?”

“Could be, could be why his brothers didn’t go back for him or take him with them when they left Kamino.” He sighed, looking out at Crosshair, who was staring up at the blossoms falling from the tree above him, “His chip is still in there but like mine, it was destroyed and is inactive. Probably got cooked by the ion blast, can’t even imagine how painful that must have been for him.” Stitches was at least unconscious when his face and head got hit, he was kept on sedatives and pain relievers for months afterwards so he didn’t feel it but if Crosshair remembered what hit him, then he was fully conscious for it... given the terrible job done in treating it, it probably still hurt him... while Stitches had gotten the best care possible, even he suffered from pains, especially in the cold or when there was thunder in the air.

“He needs to feel wanted, I think that’s why he chose to stay with the Empire, even after his chip was destroyed.” Sawbones said gently, “I think he misses his brothers and is trying to fill the void by being useful so he’s wanted by someone.”

“You always pick up on these things cyar’ika.” He smiled and took hold of Sawbones’ hand.

“I’m with you, remember?” He smiled in return, giving Stitches’ hand a squeeze.

“True.” Stitches looked to Crosshair again, he wasn’t sure if the boy would accept the offer but he was eating and sleeping despite their presence, so he at least felt comfortable enough with them to do that and judging by the gauntness of his features and bags under his eyes, he probably wasn’t doing much of either for a long while.

“It won’t hurt to ask, come, let’s go.” Sawbones started walking, keeping his hold of Stitches’ hand, all but forcing him to go along with him, he hung back while Sawbones went over to Crosshair, “May I take a seat beside you?” Crosshair looked to him, then to Stitches before nodding, “Have you thought any about what your plans are once you are released?”

“I... don’t know.” Crosshair sighed and wrapped his thin arms around himself, he was defending himself, “I...”

“It’s okay, it’s a difficult choice to make but I’m sure you’ll do what feels right for you.” Sawbones smiled gently, his hand resting on Crosshair’s thin shoulder, “But know that you have more options than you think.”

“Do you really think the Empire doesn’t want me? I’ve been more than useful to them.” Crosshair hissed, he was retreating into a defensive position, “They...”

“I didn’t ask what the Empire thinks, I asked you what you want.” Sawbones replied, he was so much better at this than Stitches was, he was kind and warm and if Stitches was any other man, he would have blushed at his love for the man but he wasn’t... so he didn’t.

“The Empire will replace you very easily, you are expendable to them, like each and every clone was during the war.” He said, “They want to get rid of clones so they can recruit nat-borns for cheap, so if they think you died on Kamino, there is a guarantee you’ve already been replaced.”

“And what do you want from me?” The boy was getting aggressive, well, more ready to throw hands to defend himself than actively aggressive.

“What’s best for you.” Sawbones didn’t back down, he was used to Stitches’ version of this, he was the one to help him back from the throws of his episodes, “You are scared and sad and feeling like the Galaxy is out for your blood, that there is no one who will love you and defend you, your family left you behind and I get the feeling you were trying to fill that void with the Empire. Am I close?” Crosshair looked between them quickly, as if looking for something, “Batchmates are supposed to love and protect each other, right?”

“But they... don’t...” Crosshair finally found his words again.

“You won’t find it in the Empire either, they don’t care.” Sawbones replied softly.

“There... was one guy... a clone...” The boy looked up at the blossoms, “When I was hit by the engine, he was the one to find me, called for the medic and stayed with me, I think he was the first person to show me any form of comfort in so long... then there was Captain Howzer... he...”

“I remember Howzer, a good man.” Stitches said, “He wanted to keep each and every person safe.”

“I could have killed him... but he spoke and I couldn’t help but listen...” Crosshair buried his face in his hands.

“You’re a good man Crosshair, you are just lost and lonely.” Sawbones massaged Crosshair’s thin back, “You were abandoned by your brothers and are looking to fill that empty space in your heart.” Crosshair looked to him, “We can help you.”

“What?” Crosshair looked so confused by what Sawbones was saying.

“We can be your family Crosshair.”

“If you’ll let us.”

## New home

Crosshair wasn't sure of why he decided to at least try and live on Naboo with the two medics and Sawbones' brothers, he was a soldier of the Empire, he was bred for combat and war and he knew he was all of this but he just... decided to stay, for some reason, "Here we are!" Sawbones smiled as they arrived a house, it was reasonably sized, had a back and front garden, the back garden was overlooking the river and Crosshair could hear ducks and other birds, "I do apologise for the duck noises, I hope they don't bother you."

"It's fine." He replied with a shrug as they entered through the front door.

"My brothers are still at work, so you can get settled in before we have introductions." Sawbones smiled, "Stitches will be home around eight tonight, he works double shift a lot."

"Oh." He frowned a little.

"Come, let me show you to your new room!" The medic gently took hold of his hand and guided him up the stairs, "It's the attic room but it gets a lot of sunlight through the skylights, it's quite sizable and is warm during the wintertime."

"Why... are you letting me stay?" He asked as they walked down the hall.

"I told you Crosshair." Sawbones smiled warmly, "You are lost and lonely, the Empire won't give you the companionship you so desperately want. I doubt your siblings will take you back either, so why not stay with us? We have the room, we have a good family dynamic and if we can deal with Stitches' personality, then we can handle yours!" The medic chuckled.

"He's... not from your batch?" He blinked in confusion as he stopped walking.

"Oh no, he's much older than we are." Was the reply, "He's been an honorary member of our family by virtue of being my cyar'ika."

"What happened to his family? Why isn't he with them?" He narrowed his eyes, for someone preaching about brotherhood, Stitches didn't seem to have brothers, especially now that Crosshair knew that Stitches wasn't officially a member of Sawbones' batch.

"He lost them, a few months into the war." Sawbones looked so sad when he said that, "That's why he wants you to find a family, because he knows what it's like to not have one."

Oh...

"Here, this door here leads up to the attic room." Sawbones was quick to change the subject, obviously it wasn't a topic that was discussed very often, "Once you're settled in and we've done the introductions, how about we go get you some new things, I doubt wearing your Imperial armour will win you any friends here. Plus, you have nothing other than that to your name!"

“You don’t... have to do that.” He looked at his feet.

“Of course we don’t but we want to do it.” He looked to the medic again, who wore a warm smile on his face once again, “Brothers help each other and you, my dear vod’ika, are part of our family now.” Crosshair somehow managed to squash down his emotions, “Come, let’s go see the room.” They started walking again and Sawbones opened the door to reveal a set of stairs leading further up, “We never really furnished it properly but it’s got a wonderful bed, the lights are bright, there is a wardrobe and desk, a bedside table and if you stand up on your tippy-toes, you can see out the skylights and see the river.” Crosshair looked around, it wasn’t the biggest room in the galaxy but it was spacious... and cosy, “There is a lot of wall space, if you’re like Madcap and Speed, who put up posters and other such things.” He walked over to the skylights and he could, in fact, see the river when he stood on his tip toes, they were also big enough that he could get onto the roof if he wanted to, “I’ll let you get settled, I’ll be downstairs in the kitchen, would you like some tea?”

“Tea?” He looked to the other man.

“We’re trying to get Stitches to cut down on his caf intake, as Grand Master Yoda wisely pointed out, it can make him very irritated.” Sawbones chuckled, “We also have some hot cocoa if you’d prefer.”

“I...” It hurt to squash his emotions down this time, Feral loved hot cocoa...

“Come here vod’ika.” He was suddenly enveloped by warm arms, “It’s okay, you’re safe here, you can cry.” He shouldn’t cry! He was a hardened soldier of both the Republic and the Empire! He didn’t cry... so why was he? He tightened his hold on the other man and buried his face in the medic’s shoulder, “Shh, it’s okay vod’ika.” He wasn’t sure of the last time anyone had shown this level of warmth to him... Feral... he was always trying to comfort him...

“I... I miss my brothers...” He said eventually.

“And that’s allowed, they were your family, you grew up together and fought together and now you don’t have them, you’ve lost two structures in such a short amount of time.” Sawbones replied.

“Why didn’t they fight for me? Come back for me? They came back for... for Omega and Hunter... but never me...” He hiccupped.

“I don’t know.” Sawbones sighed a little as he massaged Crosshair’s back, “I honestly don’t but know that we will fight for you and if need be, we will come back for you, as we would for any of our brothers.”

They stood in silence for a bit before the sound of the front door opening echoed up the house, “Sawbones! We’re back!” He didn’t know who that was but it wasn’t Stitches, the owner didn’t sound as annoyed by everything.

“Coming!” Sawbones called down, “Come vod’ika and before you say anything, yes, it’s okay to be annoyed with Speedy and Madcap. They’re loud but very loving.” He nodded and

followed Sawbones.

He liked it here...

It was warm.

And kind.



# Shopping

“What do you think? I think it would look good on you.” Sawbones smiled to him as they perused clothing, “Or are you going for dark and brooding?”

“I’ve... worn black for a long time now, I just feel... more comfortable in it.” He replied in a small voice.

“That’s perfectly fine, we’ll be going for practical over style anyways... oh!” The medic stopped, “This would look good on Stitches.”

“You buy his clothes too?” He asked as he looked through the clothes racks.

“Not always but if I didn’t at least buy some things, then he’d have one, maybe two outfits... tops.” Sawbones chuckled, “That man is insufferable sometimes.”

“You said his personality can be... bad...” He looked to Sawbones again, “But you still stay by him?”

“Of course!” Sawbones looked a little offended by that question, then seemed to draw some conclusions, “Oh... oh dear... I’m sorry Crosshair.” His gentle hand appeared on Crosshair’s shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze, “Don’t worry, we’ll stand beside you too.” He looked to Sawbones again and saw a gentle smile on his features.

“M...mm.” He nodded.

“Now, let’s get you some clothes, then we can have a look around to see if you want anything to decorate your room with.” Sawbones gave his shoulder a squeeze one more time before they started searching through the racks of clothes, there were so many fabrics and textures alongside the designs and colours, it was hard to pick some stuff out, if he was going to be looking for work then he needed clothes that could handle labour but he also wanted something with style... “Ready to go?” Sawbones asked once he had a reasonable selection of clothing items.

“Yeah.” He nodded and followed the medic, who chatted happily with the store owner as they rung up the items, he looked out at the rest of the shopping district, he wasn’t sure of anything but this wasn’t the worst thing in the galaxy, no one really paid them any attention as they walked through the crowds... too caught up in their own lives to really pay attention to someone who looked like Crosshair did.

He stopped walking when he saw a small child leaving a small shop with a plush in their arms, “Crosshair?” Sawbones’ hand appeared on his shoulder, he wasn’t sure of why he suddenly missed being slapped in the face by a tooka plush but he knew why he missed hugging a bantha... “Do you want to get something?” He blinked and looked to the medic, who wore a kind and knowing smile.

“I...” He wasn’t sure he could stand the shot to his masculine pride by buying a toy, he was a soldier of the Empire! He was bred to be strong, proud and above such things!

“What do you want? They have banthas, nexu, tauntauns and a selection of other dolls.” Sawbones guided him into the small store, “Though if you get a tauntaun, it will have to fight Stitches’ one.”

“He has one?” He blinked, the big tough medic had a plushie tauntaun?

“Oh yes.” Sawbones’ smile turned sad, “His brothers had bought it for his decanting day but they died the day before his decanting day and... never got to celebrate, it’s one of the only things he has left of them.”

“O... oh.” He replied, “Two... two of my brothers have plushies.”

“Oh?” The medic asked.

“Yeah.” He sighed and picked up a nexu plush, “One of them said I was like a nexu protecting a kit, when he was being bullied by the regs...”

“Well, how about we get you a kit to protect?” He ran his thumb over the soft teeth in the things mouth, he noticed that this particular plush was missing an eye, probably caused by a child being too enthusiastic, “Oh dear.” Sawbones said when he noticed the damage, “She needs a lot of protecting it seems.”

“She does.” He nodded, he wondered what his family was doing, how were they dealing with leaving him behind? He was going to say he probably wasn’t missed but he knew that Omega, his newly discovered sister, and Feral had been devastated that he wasn’t welcomed back by the others but neither Hunter or Echo would budge off their high horses and they were forced to accept that he wasn’t coming with them. He wasn’t sure how well that went after they left again, would Hunter let his fear and anger boil over so he lashed out at the two of them? He hoped not...

“Come, let’s head back, dinner should be ready for us.” Sawbones drew him out of his head with a soft voice and a kind hand.

“Just in time.” Grim said as they entered the house, “Stitches says he’s going to be late, problematic pregnancy that needs a C-section.”

“Oh dear! Is it Anna?” The medic asked quickly.

“No idea.” The Sergeant shrugged, “Hope you brought an appetite Crosshair, we’ve made enough food to feed the entire GAR.”

“Go bring your stuff up to your room and get cleaned up for dinner.” Sawbones handed him the bag of his new clothes.

“Okay.” He nodded and walked up to his room, he opened the wardrobe and set about hanging his stuff up, he wasn’t sure of why he was doing it because he’d never done it with his blacks... but this just seemed like a better idea with actual clothes. He’d just finished

when he spotted something on the small bedside table, it was a datapad... he picked it up and turned it on, a note was there to greet him...

>This came in while you were out, doesn't say who it's from but it's for you.<

He frowned a little as he sat down on the bed, pulling up the file marked "Important", it was an audio file but wasn't overly long... "Crosshair, Hunter doesn't... he doesn't want us to do this so we need to be... quick."

Feral.

## You weren't loyal to me

“Crosshair, Hunter doesn't... he doesn't want us to do this so we need to be... quick.” Feral's voice was a whisper.

“I found the frequency of your comm, we don't know where you are... but we can get this to you.” Omega said, also in a whisper.

“We're sorry that we couldn't bring you with us... I wanted to... to stay with you but Hunter... made me leave...” Of course Hunter would do that, “We...” There was a pause as though the two had heard something.

“We need to finish up.” Omega said quickly, “I'm sorry Crosshair.”

“I love you... ori'vod... never forget that...” Feral said quickly, “If... if I could... I'd find you...”

“What are you two doing...” The recording stopped just as Hunter's voice appeared, he hoped beyond anything that they didn't get in trouble...

“Crosshair?” He blinked and looked at the door, to where Sawbones stood, “Are you alright?”

He blinked again and realised he was crying, “I...” He tried to talk but he lost his words, so he settled for wiping his eyes.

“Was that your brother?” Sawbones asked as he sat down beside him.

“Yeah... the... the one who was bullied a lot.” He replied, he swore that if Hunter even considered laying a hand on either Feral or Omega, then he'd better pray that Crosshair didn't find him.

“I'm glad that he still loves you.” Sawbones gave his shoulder a gentle squeeze, “And the girl, who's she?”

“Omega... she's... I think she's a clone too.” He sighed as he touched the scar on his head, “I'm not sure though...”

“I see... well, how about something to eat and you can tell us about your brother and sister.” He looked to Sawbones, who wore that kind and understanding smile... he nodded, “Madcap has gone a little crazy with the amount of food he prepared, he intends to pamper you with food beyond your wildest dreams!” He stood with the medic, who was chuckling, “He doesn't get to cook for non-family members that often.”

“Oh...” He didn't know what to say to that, most food outside military rations were beyond what he imagined food to be like, “I'm not sure how much food I can actually ingest...”

“Don’t worry about that, as long as you eat, then that will be more than enough for him, besides he will probably keep some in the fridge for Stitches to have when he gets home.” Sawbones smiled as they made their way back downstairs, towards the smell of food that was like a neon sign saying happiness but he wasn’t good about eating, even as a cadet, he got full faster than any of his brothers but was constantly snacking on small things, that continued into adulthood but after the ion engine...?

He hadn’t been eating or sleeping that well or that often since then, “There you are!” He looked to Madcap, who was just serving up, “Stitches isn’t here, so you get to sit in his seat!”

“I... what?” He blinked.

“Don’t worry, there’s no set seating positions, he’s just playing with you.” Grim said, “Just don’t spill anything on the chairs or Stitches will have a hissy fit.”

“What?” He looked at each of them in confusion.

“My cyar’ika is a man of many issues.” Sawbones replied with a sigh, then chuckled, “But he won’t throw a hissy fit, he’ll just sit there and judge you until you clean it up yourself.”

“And that is so much worse!” Speedy groaned in dismay.

“Who was the message from?” Grim asked once they were all seated and started eating.

“From... one of my brothers... and my sister.” He managed to squash down his emotions and panic.

“Sister?” Speedy looked confused, “Like... a sister sister or a nat-born who was adopted into the group?”

“She’s a clone, at least that’s what I was told.” He sighed.

“Wait... they made girl clones?” Madcap asked.

“Probably only her, given the Kaminoans penchant for single use experiments.” Sawbones sighed through his nose, “Especially when it came to their... enhanced projects.”

“I... don’t really know her, I was under the control of my chip when we met her.” He looked at the food in front of him, “Feral said I smelled wrong.”

“Feral?” Sawbones asked, his voice a little angry, “Your brother is called Feral?”

“Yeah... his first squad hated him and called him that as a slur.” He sighed, “But he was starting to associate it with us and kindness... then my chip activated and I said it as a slur again.”

“Oh... oh dear.” Sawbones sounded so sad.

He sighed as he pushed around his food, “He said he missed me and loved me but that Hunter didn’t want them to get in contact... Echo probably didn’t help that either, Omega must be

good with technology because I can guarantee Tech did not help them track my comm..." He hissed.

"I am not. Understanding you does not mean that I agree with you." Tech's monotone delivery made his skin crawl, there was nothing that indicated they had been brothers once, even Wrecker pushed him away... Wrecker!

They had jokes, had little competitions and tried to one up each other but he'd shot any chance of repairing their relationship the moment he opened his mouth and let his snark out... "We still would have taken ya." Wrecker had said... but they wouldn't have, they never came back for him!

"Easy Crosshair, you're okay." A hand appeared on his back and he realised he had tears of anger in his eyes.

"They didn't fight for me... they fought for Wrecker even though his chip activated! They kept coming back for Hunter and Omega... so why couldn't they come... back for me?" He hid his face in his hands, trying not to cry into his food, trying to hide his emotions from this group of regs who just wanted to help him...

"We're loyal to each other, not some Empire."

"You weren't loyal to me."

## Rooftop talk

“Credit for your thoughts?” Crosshair jumped when a voice appeared at the skylight, he looked away from the stars and saw it was Stitches, “Should have guessed you’d find a way out here, given your sniper design.”

“I... needed air.” He sighed in return.

“Hm. Yes, Sawbones informed me of the message you received from your brother and sister, I imagine you are worried about them?” Stitches appeared on the roof beside him.

“Feral can’t stand up for himself, he can’t say what he wants to because of how he was designed.” Crosshair fidgeted with the moss growing in the gaps of the roof shingles, “I don’t know about Omega... I know Hunter though. He gets aggressive when he’s scared or upset or angry...”

“Ah. You think he’ll go for the two of them if he found out they contacted you?” Stitches was good at this apparently but Crosshair lost his words, merely nodding slowly, “I see.”

“Me and Echo are the only ones who could stand against Hunter when he gets like that.” He sighed, “Wrecker just... stood there and took it because he could very easily kill Hunter if they got into a fight... Tech hates confrontation so he just shuts down and tries to logic his way out of it... I thought Hunter had gotten better since we met Feral. Because Feral just... he can’t stand up for himself and Hunter started to see how bad he could get when faced with someone like Feral... but I guess the order going out changed them, not the way the chip makes you change but...”

“Yes, a lot had to change for clones when the order went out, I saw a lot of carriage on Kamino, brothers killing Generals... killing any brother who wasn’t affected by the chip.” It was Stitches’ turn to sigh.

“Why didn’t you turn?” He looked to the man again.

“Because my chip was destroyed very early on, it’s still in my head but it’s inactive, like yours is.” Crosshair blinked, “You thought it was out?”

“They... they said it was.” He whispered as air left him.

“Nope, it’s still there, just cooked and inactive, that is probably why you still get headaches.” Stitches shrugged.

“Do you get headaches?” He asked gently.

“No. I get other pains but that is because of other injuries.” The medic looked to the stars, “Your brother will be okay, if it gets bad, he’ll probably try to find you.”

“He... doesn’t know where I am.” Crosshair sighed again.

“If they found your signal, then they at least know the general system you’re in.” Stitches replied, “And seeing as Naboo is the biggest trade hub in the system, it will probably be the first place he looks.”

“I don’t know...” He fidgeted with his pants leg, Feral wasn’t one to flee, he would hide and just... wait for his punishment, whatever that was. He wasn’t sure about Omega either, he didn’t know her personality and how she reacted to situations like that, “I... I loved my brothers, we didn’t always get along, kark, sometimes we hated each other’s guts! But we only had each other, Feral didn’t have anyone until he joined us, so we had to stick together because if we didn’t have each other... then who did we have?”

Stitches didn’t reply for a moment, obviously thinking on his words, “We are social creatures Crosshair, we need others, we need a family to feel safe and when it’s taken away, when you can’t find anywhere to fit in... that takes a massive toll on one’s emotional wellbeing. Take it from me that that pain is more unbearable than any physical pain one can experience. Which is why I am glad you chose to stay with us, rather than go back to the cold embrace of the Empire.” Crosshair looked to him again, searching the older clone’s features for anything that either confirmed or denied his words, “Snipers are solitary people but even they need a safe place to return too.”

“What about war criminals?” He swallowed down his emotions.

“Do they feel guilt for their crimes? Are they seeking forgiveness for those crimes? Do they beg for the people they hurt to at least allow them to try and absolve them of their guilt?” Stitches met his gaze, “Because if yes, then they deserve safety to work towards repenting for those crimes.” Crosshair had to look away, casting his eyes to the water of the river below, “If you trust nothing else in this life, trust that we will be there for you and help you on your road to stability once again.”

“T... thank you Stitches.” He replied softly.

“Let’s get back inside, you’ll need sleep if you are to start job hunting.” Stitches said, “Besides, it is quite nippy up here.”

“Okay.” He nodded and followed after the medic, climbing back in the skylight, into the warm home that was now his apparent sanctuary.

“What did you name her?” He blinked and looked to Stitches, who motioned to the nexu plush sitting on Crosshair’s bed.

“Uh... Rose.” He replied, a little embarrassed by the confession but he liked the roses in the garden.

“A good name.” Stitches replied easily, “Get some sleep Crosshair, you need it.”

“Yes sir.” He nodded in reply.

“No need to call me sir, while I used to gruel the cadets and younger troopers for not calling me sir, we are not in the military anymore, so there is little point in continuing that line of



thought.” Stitches sighed through his nose, “I will be up for a while yet, so if you need me, just come downstairs, okay?”

“Okay.” He wasn’t sure why Stitches was awake at two in the morning, when everyone else was dead asleep in their beds. The medic nodded to him and started to leave the room, “Stitches?” He asked quickly, making the older clone pause mid-motion of closing the door, “Thank you.”

“Think nothing of it.”

## Families support each other

Crosshair wasn't sure about his new job as a hauler, he wasn't exactly built for strength, given his beanpole physique but it was the only job really going in the city... unless he wanted to be a clerk and that would be so boring and annoying! He was starting to enjoy it though because despite his nature as a sniper, he was beginning to enjoy interacting with the other haulers and the traders who travelled to Naboo with goods from all corners of the galaxy, even after only a week and a half of working at the port he'd actually made a few friends, Sawbones had been very happy with this development, "I'm so happy and proud of you Crosshair!" The medic had said, smiling his warm and kind smile, which made Crosshair blush a little... no one had been "proud" of anything he'd done in such a long time and that made him feel happy. He was experiencing a normal life with a family that actually accepted him for who he was, he could be a snarky person mostly because he had stiff competition with Stitches when it came to snark, the medic's wit was dry and as sharp as Crosshair's, he had someone who could keep up with him, match him blow for blow and allow him to express himself in a way he hadn't been able to before. He wished he'd had this with his brothers but they were so different in personality that his snark was seen as aggression most of the time, Feral knew he wasn't aggressive... said he didn't smell like he was going to attack, he was defending himself... he hoped his brother was safe and okay, Hunter wouldn't do anything to the brothers who stayed... would he?

He hadn't received any additional contact for Omega and Feral, had they been found out? Had their comm equipment been confiscated and they were left unable to contact anyone? He sighed and stacked the last crate into the warehouse just in time for the whistle to blow, signalling to the third shift workers that their day was finished, he went to his locker and retrieved his coat and lunch pail, "Ready to head home vod?" He looked to Grim as he appeared.

"Yeah." He nodded with a sigh through his nose.

"You okay? Did something happen?" The Sergeant asked as they started walking.

"No, nothing happened I'm just... I'm really worried about my brother and sister, I haven't heard from them since." He replied, "And I don't know if it's because something bad happened or because of something else..." He really hoped it was just because they had their comms confiscated and not because Hunter acted out in anger... or fear... he had curbed his reactions so much since they picked Feral up but this new galaxy was incredibly stressful and hard on clones. Crosshair had seen how it was affecting Hunter on Kamino... they had taken his helmet and equipment with him and left him to die on that platform, he'd wanted to return to them but the sheer distrust and anger he saw in each of them just made him swallow his wants and needs... choosing to stay behind because at least he wouldn't have to subject himself to that kind of environment but when he thought they would fight for him, ask him to come back with them, tell him that they still loved him... only Omega and Feral stepped up. He was alone because Hunter forced the two of them... no... he ordered them to abandon Crosshair, he pulled rank because he knew full well that Feral couldn't actively disobey a direct order from a superior officer!

“Don’t worry, they’ll be okay, if they’re anything like you, then they’re tough.” Grim smiled to him, “Oh yeah, Madcap wants us to swing by the butchers on the way home.”

“Where are the two of them?” He hadn’t seen them on shift, even though the four of them usually shared a shift.

“They were needed at the other port, for some reason.” Grim shrugged, “It doesn’t connect to the market so he wants us to pick up meat for dinner tonight.”

“I thought he went grocery shopping yesterday?” Crosshair frowned a little, Madcap was very particular about what he bought, food wise, so why were they being asked to pick up meat?

“He did but the two of them got distracted and completely forgot.” Was the chuckled reply, which made Crosshair roll his eyes because of course they got distracted! “You want to pick up something for dessert?” He looked to the older clone again, who had a smile on his face, he felt so lucky to have been picked up by them and not the Batch... or the Empire.

“If we have the credits for it.” He shrugged in reply, they found out Crosshair’s sweet tooth very quickly, with Speedy and Madcap constantly offering him small sweets and pastry, he was beginning to wonder if he’d actually build back up his original body weight in a shorter amount of time than the two medics had anticipated.

“We’ll stop by the butcher, then we can choose between the bakery or the confectionery store.” Grim gave his shoulder a gentle squeeze.

“Okay.” He nodded, a small smile reaching his face.

“It’s always good to see you smiling vod.” The older clone smiled warmly.

“Y... yes...” He replied quickly, hoping his blush wasn’t that recognisable in the blaring sunlight. The sun here was warm and gentle, nothing like the sun not seen often on Kamino, it made everything smell better, he wondered if Feral would like it here, would he like the smells of the markets? Probably, Feral needed kind smells to feel safe... he just wanted to be loved and told he was okay and loved... Crosshair wanted that too...

Something was off about the house when they arrived... “You seem to be having vision issues...” His stomach dropped through the floor... hard...

“Feral?”

# Help

Stitches looked up from his datapad as a knock came at the door, who would be looking for them? It was their day off... he sighed and stood up, moving to the door he opened it to reveal a boy, well... he was the size of a younger man, he was wearing armour but he didn't look or hold himself like a soldier, "Yes?" He asked, was the boy trying to pretend that he wasn't a threat by acting meek and small?

He didn't fail to notice that the boy's grey eyes were very unfocused and weren't looking at him directly, he was curious about the modified mask he was wearing, "I..." The boy started but stopped, if this was an act... it was a damned good one, "I'm looking for... someone... m... maybe you've... seen him?"

"And who would that be?" He frowned, was he actively hunting someone?

"C... Crosshair, a... a man called Crosshair..." The boy replied, shrinking away from him and squirming under his gaze.

"Who is it cyar'ika?" He heard Sawbones arrive from the kitchen and looked to see him wiping his hands with a towel, "Hello there, are you alright?"

Stitches returned his gaze to the boy, who had lost his words, "He's looking for Crosshair." He spoke for the boy, who was fidgeting with his fingers and keeping his possibly terrible gaze on their chests.

"Oh? He's at work currently but he should be home soon, do you want to come inside?" Sawbones smiled, he was always so much more accepting of people, even someone who looked like this boy.

"I..." This was a very good act if it was one.

"What's your name?" He decided it was about time to ask for a name to refer to him by, rather than just boy.

"F... Feral... my name is Feral and my number is CT-99... CT-9966." The boy, Feral, replied... this was Feral? This was one of the other enhanced clones? He looked to Sawbones, who also wore a confused look, "And... and Crosshair is my brother."

"Feral?" Sawbones asked, mouthing 'The bullied one' to Stitches who felt his chest tighten... Sawbones looked like he was struggling to stop himself moving to Feral and hugging the terrified boy until he felt safe again.

"Y... yeah. I don't know if... if he said anything about me...?" Feral all but shut down when Sawbones gently took hold of his hands.

"What happened to your cheek?" Sawbones sounded sad when he touched Feral's bruised and cut cheek, "Come inside, we'll get you fixed up."

“B... but...” Feral tried to talk but didn’t fight Sawbones as he guided him inside, he probably wasn’t able to fight it, given the description Crosshair had given him.

“My name is Sawbones, by the way, and this is Stitches.” Sawbones said gently as they arrived in the kitchen.

“N... nice to meet you both... sirs.” Feral spoke in such a quiet voice that Stitches wasn’t sure he’d actually heard him.

“Oh hush, no need to call me sir.” Sawbones chuckled, “Stitches, however, greatly approves of your formality.”

“But you can just call me Stitches.” Stitches replied with a sigh.

“O... oh...” Feral nodded.

“You seem to be having vision issues...” Sawbones said as he knelt down in front of the now seated Feral, seemingly only just noticing the boy wasn’t focusing on anything.

“I...” Feral started but was cut off by the rest of the family arriving back from work, hopefully Crosshair would be happy about his brother’s arrival.

Crosshair stopped dead when he saw Feral sitting in the kitchen, the colour drained from his face, “Feral?” Crosshair asked, he sounded equal parts scared and devastated, because there would be only one reason the boy would be here, “What... what are you doing here?” Feral paused briefly before he was suddenly wrapped around Crosshair in the blink of an eye, he didn’t say anything just buried his face in Crosshair’s shirt, “Oh Feral, what happened?”

“H... he was... he threw me out!” Feral’s muffled voice yelled, “He... he was so angry!”

Crosshair looked as though he was trying very hard to control his emotions but Stitches could see the anger flashing across his features, “Did he hurt you?” The sniper asked quickly.

“It appears he was struck across the face.” Stitches explained, “Whether that happened in that altercation or not, he hasn’t said.”

“Feral, look at me.” Feral hiccupped and looked up at him, Stitches hadn’t really realised how short Feral actually was until he was standing beside Crosshair, “Did he hit you ad’ika?” Feral nodded... “Karking...!”

“What about your sister?” Sawbones asked quickly.

“I... don’t know.” Feral managed past his hiccups, “He... he threw me out but... I don’t know what happened to... to Omega... but he... I think he prefers Omega to... to me so... so I think she’ll be...”

“You’re safe ad’ika, he can’t touch you here.” Crosshair said, speaking softer than Stitches had ever heard him speak in the short time of knowing the sniper.

“He’s right.” Sawbones said, “Come, sit down, you should drink something, are you hungry?”

Feral looked at them, “N... no... I’m okay.”

“When was the last time you ate?” Sawbones asked gently.

“I... I don’t know...” He hiccupped, wiping fresh tears from his cheeks.

“A recommendation from a medic, eat something small and go get some sleep, you are running on adrenaline right now, yes?” Stitches frowned a little when Feral nodded.

“We have a small futon you can borrow.” Sawbones smiled to him, “I’m sure you are quite tired.”

“You can come up to my room.” Crosshair smiled to his brother when the boy looked to him, “Sound like a plan?”

“M... mm.” Feral nodded weakly.

“Crosshair, might I have a word with you, about your first day of work.” Stitches motioned to the back door, to his credit, Crosshair knew exactly what that meant.

“I’ll just be outside, come get me when you’re going to go lie down, okay?”

“O... okay.”

# Fight

## Chapter Notes

I'm apparently in a mood where I want to be an ass to Hunter and the Batch, I really do like them!

"I just... I just want... I just want Crosshair to come back." Feral said weakly.

"Kid..." Hunter sighed, "We talked about this."

Feral felt something in his chest, anger mixed with something, "No..." He managed after a moment, "We didn't talk about this! You talked at me and expected me to listen! You knew I would because you're a superior officer! I wanted to stay with Crosshair but you ordered me to go! You knew I would because you pulled rank!"

"You know that's not true, he was going back to the..." Hunter started but Feral cut him off.

"You know that's bantha crap! I may be pathetic enough to follow orders but I'm not stupid Hunter!" He barked back, "We saw the Empire bugging out! We saw that they didn't send scouts! You knew full well that no one was going back for Crosshair but you don't care!" He yelled, he'd never had this much courage to speak his mind, "I wanted to stay with him if he couldn't come with us! Me and Omega wanted him to come too but you four just made him back away! He wanted to come with us! He wanted his family but you four just couldn't accept that!"

"He made his choice." Hunter sighed, more irritated now, he was getting angry but Feral, for once, didn't care.

"No! He made a choice based on you four!" He hissed, "He wanted to come home! He wanted his brothers! But no... no you had to make his choice for him! Like you always do! You always make our choices for us! Just because you're too scared to admit that you're wrong... just because we're too scared to fight your orders doesn't mean that we agree with you!"

"Feral, stop." Hunter growled.

"No!" He yelled, somehow managing to get to his feet, "He was our brother! Wrecker almost killed me and Omega but we forgave him! Crosshair only stayed with the Empire because we never went back for him, he needed someone who wanted him! Which apparently you don't! I..." He hit the ground vomiting as his mask skidded across the floor.

"Feral!" He heard Omega but someone stopped her from approaching.

“Shut your karking mouth Feral!” Hunter yelled, “You know nothing about that! How dare you! Is that what you think of me!?”

“I don’t know!” He sobbed past his retching, he spat out vomit, only to throw up again, “I... I just...”

“Hunter, leave.” He heard Echo... he was the only one to stand up to Hunter when he was like this.

“I’m not going anywhere.” Hunter growled and suddenly Feral was grabbed by his chest-plate and roughly pulled to his feet, “You want to be with Crosshair, fine, get off my ship!” He hit the concrete hard, his pack, helmet and mask landing on the ground beside him, “You better hope I don’t see you again, you little druk!”

He heard the steps go up behind him, he didn’t know where they were... what planet they had landed on but he... he grabbed his mask and wiped his face to reattach it, his chest hurt so much from both his rough landing and the painful emotions in his chest, he hiccupped as he looked in his pack and thankfully Minnow was in there. He stood up, slung his pack over his shoulder and picked up his helmet before walking away, he looked at his wrist and almost started crying when he realised his comm was broken, he couldn’t call anyone... and no one could call him... he checked his credit pouch and thankfully he had a few credits to his name. He started crying when it started to pour rain, he smelled around and managed to find an empty crate he could fit in, he climbed in and closed the top leaving a little bit popped open so air could get in but protected him from the rain and from anyone trying to find him, he... he just wanted to help Crosshair! “I... I messed up Minnow...” He hugged her to his chest, “I messed up and now... now I lost my family...” The first time he had to backbone to tell Hunter how he really felt, what he really thought of the situation and... and his only family... the only people he had left in the galaxy... abandoned him.

He just wanted to be with Crosshair!

He hiccupped and wiped his eyes, they... they had tracked Crosshair’s signal to somewhere near Naboo... maybe he could get a transport to there and see if he could find him?

Yeah.

Yeah!

That’s what he was going to do!

Screw Hunter and the Batch!

He nodded to himself and exited the crate and moved towards the port again, “Naboo? You’re looked for dock 8, he’ll get you to Naboo for cheap.” The port master said, “You okay?” Obviously the scuffle hadn’t gone unnoticed.

“I’ll be okay.” He replied, he had a mission now, he was going to find his brother!



“He’s a cargo runner so it won’t be the most comfortable of rides but he’ll get you where you need to go.” The man said.

“Thank you.” He nodded and shook the man’s offered hand.

“Sure I can give you a ride, a hundred credits or you do a job for me.” The ship Captain said.

“A job?” He blinked.

“You good with animals?” Was the reply.

“I... I like to think so.” He nodded, he liked animals and they seemed to like him.

“I’m transporting shaak, you make sure they’re fed and watered during the flight and I’ll let your fly for free.” The man explained.

“I can do that.” He had never met a shaak before but they smelled like herbivores, “How many?”

“Eight.” He could do that, that was something he liked the idea of doing! “A deal it is then.” He shook the man’s hand, “Welcome aboard.”

He nodded and followed the man up the ramp, “Feral! Kid wait!” He heard Hunter trying to make it through the crowded port but he managed to keep walking, not looking back as the ramp went up, “Feral!”

He swallowed thickly as the ship hummed to life and started its take off, he wiped his eyes quickly and went to where the smell of animals was, he put his pack down with his helmet and went to pet one of the shaak, it huffed and smelled him as he pet its head, he really hoped Crosshair was on Naboo but he’d heard nice things about the planet so maybe he could find work there and stay? Even if Crosshair wasn’t with him? But until then he had a job to do! He was kind of happy knowing his comm was broken because it meant that Hunter couldn’t try and guilt trip him into coming back! He was making his first few steps into the galaxy unaided by the Batch and he felt excited!

Terrified... but excited!

The shaak were very well behaved, despite being in a transport moving through space, they ate and drank and slept and he cleaned up after them when they pooped, it didn’t smell as bad as some things but it still made his eyes water, maybe their waste would be used as fertilizer? He’d heard that a lot of herd animals had their waste used as fertilizers by a lot of farmers, were these being shipped to farmers or butchers? He’d never tried shaak meat before... was it good? “Naboo.” The Captain said over the ship’s comm system, he didn’t know how long they’d been traveling but he’d made it!

“Goodbye friends, I enjoyed our time together.” He gave each of them a pet on the head and a chin scratch before picking up his stuff and walking down the ramp, “Thank you Captain.” He said to the man as he met him on the platform.

“Let’s see how well my herd is.” The man vanished up the ramp Feral had just come down, leaving him alone for a moment, “Good work, you even cleaned up after them?”

“Was... was I not meant to?” He blinked.

“You’re the first hand I’ve had who did that.” Was the reply, which made Feral feel a little embarrassed, “Good work kid.”

“Thank you sir.” He nodded, then froze when, instead of a hand shake, he felt a pouch appear in his hand, “What?”

“For a job well done, good work deserves good pay.” The man replied but before Feral could find his words, the man vanished back up into the ship, leaving him alone again.

“O... oh. Bye... bye Captain!” He called as the ramp went up, then opened the pouch and counted the credits... “One... one hundred?” Wasn’t that the price of passage if he’d chosen to pay instead of taking the job? Why was the Captain paying him that much? He didn’t know but he caught a familiar scent on the wind...

Crosshair.

He started out into the city, following the scent, there were a lot of people here, all different kinds, there were smells of food and spices and so many warm smells that he didn’t know or understand, maybe he could visit here when he’d completed his mission? He followed it to what smelled like a residential area, there were so many homes here and they all smelled warm but he had a mission and soon he found the source of the scent. It was a home but now that he was close enough... he could smell regs also but they didn’t have that wrong... chip smell... he swallowed down his fear and walked to the door and knocked, he wasn’t sure what he was doing, what if he was following a ghost of a smell? What if Crosshair was already long gone? He didn’t get long to think on it before the door opened and a blur entered his vision, “Yes?” The man... reg... smelled really stern.

“I...” He suddenly lost all his words, “I’m looking for... someone... m... maybe you’ve... seen him?”

“And who would that be?” The reg asked, his voice carrying a frown.

“C... Crosshair, a... a man called Crosshair...” He swallowed thickly, shrinking down under the hard, stern gaze the man was giving him.

“Who is it cyar’ika?” Another reg voice appeared but this one was softer... kinder... warmer... “Hello there, are you alright?”

“He’s looking for Crosshair.” The first man said.

“Oh? He’s at work currently but he should be home soon, do you want to come inside?” The kind one asked.

“I...” He fidgeted with his fingers.

“What’s your name?” The stern one asked.

“F... Feral... my name is Feral and my number is CT-99... CT-9966.” He tried to find his backbone again but after what happened with Hunter... it refused his call, “And... Crosshair is my brother.”

“Feral?” The kind one asked.

“Y... yeah. I don’t know if... if he said anything about me...?” He froze when the kind man took hold of his hands.

“What happened your cheek?” He flinched when the man touched the place Hunter had hit him, “Come inside, we’ll get you fixed up.”

“B... but...” They didn’t know him at all, he could be a bad person for all they knew!

“My name is Sawbones, by the way, and this is Stitches.” Sawbones sounded and smelled so kind.

“N... nice to meet you both... sirs.” He swallowed thickly as he was guided into what smelled like a kitchen.

“Oh hush, no need to call me sir.” Sawbones chuckled, “Stitches, however, greatly approves of your formality.”

“But you can just call me Stitches.” Stitches replied with a sigh.

“O... oh...” He nodded.

“You seem to be having vision issues...” Sawbones’ blur knelt down in front of him once he was seated.

“I...” He stopped when he heard the front door open and voices filtered in.

“Feral?” He heard Crosshair, “What... what are you doing here?”

He couldn’t help it... he ran to him...

Hugged him.

# Wanting to go home

## Chapter Notes

Apparently Feral has Stockholm syndrome 🙄

Crosshair could barely breathe as he followed Stitches out onto the back porch and they moved to the wall looking out at the river, “Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth Crosshair.” Stitches said, he was scarily calm for someone who just learn about what Hunter had done to Feral.

“He hurt him. Not just physically!” He could barely wrap his head around the information, “He...”

“Breathe vod’ika.” Stitches’ hand appeared on his shoulder.

“You’re right... he can smell me and that will make him... more scared and upset.” He tried to reign in his emotions, he knew that strong negative emotions could make Feral feel nauseous.

“Smell you?” Stitches asked.

“Yeah... he has an over developed sense of smell and... according to Tech, smell everything on a chemical level.” He replied, looking to the door, “How could this have happened? He... Hunter karking pulled rank, knowing full well that Feral can’t say no or disobey a superior officer! He literally can’t say no!”

“He is here now and we will help him, like we are helping you but it is very clear that you two are nothing alike, so our strategy will have to be different.” Stitches sighed, “Can you tell me anything about him as a person?”

“He... he was designed to be submissive to superiors, he literally can’t fight back when faced with someone of rank or authority but... but he wants to help people... he’s warm and kind and just... wants people to be happy.” Crosshair smiled a little, “He always knew I wasn’t what the others thought I was...”

“You are very attached to him I see.” He looked to Stitches, who wore a small smile.

“Yeah... I guess I am.” He replied, “He can’t see... well not great anyways, his vision is seriously short-sighted.”

“I saw that, was he never recommended corrective lenses?” Stitches asked as Crosshair hopped up onto the wall to sit on it.

“No, between his first squad and the war effort... and his own crippling lack of self-worth... he never believed he was deserving of anything that could make his life easier.” Crosshair looked at the house, he wondered if Feral would like it here, he liked animals so he’d probably enjoy the ducks and other water birds.

“Hm. I see.” Stitches replied after a moment’s thought, “Are you okay with him sharing your room?”

“Of course!” He replied quickly, “Better than him sleeping in a workshop!”

“Is that where he slept on the ship?” The medic frowned a little.

“Yeah... he slept beside Gonky, he loves that droid... and now he was forced to leave behind his best friend...” He hissed a breath, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Stitches? We have an issue.” They looked to the house, where Sawbones was walking towards them from, looking very unhappy but not angry, just... sad.

“What issue?” Stitches asked and Crosshair could see each and every muscle in the medic’s body tense up.

“He wants to go home.” Sawbones replied.

“What?” Crosshair asked quickly, “But...”

“He’s scared and in pain, both physically and emotionally, he wants normalcy back.” Sawbones explained, then sighed, “Grim is with him, making sure he at least eats something small.”

“Does he have Minnow?” He hopped off the wall quickly, “She’ll help him.”

“Minnow?” Both medics asked.

“She’s his first sister and best friend.” He had to make sure Hunter hadn’t stolen her from Feral, like the Batch had stolen Crosshair’s equipment, he could handle his equipment being stolen, he didn’t need them but Feral needed Minnow! He made it back to the house in seconds but slowed down and tried to calm down before he entered the home, he couldn’t make Feral any more upset, “Hey, you okay?” He asked his brother, who was sitting at the table with Grim, thankfully eating something and Crosshair smiled at the straw in a tumbler of water... until he realised it was the straw Wrecker had given him.

“Y... yeah...” Feral nodded, “I... I want to go home...”

“Oh ad’ika...” Crosshair sat on the chair beside Feral, “Home isn’t safe for you.”

“I... but what if... Hunter is sorry... he... he could be looking for me!” Feral replied quickly.

“Then he can come to you, not the other way around.” Grim said gently, “If he’s sorry, he can do the work.”

“B... but...” Feral fidgeted with his fingers.

“Feral, if Hunter did that to me or any of us... would you expect us to forgive Hunter?” Crosshair asked, “Should I forgive Hunter for what he did? When he ordered you and Omega to leave me behind?”

“N... no.” The younger clone said quickly, “He... he shouldn’t have done that to you!”

“He shouldn’t have done that to you, ad’ika, you know that what he did was beyond wrong, so you shouldn’t apologise to him, shouldn’t return to him or even contact him.” He carefully took hold of Feral’s small hands, “Do you have Minnow?”

“Y... yeah, she’s with me...” Feral replied in a small voice, “I... I was scared she wasn’t but... it’s like she knew I would need her because... she was in my pack and I never put her in my pack unless we’re on shore leave!” Crosshair smiled, that bantha was a karking Jedi, he was sure of it.

“She will always help you Feral.” He replied softly, “How about I show you to my room and we can introduce her to Rose?”

“R... Rose?” Feral asked in confusion.

“She’s my new best friend.” Crosshair needed Feral to feel safe here, if he didn’t feel safe, then he wouldn’t eat or sleep, he’d be on edge all the time and that would make his desire to return to Hunter and the Batch so much stronger, “Grim, can you tell the other two that I’ve brought Feral upstairs?”

“Sure thing vod.” Grim nodded.

“I think you’ll like it up there, it’s very sunny.” He carefully guided Feral upstairs.

Hunter was so karking dead!

## So do I

Stitches looked to Grim as they arrived back inside the house, “Cross brought him up to his room.” The Sergeant said, “Madcap and Speedy are on their way home.”

“Best keep them away from Feral for the time being, seeing how he is reacting to us and we’re calm.” Sawbones sighed gently, “I’ll go find the futon and see if they’re okay.”

“Good idea.” Grim nodded and they both watched as Sawbones vanished upstairs, “Situation?”

“He’s going to need a lot of help.” Stitches replied after a moment, “There is also the issue of if Feral found Crosshair, then the Batch can make an attempt at finding the both of them, they just have to follow where the ship Feral arrived on went.”

“You think they would?” Grim frowned.

“I do.” He replied with a frown of his own, he knew those types of people, “Hunter will arrive and try desperately to apologise, saying he never meant to and that he is so, so sorry... and Feral will accept it because he doesn’t want people to be sad.”

“Hm.” The other man sighed, “What are we going to do if he does show up?”

“I will speak with him.” Stitches looked to Grim, who grinned after a moment.

“I am so glad you’re on our side ori’vod.” Grim chuckled when Stitches smirked back.

“You just have to keep Feral from going to Hunter, if he does then he will one hundred percent go back to him and that is not good for him, he will be throwing himself back into an abusive situation...” He squeezed his eyes shut and pinched the bridge of his nose, he couldn’t believe that brothers would do that to a brother, “He has Crosshair now and he has us and if I have learned anything about Crosshair in our time together, is that he will defend his brother tooth and nail.”

“Yeah...” Grim sighed through his nose, “Given his limited vision and... other issues, he probably won’t be able to live a “normal” life here.”

“We will help him live as close to normal as we can, Crosshair knows his brother’s skill set, he’ll help Feral as best as he can.” Stitches sighed, then looked to the door as the other two arrived home.

“Guys!” Speedy called, “We’re back!”

“Where were you two?” Grim asked.

“Port on the other side of the city.” Madcap replied, “Hey, who’s stuff is that?”

“That is Crosshair’s brother’s things.” Stitches explained, “He is not able for horsing around or any hyperactive emotions, okay?”

“Is it Feral?” Speedy asked quickly, “Oh man... if he’s here then...”

“Yes, so I will ask you to be as gentle as you can with him.” He replied, he knew they were amazing brothers and he hoped they would help Feral feel safe in this new environment, “He isn’t like Crosshair, okay?”

“Yeah! Don’t worry about it, we’ll be on our best behaviour and will help him like we help Crosshair!” Speedy grinned.

“Good to hear.” Grim nodded to the two.

“He ate some of the leftovers from yesterday and has gone to lie down, I’m unsure of if he will eat dinner but I’m sure he means no offense Madcap.” Stitches sighed.

“None taken! Crosshair didn’t eat a whole lot his first night here, remember?” Madcap replied with a smile, “I might make him something small and easy to stomach, that might help him feel welcomed.” Stitches smiled a little, this family was so welcoming and accommodating to everyone who sought help.

“I’ll go check up on them, okay?” He looked to the three of them.

“Sure thing ori’vod.” Grim nodded and Stitches nodded in return before making his way up the stairs, he couldn’t hear much from the three in the attic room, so he knocked to announce his presence.

“Can I come up?” He asked gently.

“Of course.” Sawbones replied softly, “Be quiet thought.”

He opened the door to scale the steps but he paused at the top and smiled softly at the sight of Crosshair holding his brother close to him, the boy was hiccupping despite apparently being asleep, his thin arms wrapped around a plushie bantha, “How is he?”

“Exhausted.” Sawbones replied, “He also has bruises on his chest and arms.”

“Oh?” He frowned in return.

“Hunter threw him out of the ship... literally.” Crosshair said and Stitches watched as some of the tension bled from Feral’s frame, “He likes the vibrations of people’s frames when they talk, he loved sitting with Wrecker when he talked because Wrecker’s frame is huge and he has a big voice.”

“I see.” He replied, “Any internal issues from the injuries?”

“No, luckily.” Sawbones sighed.



“Good.” He looked to Crosshair and Feral, it was so heart-warming to see Crosshair being so soft and warm to someone, given his past and time with the Empire... it was comforting to know that a safe and kind environment could help even the most damaged of people, “Madcap and Speedy have arrived back.”

“Oh good, I was getting worried.” Sawbones smiled.

“Madcap says he’ll start dinner soon and won’t take any offence if Feral doesn’t eat or only eats a little bit.” He explained, he said the same when Crosshair started to live with them because Crosshair clearly hadn’t been eating well in the Empire, so he couldn’t really stomach large quantities of food, regardless of how good it was... to be fair, Stitches wasn’t exactly the best example of a consistent, healthy eating habit, he was trying to work around his eating issues but it was difficult.

Feral made a small noise before wiping his eyes, sighing and stilling again, “You’re supposed to be sleeping ad’ika, not checking up on us.” Crosshair said gently as he hugged Feral a little tighter.

“Checking up on us?” Sawbones asked softly.

“Yeah... he can smell emotions...” Crosshair replied, “Even when he’s sleeping.”

A survival tactic for an abuse victim...

“I hope he feels safe here.” Sawbones smiled.

“So do I...”

# Sleep

## Chapter Notes

Crosshair is a big old softy!

“Here we are, this is my new room.” Crosshair said to his brother as they arrived in the sunlit room, he could hear Feral smelling the air and wondered what he could smell, what did Crosshair smell like to him? What did anything smell like to his brother?

Feral hugged Minnow to his chest as he moved carefully around the room, still smelling his new environment, “All this... is yours?” Feral asked.

“Yes, Sawbones helped me buy some new clothes and got me Rose.” He replied and went over to his bed, picking up the nexu, “She’s like us, she’s missing an eye, so she’s defective.”

“O... oh.” Feral said and once she was close enough to him that he could actually make her out, he seemed to realise she was a nexu, “She... she’s pretty.” Feral smiled behind his mask, “H... hi Rose... this is Minnow... please don’t eat her.” Crosshair wasn’t sure if nexu would take on a bantha, or if they even could... seeing as they were rarely in contact with each other.

“I’ll make sure she behaves.” Crosshair chuckled, “I’m sure if we ask Sawbones, he can help us buy you some clothes, something other than your armour and blacks.”

“I... I can’t...” Feral retreated into his lack of self-worth, wearing it like a well-worn coat.

“Of course you can.” They looked to the man in question as he appeared at the top of the stairs, “Sorry for interrupting but I brought the futon.”

“Thanks Sawbones.” Crosshair replied, smiling a little at the sound of Feral smelling the new addition to the room.

“How are you feeling vod’ika?” Sawbones asked gently as he walked over to them.

“I’m... a... a little sore...” Feral managed, “And... tired...”

“How about I give you a once over when you change into something more comfortable than armour and blacks.” The medic smiled and Crosshair suddenly thought of something... where was Feral’s jumper? He usually kept it in his pack, just in case he needed it out in the field, hopefully he had it with him because he needed the comfort jumper... hopefully Hunter and the others hadn’t stolen it.

“You can wear some of my stuff until we get you your own stuff, how about that?” He smiled to Feral when the younger clone looked to him, “Might have to tie the drawstrings really tight though, given you’re smaller than even me.”

“I have been wondering if that is due to your mutation or is it down to metabolism?” Sawbones set up the futon beside Crosshair’s bed.

“I... I’m designed to be... a lot smaller than other clones... because I’m an infiltration scout and I need to fit... in tight spaces.” Feral fidgeted with his fingers.

“That’s really interesting.” Sawbones smiled when he stood up again, turning to face them, “Do you need assistance undressing?”

Feral’s pale face was enveloped by a massive blush, “I... I mean...”

“No need to be embarrassed vod’ika, I’m a medic, I’ve seen everything by this point.” The medic chuckled.

“O... oh.” Feral continued to blush but he’d started to hiccup.

“Easy vod’ika, you’re safe, no need to panic.” Crosshair said gently, earning a confused look from Sawbones, “He only starts hiccupping when he’s panicking and about to start hyperventilating.”

“What an interesting indicator.” Sawbones replied, “So you only hiccup under stress?”

“Y... yeah.” Feral managed past his hiccups.

“That is good to know.” The older clone replied, “I know what to look for now.”

“W... why?” Feral sounded small.

“So I can help you if you panic.” Feral practically shut down when Sawbones carefully took hold of his hands, “And I would love to help you, if that’s alright with you?” Feral nodded quickly and Crosshair knew full well that that didn’t mean he agreed, just answering what he thought Sawbones wanted to hear but Sawbones clearly picked up on this, “I hope you will feel safe here soon.”

Crosshair went to his closet, took out a pair of pyjama bottoms and t-shirt, then walked back to the two, “Here we go, some clean clothes for you.”

“T... thank you ori’vod...” Feral replied as he took the items.

“No problem ad’ika.” He replied gently, smiling softly at the happy sound from Feral when Crosshair put his hand on his head, “I hope they smell okay, they smell okay to me but we both know I’m practically nose blind.”

“Y... yeah! They smell okay.” The younger clone nodded, “Because... because they smell like you!”

Crosshair's heart practically melted at those words, "That's great to hear." He smiled more and noticed the soft and gentle look on Sawbones' face, "Let's get you changed, then you can see if you want a nap."

"O... okay!" Feral bounced, he was relaxing a little bit, still hiccupping but relaxing, probably because Crosshair was happy and calm, which signalled to the young clone that this was a safe space.

Feral was out like a light the second they sat down and Crosshair had wrapped his arms around his baby brother, holding him tight... well as tight as he could given the massive bruises on Feral's torso and arms, "This looks like you hit the ground hard." Sawbones had said.

"H... he threw me out of the ship." Feral had explained.

Crosshair was going to murder Hunter if he saw him again, he bodily threw Feral... who wasn't exactly built for impacts of any height... out of the ship, down the steps onto hard concrete, his baby brother was incredibly lucky that he didn't sustain anything other than bruises. Crosshair could be there to protect Feral now, they had Sawbones and his Batch, they had Stitches who looked like he destroyed people with cutting words... probably more effectively than Crosshair, seeing as he never spoke in anything but a calm and neutral volume voice, that constant calm was scary though, "No one's going to hurt you here." He whispered to his sleeping brother, "We'll protect you."

From Hunter and the Batch!

## Dinner time

“Take your time ad’ika, don’t want you falling flat on your face.” Crosshair smiled to Feral as they made their way down the first set of stairs, dinner was ready and Crosshair could hear the rumbling of Feral’s stomach, “I think you’ll like Madcap’s cooking.”

“W... what are they like? S... Sawbones’ brothers I mean.” Feral asked once they made it down the first set, pausing only briefly to pull his pants back up because even on the tightest drawstring setting, it was still too loose on the tiny trooper, the t-shirt wasn’t too bad... it wasn’t a complete tent, just loose.

“We’ll get you some better clothes tomorrow.” He chuckled, “As for his brothers, Grim is a lot like Sawbones, just looks like his name entails. Madcap and Speedy are great brothers just... very hyper and not great at personal space.”

“O... oh... do you think they will... will they like me?” The younger clone fidgeted with his fingers.

“I don’t know how they could do anything but love you.” He replied gently and took hold of Feral’s small hand, “So don’t worry about that, they like me, so I think you’re safe on that front.”

“I... I like you ori’vod.” Feral replied quickly.

“I know, you stood up for me, fought for me... thank you for that ad’ika.” He smiled to Feral, who blushed a little, “Come on, one last set of stairs to get down, then we can make your stomach stop singing the song of its people.”

“O... oh.” Feral blushed more but Crosshair could see a small smile, partially hidden by his mask.

“How are you feeling now vod’ika?” Sawbones met them at the bottom of the stairs.

“I’m... I’m okay.” Feral nodded.

“That’s great to hear... are they causing you any pain?” Crosshair knew the medic was looking at the bruises that were peaking out from underneath the t-shirt.

“N... no, luckily they’re only... on my torso and arms... so...” Feral replied shyly.

“Small blessings.” Sawbones chuckled, he sighed a little, “I hope you’ll let us know if you need help, myself and Stitches are medics so we’ll be able to help you with any hurts you have.”

“I... I will.” Feral nodded and Crosshair was beginning to wonder if Feral was starting to recognise Sawbones’ scent as a safe one, hopefully he would at least seek out one of the medics for help with his pains.

“Come, dinner is ready, we had to break out the second half of the table, our family keeping growing!” Sawbones chuckled again.

“O... oh I’m... sorry...” Feral was falling into that warm embrace again.

“Oh it’s not a problem for us, maybe for the poor spiders who were using it as a home, come, you must be starving.” Sawbones smiled warmly.

“Surprised you didn’t hear the song of the stomach people.” Crosshair grinned, earning another blush from Feral.

“Oh dear.” Sawbones said softly as he guided Feral to the table, “Madcap, Speedy, this is Feral, he’ll be living with us for however long he wants.”

“He... hello.” Feral waved shyly, “N... nice to meet you.”

“It’s great to meet you, we’ve heard a lot of good things about you.” Madcap smiled but didn’t move to make contact.

“Yeah, Crosshair’s been telling us all about you.” Speedy continued, both of them were being very quiet... well quiet for them.

“O... oh.” Feral blushed a little.

“Sit, I’m sure you must be hungry.” Stitches said, motioning to the two free chairs, one of which was right beside the medic, the other was beside Grim but surprisingly Feral chose to sit beside Stitches... maybe he could smell something in the medic that others couldn’t see? Stitches’ eyebrow vanished into his hairline, obviously also wondering why Feral chose to sit beside him and not Grim, who probably smelled safer and gentler, “Madcap has made food that may be gentler on your stomach than the heavy meals he normally makes.

“O... oh... no... no you didn’t have too.” Feral said quickly.

“I know.” Madcap said happily, “But what kind of host would I be if I made you feel ill on your first night here?” Feral was blushing like crazy, “Besides! It still tastes great, not to toot my own horn or anything.”

“He likes showing off.” Grim said with a soft chuckle, earning a small smile from Feral.

Crosshair smiled as the night went on, watching more of the tension in his brother just bleed out of his frame, he was enjoying the brotherly banter and warm environment, he didn’t add anything to the conversations... just basked in the warmth. Neither Crosshair or Feral had ever really been involved in this kind of familial environment, Feral’s first squad hated him and kept him tied to the ship, leaving him to eat all alone, the Batch was okay but they were all far to different as people, with clashing personalities, that it never really felt... like this. Feral was eating, which was the main thing, and he was eating more than they thought he would, making Crosshair wonder when he last ate, he knew Feral kept ration bars and other small snacks in his belt pouches because he was designed to stay in vents and waste disposal pipes, so he needed something to help him get through a mission and not have his stomach

give away his position. “And here is dessert!” Madcap said as he reappeared from the kitchen proper with small plates, on which were the ice-cream cake that Grim and Crosshair had bought, “Thanks to our lovely brothers for picking this up!”

They all stopped talking when they noticed Feral was crying gently, “Feral?” Stitches asked, “Are you alright?”

“I...” Feral wiped his eyes, flinching slightly when he found the wound on his face.

“Ah, I understand.” Stitches replied but didn’t elaborate for the rest of them, Crosshair looked to Sawbones, who wore a sad smile.

Stitches knew and understood something...

Was that why Feral sat beside him?

Probably.

## They had all the time in the world

“Feral?” Stitches asked, “Are you alright?” The boy’s tears had taken them all by surprise but Stitches instantly picked up what was wrong, Feral probably had never imagined he’d experience this level of kindness and affection, he was with the Batch during an active war, then was living pay check to pay check while trying to stay one step ahead of the Empire and anyone they sent after them. This was probably the first solid, home cooked meal he’d ever had and to be offered a treat afterwards? His life before probably hurt him more than the Batch even realised, than Crosshair realised... “Ah, I understand.” He said gently because he could sort of understand, the first time he shared a meal with Sawbones and his brothers after what happened on that planet, he had the exact same reaction, he caught the confused looks of everyone except Sawbones, who just wore a sad smile... maybe the reason why Feral had sat beside him was because he could smell Stitches’ past hurts? Whatever it was, he knew he would encourage the boy to engage with the cake, “You should try it, this was specifically picked out by Crosshair.” He smiled when Feral looked to him, then looked to his brother.

“Y... you like... cake?” He asked Crosshair.

“Hunter had me chewing toothpicks because I kept eating candy that was eating into our stock budget.” Crosshair replied with a smile, “I still snack but not so much on candy.”

“O... oh.” Feral nodded, “It... it smells good.”

“And that is the best compliment the baker can ask for.” Grim chuckled.

The Sergeant was correct because if it smelled good to Feral’s extreme sense of smell, then it was probably very good, “It’s very good.” Speedy said, mouth full of the dessert.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full Speedy.” Sawbones sighed a little.

“Sorry!” Speedy said once he swallowed his food but this made Feral giggle a little, not laugh, not chuckle... giggle.

Stitches had never heard a clone giggle before, “It’s good to hear you laugh vod’ika.” Sawbones said in a soft voice, earning a blush from Feral, “Let’s eat before it melts.” He said to the ones not already eating, Stitches smiled at the small happy sound from Feral, it was so small and quiet that if he hadn’t been paying attention, he probably wouldn’t have heard it at all. He saw the soft look on Crosshair’s features, he’d also heard the noise over the sounds of the continued conversations, he’d never thought he’d see the sniper’s entire personality change that quickly but he was in a safe environment, with people who loved him and wanted to help him, now he also had his brother, who he could help... he got to be a big brother again and Maker knew that Feral needed all the love and attention he could get, both of them needed it to be fair, Crosshair needed it so he could lower his cactus walls enough that he could be completely safe and wanted in this environment, Feral needed to feel safe, full stop, he needed to feel safe, to feel loved, to be told with confidence that he was okay and he was loved.



He smiled a little bit more when Feral did a tiny happy dance, obviously the dessert was very good, despite the probability that his sense of smell would throw off his sense of taste, “You like it ad’ika?” Crosshair asked with a smile of his own.

“M... mm.” Feral nodded.

“We’ll have to get this again.” Grim nudged Crosshair.

“What can I say, I know good ice-cream cake.” Crosshair shrugged.

“You even picked up a good bit of meat.” Madcap grinned to them, “I’m surprised!”

“Hey, we’re not that bad.” Crosshair frowned a little.

“Totally, absolutely.” Madcap chuckled.

“How is your cheek?” He asked the boy once they’d finished dinner and began to go different places, “It looks quite sore.”

“I... it’s a little sore, my mask puts pressure on it when I breathe in.” Feral replied.

“Hm. I take it you have to wear it because of your mutation?” He had been wondering about it.

“Y... yeah.” Feral nodded, fidgeting with his fingers, “Because of... how over-developed my sense of smell is... I get overwhelmed the second I... take it off... which means I... throw up.”

“Ah, that makes sense.” He nodded in reply, “Would you like either me or Sawbones to have a look before you go to bed?”

“Oh... um...” He began to stammer and hiccup.

“Easy ad’ika, you’re okay, no need to panic.” Crosshair was by his side in seconds, Stitches raised his eyebrow at the speed of the sniper.

“You hiccup when you panic?” He asked the boy who nodded shyly, “An interesting indicator.”

“T... that’s what Sawbones... said... I... I only hiccup when I panic or... start to hyperventilate...” Feral replied as he fidgeted with his fingers.

“Ah, I appreciate you informing me of this, should you need help when Crosshair is at work.” He blinked when he saw the faint scars on Feral’s thin neck but decided to not say anything, he didn’t want to make the boy panic any more than he already was, “Come, I’ll apply some bacta to your cheek and bruises, it should make sleeping a bit more comfortable and no, we won’t be wasting it on you.” He said before the boy could say what Stitches knew he was going to say, “We own a clinic, we are not short of it and you need help, you deserve to at least be comfortable.”

“O... oh.” Feral managed past his hiccups.

“He gave out to me for that too.” Crosshair chuckled, “Except it was food and clothes, not medical supplies.”

“R... really?” Feral blinked and looked at his brother, Stitches wondered how bad his eyesight actually was, he’d ask when Feral felt more comfortable in his new environment, however long that took, they had time.

All the time in the world.

## A problem

Crosshair wiped his eyes when the need to use the refresher woke him up, he could hear the small snores from Feral, the young clone was sleeping curled up on the futon, a heavy comforter was over him and he was hugging Minnow to his chest. He smiled gently as he sat up, he hoped he wouldn't wake Feral up as he went downstairs to the refresher but luckily his brother was still asleep when he returned, he must have been exhausted, even with his nap he hit the futon snoring but then again, emotional stress would make anyone tired and Feral had been under a lot of emotional stress. Crosshair was so happy Feral had gotten away from Hunter and the others, that he'd found somewhere that would take him in and love him, that would let him be safe and himself, like it had let Crosshair, he was also happy that he got to be a brother again, an ori'vod, he got a member of his family back and they actually wanted to be with him... he smiled at the small noise Feral made as he wiped his eyes, a sigh left him before he stilled again, his soft snores returning to the room, "I'm okay ad'ika, sleep easy, you're safe here." He said gently as he pulled the comforter up over Feral's shoulders, earning a small happy noise from the small clone. He lay down in his bed and sighed, he hoped that they wouldn't have to live in fear of Hunter and the Batch finding them, he wanted to live in peace, live the life they'd been denied for so long, a simple life with an ordinary job but he wasn't sure if Feral could even work in such an environment, given his temperament and poor eyesight... he'd come on a cargo ship that was hauling shaak, maybe they could get him something that dealt with animals? He might like that, he liked animals and they liked him, he'd ask in the morning, sleep now...

He was awoken by a buzz of his datapad, it was buzzing like an angry bug but thankfully it hadn't woken Feral up, he sat up and picked it up but felt his blood run cold... he moved as quickly as he could without waking Feral up, luckily Stitches and Sawbones were already up, "Crosshair?" Stitches asked with a raised eyebrow, "What's the matter?" He didn't answer, only held out his datapad, "Is that...?" Stitches' voice went scarily calm.

"Hunter." Sawbones sounded angry.

Stitches frowned and opened the channel, "Crosshair! Where the kark is Feral!?" The voice on the other end was Hunter but no one answered for a moment, "Crosshair answer me!"

"This isn't Crosshair." Stitches explained, "Might I ask who's calling?"

"Who are you and what the kark did you do to my brothers!?" Hunter barked.

"I have no idea what you are talking about but it's rude to not answer a question before asking your own." Stitches didn't sound angry or anything like that... he just sounded very unimpressed, "So I will ask you again, who is calling?"

"You... you're a reg!" Hunter seemed to realised that Stitches was, in fact, a reg.

"How observant, who is calling?" Stitches repeated.

“What the kark did you do to my brothers?” Hunter wasn’t backing down, he was refusing to tell Stitches who he was, typical Hunter.

“As I said, I have no idea what you are talking about, it seems you have the wrong code, I wish you luck with finding your brothers.” Stitches frowned but Hunter got more in before the medic could close the channel.

“I know where this signal is coming from! If you don’t tell me where my brothers are I’ll...” Crosshair felt sick.

“You’ll what? Are you threatening someone who is innocent in whatever matter you have?” Somehow Stitches stayed calm, he didn’t get angry or raise his voice, he just sounded so unimpressed, “You refuse to tell me who you are, you are threatening me and my family, all because you think I know where your brothers are?” He frowned but before Hunter could respond he cut him off, “I’m trying to live peacefully, I do not need someone coming to my home and threatening me. If you come here, I will get the authorities involved, so don’t call this code again and let me be.”

Hunter didn’t get a chance to respond before the channel was closed by Stitches, “That’s not good.” Sawbones said after a moment’s silence.

“He... what if he comes here?” Crosshair couldn’t think.

“You four will be at work and so will we, so we can take Feral to the clinic, where he’ll be safe.” Stitches replied easily, “If you leave this datapad here, then they’ll track it to here but there won’t be anyone here.”

“They might break in.” Sawbones sighed, massaging his forehead, “Why can’t they just leave us alone?”

“Hm. That call came from within the system, so I might hazard a guess that they will be here at some point today... Sawbones, take Feral to the clinic, tell them I won’t be on shift today because of the reason.” The medic looked to Sawbones.

“Of course.” The other medic replied with a nod, “Will you be alright?”

“I have the authorities on speed dial, unruly patients and all that.” Stitches shrugged, “Crosshair, you must go to work, both you and him are what Hunter is after.”

“I can’t leave you to...” He started but was cut off by the older clone.

“You can and you will.” Stitches’ tone left no room for argument, “Feral will go with Sawbones to the clinic and you will go to work.”

“O... okay. I’m in the warehouse so... they won’t see me in the port.” He nodded after a moment’s hesitation.

“Very good.” Stitches replied then looked at the chronometer, “We should get the others up, you are all due in an hour.”

Crosshair was scared.

But Stitches wasn't.

# Verbal beatdown

## Chapter Notes

Who needs physical violence when you can beat them into a corner with your words? It would probably have hurt less for Hunter if Stitches had actually punched him.

Also Omega is a smart cookie!

Stitches looked at his chronometer, thirteen hundred hours, it had taken very little convincing on their part to get Feral to join Sawbones in going to the clinic, the boy was probably really interested in actually seeing what the city had to offer in terms of smells, Sawbones said they would go shopping afterwards for clothes and other things, which made Feral equal parts excited and falling back into self-doubt. Luckily the boy hadn't picked up on what was probably going to happen once he'd left, once everyone left, probably because only Crosshair, Sawbones and Stitches knew about what was going on, Crosshair said he'd fill in the other three once they were away from Feral, also because Stitches and Sawbones were very good at regulating their emotions and Crosshair could blame his on having to go to work, which Feral had no idea what Crosshair did for work, so he could imagine that that was correct. He sighed through his nose as he made a cup of caf and went to sit on the small garden bench in the front garden, the Batch wasn't stepping one foot in his house because their scent would permeate the area and Feral would know instantly that they had been here, which would make him want to go back to Hunter, to the brothers who wouldn't stand up against their Sergeant for either him or Crosshair. He didn't tell anyone that he knew the four batch members from when they were cadets, he said he'd met Crosshair when the sniper ended up in medical but he knew the other three, he wondered if they remembered him from their cadet days, he was a very physically distinct clone, between his hair and his beard and the huge karking scar right on his face, he was easy enough to spot in a crowd of clones. He was halfway through his caf when he saw a group of people approaching, one of which was a giant, full of muscles who could one hundred percent break Stitches in half with little effort but only if he could get his hands on him, he was probably that little bit slower in movements than his brothers, that was Wrecker, he remembered the boy was much bigger than his brothers, even as cadets. The goggled one was the brains of the outfit but that didn't mean he couldn't hold his own in a fight, though from what Stitches remembered he wasn't one to start fights if he could avoid it, Tech was always trying to be the pacifist, Stitches hoped that was still the case and from what Crosshair said, he was. He wasn't surprised by Hunter's appearance, he was always trying to be a badass, which was cemented by the appearance of a half face tattoo, his hair was also long but held back by a bandana, he wondered if the Sergeant would resort to physical violence when faced with Stitches, or would his brothers hold him back? He didn't know the boy with the cybernetics but both Crosshair and Feral said he was called Echo and was from the 501st under General Skywalker and Captain Rex, he looked like he'd been through the ringer a few times, he'd done a stint in a cryopod if he

heard correctly, he'd also heard from Crosshair that this Echo was the only person to actively stand up to Hunter when he lost the plot. He also spotted the girl, Omega, but she was very muted in her movements, like she didn't want to be here or doing what was about to go down, he hoped Feral's assumption of Hunter preferring her over him was correct and she wasn't physically hurt by the older clone.

Because Stitches would murder him before he even opened his mouth.

Not that he wasn't on the fence about murdering him for what he did to Feral but that was a slightly different story.

He couldn't see anything visible as they drew closer but that didn't mean there wasn't anything, he hadn't failed to notice that she was glued to Wrecker's side, "I guess I shouldn't be surprised that you still insist on being tardy Sergeant." He said as he sipped his caf, not breaking eye contact with the man once it was made, "Once tardy, forever tardy."

The man paused as recognition blossomed in his eyes, "Stitches? What...?"

"I would ask that you refer to me as sir, boy, I won't stand for disrespect even if the GAR is no longer a thing." He replied easily, "Now, what are you doing here? I have work in..." He looked at his chronometer, "An hour."

"We..." Echo started but Stitches cut him off.

"I didn't ask you ARC trooper, I asked him." He motioned to Hunter with his caf mug, "So, let's try that again, what are you doing at my home Sergeant Hunter?"

"Where are my brothers!" Hunter growled.

"Where are my brothers... what?" He frowned.

"I am not here for pleasantries, answer me!" Hunter made to open the fence gate but stopped when Echo grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Why do you want to find them?" Stitches asked with a raised eyebrow, "Did you lose them? Did they leave? Were they captured? You are very bad at giving information Sergeant, Tech, would you like to fill in the blanks."

"He's...!" Hunter started but stopped dead when Stitches glared at him as he stood up.

"I didn't ask you Sergeant, I asked Tech, do none of you know anything about etiquette?" He placed his empty mug down on the bench and walked over to them, hands clasped behind his back, his stand military, he wasn't a superior but he was a senior and that meant he would command respect from these brats, "So, Tech, would you like to answer?"

"We... I..." Tech cast his glance to Hunter.

"Eyes on me trooper, not him, I'm asking the question, not him." He frowned.

“Y... yes sir.” Tech replied, “We... one of our brothers was left behind on Kamino and the other left after an altercation.”

“Thank you for the information, Tech.” He nodded to the goggled trooper.

“Y... yes sir, thank you sir...” Tech fidgeted with his datapad.

“At least one of you has some grasp of etiquette, now, Sergeant I am speaking to you again.” He looked to Hunter, “Why are you looking for them if you abandoned one and forced another to flee?”

“B... because...” Hunter seemed to lose his words.

“Because?” He raised his eyebrow but Hunter looked away, “Anyone else want to answer?”

“Because Hunter doesn’t speak for all of us sir.” Wrecker said.

“Oh?” He was sure his eyebrow was in his hairline, “And who is he speaking for that has a different opinion? Hands up.” He wasn’t surprised that Wrecker and Omega held up their hands but Tech only had his at half-mast, “Would you like to explain your hesitant answer Tech?”

“I... don’t agree with how Hunter goes about... doing things but I do agree that... Crosshair isn’t safe to have with us.” The boy said as he slowly fixed his goggles that were slipping down his face.

“And why would you not trust Crosshair? Why is he not safe to have with you?” He looked at each of them, “This is now an open forum, so any of you can answer my questions.”

“Because he joined the Empire and stayed with them despite his chip being removed.” Echo explained with a sigh.

“Did you try to go back for him? Or did you leave him behind?” He knew the answer but they didn’t know that Crosshair was staying at the house and they wouldn’t learn it.

“He made his choice.” Hunter found his words, obviously that was a subject he could get his emotions to focus on.

“Did he?” He looked to the Sergeant who looked away quickly, “And what of this other brother?”

“Feral, he wanted Crosshair to come back but if Crosshair couldn’t come with us... he wanted to stay with Crosshair.” Omega finally joined in, finding some confidence in the fact that Stitches was verbally putting Hunter in time out, “I wanted Crosshair to come too but when Feral finally stood up to Hunter, Hunter hit him and threw him out of the ship!”

“Oh?” Hunter was squirming under Stitches’ hard gaze, “And?”

“And Feral left, got on a ship heading this way.” Wrecker said, “He’s out looking for Crosshair.”



“And you think they’re here? Would they willingly go to a reg for help? After what happened with the order?” He asked, “I highly doubt that.”

“We tracked Crosshair’s comm to here!” Hunter finally pushed a little bit back against Stitches.

“I bought that comm from a trader, had I known it was someone else’s I would have wiped it.” He was incredibly proud of his ability to lie, it had helped him get off Kamino, helped him get to Coruscant in order to save Sawbones and his brothers, he could even beat a polygraph test he was that good, “So, are there any more questions?”

“C... can I... can I speak with you sir?” Omega said, “P... privately?”

“Of course, is something the matter?” He asked.

“You... you’re a medic, right?” She was blushing.

“Indeed I am.” He was curious now.

“I have... girl problems.” She said, which made the men look incredibly embarrassed.

“Of course, come, I’m sure your brothers can find their way back to their ship, seeing as they don’t want to hear about the perfectly natural processes of a female’s reproductive system.” He stared at Hunter until he backed down from his urge to object.

“We’ll... be at the ship.” He replied and they left.

“Now.” He looked to her, “What can I help you with truthfully? I’m sure you want to talk about girl issues but I get the feeling you are using that as a cover up.”

“How did you...?” She blinked and looked up at him.

“I have seen a lot of things in my time, I think I can tell a cover-up from a klick away.” He smiled a little, “Come, sit.” He motioned to the bench, “You can ask your real question then I can talk to you about your girl problems.”

“Are they safe?” She asked almost as soon as he sat down, “Crosshair and Feral, I mean.”

“Yes, which is why I didn’t let the Batch into the house, Feral would have been able to smell them and that would be bad for him.” He replied, “Feral and Crosshair were incredibly worried about your well-being, so I will ask you as a medical professional and a friend to your brothers, are you in any physical danger?”

“Wrecker saved me, he wanted to save Feral but everything happened so fast, they ganged up on Hunter when he did that to Feral... Hunter is genuinely sorry for what he did but... I don’t think it would be safe for Feral or Crosshair to return to them.” She sighed a little.

“Is it safe for you? Given your vocal support for both Crosshair and Feral?” He raised his eyebrow.

“Hunter is so broken by what he did, he is trying so hard to make amends for his actions, he hasn’t acted out in anger or fear since it happened, so I think I’m okay because I have Wrecker to help me.” She smiled.

“Well, if you need somewhere to go, should things get bad, you have a safe place here.” He smiled to her, “This is my personal comm code, should you need me or my family to swoop in and get you, okay?”

“O... okay!” She said happily.

“Now, you have questions about girl problems?” He smiled a little more at her embarrassed look, “Trust me Miss Omega, I’ve dealt with every stage of female reproductive systems, had to do a C-section over a week and a half ago, so nothing you say is gross.”

“Okay!”

“Ask away.”

## Oh no

Crosshair hated looking at the Marauder, it was a painful reminder of everything he once had but was denied... had ripped away from him, he'd seen the five members of the Batch leaving the port, he really hoped Stitches would be okay, "He'll be okay, he's quite scary when he pulls a non-existent rank out of his sheb." Grim said, "I'll be surprised if Hunter actually comes out on top of any discussion. There's a reason he was known as the scariest medic in the GAR and that was up against medics like Reaper."

"That's because Reaper told you straight up that he hated you, Stitches has to destroy you with calm, cutting words before he gives you confirmation on if he likes you or not." Madcap said, as he walked by with a crate in his hands.

"Not to mention that because Stitches had people he liked, he was quick to jump on anyone who threatened those people." Speedy added, "Reaper just hated everyone."

"Stitches liked Reaper though, no idea why or how." Grim sighed a small laugh, "We should get back to hauling, we're not getting paid to sit on our thumbs, nattering like a group of Corellian grandmother."

"Yes sir." Crosshair nodded and started to follow Grim but froze when a voice yelled.

"Hey! That's Crosshair!" He knew that bellowing voice...

Kark!

"Keep moving." Grim said quickly, "Speedy, Madcap, with us."

"Yes Sarge." Was the reply.

"We have to go boss." Grim said to the foreman, who was about to reply but was cut off by the approaching forms of the Batch.

"Go... go now." The man said quickly, opening the side door to let them out, "I expect you to make up the time!"

"Yes sir!" They all replied before speed walking out of the port, into the densely packed crowds of people.

"Stitches, we've got a massive problem!" Grim said into his comm.

"What?" Stitches asked quickly, "Details?"

"Wrecker spotted Crosshair, we're trying to get away from the four, trying to lose them in the crowds." Grim replied, "But Hunter sounds pissed."

Stitches was silent for a moment, "Location point?"

“We’ll meet up with you at the tree.” Grim replied, “Speedy, Madcap, divide and conquer, Crosshair, with me.”

“Affirmative.” They all replied.

They couldn’t chance drawing the four of them into the main area of town, not when the clinic was there, not when the market was there, they couldn’t chance Hunter finding Feral, he was gunning for Crosshair with possibly bad intentions, they couldn’t throw Feral into this, “Batch has split up, Hunter’s on your tail sarge.” Madcap’s voice came over the comm.

Crosshair felt fear and panic squeezing his heart, it was making his chest hurt so bad, “Meet at the tree, they won’t attack in a crowded area but we can make a stand once we get the tactical advantage, we know the area, they don’t.” Grim was in full officer of rank mode, “Just keep ahead of them.”

“Yes sir!” Was the joint reply.

“Crosshair! You better stop running!” He heard Hunter yelling... why couldn’t they just leave him alone? He just wanted to live in peace! He wanted a peaceful life on Naboo when he could be a brother again, where he could help Feral! That’s all he wanted!

He squeezed his eyes shut, “Come on vod’ika.” Grim said as he took hold of his arm, “Once we’re clear of the crowd, we’re going to have to book it.”

“Y... yes sir.” He nodded, “I’ll follow your lead.” He hated this but they had to get them away from the clinic, from the market, from Feral.

They broke into a dead sprint once they crossed the boundary leading out to the beautiful grasslands, he loved it out here and hoped to bring Feral out here, to let him experience the beauty and calm of the lake country, Feral would love it because it smelled good to Crosshair and he didn’t have the sense of smell Feral did, “Crosshair!” He flinched when a stun shot flew past them, “Stop running! Now!”

“There’s the tree!” Grim said as they approached a huge rock that was shaped like a dead tree.

“Heads down guys!” Grim grabbed Crosshair to the ground as both Madcap and Speedy returned fire, stun shots but it gave them time to get the last few feet to the tree, where they ducked behind the stone, “What’s got their knickers in a bunch?” Madcap asked quickly.

“Crosshair! We only want you!” Hunter yelled, there was a cease fire.

“And why only him?” Grim called back.

“This doesn’t involve you reg!” Hunter barked, “We just want Crosshair, send him out and you will go free.”

“It does involve me when you are intent on hurting my brother!” Grim yelled back.

“He is not your brother reg!” Crosshair tried to calm his breathing, he was panicking quite badly, he was unarmed!

“He’s not yours either at this point! You left him for dead!” Grim gave Crosshair’s shoulder a squeeze, “He is our brother now, he is somewhere where people love him and actually want him around!” Crosshair felt tears stinging his eyes at the words of the reg.

“Spread out!” Hunter ordered the other three, Crosshair wasn’t sure where Omega was, hopefully she wasn’t here and was safe on the Marauder.

“I’m not doing this anymore Hunter!” Wrecker said, making Crosshair blink, “He doesn’t want to go with us, he doesn’t want to be your brother anymore! At this point I’m not sure I want to be your brother anymore!” Crosshair peaked out from behind the tree, seeing Hunter squaring up against Wrecker, “After Kamino... it’s like I don’t know you anymore! The Hunter I know would never hurt Feral, he wouldn’t disown him, he wouldn’t threaten Omega and he sure as kark wouldn’t be on a manhunt to get Feral back!”

“Shoot to kill.” Hunter growled.

“What?!” The others asked.

“I gave an order and good soldier follow orders!”

Oh no.

## Baton and GNK

“Sergeant Hunter!” Crosshair looked at the Sergeant quickly, then at the medic who appeared behind him as if from nowhere but before Hunter could realise what was happening, there was a resounding ‘THUNK’ and Hunter dropped like a tonne of cement, “The doctor will see you now.” Stitches said as he fixed his hair and retracted his baton, earning raised weapons from the other three, “Next one of you brats to fire your weapon against a member of my family will wish you died here, so drop your weapons.” The medic glared at each of the Batch members in turn, raking his hard gaze over them, “Now.”

“Okay... we’re dropping them.” Echo said, motioning for the other two to do the same.

“Madcap, Speedy, pick up their weapons.” Stitches wasn’t taking any karks today apparently, “And take any hold-out weapons they have.”

“Yes sir!” The two moved quickly and picked up the weapons before going to each member and taking their other weapons.

“Wrecker, pick up Hunter and follow me, you two.” He looked at Tech and Echo, “You’re coming with me too.”

“Yes... yes sir.” Crosshair had never heard Tech sound that small or seen Echo act like that to a trooper not of rank, Echo was an ARC trooper, he was the best of the best in terms of Regs, Stitches wasn’t of rank but that didn’t mean he didn’t command respect.

“See, told you he was scary.” Grim said and Crosshair nodded, he was really glad he was on the medic’s good side, “Come on, we should go back home, don’t want Feral and Sawbones to worry about us.”

“Y... yeah.” He nodded and smelled his clothes, luckily he’d been upwind of the Batch, so their scent wasn’t going to latch onto his clothes... he hoped anyways.

“Crosshair...?” He blinked out of his head, he’d apparently been staring at the kitchen table for longer than he thought, “Are you okay?”

He looked to the concerned face of Feral, “I’m okay, rough day at work.” He smiled.

“O... oh.” Feral nodded, then seemed to perk up, “Sawbones... he brought me shopping and I got a... a lot of clothes, apparently it’s easier to get clothes for me than it is for you!”

“I’m an extra-large beanpole, you’re a fun sized beanpole.” He chuckled, which earned him a giggle from Feral, “How about you show me what you got, I’m sure they look great if Sawbones was with you.” He hoped Feral never learned that the reason Hunter attacked him was because of a chip that Crosshair was convinced they removed them on Bracca, that’s why they went there after all...

Right?

“O... okay!” Feral bounced happily and they made their way up to their now shared room, they’d have to get Feral a proper bed soon, he deserved a bed, he deserved all the comfort he’d been denied for his entire life.

“They are... very colourful ad’ika.” He smiled as Feral showed off his new clothes.

“I never got to wear anything other than black for so long! So I wanted to wear something... that makes me happy.” Feral said and Crosshair could see the small smile on the younger clone’s features.

“I’m very happy they make you happy. I, however, wouldn’t be caught dead in them.” He grinned to Feral, who giggled again, he knew it was a playful jab, not an attack. Feral always knew Crosshair wasn’t on the attack, he was on the defensive, he was like Feral in that regard but he could actively stand up for himself while Feral couldn’t. Maybe in a family environment, not a military one, Feral could learn to stand up and voice his opinions without the constant fear of being disciplined, “I hope you also got some sleepwear?”

“Yeah! Sawbones also got me some nice, colourful bedding!” Feral bounced and showed Crosshair the tie-dye bedding covers, it was very bright and colourful.

“I may have to get a sleep mask! These look like they’ll glow in the dark!” He laughed.

“At... at least you’ll never accidentally stand on me in the dark!” Feral replied happily, he was calming down so much in only a day, he really didn’t feel safe in either his old squad or in the Batch...

“That is very true ad’ika.” He smiled to Feral and Feral bounced again before plopping down beside Crosshair.

“This place... makes you so happy.” His baby brother said softly as he rested his bald head on the sniper’s shoulder, “I’m... really glad.”

“This is the happiest I’ve ever seen you ad’ika.” He smiled and rested his cheek on Feral’s head, “I’m so happy you feel safe enough to show this side of you.”

“I like it here.” Feral replied, “I... I’m still... I keep thinking that it’s... not real and I’m going to...”

“It is real, you’re safe here, you have a whole family here that will love you and protect you, like they do for each other, like they do for me.” He sighed softly, “Maybe one day we can talk with the others but I don’t want you to feel like you have to go back to them, I don’t want Hunter to guilt trip you...”

“I was glad my comm broke when he threw me out, it meant he couldn’t contact me, couldn’t try and guilt me into going back... but I do miss them a whole lot...” Feral hiccupped, “I miss Gonky most of all.”

“Yeah... I figured you would.” He replied, “So I got you something, it’s not him but it will help you remember him.”

“What is it?” Feral sat up and Crosshair placed a small GNK droid model in his small hands,  
“Is... is this...?”

“It isn’t a droid but it does walk around and make the noises, they make them for kids, I think it’s to introduce them to the GNK droids that a lot of ships use.” He smiled.

“Oh... can I... can I call it Gonky?”

“Of course.”

“Yay!”



## Stupid machines

Stitches saw them, he heard the phrase that haunted the nightmares of every freed clone, “Good soldiers follow orders.” but to hear it coming from one of the Batch, from one of those boys... he bit his lip before extending his baton.

“Sergeant Hunter!” He yelled when he was right behind the boy and before Hunter could even comprehend what was about to go down, Stitches thwacked him across the back of the head, knocking him right out. “The doctor will see you now.” He frowned as he fixed his hair, Sawbones had always joked that that was basically his catch-phrase during the war, when he was out in the field... he saw the other three raising their weapons but he knew they wouldn’t fire, not after what just came out of Hunter’s mouth, “Next one of you brats to fire your weapon against a member of my family will wish you died here, so drop your weapons.” He glared at each of them, raking his hard gaze over them, “Now.”

Thankfully Echo knew when to fight and when not to fight, because he motioned for the other two to follow his lead, must be the ARC trooper training, “Okay... we’re dropping them.” He watched as the three placed their weapons on the ground.

“Madcap, Speedy, pick up their weapons and take any concealed weapons they have.” He couldn’t chance them shooting up the clinic, not when he had so many patients and staff there.

“Yes sir!” The two said and Stitches watched as the three emptied out their pockets of small weapons, Tech didn’t bother and just took off his belt to save time, taking only his datapad to keep on him.

Once he was almost completely sure that they didn’t have any concealed weapons he turned to the giant, “Wrecker, pick up Hunter and follow me, you two.” He looked at Tech and Echo, “You’re coming with me too.”

“Y... yes sir.” Tech looked like he wanted the ground to open up and swallow him, Echo was still standing like a soldier but didn’t fight Stitches’ orders, thankfully realising that while Stitches wasn’t a superior officer, he was a senior officer and what he said held more weight than his own.

“Move it.” He ordered and led them to the clinic, he had to see why Hunter’s chip only made his temperament change, why it didn’t make him turn on the Batch but only those who stood against him, maybe it sustained damage? Crosshair had informed him of the Batch going to Bracca to get them removed, which didn’t make sense if Hunter’s was making him act this way... “On the scanner cot.” He pointed to the object in question, he’d brought them in the back door, didn’t want to scare any patients and all that, “Anyone want to tell me how Hunter could still have a semi-active chip when you all got the removed?”

“We don’t know sir.” Tech replied, “My scan after our surgeries didn’t show anything.”

“Hm.” He frowned, “What equipment did you use?”

“I... I created a scanner for detecting the chips and Captain Rex brought us to Bracca to use their surgical pod.” Tech was fidgeting with his datapad, “I had believed that my equipment was fool-proof...”

“So you used a home-made device and...” He sighed and pinched his nose, “Maker preserve me and give me patience, do you realise how finicky those stupid pods are on a good day? You all went to a planet full of rusty and water logged venators and used a pod that hadn’t been used in... what... half a standard year?”

“Basically.” Echo nodded in replied, “Rex said he’d had his removed on a venator and thought it would be the best place for it.”

“Give me...” He sighed as he ran his hands down his face and let out an exacerbated groan, “I thought he grew out of it but he really isn’t the sharpest tool in the shed!”

“You... know him sir?” Wrecker asked.

“Of course I know him, I put him back together more times than he’d care to mention, between him and Cody I’m surprised half of us Gen Ones made it to adulthood.” He hissed a sigh, then turned to the console to calibrate it.

“You are a gen one sir?” Tech asked softly.

“I am.” He replied, “Was one of the first medics to arrive in the first battle, saw more brothers die in the first five minutes than I ever imagined I’d see...” He sighed a little as he watched Hunter vanish inside the pod, “Right... beginning scan.” He watched as the images came through, “Well kark me sideways...”

“What?” Echo asked.

“That stupid machine... was he the last to be done?” He looked at the three who looked to each other briefly.

“He was.” Echo frowned a little, “Why?”

“Because it only took half of it and it didn’t completely deactivate it.” He grumbled, “It was done by a pod, so it was cut and cauterised before it could deactivate fully.”

“Why did it take so long to show up sir?” Wrecker asked, “Bracca was a year ago!”

“Did yours activate fully first time?” He looked at the giant.

“N... no.” He frowned a little, “Neither did Crosshair’s.”

“You enhanced clones have a wonky genetic structure, so it wouldn’t have activated fully or might have activated gradually, over an extended period of time, or it could have been activated by a serious blow to the head.”

“He... he did get bodily thrown from the Marauder when we were trying to escape from a rescue mission.” Echo said, “Fell at least a hundred feet, hitting several trees on the way

down.”

“Well that would do it.” He frowned even more, “Right. I’ll actually remove it this time, personally, can’t take any chances with those stupid pods.” He hated the machines sometimes, sometimes organic medics could do it ten times better, more often than not.

He greatly disliked machines.

Stupid clankers.

## Soft night

“Crosshair?” He grumbled as he groggily woke up, the kind face of Sawbones greeted him when he opened his eyes, “I thought you’d appreciate an update on the condition of the Batch.” The medic whispered, so as not to wake the other occupant of the room, Feral was thoroughly happy with his brightly coloured bedding, cuddled up beneath it while hugging Minnow to his chest, his new little toy beside his pack and helmet.

“What happened?” He wiped his eyes, also whispering.

“Hunter’s chip hadn’t been fully removed, it didn’t force the full directive... just made him more aggressive than normal, more prone to attacking someone who questioned him or his orders.” Sawbones sat down on the side of the bed as Crosshair sat up, “Which is why he attacked Feral.”

“Did they get it removed?” He asked quickly.

“Stitches did the surgery himself, from what he saw, the reason it wasn’t fully removed was because it wasn’t sitting where the chip was in everyone else.” The medic looked to Feral, “Apparently Feral never had one.”

“What?” Crosshair blinked and looked to his brother also.

“They found what looks like an abscess scar on his brain where the chip should be.” Sawbones sighed, “Which could explain a multitude of his issues.”

“Mm... something wrong?” Feral asked softly, wiping his eyes as he woke up.

“Just making sure Crosshair is okay, he had a rough day at work and Grim is worried about him.” Sawbones smiled as he stood up, moving over to Feral and pulling the comforter up over the small clone’s shoulders, “You should sleep, you’ve had an exciting day also.”

“Mm...” He wiped his eyes again, “It’ll be okay ori’vod...”

“With your help everything is going to be okay.” Crosshair replied and his heart melted at the happy sound Feral made as he snuggled up under the comforter, there was a soft sigh and after a moment, soft snores returned, “Hunter hurt him, even before his chip made him attack him physically, he made him feel like everything he did was wrong...” Crosshair wasn’t sure if there had always been an issue with Hunter’s chip or if it was because of the bullying that made him such a sheb, whatever it was, it had had a profound impact on not just Feral but all of Hunter’s brothers. He was so intent on keeping them safe that it went from Hunter ending up with stress migraines to him aggressively trying to keep everyone in line so they wouldn’t get bullied or hurt, failing to realise that that was almost as damaging to them, finding Feral had helped him curb that so much because his usual tactic was destroying Feral... because Feral couldn’t fight back and tell him to sod off, trying to force him back into line was so damaging because he started to believe everything he did was out of line...

“He’ll be okay, he’s out of that environment, he’s safe and happy.” Sawbones replied gently, his warm hand appearing on Crosshair’s shoulder, “So are you, don’t push yourself to help him, he will react to your negativity if you try too hard.”

“Y... yeah.” He nodded.

“The Batch wants to talk to you before they leave, I told them point blank that they won’t see Feral, he’s too fragile.” The medic sighed a little.

“Good... good call.” He nodded, “I was going to take him to the stables at some point, introduce him to the animals, he really likes animals.”

“He will love it because he’ll get to spend time with you.” Sawbones smiled warmly, “Now, you should get more sleep, I only woke you because it’s the only time we could talk without upsetting Feral.”

“Yeah... we need to get him an actual bed.” He looked to his brother and smiled when Feral made a small noise, wiped his eyes, sighed and stilled again, “You’re supposed to be sleeping ad’ika, not checking up on us.”

“I’ll leave you too it, should you need us at any point, you know where to find us.” He nodded to the medic who wore his soft and kind smile before leaving quietly, he lay back down and closed his eyes with a sigh, he wasn’t sure he wanted to meet with the Batch, not after everything that happened but if Stitches had successfully removed Hunter’s chip, then he was more than likely going to be calmer and less likely to order Crosshair dead on sight.

Hopefully

He tossed and turned for a while before a body appeared in the bed beside him, causing him to jump a little, he wasn’t sure how awake Feral actually was but the small clone snuggled up beside him and sighed a little as he wrapped an arm around Crosshair’s chest, which meant Minnow was being hugged between them... but that was okay... “Thanks ad’ika.” He said gently.

“Mm...” Was the only thing he got in reply before Feral returned to actual sleep.

Maybe one day, when Feral was more secure in himself, they could let Hunter see him, when there wasn’t the possibility of Hunter guilting Feral into returning and forgiving him on instinct because Feral did nothing wrong, he just wanted to help. Like Crosshair did but was unable to complete because of his temperament, he didn’t make friends easily, he always saw them as above the regs but now? Living with a family of regs? He realised that his judgement of the regs, tarnishing them all with the same brush, it was unjust and fuelled by years of bullying at the hands of reg cadets... but Feral tried to see the good in everyone, he wanted to help and make people happy, they were complete opposites in many ways but Feral had gravitated to him regardless. Once he’d relaxed, he moved to understand them based on their scents, it was his primary sense when interacting with the galaxy, he saw good in Crosshair...

Even when no one else did.

They needed each other.

## Tense talk

Crosshair was happy that Stitches was coming with him to meet with the Batch, he knew they were scared of the medic, so they wouldn't try anything in his presence... he hoped anyways, Hunter seemed to be stable when he woke up according to Stitches, "You'll be okay Crosshair." Stitches said from beside him, "It is understandable that you would be scared or nervous."

"What... what if they try again?" He asked in a small voice, he couldn't leave Feral alone, not after everything they'd been through in such a short amount of time.

"Then I will beat the tar out of them." Stitches replied easily with a shrug, "I've gone up against bigger threats than them."

"Thank you Stitches." He smiled a little.

"Think nothing of it Cross'ika." Stitches smiled a little in response, which almost made Crosshair cry at the affection in those words, in that affectionate term, "There they are." The Batch was standing at the Marauder, talking to each other but they were standing around in a nervous atmosphere, the tall grass flowing around them like water, they couldn't chance this meeting on the crowded platform.

He all but froze when Hunter noticed they were walking up to them, their eyes meeting briefly before both of them looked away, "Crosshair... I..." Hunter tried to find his words, "Nothing I ever do will make up for what I did, what I said and ordered..."

"No it won't." Crosshair jumped in quickly, "Nothing will ever repair what we once had, I don't know how far you were under the control of that broken chip when you abandoned me, when you ordered Feral and Omega to abandon me, I can move on from that but I will never, ever forgive you for what you did to Feral." Hunter looked away, "You physically hurt him, you broke his trust and destroyed any idea he had that you loved him, you became the one thing he was terrified you'd become."

"I... I know." Hunter sounded so small, "I... I just wish I could tell him that I never wanted to hurt him, so I could apologise and wish that he lives a life better than the one I made for him."

"You know exactly why you can't see him." Crosshair hissed, "Because you know he'll come "crawling back" to you because he always does." Hunter went several shades paler, "Oh yes, I heard about what you said, Feral isn't some dog that comes crawling back to its master despite getting physically and emotionally abused, he is a person, he is a brother who just wants to be loved and have that love reaffirmed because he can't keep that idea up by himself. He has been abused for so long that he can't fight back and when he does, he gets beaten by the one person he wanted to love him, not only that you threw him out! You physically threw him out!"

“Don’t you think I... I know that!?” Hunter finally found his voice again, “I never wanted this, I never wanted to hurt him!”

“But you did! And you hurt me! All of you hurt me and all of you hurt Feral!” He hissed, pointing to each of the four men, “I wanted to come home, I wanted you to come back for me, Feral and Omega wanted me to come back, or if I couldn’t Feral wanted to stay with me!”

“You chose to stay!” Hunter found his way into Crosshair’s space but moved back when Stitches moved between them.

“Feral knew I wanted to come home.” Crosshair said, “He always knew me, he knows me better than any of you do... and we grew up together...”

“I think this conversation is over.” Stitches said, looking to Crosshair, “This isn’t good for you.”

“No, he wants to say something, then let him say it!” Hunter growled but backed away slightly when Stitches stared at him.

“I said this conversation is over.” The medic said, “Unless anyone else has something to say?” The others all looked at each other but only Omega moved, she came over to him and hugged him.

“I’m... sorry this had to happen.” She said, her voice muffled by his shirt.

“Thank you Omega.” He sighed, hugging her back, “You’re a good kid.”

“Any brother want to say something?” Stitches asked, his stern gaze raking across the men, “Speak now or forever lose the option.”

Wrecker moved and before Crosshair could even react, the giant had pulled him into a tight hug, “I’m sorry Cross, I really am.”

“So am I big guy.” He replied, he’d missed Wrecker’s hugs, “So am I...”

“Oh, Feral’ll want this back.” Wrecker said, producing Feral’s jumper from his pack, “I wanted to give it to him in person but... well...”

“I’ll...” He looked to Stitches.

Stitches sighed a little, “Wrecker, Omega, I will grant you five minutes with Feral.” He said, “No one else is going to see him.”

“But...” Hunter started but stopped quickly when Stitches stared at him.

“I said, only Wrecker and Omega, you three get to stay here and think about your choices.” He said.



“You... you can't do that!” Hunter finally found his backbone and started to stalk up to Stitches but the medic just frowned and laid Hunter out with a punch.

“I won't repeat myself.” Stitches said, his voice scarily calm, “You will stay here, understand?” Hunter glared up at him as he tried to stop the blood gushing down his face, “I refuse you access to Feral, to the victim of your abuse, you may not have thought that...”

“H... Hunter?” They all looked to the young clone who stood there, looking so confused... and scared.

“Feral...?” Hunter asked.

Crosshair had to move quickly when Feral sank to the ground crying and hiccupping, “Shh... it's okay ad'ika.” He said gently, “He won't hurt you.”

“He... he said he would!” Feral sobbed, “I... please don't...!”

“Feral...” Hunter said weakly.

“I didn't mean too!”

## Family lost and family found

“Crosshair, bring your brother home.” Stitches said, not taking his eyes off of Hunter, making sure the Sergeant didn’t move but Crosshair couldn’t seem to get Feral to move, the small clone just couldn’t get his legs under him to stand.

“Feral?” Wrecker asked gently, “Can I come over?” Feral sniffled and hiccupped, “You know me, I ain’t gonna hurt you.” Feral tried to wipe his eyes but the tears wouldn’t stop, Wrecker moved slowly and carefully, “Here, I think you need this.” Stitches blinked and watched as the small clone was swallowed by a jumper, it clearly wasn’t designed for him nor was it anywhere near his size but it did help the boy in calming down.

“M... my jumper?” Feral asked with a hiccup when his head reappeared from inside the tent that was the jumper, his entire body was covered by the deep blue fabric, legs and all.

“Yep.” Wrecker smiled, “I wanted to give it back to you when we found each other but when I learned there was the chance that I wouldn’t be able to, I was going to ask Cross give it to you but now I can give it to you in person!” Stitches noticed something important of where Wrecker had positioned himself...

Between Feral and Hunter.

He was blocking Feral’s view of Hunter.

He was using his massive bulk to keep Feral out of the line of fire should Hunter try anything, “Not sure if it smells safe to you anymore but I’m sure it’ll smell nice again soon!” He watched as Feral smelled the jumper, “I kept it with Gonky, he misses you too but understands that you don’t want to come back, so do I, you’re safer here than you ever were with us.”

“Gonk!” Apparently the droid in question had heard Feral’s voice and came waddling up to them, straight past Hunter who had finally sat up, Tech had given him a cloth to stem the blood flowing from his nose.

“Hey Gonky.” Crosshair said gently.

“Gonk!” The droid replied, nudging Crosshair, almost like he was annoyed at something.

“Missed you too buddy, sorry I went away without telling you.” Crosshair replied before landing on his butt when the droid nudged him off his feet, this earned a weak giggle from Feral and a soul crushed look from Hunter.

That’s right Hunter, look at the damage you caused, at the pain you wrought here because it will be the last image you take to your grave.

He looked to Feral and the two, just in time to see the small clone hug the droid, “Gonk?” The droid seemed to have close attachments to the crew.

“I’m so sorry I left... that I can’t come home with you...” Feral said weakly, fresh tears dripping down his cheeks, “But know that you will forever be my bestest best friend in the whole galaxy and... and you will always have a place in my heart!” The pain the boy felt had migrated from just Hunter, to now include Tech and Echo, the ARC trooper looked away from the scene and Tech looked at his datapad... but Hunter couldn’t look away.

Good.

“I’m sure that we can come visit you both on occasion.” Wrecker said, “If you’d like and if that’s okay with your new family.”

“Yeah!” Omega said happily, “It’ll be nice.”

Feral was smelling the air, probably looking for anything that might indicate if the giant was honest or not, “S... Stitches... sir?” He smiled a little when Feral looked at him, well, what the boy probably assumed was him by scent.

“That is up to you, I can only advise you based on my status of being a medic.” He explained, “If you want Gonky, Wrecker and Omega to visit then I think it would be good for you.” He made a very obvious point of not saying to other three because they were not good for Feral or Crosshair, thus they weren’t welcome. They had made the least amount of effort to at least try to address the damage, Hunter seemed to be making himself a victim, he was a victim of the chip and Stitches couldn’t hold that against the young Sergeant... but Feral would never be able to be left alone with the man, neither would Crosshair but that would be more because Crosshair and Hunter would probably try to kill each other.

Tech had shut down and wasn’t engaging at all, he rarely got involved with these things but this was him trying to distance himself from everything, Echo still wouldn’t look at the group but Stitches could see the pain on his pale face, Echo had been a member of Domino Squad, Stitches remembered them from their days as cadets, he’d help them with bullies which, more often than not, was one of the squad members, usually picking on Echo and Droidbait. He had heard of the disaster that was the Rishi moon, he’d been on Coruscant when Fives died... Echo was feeling that pain all over again but this time it was partially his fault.

“I’d like to see them more often, we need family, don’t we ad’ika?” Crosshair said gently, the sniper had wanted his brothers to return for him and fight for him.

“M... mm.” Feral nodded as he wiped his eyes.

“Gonk!” Gonky nudged Feral.

Stitches left the small group and went to Hunter, Tech and Echo, his face returning to his resting teacher face, the one that made everyone listen, “You three will not be welcomed to visit, I don’t care what you do when those three are visiting but if I see you anywhere near our house or if I hear anything from Crosshair or Feral even suggesting that you were there, I will make sure they never find a body to burn.” He said calmly, “What was and wasn’t done here has forever barred you from visitation, for life. Am I understood?”

“Y... yes...”

“Yes?”

“Yes sir.”

## You are our family

“Stitches... sir?” Crosshair looked to Tech as the others went back to the Marauder, Wrecker helping Gonky back up onto the ship.

“Yes Tech?” Stitches had stayed calm the whole time, which helped the atmosphere a little, Crosshair didn’t even want to know what an explosion of negative emotions would be like from such a stable man.

“I...” Crosshair had never known Tech to lose his words, even when faced by an angry Hunter he always had something to say, he never lost his words because they were his strength but apparently they couldn’t defend him against the sharpness of Stitches’ words, the medic’s weapons, “I just...”

“Tech smells really sad.” Feral said in a small voice, “I... I don’t think I’ve ever smelled him this sad.”

“He’s just been told that he can never see you again because he didn’t act.” Crosshair sighed... Hunter he could understand being denied but Tech? The resident genius’ main response to these situations is always to shut down, it wasn’t like he could act because his brain decided it wasn’t worth it, there was too great a chance of damage, physically or emotionally, “Maybe Stitches will go easy on him... come on, let’s head home, Sawbones is probably pulling his hair out worrying about you.”

“O... okay.” Feral nodded and took hold of Crosshair’s hand at they walked back to the house, “I... I’m sorry I disobeyed but I... I caught their scent and I... I thought I imagined it...”

“I am a little upset but that’s because we wanted to keep you safe from them, from Hunter, I’m sorry we didn’t tell you they were planet side but we were afraid you’d want to go back to them.” He sighed a little.

“I... I was so scared he’d hurt me again... because...” His brother started hiccupping.

“We know why he hurt you.” He said, earning a confused look from Feral, “Ad’ika, his chip wasn’t fully removed and it was making his head over react, making his emotions louder... those emotions and thoughts existed already but... but the damaged remains of the chip made him lose control and act on those emotions and thoughts.”

“He... he wanted to do that?” Fresh tears dripped down Feral’s pale cheeks.

“He’s been like that since we were cadets, he’d try to beat us back in line so we wouldn’t get bullied or hurt by the regs.” Crosshair sighed through his nose, “The damaged chip just made his moral boundaries get chucked out the airlock, he saw you as a threat to his plan to keep you all safe, so he had to get rid of the threat before it could bring the bad people down on you all.”

“He... this... this is my fault?” Feral was hiccupping quite badly now.

“No, this is not your fault ad’ika, this is no one’s fault but the kaminoans and Hunter himself.” Crosshair gave Feral’s small hand a comforting squeeze, “It happened with me on Kamino, he was a ticking time bomb, any one of the Batch could have set him off, you just happened to stand against him.”

“There you are vod’ika.” Sawbones met them at the gate, “I have been so worried... oh no, are you alright?”

“I...” Feral hiccupped before wrapping himself around the medic, sobbing into his chest.

“Oh vod’ika, it’s okay.” Sawbones said gently, wrapping his arms around Feral’s small frame, Crosshair wasn’t sure if Tech would be allowed to have visits, inaction was as great a crime as action to Stitches but the medic had compassion, that much was clear... so maybe he would go easy on him? “Come, let’s go inside and get you something to drink, are you hungry at all?” Feral shook his head as he followed after the medic, “That’s alright, there’s still time before dinner.”

Crosshair had wanted to return to his brothers, he wanted them to return for him and love him again but... Hunter had been changed by his damaged chip, Echo saw him as too big of a threat, so did Tech apparently, Wrecker wanted him to come back but was so angry at him... he sighed because he knew he’d karked up but the Empire seemed like the only place that wanted him, it saw worth in him... but now? Now he had a whole family who loved him and his sometimes very annoying quirks, they protected him from harm, from a brother who was intent on killing him the second he saw him, he just wanted a family, he wanted someone to love him, to need him and want him to stay... he should have listened to Howzer much sooner, should have believed him and everything he stood for, “Vod? You okay?” He looked to Grim when the Sergeant’s hand appeared on his shoulder.

“Th... thank you for standing up for me.” He managed, “For helping me...”

“We told you vod, we will protect you, we will come back for you and fight for you, you are our brother now, our family and we protect our own.” Grim smiled gently, “You may not have been our batchmate but you are one of our batch now.” Crosshair felt tears dripping down his cheeks as his vision got blurry, “There will be ups and downs but what family is perfect?”

“Y... yeah.” He smiled as he wiped the tears dripping down his face.

“Come on vod, let’s go inside, I need a sit down and a cup of tea.” Grim chuckled.

“Does Stitches drink a lot of caf?” He asked softly as they entered the home.

“When I first met him, he was never seen without a mug of caf in his hand and Script, another medic, joked that Stitches had caf for blood.” Grim replied, “But with Sawbones’ help he’s cutting down substantially.”

“Substantially?” Crosshair asked with a quirked eyebrow.

“He now only has four cups a day.” Grim grinned.

“Only four?” Crosshair blinked.

“Down from sixteen!”

“Sixteen!? How irritated was he back then?!”

“Very.”

# Flashbacks

## Chapter Notes

Crosshair gets to see the cracks in Stitches' calm and stable armour

“Crosshair!” He woke up to Feral shaking him, it was still pitch-black outside, meaning still night time.

“Feral? What... what’s wrong?” He asked wiping his eyes, he could hear his brother’s stomach churning and could suddenly feel the crushing atmosphere in the air, which made him bolt upright, he was suddenly aware of the noises from downstairs, the muffled shouting and breaking of crockery.

“Some... something’s wrong with Stitches! He... he smells wrong!” Feral hiccupped, “He...”

“Easy ad’ika, I’ll go check it out.” He gave Feral’s shoulder a squeeze.

“Cyar’ika please, you’re okay.” He heard Sawbones’ voice when he opened the door to his room.

“Stay up here.” He met Grim in the hallway, “Sawbones will handle this.”

“What’s... what’s happening?” Feral asked as he came to stand beside the two, no sign of Speedy and Madcap.

“He’s experiencing a flashback episode.” Grim sighed.

“Why!?” That was Stitches’ voice but it was so full of emotions that Crosshair had never heard from him.

“Cyar’ika, please believe me, you are not screaming.” Crosshair blinked and looked to Grim, who sighed again, “You’re going to wake up the others and that will make you panic more.”

“Why... I can’t...?” Stitches was hyperventilating.

“Stitches, I need you to listen to me, can you do that?” Sawbones’ voice was suddenly soft and gentle, it seemed the explosive part of the episode was over, leaving Stitches sobbing hysterically, “Remember your training cyar’ika, in through your nose, out through your mouth.”

“They... they hurt brothers!” Stitches sobbed, Crosshair felt his stomach drop, looking once again to Grim, who wore the expression he got his name from.



“They did but we’re going to help them, we’re their brothers now, okay?” Was this something to do with him losing his brothers?

Feral took hold of Crosshair’s arm in his small hands and hid his face in Crosshair’s shirt, “He... smells so sad...” Feral’s voice was so muffled and quiet that Crosshair wasn’t sure he’d actually heard him.

“We’re all okay but you hurt yourself, let’s get you patched up and back to bed.” Sawbones’ voice was so kind and gentle that it seemed to help Stitches out a lot more, “Sound like a plan?”

“We better get back to our rooms, don’t want to be in the hall when they come back up or he’ll freak out again.” Grim said.

“O... okay.” Both Feral and himself nodded before making their way back to the bedroom.

“Crosshair...?” Feral sounded small, smaller than usual.

“Yes ad’ika?” He looked to his brother, noticing the tears in his grey eyes.

“Was... was this our fault?” Feral looked to him, “Because of Hunter and the Batch?”

“I... I don’t know.” He sighed, “There is so much I don’t know about Stitches and what triggers these episodes... I’m not going to ask him though, maybe Sawbones but not Stitches...” He was pretty sure it was caused by the fight they’d had with Hunter and the others, given the “they hurt brothers” line from the panicking medic, “But don’t worry, he’ll be okay, he has his family to look out for him and we’re part of that family, so we can help him too.”

“Y... yeah!” Feral said a little happier, “N... not sure how but... but I like helping!”

“You give great help ad’ika.” Crosshair smiled to him, “Do you want to bunk with me or are you okay?”

“I... I’ll be okay.” Feral nodded, “Are you okay?”

“Lot happened recently but I have a lot of people to help me, you included.” His smile softened at the happy sound that accompanied Feral’s small bounce, “Get some sleep, long day ahead of us.”

“Okay.” They both lay down in their respective beds, “Ori’vod?”

“Yeah?” He wiped his eyes.

“I love you.” His heart melted a little.

“I love you too ad’ika.” He held his hand down over the side of the bed, smiling when Feral’s hand found his, “Never forget that.”

“I won’t.” Was the soft reply.

The warm sunlight streaming in through the skylights greeted him when he woke again, he looked around and judging by Feral's empty but made bed, the young clone was already up and downstairs, Crosshair smiled a little, he rarely made his bed here but Feral was here two nights and was already starting his day by making his bed... maybe it was because it was his first actual bed in Maker knows how long? He sat up, then with a stretch and a scratch he stood up, moving to the door to use the refresher before going downstairs, he paused when he saw Feral moving around the kitchen, picking up pieces of destroyed crockery that hadn't been the night before, he was humming to himself as he felt around carefully for the pieces and Crosshair could hear him smelling the pieces as he picked them up. He wasn't sure how Feral was finding these pieces, maybe he found a shard and sniffed it to pick up the scent on it, which he used to find the others?

"You having fun ad'ika?" He asked softly, which made Feral jump out of his skin, almost dropping the small basin full of crockery pieces.

"Oh... oh I didn't hear... I just thought I'd help, they didn't get... all the pieces and I didn't want anyone to hurt themselves on the sharp bits." Feral blushed, "I pick up the big bits... then use the sweeping brush to get the small and tiny pieces into dust pan..."

"How are you finding them?" He asked as he walked over, careful to look for anything in his path to the small clone.

"I can smell them." Feral replied and Crosshair could see a smile on his features.

"Your nose is made of magic, you know that right?" He grinned, earning a giggle from Feral, "Do you want any help?"

"I... I'm nearly done, just have to... do the laundry room." Feral looked to the door.

"Laundry room?"

"He has... a great throwing arm."

"Apparently."

## Like glue

“Feral... kid, I will probably never be able to see you again... Stitches has barred me for seeing you until he can confirm you want to see me of your own choice, not a knee jerk reaction to my emotions. He has, however, let me send you voice recording, I can fill you in on our adventures, it won't be the same without you, Gonky is so lost without you beside him, sleeping on him and keeping him company... I'm going to miss you so much but I know that being with us has been so bad for your and I know that... that I haven't helped, to be honest I've made your life horrible, I never intended to but my coping tactics, which were bad when faced with people who could fight back, were destroying you. I am so sorry Feral, I hope that there had been some good times in our time together, I hope I gave you something other than pain because you gave me so much love and happiness... I miss you already kid... I love you... I always have... never forget that okay? Oh and Crosshair? I have no words to convey how sorry I am, for abandoning you, for everything... I love you vod'ika... Hunter out.”

Crosshair could barely hold back his tears as the two of them listened to the recording, Feral was sobbing as he hugged Minnow to his chest, the file was sent to them at some point in the night, it was wasn't a guilt trip, this was raw emotions from someone who was genuinely broken and sorry for everything that had happened, “Come here ad'ika.” Crosshair said as he pulled Feral into a hug, “Don't worry... we'll all see each other again... someday.” He didn't know when, he didn't know how but they would be a family again, they would all be together once more... hopefully before they all joined 99 on his long march.

“Can I come up?” A voice asked after a knock on the bedroom door.

“Of course.” Crosshair replied as he wiped his eyes and looked to Sawbones as he appeared at the top of the stairs.

“Who wants some hot cocoa?” The medic smiled as he walked over with two mugs, “We even have cream and marshmallows, though I am unsure of how you'll be able to drink them through a straw.”

“Cocoa for breakfast?” He smiled as he took the offered mug, “And you say you're a medic.”

“I am but unlike my dear cyar'ika, I allow for comfort foods when the need arises.” Sawbones smiled gently, “Here vod'ika.” He held the mug to Feral, who finally looked up from where he'd buried his face in Minnow.

“How... how is Stitches?” Feral asked as he took the mug from the older clone, seemingly only noticing now that there was cream and marshmallows, “Oh... I've... never had cream and... marshmallows...”

“Well, there's a first time for everything I suppose.” Sawbones replied, “As for how Stitches is... he's still sleeping, he hasn't been sleeping properly and his eating habit has slipped slightly...” The medic sighed, “He's more likely to have these episodes when he's tired or hungry, I won't know how he is until he wakes up.”

“O... oh.” Feral nodded.

“Do they happen often?” Crosshair took over the questions when Feral sipped his cocoa, “The episodes I mean.”

“Since moving to Naboo, not as much, they happen every now and again if he’s under a lot of stress but during the war they happened a fair amount.” Sawbones sighed and sat down on the bed beside them, which had Feral sitting between them, “Brotherhood and family are his foundation, he had a great batch, they were very close but when he lost them... well... he didn’t have many people. We were based out of Coruscant and he was on Kamino, he had Script and Needles but they were friends... not family.”

“How... how did he lose them?” Feral asked in a small voice.

“Bombing raid a few months into the war, they were behind enemy lines, no way of getting to Republic forces because their ship was shot down... the building was hit by a shell, he was the only one to survive... his brothers had been crushed by the rubble, he was pinned, in agony, surrounded by the dead bodies of his brothers for hours before he was found by a squad from the 187th under General Windu.” Sawbones sighed and Crosshair felt his heart clench, “By all rights he should have succumbed to his injuries... sometimes he wishes he had... but he decided to live, to fight for people who might go through something similar to him, help people with PTSD, he was more a psychologist than a surgeon most of the time.”

“So... Hunter’s actions went... they went against everything he wants brothers to be?” He asked.

“Yes.” The medic sighed, “He acted on instinct and his base instinct believes that inaction is as grave a crime as action... but talking with Tech and Echo helped him come back around, the Batch can come here and have supervised visits but Hunter can only come if you want him too. However, judging by your reactions to his message, I imagine you do want to meet with him.”

“Stitches doesn’t... want me to... but that’s because I...” Feral sighed, “I guess I need people to be... happy and Hunter isn’t...”

“He just doesn’t want you to run back into a situation that will be bad for your mental wellbeing, he has barred Hunter until you are in a good headspace for a reunion.” Crosshair explained.

“He’s correct, goodbye may seem like forever but it isn’t.” Sawbones smiled when Feral looked between them, “You can’t keep families apart for too long you know.”

“R... really?” Feral asked softly.

“Nope because we’re like glue.” Crosshair wrapped his arm around his brother, “We stick together, even if the bond isn’t as strong as we’d like.”

“Okay!”

## Laundry

“Vod?” He blinked when a voice found its way into his thoughts, “Vod, you okay?” He looked to the owner of the voice, seeing it was Grim, “Come on, shift’s over.”

“O... oh.” He blushed a little, he must have been in his head longer than he thought.

“Something wrong?” Grim asked as they got their stuff from the lockers, “You’ve been lost in thought for a good while now.”

“Just... me and Feral share a decanting day.” He replied, “He’s two years younger than me but we share it.”

“And?” Grim raised an eyebrow in confusion.

“It’s next week and I don’t know what to get him.” He replied, “He probably already got me something.”

“Oh... that’s probably why he was flustered yesterday.” He blinked and looked to Grim again, “Sawbones said he’d take him shopping tomorrow morning as it’s his day off, so Feral probably hasn’t gotten you something yet.” The Sergeant grinned, “We’re also off tomorrow if you want to go shopping?”

“What... what do you think he’d like?” He wasn’t good at the whole gift buying thing, he’d usually just let the others choose the gift and he’d give his approval if he thought it worked.

“I think he’d like anything you get him because it comes from you.” Grim smiled gently, “But how about we have a look around tomorrow afternoon, sound like a plan?”

“Yeah... yeah it does.” He smiled in return, he really wasn’t sure what to get his baby brother but he was sure that with the help of their new family, it would be a good gift, he wondered if the Batch remembered it was their decanting day soon, had their days of celebrating decanting days vanished when the order went out?

“We’re home!” Grim called when they entered the home, where the smell of fresh laundry met them.

“You’re home!” Feral appeared and hugged them both, “St... Stitches and Sawbones said... they’re going to be late...”

“You’re on your own?” Crosshair asked with a small frown.

“Yeah because Speedy and Madcap are... working at the other... port but I did laundry and... I cleaned up!” The young clone bounced happily, “I’ve never used a washing machine before but I figured it out! The line was too tall for me but the nice man next door gave me a hand.”

Crosshair smiled happily, “You becoming a domestic clone?” He asked, gently placing his hand on Feral’s head, earning him a happy sound from his baby brother.

“I... I spent a lot of time with 99, so I... I better have picked something up or he’ll be... very unimpressed with me!” Feral replied, he wore a grin, only slightly obscured under his mask.

“He won’t be anything but proud of you.” His smile turned soft.

“He’ll be proud of you too ori’vod.” Feral said before he wrapped his arms around Crosshair again.

“Thanks ad’ika.” He returned the hug, “How did you figure out how to use the washing machine?”

“Magic!” Feral giggled, which made Crosshair chuckle in response.

“Anyways, I need to have a shower and change my clothes.” He said as Feral released him from the hug.

“I... I put your clean clothes in your wardrobe.” Feral called after him as he started up the stairs, “And there are fresh towels in... in the refresher! More in the airing cupboard if you need them!”

“Thanks ad’ika!” He replied, it was weird having clean clothes during the week, they normally did laundry on the weekend, when someone was off... but Feral seemed to enjoy the task, he smiled at the thought of fun-sized beanpole Feral trying to reach a clothes line that was arm’s length away from standard clone size, Crosshair had issues with it sometimes and he was an extra-large beanpole.

“Don’t use all the hot water Crosshair!” He heard Grim on the other side of the door, “I need one too!”

“Sure thing!” He called back and turned off the shower, “Come on in!” He wrapped a towel around his waist as the door opened.

“Fresh towels?” Grim asked with a blink.

“Yep.” Crosshair smiled, he hoped Feral would slot into domestic life as easily as Crosshair did, he seemed to be doing it already to be fair, “I think he’ll be okay here...”

“Feral?” Grim asked, obviously confused about the train of thought that led to that statement, “Yeah, he seems to be settling in okay and it’s only been a few days.” The Sergeant said as he turned on the shower.

“I think it took him this long to get a base idea of the house layout.” Crosshair smiled as he dried his hair, which was starting to grow out again, it wouldn’t cover the scar but that was okay because... because it was a reminder of how he got here, it was a story of his desperation to be accepted somewhere, to be wanted by someone... anyone... now he had a whole family of brothers who accepted him and wanted him, who accepted and wanted Feral.

“I think Stitches and Sawbones are looking in to getting him corrective lenses, so he can at least see a little better.” Grim said.

“Tech is also short-sighted but nowhere near as bad.” He sighed a little because that meant multiple things, the who batch was short-sighted, they only saw the problems of the now and not the future, “Hopefully it will make his life even a little bit easier.”

“Hopefully.” The other man sighed also.

“How’s Stitches doing? I haven’t seen him since yesterday.” He had been worried about the medic, he had suffered a massive episode that resulted in lots of broken crockery and injuries to the man, nothing serious but it had left a mark on Stitches’ mood since then, he went to work at stupid hours of the morning and didn’t come back until late.

“He’ll be okay, it takes a while for him to calm down again.” Grim replied.

Crosshair sighed again, “I hope so...”

“Same.”

## Found families are still families

Stitches sighed as he opened the front door, it was well into the night when he got home and he was running on energy fumes, everyone else was obviously asleep because the house was dark... except he saw a small light in the kitchen, who would be up? He hung his coat up and took off his boots before walking to the kitchen, he paused and smiled gently at the sight of Feral asleep at the table, a cold mug of what smelled like cocoa was sitting on the table just beyond his folded arms that were acting as a pillow for his head, "Feral? Little One?" He asked gently, resting his hand on the boy's small back

"Welcome home... ori'vod... I..." Feral replied but was clearly not anywhere close to fully awake, must be that smelling the environment thing Crosshair mentioned.

"Come on Little One, let's get you to bed." He said gently and picked up the boy, he was so small and light.

"Mm." Feral wrapped his arms around Stitches, "Made you... cocoa..."

"Thank you but you should be in bed." He replied as they ascended the stairs, he got no verbal reply just small, soft snores. They would have to get Feral a proper bed soon, the futon was good for a short while but over time it could get a little uncomfortable, he gently placed Feral down and gave him his plush, which he hugged to his chest instinctively "Good night Little One, sleep easy." He said as he pulled the comforter up over the boy's small frame.

He stood up slowly and made his way back to the stairs, "Stitches?" He heard Feral's small voice, still heavy with sleep.

"Yes Little One?" He looked back to Feral.

"I love you ori'vod." He felt his heart hurt at the honesty of the statement.

"And I you." He replied, "Sleep, we can speak in the morning." He made it down the stairs and carefully closed over the door, he had to pause at the door though, his thoughts catching up with him, in the space of such a short amount of time, he was basically a parent to Crosshair and Feral... he wasn't sure about that, sure he was the oldest here, not that old though... he would help them regardless, to be the best them that they could possibly be.

He smiled to himself and made his way to bed, he was half way through getting into his sleepwear when Sawbones' voice appeared in the dark, "Cyar'ika?" The other medic didn't sound fully awake either, "What... time is it?"

"It's late cyar'ika, go back to sleep." He smiled and the second he lay down, Sawbones was snuggled up against him, "I'm getting some sleep, don't worry."

"Good." Sawbones sighed a little, Stitches smiled and kissed the top of his head, "Night..."



“Good night cyar’ika.” He sighed a little too... he had a family again, it wasn’t the one he was decanted with, it was small and a little broken but it was good... he wrapped his arms around Sawbones and hugged him, he was safe with his family and they were safe with him, with each other. He was rudely awoken by his alarm blaring at him, “I’m up! I’m up you damned thing!” He hissed as he hit it to make it stop, he massaged his forehead once it stopped but blinked when he realised it was way later than he normally set his ... midday... “Midday!” He sat up quickly, he was supposed to be at work three hours ago! He moved quick to get his clothes on but spotted a note beside his alarm,

> Don’t forget it’s your day off. If no one is home when you wake up, know that:

- I’ve taken Feral out for some shopping

- Grim and Crosshair have also gone shopping

and

- The hyper duo is at work.

So try not to freak out too much :) <

He blinked again as his brain caught up with the situation, Sawbones had let him sleep, obviously for as long as his body needed, which was apparently a long sleep, with a sigh he fixed his hair and much more calmly put on his clothes before going to the refresher, he’d have to get a shower soon, he hated them so much... he spotted a small pile of fresh towels on the small cabinet that held their spare towels and bathroom essentials. He picked one up and smelled it, these were very fresh based on the strength of the scent, it wasn’t like the others to have fresh towels out every day... “Hm.” He frowned a little, he’d have to ask when someone got back, he sighed a little then made his way downstairs, the house was empty and quiet, “Hm... some tea and a sit down in the garden might be nice.” He said to himself with a nod.

He had just finished his tea when he heard someone open the back door, “We’re back ori’vod!” Feral called happily, they boy was slotting into normal live very quickly but that was under easy circumstances... they hadn’t dealt with a fight or anything like that yet.

“Coming!” He called back and stretched before standing up, “I hope you got what you needed.” He smiled to Feral as he met him at the door.

“It took a while to find it but I think we got it.” Sawbones smiled as he put stuff away.

“Oh?” He looked to Feral.

“Me... me and Crosshair share a... a decanting day so... so I wanted to get him something... he’s had a very bad year and I wanted to help him feel better.” Feral replied and Stitches noted that his speech got more broken when he talked about making his own choices.

“I’m sure that he’ll love it because it’s from you.” He smiled and watched the small blush appear on Feral’s pale cheeks.

“R... really?” He asked in a small voice.

“I can guarantee it.”

“Y... yay!”

# Present hunting

## Chapter Notes

Things that make me sad: Imagining that Crosshair had no one to celebrate his decanting day with when he was with the Empire. ):

“So, did you celebrate last year?” Crosshair blinked and looked to the man beside him, “Your decanting day, did you celebrate it?”

“I... it was after Bracca so...” He sighed as he touched the scar on his head, “I managed to get myself a little cake and... when the nat-borns were asleep I... celebrated my decanting day, I even said decanting day wishes for Feral... quietly, I wanted to celebrate with my brothers but...”

“Hey, we’re here and so is Feral, we’ll celebrate together.” Grim said gently as he rested his hand on Crosshair’s shoulder, making him look to the older clone again, “You won’t be alone this year, okay?”

“O... okay.” He nodded with a small smile, he had people with him, brothers... he could celebrate with Feral this year, they could get each other little gifts and have fun, “What do you think he’d like?” He asked as they walked through the market, “He... I know he likes the little droid I got him, so he might like a friend for his droid, he wouldn’t want them to be lonely... he has Minnow so a plush isn’t on the table... he has enough clothes...” Now that Feral had the comfort jumper back he was so much more relaxed, knowing he could retreat to the safety of their shared room and just... hide in it... Stitches probably needed a go in the comfort jumper, it had a calming effect on everyone, Crosshair was so glad Wrecker kept it with Gonky, it probably smelled so much safer than if he’d kept it with the rest of them, “It’s really difficult to get him something because he’s never had the confidence to tell people what he likes, mostly because of his first squad but even with the Batch, we never knew what to get him, Tech and Wrecker gave him something, his mask and his metal straw... but after that he never accepted he deserved anything so he never said anything.”

“I see.” Grim frowned a little, “Well, Sawbones was saying that he liked the smell of one woman’s perfume, said it smelled kind and safe.”

“He experiences the whole galaxy through his nose, he rarely finds loud smells nice, so it must have been attached to a nice lady.” He smiled.

“He can tell good people from bad people?” Grim asked.

“Yep, well... when he’s not in panicked survival mode.” Crosshair sighed through his nose, “It took him listening to our hearts to realise we weren’t a threat.” He noticed Grim looked

confused, “He likes listening to people’s hearts, he likes the feel of the vibrations it makes, he likes kind vibrations... like the vibrations of someone he loves when they talk.”

“Is that why he’s a very huggable person?” The older clone smiled.

“Yeah.” He smiled in return, he would never be tired of the hugs Feral gave, they were warm and kind... and Crosshair needed so much warmth and kindness, he’d been starved of any kind of kindness for so long that when Sawbones and Stitches offered him a place in their family, a place that was warm and kind and accepting... he couldn’t say no. His need to be useful to the Empire, his desperation to be needed and useful... it almost robbed him of a safe home, with a family that accepted him, there were disputes but they were easily remedied by a cup of cocoa and a conversation at the dinner table, generally under either, the stern gaze of Stitches or, if Stitches was involved in the dispute, the kind but authoritative gaze of Sawbones... it was very civilised to be honest... so much better than what the Batch did. Heated disputes that almost always ended up in a punch up, mostly because the disputes usually involved Crosshair and Hunter butting heads over something stupid and small, Wrecker usually broke it up... but when they took in Feral, they had less explosive blow-outs because Feral, even though he was the physically smallest person on board, tried to get them to stop before the emotions got too loud and he just started crying, then started gagging as the smells made his stomach churn. They tried to talk it out once they discovered that their explosive arguments and punch ups were making their brother physically sick, they learned very quickly that they couldn’t solve all their problems with violence, that they had to learn to talk it out...

Which didn’t always work, emotions got too loud and Feral spent the night hugging the bowl in the refresher.

“What’s so funny?” Grim asked when Crosshair huffed a weak laugh.

“Feral and Hunter used to joke that one of Feral’s undesirable enhancements was his bottomless vomit maker.” He replied, “He would get so physically unwell when we got into explosive arguments, we tried talking about our issues but me and Hunter just couldn’t click on somethings and we just...”

“Punch up in the refresher?” Grim asked with a smile.

“Yeah, I think Feral will prefer the way you all settle disputes.” He smiled a little, then realised this wasn’t helping him in his search for a decanting day present for his baby brother.

“You know something, I just had a weird idea.” Grim said as he stopped walking, earning a raised eyebrow from Crosshair, “There are these things they designed for babies who are colic, they are designed to simulate the heartbeat, vibrations and warmth of their mother, which help comfort the baby.”

“Are you suggesting we get Feral one?” He was sure his eyebrow was in his hairline and unlike Stitches, Crosshair had quite a high hairline.

“Well, something similar, you said he calms down when listens to people’s hearts, likes the vibrations of people when they talk, so it might be something to think about, especially if he’s

at home on his own for any amount of time.” Grim replied as he folded his arms.

He blinked, “That’s a good idea actually.”

“I have them on occasion.”

## A quiet celebration

“Crosshair?” He was gently shaken out of slumber, the room was dark but he could make out Feral in the shafts of moonlight as they came through the skylights, this wasn’t like last time, this wasn’t an emergency.

“What’s wrong ad’ika?” He asked and wiped his eyes as he looked at the chronometer, oh one hundred hours.

“Happy decanting day.” Feral said.

“Happy decanting day.” He smiled softly, “Why wake me up now, why not wait till morning?”

“Because the others will be up and I wanted a moment to just celebrate ourselves, because we couldn’t do it last year.” Feral replied in a small voice as Crosshair sat up, “And... I wanted to give you this now, I got something small for when the others are up... but I wanted this to be between us...”

A substantial package appeared in his hands, “What is it?” He asked before leaning over to turn on the small light between the bed and the futon.

“I couldn’t get you a scope so...” Feral fidgeted with his fingers, “So I got you something else.” Crosshair blinked and slowly unwrapped the present to reveal a telescope, “The nice man at the market said that before there was space flight, sailors used these to see long distances, people would watch the stars with them and... I thought you’d like it.”

“Oh ad’ika.” He smiled and ran his fingers over the instrument, he didn’t even want to know how much it cost, “It’s beautiful.”

“R... really? You... you like it?” Feral asked shyly.

“I love it.” He replied gently, “Come here.” He opened his arms to the younger clone, there was only a brief hesitation before his arms were filled, “Thank you... thank you so, so much.” He had missed being able to look through a scope, to see beyond the battle, to be able to see things that others couldn’t... to be able to help...

“I didn’t know what to get you... but I know you missed having a scope... you always smelled so happy when you looked through it.” Feral returned the hug, not as tight but still comforting.

“Nothing gets past that nose of yours... does it?” He smiled when Feral shook his head, “I got you something too, do you want it now?”

“O... oh... you didn’t have too.” Feral replied and Crosshair could feel the younger clone’s blush.

“What kind of ori’vod would I be if I didn’t get my vod’ika something for his decanting day?” He chuckled and felt the tension bleed from Feral’s frame, “Grim helped me with this because we both know I’m absolutely terrible at getting gifts.”

“Is... is that why you two were out yesterday?” Feral asked as they broke the hug.

“Yep and it appears we had the same idea, because I wanted to give you something personal when we were alone, then give you something small for when the others were up... you just beat me to the punch.” He grinned, earning another blush from Feral, “Now, this is possibly the weirdest thing I’ve ever bought in my entire existence but Grim thought it was a good idea and he’s better at this whole shebang... so...” He reached under the bed, luckily Feral’s eyesight was terrible because he didn’t see it when he lay down to go to sleep and luckily it smelled like Crosshair so he didn’t get suspicious, “We’re going to have to sit on your futon for this.”

“What is it?” Feral was so confused as they moved to the futon.

“So, you know how you love the sound of people’s heartbeat?” Feral nodded, “And the vibrations people make?” Another nod, “And the warmth of sleeping on another person?”

“Y... yeah?” Feral looked even more confused.

“And I know you won’t always go to someone when you need comforting because I guess you don’t want to bother them.” He smiled, “Well, Grim suggested I get you this.”

Feral blinked and opened the box, sniffing it before looking to Crosshair again, “What is it?”

“This is a comforting device, originally designed for babies who were colic but apparently they started designing it for young adults that suffer from severe anxiety and other behavioural issues.” He explained, “It mimics the warmth of another person’s body, the sound of a calm heartbeat and the vibrations of someone speaking softly.” Feral blinked in confusion as he took out the thing, it was vaguely humanoid shaped, he placed it down in the futon and lay on it, Crosshair smiled as he turned it on and watched as any tension in Feral’s body just melted away, he didn’t need to ask the young clone if he liked it because he could see it.

“It... it sounds like... Hunter’s heart...” Feral’s voice was small again.

“That’s because it is.” Crosshair replied gently, he’d took a leap of faith and got in contact with the Batch, mostly to remind them of their shared decanting day but to also ask if Tech had a recording of Hunter’s heartbeat, the man had been incredibly confused but sent over the file anyways, then said they would speak with Stitches about coming to visit them for their decanting day, Feral didn’t know this was happening but Stitches had said that this once, and only this once, Hunter could visit because Feral had been saying he wanted to see Hunter of his own choice. Feral had been doing really well in the home, had survived a dispute between Crosshair and Madcap without needing to hug the bowl in the refresher, it was such a short amount of time and he was slotting into normal life so well, they would take a chance on letting Feral meet with Hunter, “Do you like it?”

“M... mm.” Feral nodded.

“It should help you when you miss them.” He massaged Feral’s small back, “And when you’re scared and want comfort, even when we’re not home.”

“Thank you...” Feral hiccupped.

“No problem ad’ika.”

“I love you.”

“And I you.”



# Reunion

“Happy decanting day vod’ika.” Sawbones smiled as they arrived downstairs, giving Crosshair a kiss on the forehead, “And you too vod’ika.” He gave Feral a kiss also but on the top of his head, earning a happy sound from Feral and a little bounce, “I do hope you both had a good night’s rest.” The medic had a knowing smile.

“Y... yes.” Feral nodded, obviously smelling what Crosshair was seeing.

“Oh good, let’s have some breakfast, Stitches had to pop out for a little bit but should be back soon.” Sawbones smiled when Feral took hold of his hand also making Crosshair smile softly, Feral was getting comfortable in this setting, he was relaxing and allowing himself to be himself, like the setting had allowed Crosshair to be himself, “The other three aren’t up yet, so you have the table to yourselves.” Even though Feral was acclimatizing well, he still had issues with eating, still had issues with accepting that he deserved food and that it wasn’t being wasted on him. So, sometimes eating with a large group of people was difficult to do without him ending up crying, especially in the morning, it was made worse when they had a dessert after dinner but luckily Stitches was there to talk with him, Sawbones had told Crosshair that Stitches had similar reactions when he first shared a meal with Sawbones and his brothers, after the loss of his own brothers because he thought he didn’t deserve it... because he let his brothers die... because he couldn’t do his job as a medic.

“Aren’t you and Stitches working today?” He asked as the three of them sat at the table.

“No, we have a full roster but we are on emergency call should the need arise.” Sawbones replied, “Would you like some cocoa Feral?”

“O... oh... um...” Feral stammered, hot cocoa was also still an issue.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to ad’ika.” Crosshair smiled and gave Feral’s shoulder a squeeze, “There’s juice or milk or even water if you want one of those.”

“Oh vod’ika, I didn’t mean to upset you.” Sawbones said gently as he moved to sit beside Feral, who had started to sob, “Shh, it’s okay.” He wrapped his arms around Feral and hugged him to his chest. Crosshair hated seeing his brother so sad, he couldn’t blame the Batch for this one because they had tried so hard to help him overcome this... no, this was fully on Feral’s first squad and the abuse they subjected Feral to, “Myself and Stitches have gifts for both of you, would you like them now? Or should we wait for Stitches to get back?”

“I think we should wait for Stitches.” Crosshair smiled, spotting the knowing smile that returned to the older clone’s features, they both knew where Stitches had gone and why he had gone but hopefully he got back soon, before Feral freaked out too much.

“Wh... where did he go?” Feral looked to Sawbones when they broke apart.

“He had to go pick something up from the clinic, he shouldn’t be too much longer, well I would hope so, given his great dislike for tardiness.” Sawbones chuckled, then continued

when he saw their confused faces, “Oh he hates it! It was one of the things he’d dole out disciplines for, either show up early or on time, or don’t show up at all. Gave me a gruelling once when I was training under him, I had been up way later than I had meant to and had slept in.”

“You... you trained under him?” Feral asked.

“I did.” Sawbones smiled a little sadly, “I had to finish my training under someone else because he’d gone out into the galaxy with his brothers... and only he came back... half dead and so very, very broken.”

“But... but you helped him and now... now he smells strong and... proud.” Feral fidgeted with his fingers, “Like... like one of... the Commanders...”

“I’ll take that as a compliment Little One.” They all looked to the medic as he appeared in the kitchen but Crosshair noticed he’d left the front door open.

“O... oh you... you left the door open ori’vod... shouldn’t we...” Feral stopped dead, the only sound leaving him was the sounds of him smelling the air that wafted in from the outside, “H... Hunter?” He looked between them and Sawbones nodded, “Hunter!”

It was a miracle that Feral made it outside without knocking anything over, “Kid!” They heard and by the time the three of them made it to the door, Feral was vacuum sealed to the Sergeant, who was hugging him tight, “Happy decanting day kid.” Hunter said into Feral’s shoulder, “Didn’t think we’d miss it, did you?”

“I... I never, ever thought I’d see you again!” Feral sobbed, “I... I wanted too...!”

“I know... I know kid, so did I.” Hunter replied, Crosshair smiled at the sight, they had kept them apart for the sake of Feral’s mental health, so he wouldn’t go running back into an abusive situation solely because he thought it’s what Hunter wanted and not what he himself wanted but seeing this... maybe keeping them apart wasn’t good either, denying Feral access to the only family he’d known for so long...

“Come ‘ere Cross!” He was suddenly enveloped by huge arms and hugged so tight that his feet left the ground, “Happy decanting day!”

“Wr... Wrecker... can I... please breathe!” He wheezed past the giant’s bone crushing hug.

“Oops! Sorry!” Wrecker laughed as he released Crosshair, leaving him gasping for air, he hadn’t missed those... not one bit.

“Happy decanting day ori’vod!” Omega appeared and hugged him once he’d managed to get his breath back.

“Hey Omega.” He smiled, “You been good?”

“I have!” She smiled up to him, “Have you?”

“You know I have.” He grinned because Stitches was in contact with her, helping her in her transition into adulthood.

He needed them too...

He needed his family.

## Realising many things

Stitches stood at the port, watching as the Marauder touched down, he wasn't one hundred percent happy with this but it was two of his brothers' decanting days and they wanted to see their brothers, well, this was a surprise for Feral because Crosshair already knew that they were coming, it was his idea after all. He frowned as the steps came down and the five of them descended the steps, "You are getting better with your time management Sergeant." He said to the young trooper, who ducked his head and wouldn't make eye contact, much to Stitches displeasure, "I hope you are all versed in how this meeting will take place?"

"Yes sir." They all replied.

"I will be keeping a close eye on you all but I will ask that we all not upset Feral by being too negative, I will try and I expect you all too as well." He looked at each of them, "Understood?"

"Yes sir." They all replied again, they were very willing to at least attempt it, they knew Feral could smell emotions and how negative emotions could affect him.

"Very good. Follow me." He turned on his heel and led them through the streets, he wondered if they would have remembered if Crosshair hadn't reminded them? He was also very confused as to why Crosshair needed a recording of Hunter's heartbeat but then again, Feral liked listening to the organ, it may be him wanting something from the Batch because he couldn't meet them in person...? He was beginning to wonder if keeping them apart was doing the boy as much good as both him and Sawbones wanted for the boy, he was slotting in very well and was making good strides towards a somewhat decent grasp on his mental health. "Wait out here, this is a surprise after all." He looked to the five, who all nodded, "Good." He nodded and entered the house without closing the front door, allowing the scent of the Batch to follow him in, it had taken a moment for Feral to catch the scent but when he did, he was off like a shot, somehow missing everything along the way.

He smiled a little as he watched the family reunite once more, this time in safety and gentleness, "Are you alright cyar'ika?" Sawbones asked gently, taking hold of his hand.

He sighed through his nose, "Just doubting myself, I want to keep Feral and Crosshair safe from the Batch... but I'm starting to think I'm causing more harm than good..."

"They need their family cyar'ika." Sawbones said gently, "The brothers and sister who are like them, we are a safe place and a good family for them but we are normal clones, our lives have been so different to theirs, we just don't understand what they went through."

"You are correct cyar'ika... again..." He huffed an unhappy laugh, "I guess I still have a lot of issues to work through."

"We all do but yours is different to ours, you are like them." Sawbones smiled to him, "Maybe you can find peace with them also, work past the past and work towards being part of the stable ground the boys can stand on, don't be the wall between them and the Batch."

“You have such a way with words.” He smiled sadly, “I guess most of my life has been enclosed by walls...”

“You just need to let people take them down with you.” Sawbones cupped his cheeks and kissed his forehead, “And you need to let me shave that hedge again.”

“I need a shower anyways.” He chuckled.

“In the worst way! I’m surprised Feral can stand anywhere close to you!” His cyar’ika laughed, “Come ade! Let’s head inside.” He called to the youths, seeing these young people just solidified how old Stitches felt sometimes.

“W... what does ade mean?” Feral asked.

“Ade, noun, means children in mando’a.” Tech explained.

“O... oh.” Feral nodded as he followed behind the others, pausing in front of Stitches, “Stitches?”

“Yes Little One?” He blinked, then froze when Feral hugged him.

“Thank you... for this... for letting us see... our family...” Feral’s muffled voice was very soft and if Stitches hadn’t have been paying attention, he probably wouldn’t have heard him.

“You deserve to see them and it is... wrong of me to deny both of you that right.” He replied and hugged the boy, “I thought I was doing what was best for you... but I see now that that wasn’t the best course of action on my part.”

“I... I know why you did it...” Feral replied, “And... and I think it did do us good, especially me, because now we can see them and be... I can be safe in doing it...”

“That makes me happy Little One.” He smiled, “Come, we have a day to celebrate.”

“When’s your decanting day ori’vod?” Feral asked as he took hold of Stitches’ hand.

“Oh it’s not for a while.” He replied, “And don’t ask how old I am because I want to at least pretend I’m not old.”

“O... okay!” Feral nodded and bounced a little, “Sawbones is right... you do need a shower.”

“You are getting cheeky, you know that, right?” He chuckled, earning him a giggle from Feral, it was still something Stitches was getting used to because Feral was bred to be a soldier but was anything but one.

“This place is making Crosshair so happy, I’m... glad it was you and Sawbones who rescued him, not us... or the Empire. He needs happiness after... after everything he’s been through.” Feral smiled, a soft smile almost hidden by his mask, “So... thank you... for giving him a family who lets him be him, it’s a better gift than... I could ever give him.” Stitches’ heart melted at those words, “And I’m happy they help you... smell strong and proud...”

“Thank you Little One.” He didn’t have many words to give.

So he hugged him.

## Droid and a chat

“Oh! I forgot something in the ship!” Omega had said, “I’ll be right back!” That was twenty minutes ago and Crosshair was getting a little concerned, Feral was intent on making up for lost time with his brothers but Crosshair... still felt a little like an outcast.

“You okay vod?” Grim asked as the older clone sat down beside him, “You’re sitting over here all alone.”

“Just... I feel like an outcast... like I don’t belong.” He sighed.

“Don’t worry, you’re not an outcast, come on, let’s get back to mingling, yeah?” Grim smiled to him and after a moment he nodded, he followed after the Sergeant, back towards the group.

“Ori’vod!” Feral jogged up to them and wrapped his arms around Crosshair, “I... I’m sorry we made you feel bad...”

He should have known that Feral knew he wasn’t happy, “That’s okay, I’m just... not used to this many people anymore.” He returned the hug, not just that though... he still didn’t feel safe with the Batch, he didn’t feel safe letting Feral near the Batch but this was the best way for the two of them to try and rebuild their relationships with the others.

“It’s... they’re not going to hurt us...” Feral said so softly that even Crosshair barely heard him, “They... they’re really sorry...”

“I know... doesn’t mean I... can’t be nervous.” He sighed a little, “Come on, I want to give you your little gift.”

“Oh... okay!” Feral bounced once they broke the hug, “I can give you yours!”

They were almost back with the group when Feral paused and Crosshair could hear him smelling the air, he was about to ask his baby brother what he smelled but was cut off by a loud “Gonk!”

“Sorry we’re late!” Omega appeared alongside the droid that was carrying something on top of his chassis, “He had trouble getting down the steps!”

“G... Gonky!” Feral was wrapped around the droid before anyone even blinked, “I missed you!”

“Gonk!” The droid nudged him gently as Omega took the thing from his head, “Gonk?” The droid was confused as to why Feral hadn’t let go and why the young clone was crying.

“I... I missed you so much...” Crosshair smiled sadly, whatever about missing the Batch, Feral missed Gonky beyond anything in the galaxy, “Th... thank you for being here for us.”

“Don’t I get a hug Gonky?” Crosshair asked with a chuckle, trying to lighten the mood, “Goes to show who you love more, I feel so insulted.”

“Gonk!” The droid nudged him hard once Feral released him from his hold, “Gonk!”

“Oof!” Crosshair landed back on his rear, “Save me Feral!” He laughed as the droid nudged him again, earning a giggle from Feral.

“He’s sorry Gonky!” The younger clone said as he put his hands on the droid’s side.

“Gonk!” The droid stopped, clearly happy with his triumphant win over Crosshair.

“Come on guys!” He looked to Madcap, who was waving them over to the table, “Cake time!”

“Come on ad’ika.” He smiled as he stood up, holding out his hand for the younger clone, who took it without hesitation.

It was after sundown by the time they ran out of food and beer, now everyone was inside and just chatting with each other but Crosshair spotted Feral, in the corner, sleeping sitting upright, propped against Gonky... like he had done so many countless times before, Omega was curled up on top of Feral, her head resting on his chest and his arms were wrapped around her, “Crosshair?” He blinked and looked to Hunter as the Sergeant appeared beside him, “Can we talk?”

“O... of course.” He nodded, “Let’s talk outside, don’t want to wake Feral and Omega up...”

“Mm.” Hunter nodded and the two of them went outside, Crosshair gave Stitches a look.

A look that said ‘I should be okay but I might need help.’

Stitches nodded in understanding before returning his attention to the conversation he was engaging in, “What did you want to talk about?” He asked Hunter once he closed over the back door, he had an inkling about what his older brother wanted to talk about but better to get the reason from the horse’s mouth.

“How... how are you liking it here?” Hunter asked after a moment.

“I... I love it here.” He replied, “I’m... I get to live a normal life, I have a job, a roof over my head and I get to be a brother again.” He saw the flinch the older clone had at that last part, “I’m not going to sugar coat it Hunter, I feel safer and more loved here... than I ever have before.”

“I... I know.” Hunter sighed.

“It wasn’t just your fault, I was a right pain in the sheb, we never clicked as brothers because... we because we were too different, we were too different from the regs but we were also too different from each other.”



“That is true...” Hunter replied, “I wish we could have been closer, I wish I hadn’t been so controlling and... I wish we’d talked more.”

“I do too.” He replied with a sigh, “We never talked, you and I... and I don’t think... Maker I just wanted to talk but I couldn’t make myself open up to you and...”

“I know vod’ika...” Hunter replied and placed his hand on Crosshair’s shoulder, “I’m so happy that you found somewhere safe and that... well I’m glad Feral is safe... I hurt him so badly and I know I can’t blame all of it on the broken chip... Stitches told me that it just amplified my emotions... my negative emotions... I had those feelings in my heart and I...”

“He was... he blamed himself for it, he wanted to... crawl back to you because he was afraid you would be sorry and so sad...” He hated that, he hated that Feral took blame so easily and...

He wasn’t a bad kid...

Just very, very broken...

## Guide you home

Crosshair smiled to Feral who was lying on his new comfort device, Minnow under his arm and his ear pressed just above where the heart beat was, his comforter over his small frame but Crosshair moved to him and pulled it up over Feral's shoulders, "Sleep easy ad'ika." He said gently, resting his hand on Feral's head for a moment. He stood up and went to the skylight, opening it and climbing out onto the roof, it took a moment to get comfortable but once he did, he took out his beautiful new instrument and set it up, this was the old way, the way of the ancient sea farers, no fancy dials or technical doohickies, just a telescope, with lenses and a focusing ring. He smiled and pointed it towards the stars, he kinda missed the beauty of the stars as they flowed past the ship in a stream of white lines, he missed it but he preferred it down here, where he could look to the stars in safety, look to them like their ancestors did in the far distant past, he saw stars in formations that he didn't know, so he took out Feral's smaller present, star maps... old star maps that told of the stars and their formations, their names and their use in navigation. He wasn't sure where the kark Feral got these but this was Theed, anything was possible here, it was city of rich history and many cultures, he'd never gotten such a beautiful gift in his entire life, he missed his custom Firepuncher... she had gotten him through the war alive and kept his brothers safe but he had no need for a rifle here, she was still with the Batch... maybe someone would pick her up and use her as she was intended.

He didn't know how long he was out there for, just him, the sky and the stars that told many stories.

But it was so peaceful...

He checked his chronometer and with a sigh he collected his stuff before re-entering the room, he should get sleep, his boss wouldn't appreciate him falling asleep on shift, "Do... do you like it... ori'vod?" Feral asked, his voice heavy with sleep.

"I love it ad'ika." He replied.

"Y... yay." Feral wiped his eyes.

"Go back to sleep, we'll talk in the morning." He pulled the comforter back up over Feral's shoulders.

"Mm..." Feral nodded and with a sigh he returned to sleep, his soft snoring returning.

"Thank you ad'ika." He put the instrument away in his wardrobe and after taking off his jumper, he lay down and tried to get comfortable, he jumped a little when Feral crawled into his bed and wrapped his arm around Crosshair's chest.

"Real thing... better..." Feral mumbled as he wiped his eyes.

"Yeah... I suppose it is." He smiled and hugged Feral close, earning a happy but sleepy noise, "Night ad'ika."

“Mm... night...” Feral snuggled against him and found sleep easily.

Feral was already up when Crosshair was rudely awoken by his alarm, the small clone could wake up early without the need for an alarm, Crosshair was convinced he was actually magic because it took Crosshair ages to not only wake up but get up too, “I’m up you stupid thing.” He hissed as he hit the alarm a few times to get it to shut up, he grumbled and sat up as he wiped his eyes, refresher first then go downstairs.

“Ori’vod!” He blinked when his vision was filled by Feral the second he entered the kitchen, he blinked again when he realised that Feral was wearing glasses, Feral was taking in every inch of Crosshair’s appearance, “You... you have grey hair! And... and a tattoo!”

“You... you can make that out?” He asked quickly, then spotted Stitches and Sawbones sitting at the kitchen table.

“Y... yeah!” Feral bounced, “They had them made for me!”

“They aren’t perfect but it will make your life much easier vod’ika.” Sawbones smiled.

“That’s... that’s amazing Feral!” He smiled happily, Feral had a wide smile on his face, “We’ll have to go exploring now that you can see!”

“Yeah!” Feral wrapped his arms around Crosshair, hugging him tight “Mm!”

“Would you like your present Crosshair? Seeing as we couldn’t give you it yesterday?” Sawbones smiled gently, putting a small box down on the kitchen table, the rest of Sawbones’ batch had given them a gift yesterday alongside the Batch but the two medics hadn’t had a chance before Feral fell asleep and Hunter took Crosshair outside to talk, it had been... a relief to talk to Hunter, to actually talk and not let it devolve into a shouting match, it might have been the alcohol or something but it was good to talk again.

Feral seemed to know something was up, “I need to check on the laundry!” He bounced, “Now that I can actually see what I’m doing!”

“Oh... okay.” Crosshair blinked in confusion but watched as Feral left to go to the laundry room, after a moment he sat down at the table and took hold of the present, it was light enough so he had no idea what it was, he paused when he opened it and saw it was an old-fashioned compass with a slight crack on the transparent part, “A compass?” He looked to the two.

“Yes.” Stitches nodded, “So you will always find your way home. It was my eldest brother’s, said it would always point us home, no matter where we were.” He looked to the compass again, “It brought them home and guided us here, now... now I give it to you.”

“I... I can’t take this...” He replied quickly, “It’s yours and it...”

“No, it shouldn’t be stored in a dusty old box by a dusty old man who has found his permanent home.” Stitches smiled sadly.

“But...” He didn’t know what to say or think, “I... I just...”

“May it and the stars guide you to happiness.”

## Fights happen but talking helps

He hadn't meant to escalate the argument, he knew yelling would do him no good against Stitches but he was having a karking horrible day and he just snapped, "What the kark would you know about that!?" He hissed but Stitches seemed unfazed by his aggression, "Well!? Answer me!"

"Are you finished?" The way Stitches just blanked him and his aggression... just made him even more angry, he was gunning to get physical, until he caught sight of Feral in his peripheral vision, the younger clone was supposed to be outside hanging clothes on the line but he was now standing in the doorway, his hands tight around his own neck and his stomach squirming loudly.

"Feral..." He moved to Feral, "Ad'ika, I need you to let go." He said as Stitches moved with him.

"I... I didn't..." Feral hiccupped as he hyperventilated, "I'm sorry... I..."

"Feral, this isn't your fault but we need you to let go." Stitches said, his hand moving to Feral's small ones, "Come on... there we go." Feral hiccupped as his hands were taken away from his neck, it took only a moment before Feral started sobbing.

Stitches looked to Crosshair, angry confusion was prominent on his features, "Hey, can you look at me? Listen to me?" Crosshair asked Feral gently and the young clone finally looked to him, tears dripping down his cheeks, "This isn't your fault, do you trust me?" Feral nodded, "This is down to us, not you, I'm having a bad day and..." He stopped when Feral wrapped his arms around him, "It's okay." He repeated several times as he wrapped his arms around Feral.

"Oh dear, what happened?" He looked to Sawbones as he appeared in the kitchen, Feral couldn't answer past his sobs and hiccups.

"We had a heated discussion." Stitches replied, "Myself and Crosshair, Feral has reacted to the negativity, he believes it is his fault, when it is not."

"Oh no." Sawbones moved to them and placed his hand on Feral's small back, "Were the two of them being mean to each other?"

"Y... yeah." Feral managed, "I... I didn't mean..."

"It's not your fault, they're both too stubborn to admit that they might be wrong, so you shouldn't take that fault onto yourself, okay?" Sawbones smiled when Feral looked to him and nodded slightly, "Come, let's finish hanging up the clothes, then you can help me with the garden, sound like a plan?"

"O... okay." Feral nodded and once they broke their hug, Crosshair watched as the two went outside.

“He was protecting his neck, why?” Stitches asked once the two were far enough away.

“You saw his scars... right?” Crosshair looked to the medic, who nodded, “The cadets on Kamino tried to hang him with bedding, those are the faint burn scars, his first squad kept him leashed to the drop ship by a collar but when we managed to get the collar off him, the squad tried to choke him with a leash, those are the deeper burn scars... they found a new collar later on... one with spikes... so he’s protecting his neck because... because that’s the first place he knows clones will attack.” He sighed a little, “Especially if he thinks regs have turned on him, he had that same reaction on Anaxes when we got into a squabble with the regs.”

“I see...” Stitches frowned, “So not only does he get sick, he tries to effectively strangle himself so no one else can?”

“Yeah...” He sighed again, looking out the window to see Sawbones and Feral hanging up the laundry, he smiled as he watched fun-sized beanpole Feral jump so he could at least attempt to get a towel over the line without help from his step stool.

“Do you want to talk about what’s got you upset?” Stitches asked.

“Just... getting abuse from a ship at the port, apparently a crew on a fancy ship think I look gross because of this.” He motioned to the scar on his head, “Said I should let my whore spouse hit me again... to make my head even...”

“I see.” Was all he got from Stitches aside from the cold seated anger he felt radiating from the medic, “Did none of our brothers say anything or do anything?”

“Grim helped me and the hyper duo told them off but then they were mocked for being dirty, pathetic clones...” He ran his fingers through his hair, “Ship’s a really expensive one so...”

“Posh, elitist shebs is what they are and they disgust me” Stitches grumbled, “They give us hardships at the clinic also, refuse to let either myself or Sawbones treat them, regardless of if we’re the only medics on shift, think they’re better than us because we’re clones.”

He sighed in reply then spotted the man next door talking with Feral over the fence, not all people were bad, some were good and kind people, “Maybe one day... clones will be freed of the chip and we can all... live a normal life.”

“Maybe... but until then we have our family and as much as it pains me to admit, you have the Batch.” Stitches sighed.

“Yeah.” He looked to the medic, who was staring out the window, “Why did you give me the compass?”

“Because you need guidance in your life Cross’ika.” Stitches replied, “My brother would have taken you under his wing and guided you towards the path that’s right for you, he can’t be here physically but that compass will allow him to guide you in spirit.”

“What... was he like?” Crosshair asked as he took out the compass, “Your brother?”

“Kind, warm, gentle but was a leader through and through, he was everything I thought a Captain should be.” Stitches smiled gently, “He would have liked you, he saw the good in practically everyone, like Feral does... just with more confidence.”

“Yeah... he needs help with that.”

“Be his brother Cross’ika and he will follow your example.”

“I will.”

## Why did you help me?

“Crosshair?” He looked to his brother as they got dressed for bed.

“Yes ad’ika?” He asked.

“Do... do you know sign language?” Feral asked shyly, fidgeting with the cuff of his sleeve.

“I do... why?” He frowned a little in confusion, why would Feral want to know that?

“Be... because the nice man next door’s son was released yesterday from the hospital for people not safe in their brains, he had been involved in a clanker attack and lost his hearing, and...” Feral replied with a sigh, “And he smells so sad, I think it’s because he’d been in the hospital for nearly three years and he doesn’t know... how to live at home anymore... so, I thought I’d learn sign language so I... could help him feel a little better!”

Crosshair softened at the sincerity of those words and the bounce that showed his determination, “Of course ad’ika.” He smiled as he signed alongside his words.

“Yay!” He was suddenly enveloped by Feral’s thin arms, “Mm!” Feral hugged him tight.

“Let’s get to bed, don’t want Stitches or Sawbones to gruel us about staying up too late.” He chuckled as they broke the hug, he didn’t know how anyone could hate Feral, he was safe and warm and always wanted everyone to be happy and smiling.

“Night ori’vod.” Feral said as he pulled his comforter up over his shoulders before snuggling up on his comforting device, hugging Minnow to his chest and pressing his ear to the heartbeat sound.

“Night ad’ika.” He replied as he climbed into bed, hopefully the bed they got for Feral would arrive in the morning, Feral needed a bed of his own, something soft and comfortable and his, “Sleep tight.” He reached over and turned off the table light, the room being engulfed in darkness with streams of moonlight cutting through the dark.

“Mm.” Was all he got in reply.

“Good morning vod’ika.” Sawbones smiled to him when he arrived down in the kitchen.

“Mornin’.” He replied.

“Are you alright?” The medic was suddenly in front of him.

“J... just a headache, Stitches said I’d get them every now and again because...” He touched the scar on his head.

“Oh dear, do you want to take something for it?” Sawbones asked gently, his kind fingers touching the scar as well.



“I... I’m scared...” He replied weakly.

“Why are you scared vod’ika?” Sawbones cupped his cheeks in warm hands, “Oh... are you afraid the chip will reactivate?” He nodded and looked to the floor until Sawbones moved his head so he could meet his gaze, “Don’t worry, we’ll help you, no matter what happens... okay?”

“O... okay.” He nodded again, “Thank you... for everything.”

“You are most welcome vod’ika.” Sawbones smiled again, his thumbs massaging Crosshair’s cheeks, “Now, let’s get you something to eat so you can take something for the headache.”

He smiled in return, “Okay.” He replied and Sawbones released his face, allowing him to look out the back window, where he spotted Feral talking to the man next door as he tried to hang up the washing, his baby brother was always doing washing and tidying, now that he could see better, he was helping Sawbones in the garden, it was clear he was a domestic clone before he was anything else and now that he could see, he could do everything with greater confidence because his world was made clearer, “Feral was asking me if I knew sign.”

“Did he?” Sawbones looked a little surprised, “Did he say why?”

“Yeah, apparently the nice man next door was telling Feral that his son was finally home from, as Feral put it, the hospital for people not safe in their brains.” He smiled as he watched Feral wave to the son in question, “Apparently he was rendered deaf because of a clanker attack and hospitalised.”

“Oh dear... that might explain why he asked for Stitches to come over.” Sawbones replied, “It is very kind of him to open his home to him.”

“So Feral wants to learn sign so he can communicate and make him feel welcome and make him smell less sad.” Crosshair explained, “Do you know sign?”

“Indeed I do, so does Stitches, it is incredibly useful in our profession.” They both looked to Feral, “Grim said the three of them will help you put the bed together, though it might take a while, depending on the hyper duo.”

“Why do you call them the hyper duo?” He looked to Sawbones again.

“Well, it used to be the hyper trio when Stitches’ brother Tail-Gaiter was alive, oh it was like trying to wrangle tookas who had eaten sugar!” Sawbones chuckled, “But when TG died... the trio was down to two... and they never really recovered from that because they did practically everything together... so much so that Stitches gave Madcap TG’s helmet... it’s still in his room.”

“Does... Stitches have the other three’s helmets?” Crosshair didn’t know if Stitches had managed to get them off Kamino or if he even kept them for that long.

“Indeed he does.” Sawbones smiled sadly, “They’re in his office, a little worse for wear after being in a crate on a ship getting shot at but they’re still with him.”

“That’s good.” He nodded, he was silent for a moment before speaking again, “Why did you help me? You saw I was Empire but...”

“Because you needed help, Cross’ika, not only because you were going to die of heatstroke but because you were left behind... by not only the Empire but the people who should stand by you, your brothers and sister. They left you, abandoned you and that went against everything myself and Stitches stand for, brotherhood and family, one is supposed to be safe with their batch... Stitches was very upset with how you were treated... as I said before, his whole ideology is based around family, he saw something in you... something so painfully familiar...”

“What did he see?” Crosshair blinked.

“Himself...”

## Mental health issues

Crosshair smiled warmly as he watched Feral interacting with the man next door's son, Sawbones and himself had spent the morning teaching Feral the basics of sign language, which he seemed to pick up very quickly, it was a language he had an easier time with learning, they'd found out pretty quick that Feral couldn't read or write once he'd gotten his glasses, they weren't sure if that was because he'd been unable to learn due to his poor vision or because of the huge patch of damage in his brain. Sawbones said he'd try to help Feral learn to do both but Stitches wasn't overly optimistic, "I would need to run a scan to tell how great the damage is but from what Tech was telling me... there may be RHD."

"RHD?" Crosshair blinked.

"Right Hemisphere Damage." Sawbones explained, "You think it could be what is affecting his communication skills?"

"What is RHD?" Crosshair looked between the two medics.

"RHD is an acquired brain injury, usually secondary to stroke or traumatic brain injury, that causes impairments in language and other cognitive domains that affect communication." Stitches sighed as he looked out at Feral, who was apparently making a friend, "The right-side controls things like attention, memory, reasoning, and problem solving, so a person with RHD may have trouble communicating with others because of this damage... it can also lead to behavioural issues, so the abuse and bullying Feral endured may have kicked this into overdrive, causing his issues with talking... I think his ease of speaking now is because he genuinely feels safe, so he can concentrate on his words."

"So... he'd have an easier time with sign, than mouth words?" Crosshair asked.

"In theory yes." Sawbones sighed a little, "We will help him through this, like we would any of our brothers or patients, regardless of his issues." He chuckled after a moment, "We just keep adding people with behavioural issues to this perfectly stable family, that's three now!" Crosshair wasn't sure what is issue would be classed under, "Aggressive anxiety, if you're wondering."

"O... oh." He nodded, then looked to the front door as it opened.

"We're home!" Grim called in and Crosshair caught Feral stopping his conversation when he caught the three clones' scents, "Hey, where's Feral."

"Out back, making a friend." Sawbones smiled, "How was work?"

"Same old, same old." Grim shrugged with a sigh, "Boss says you'll be on evening shift tomorrow."

"Odd, he normally has me on third shift not fourth." Crosshair frowned a little.

He was about to speak again when the back door opened, "You're home!" Feral said excitedly and hugged Grim, "I missed you!"

"Missed you too vod'ika." Grim replied as he returned the hug, Crosshair smiled a little.

"I'll be back in a moment, need to use the refresher." He said quickly and made it up the stairs in record time, made it into the refresher and just... sank to the ground, he wanted to help Feral, he wanted to be the best big brother in the galaxy for the young clone but... how was he supposed to help when he needed so much help himself! Sawbones had been correct, there was no point running himself into the ground trying to help because that would make everything worse, he had to take time for himself and let the others help, to let them help both of them because damned if Crosshair didn't need help right now.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Stitches voice came from the other side of the door, "Sawbones brought Feral out for a walk, so you don't have to worry about upsetting him."

"I... I want to be the best brother to Feral, I want to give him everything he was denied for so long... but..." He hissed a sigh, Stitches didn't say anything, just letting him continue, "How can I be something I never had myself, I don't know what I'm doing because I never had that... I'm the youngest of my brothers but... it was more like a friendship than actual brotherhood... I..."

"I think that is something that will make you a better brother." Stitches replied after a moment.

"How?" He hissed.

"Because you know what it's like to not have it, you know what you wanted, so you will be able to channel that into your relationship with Feral." Stitches sounded so sure of himself, he always came across as so in control, only once had Crosshair heard Stitches lose control and that was scarier than anything Crosshair had seen in the older clone, "Crosshair... listen, take the blows and let them help you be a better person now... because if you wait too long then you end up like me."

Crosshair blinked in confusion before standing up to open the door, which revealed Stitches leaning against the doorframe, "What... what did Sawbones mean when... he said you saw yourself in me?"

Stitches sighed a little through his nose, "For many, many months I was so angry at everything and everyone, especially my brothers... they left me behind when we were coming home to celebrate my decanting day, they left me behind... they didn't want to and I know they didn't... but I let that pain and anger fester inside me and that fuelled my already diagnosed paranoia to new extremes, I saw that anger and sadness in you when we rescued you from Kamino and... Maker... I knew I didn't want you to fall down the path I did because I'm still struggling to get off that path." Stitches, for the first time since Crosshair had met the man, wouldn't make eye contact, "I became an angry man that thought there was nothing to be happy about, that all I had was to work myself into the ground... Sawbones and my friends helped me but it wasn't the same..."

“Stitches...” He said before his words left him.

“Don’t let your anger warp you Cross’ika... please?”

“O... okay.”

## Fireworks

“Did you enjoy your walk Feral?” Stitches asked as they all sat down for dinner, he was always thankful for his ability to regain control of his emotions very quickly when he needed too.

“Mm... we went to feed the ducks.” Feral bounced happily, “I like the ducks.”

“Crosshair was saying you like animals.” Grim said and Feral nodded quickly, “There’s a stable just outside the city that’s owned by a sanctuary for abandoned and abused animals, do you want to go have a look, see if they’ll let you talk to the animals?”

“R... really?” Feral looked to all of them, “You... you think they would?”

“I’m sure they would, they’re always looking for help, we donate to them every month.” Sawbones smiled.

“Do... do you want to come when we go... ori’vod?” Feral looked to Crosshair, the sniper softened, he was calming down after his crisis, he would be an amazing brother... he just had to believe in himself and what he wanted to be for Feral, his baby brother who needed a safe and solid presence in his life, a brother like him.

“If I’m not working.” Crosshair smiled, “We could slot it for one of my off days if you’d like?”

“Y... yeah!” Feral bounced happily.

“Food time!” Madcap said as he and Speedy arrived with food, “Hope everyone brought their appetites!”

Dinner was peaceful as usual, save for a few quips between himself and Crosshair but Feral was okay with these, he clearly knew these weren’t meant to hurt, just natural sarcasm and snark, he usually giggled at them, Stitches was still struggling to get over the fact that the young clone giggled, not laughed or chuckled, he giggled like a blushing maiden most of the time and the rest of the time he made happy sounds that weren’t laughs or chuckles or giggles, just happy sounds. Obviously he’d learned to vocalise differently to most clones due to his problems with speech, “Oh! Did Crosshair tell you?” Grim said once the meal was over and looked to Feral, who looked confused and shook his head, “You’ve got a bed now, an actual bed.”

“I... what?” Feral blinked and looked to Crosshair.

“You’ve got your own bed now, no more sleeping on the futon.” Crosshair smiled, Feral looked to all of them and Stitches could hear him smelling the air.

“I... have a bed?” The young clone sounded so small and confused, “My... my own bed? That’s mine?”

“It’s all yours ad’ika.” Crosshair nodded.

Stitches spotted the sad, almost broken, look on Sawbones’ features, Crosshair also had a slightly sad look on his features, clearly Feral had never had a bed in his life, did he have one when he was a cadet? He wasn’t sure but none of them were going to ask that, “Why don’t you show him Crosshair while we do the dishes.” Madcap said.

“Come on ad’ika, lets go have a look.” Crosshair smiled and the two vanished quickly when Feral nodded happily.

“Cyar’ika?” He looked to Sawbones as they got ready for bed, “Are you alright?”

“I...” He sighed through his nose, “Just remembering things I... don’t really want to...”

“I understand.” He smiled when Sawbones put a warm hand on his back, “We can talk in the morning if you want?”

“Mm... I...” He was cut off but the sudden appearance of an explosion followed by a crackle.

“Trooper! Trooper can you hear me!?” He flinched at the memory, he couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t... he clamped his hands over his ears as he tried to block out the sounds, why were there explosions! He couldn’t move! He couldn’t breathe! Where were his brothers? Where was anyone!? Where was...?

He felt something grab him, he didn’t think, he had to get it off!

The thing made a pained noise but Stitches didn’t care what it was... he was panicking, he was hyperventilating, why were there explosions!? “Stitches!” A voice appeared beside him and someone grabbed him again, “Stitches! It’s alright!” The voice said but he couldn’t... he pushed the person away and was on his feet in seconds.

Where were his brothers?!

He bolted and made it outside, outside to the explosions, the bombs... he didn’t know where he was going, it was dark and there were bombs! He slowly ran out of adrenaline, he had to stop but there were explosions... he had to find his brothers! He slumped against the railing overlooking the river, he struggled to catch his breath, his chest was on fire, his heart was pounding and he just couldn’t run anymore. He was sweating, despite the cold air... he could smell nothing but dust and blood and death, the dead bodies of his brothers... he sank to the ground and started sobbing, all he could hear was screaming, bombs... explosions... he felt a hand on his shoulder, “Cyar’ika?” He blinked as his mind came back to him, he looked over his shoulder and saw it was Sawbones, “You are safe.”

“Why... can’t I... I stop screaming?” He choked a sob, “Please... tell me! Why can’t I...?”

“You aren’t screaming Stitches.” Sawbones knelt down beside him, “You are scared and hurting, but not screaming.”

“Sawbones! Feral! Did you find him?” He heard the others before he was blinded by a flash of colourful light that accompanied the explosions.

“Ori’vod?” He felt a smaller hand on his shoulder, he blinked and looked to the person, seeing it was Feral, he could hear the younger clone’s stomach squirming at the wash of emotions that Stitches...

“I... I... why can’t I...?” He swallowed down his own gag reflex.

Why were there explosions!

They were on Naboo! Away from the war and the fighting and... “Because sometimes... it’s okay to scream.” Feral replied, “To be scared and... it’s okay to cry and...” He felt those small hands appear over his ears as another explosion went off.

“Karking...” Sawbones hissed, “Cyar’ika... it’s okay, just fireworks...”

“You’re okay... ori’vod...”

Why couldn’t he...?



## Detrimental results

“You three, find out what’s happening, I need to find the others.” Grim said quickly as he started towards the wide open front door.

“Yes sir.” The three of them replied, Crosshair didn’t know what was happening or why it was happening but what he did know was that Stitches was in a flashback episode, had bolted outside and was now lost in the city somewhere, he could hear a commotion from next door, the nice man...

“Crosshair from next door, are you alright?” He knocked quickly, flinching slightly at the explosive firework that erupted above the houses, he could hear the man’s son screaming in terror.

“Screw you, you disgusting clone, we don’t have to do anything.” He spotted Madcap and Speedy in a confrontation with the new group in the area.

“I’m calling the authorities!” The nice man said when he opened the door.

“They’re already on site.” Crosshair said quickly, looking to the officers that had arrived, Madcap and Speedy spoke with the officers before they were asked to go and they came over to Crosshair and the nice man.

“How is your son Mr. Mier?” Speedy asked as they arrived.

“They... they have no idea who lives here, who their fireworks will affect, my son was just starting to settle back into normal life...” Mr. Mier sighed weakly, “And what of Stitches? I heard the commotion.”

“Our brothers are out looking for him...” Crosshair started but was cut off by his comm chirping, “Crosshair.”

“Crosshair, we found Stitches.” Grim’s voice came over his comm, “Situation?”

“The new guys were setting off fireworks...” He replied with a frown.

“Celebrating Empire Day.” Madcap hissed and Crosshair felt his stomach drop.

“We’re on our way back to you.” Grim said after an uncomfortable amount of time, “Just... prepare for... it’s not good.”

“Yes... yes sir.” Crosshair looked to Madcap and Speedy, who wore the same expression he was wearing.

“Does Mr. Mier’s son need help?” Sawbones’ voice came through before the line closed.

“Yes... he does.” The man replied.

“Meet us at the clinic, I’ve called one of the emergency medics we have on standby, be careful.” Sawbones said before the line closed.

“Ori’vod!” Feral was wrapped around him the second he stepped foot inside the clinic, the young clone had been crying and Crosshair could hear his uneasy stomach.

“Hey, are you alright?” He hugged his brother tight as the rest of his group entered behind him but Feral shook his head.

“Why... why are people so mean!?” Feral hiccupped, “Stitches... he smells so wrong! So broken and small... he doesn’t smell like him!”

“Easy ad’ika, it’s going to be okay.” He replied gently, “Do you trust me?”

“Y... yes!” Feral replied quickly.

“You four should head home, the authorities will be here soon and they already have statements from you two.” Grim looked to Madcap and Speedy, “No point in us all being here if we’re not all needed.”

“Keep us updated Sarge.” Madcap said and Grim nodded stiffly.

“Come on ad’ika, let’s go home, okay?” He asked Feral who nodded glumly, he let his hand be filled by the young clone’s small one, “Everything will be okay, don’t worry.”

“Okay...” Feral sighed weakly.

“Don’t worry vod’ika! Stitches will be okay, he’s a tough ori’vod!” Speedy said with a smile, “We’ll just have to be extra careful with him while he gets back on his feet, okay?”

“M... mm.” Feral nodded, “Okay.”

“What do ya think of the bed?” Madcap asked, clearly trying to distract Feral away from any dark thoughts the young clone was one hundred percent having, this wasn’t his fault and there was nothing he could have done to stop this from happening... and there was nothing he could do to help right now.

“I... I’ve never slept in a... a bed before...” Feral said in a small voice, “Well... I... I had one when I was a... young cadet but... I’m missing a big chunk of memory that... I don’t know...”

“You have a blank spot in your memories?” Speedy asked with a blink.

“M... mm.” He nodded and Crosshair could see the panic and emotions building in his small frame.

“Well, at least now there is little chance of me standing on your or falling over you.” He said quickly, “I smash my shins before I’d hit you.”

“Y... yeah.” Feral blushed.

“And you get to be tall.” Madcap chuckled as they opened the front gate.

“Y... yes...” Feral was blushing so much Crosshair could see it without the lights being on.

“Anyone want cocoa before bed?” Crosshair asked, looking to the other three.

“I just want to get some sleep, I hate... I hate dealing with people like that.” Madcap sighed, a little aggressively, “But they’ve been dealt with by the proper authorities and... well not much we can do except getting some sleep.”

“Of course ori’vod.” He nodded, “Speedy?”

“Nah, my bed is calling me.” The older clone replied, then looked to Feral, “Don’t worry vod’ika, he’ll be okay.”

“Mm.” Feral nodded a bit more confidently.

“Night guys.” Speedy said as the two older clones vanished upstairs.

“Night, you want some Feral?” He looked to his brother, “Might help you relax a little.”

“I... I don’t like fireworks... they make my nose hurt so much.” The young clone said in a small voice, “It made Stitches stop smelling like... himself... he smelled so small and...”

“Yeah... he was lost in his memories.” Crosshair sighed a little through his nose as he guided his brother to the kitchen, “I think he didn’t smell like himself because he wasn’t himself, he was the him from when his trauma happened, he wasn’t here... he was back there...”

“Do... do you really think he’ll be okay?” Feral took hold of Crosshair’s hand again, looking to him with sure hopeful eyes.

“I do.” He smiled, “Now, do you want cream and marshmallows?”

“I... the marshmallows get stuck in my straw...”

“Just cream then?”

“Y... yeah!”

# Sewing

## Chapter Notes

Feral likes helping but so does Stitches!

Stitches hated the shakes in his hands as he sat at the kitchen table sipping on a glass of water, he hated the long blank staring he'd fall into as he stared at the table top, he hated his family tiptoeing around him like a glass figurine... but the thing he hated the most was the panicked flinches and almost panic attacks that the sound of anything close to a bang sent his brain spiralling into, "Hey ori'vod?" He blinked and looked to the suddenly there form of Feral.

"Y... yes Little One?" He asked after a moment.

"You can sew people up... right?" Feral fidgeted with his fingers and Stitches nodded slowly, "Can... can you sew other things? Like clothes and stuff?"

"I... I can, why?" He was very confused at this point.

"Can... can you teach me how to? Minnow has a hole in her foot and Crosshair knows how to sew but... he's at work so..." Feral nodded in determination, "And... I... well I want to know how to do a lot of things ... I thought I'd ask you!"

"Minnow has damage?" Stitches asked, a little quicker than he'd like but this was Feral's best friend.

"Only a little bit... the stitching has come loose on her back foot." Feral replied, "She's not... well she's not a young bantha anymore and she's been through a whole lot in the time I've known her... so she's allowed to show... some wear and tear I think."

Stitches softened a little, the interaction safely bringing his brain back down from the top of its spiral, "How about you go grab her and I'll get my sewing kit?" He smiled to the young clone.

"O... okay!" Feral bounced and vanished quickly, making little to no noise as he moved, must be that infiltration scout training kicking in, he stood up shakily and went to grab his sewing kit, he wasn't sure how well he'd be able to sew effectively but maybe he could do it? Was that Feral's overall plan? He had just sat down when Feral reappeared, this time with Minnow in his arms, "C... Crosshair said she's... almost as old as you are! He found her... production tag!" He showed Stitches the small tag that had been hidden under her mountain of fur, "She... she'd be able to have young if she was full sized!"

"Okay now I feel old." He chuckled weakly as Feral sat down beside him at the table.

“Did... did you know that they can live until the age of one hundred?” Feral asked excitedly, “And that... they produce blue milk? Wrecker says it makes those chocolate shake things taste somewhat better, looks awful but doesn’t taste as... terrible.”

“Shakes?” He looked to the boy.

“Y... yeah! When... when I was hurt by the bad clones...” Feral touched his neck in a similar fashion to how Crosshair touched the scar on his head, “I... I couldn’t swallow correctly, it hurt to eat, it hurt to breathe... but Tech managed to get some of those supplement powders, you know... the ones you mix with water to at least get... some nutritional intake?”

“Ah, those shakes.” He huffed and Feral giggled happily, “Oh yes I know those abominations very well.”

“Tasted so much worse when I threw them up later, but Crosshair always had his little bottle of... well I don’t know what they were but they helped a whole lot with my nausea and pain.” Feral sighed a little, “After... after the order went out and we lost Crosshair to the bad smell... every time I got sick... all I could hear or imagine once I’d stopped and left the refresher was Crosshair asking if I needed one of those meds... I missed him so much but Hunter would get angry at me when I said he lied about never abandoning one of us...”

“He has gotten like that before?” Stitches asked quickly, the shake in his hands gone in an instant, “Has he ever struck you?”

“O... once.” Feral replied weakly, hugging Minnow to his chest until Stitches was sure her head would pop off, “It was before we set out for Bracca and I was having a terrible day... and he was having a terrible day because Captain Rex had shown up and... I got really sick and upset and I said things I shouldn’t have and he did things he... shouldn’t have... but it was Echo and Omega who helped me that time. I... I think his bad smell was starting to surface but I didn’t want to believe it so I... I just ignored it.” Feral went silent for a moment, “But now I’m here! And... and I get to be myself and help other people! I like helping people!”

Stitches softened again, “That is great to hear Little One.” He smiled, “Now, let me have a look at the patient.”

“M... mm!” Feral nodded and handed over Minnow, “Crosshair... said that you’re the one who taught him to sew! Back... back when he was a cadet?”

“Yes. I was his attending when he mulched his shin bone jumping off one of the towers in the citadel on Tipoca, it was their first time on the course if I remember correctly.” He replied and examined Minnow’s back foot, “He was a grumbly, snarky little druk when he was that age but very willing to learn things that would focus his attention outside of simulations and training.”

“Is... is he the one to make Lula for Wrecker?” Feral asked, “She’s... a tooka plush.” He continued when Stitches looked at him in confusion.

“If she was made after that sewing lesson, then more than likely.” He smiled.

“You... you helped him ... even when he was a cadet!” Feral bounced, “Thank you ori’vod!” He froze a little when Feral’s arms were suddenly around him, “Mm!” Stitches could have cried at the contact... it was full, genuine with no hesitation.

It was safe.

It was warm.

## Visiting the animals

“Stay with me ad’ika!” Crosshair called after his brother who had broken formation to run up to the fence that circled a large holding field which was connected to a large barn type thing, “Don’t spook the animals.”

“Hello friend.” Feral said happily to the large, big eared thing that walked up to him, “You smell very interesting.” The thing leaned in to smell Feral in return, earning a giggle from the small clone when it pushed its nose into his neck and into his armpit, “That tickles!”

“You must smell interesting to it also ad’ika.” Crosshair smiled, he always wondered what the galaxy smelled like to his brother, how different was it to how most humans perceived the galaxy, Feral seemed to clock things that were invisible to the naked eye so maybe it was similar to how Crosshair saw the Galaxy? His keen vision, which he was made for, helped him see things with laser focus, he could see further than his brothers could and he could see things that no one else did but even he was blind to some of the things Feral could experience, Crosshair could see the slight tells of someone lying but Feral could tell with pinpoint accuracy when someone wasn’t being one hundred percent honest.

“What are you?” Feral asked the thing as he pet its snout.

“She is a fathier.” A woman said as she walked up to them, “Welcome, I take it you are the two Sawbones said were coming?”

“He called ahead?” Crosshair blinked.

“Of course, apparently you two aren’t exactly good at introductions.” She chuckled, “I’m Sara.”

“Crosshair and this is Feral.” He shook her hand before motioning to his brother, who waved shyly before giggling again when the fathier resumed her smelling of him.

“That tickles!” He tried to stop her shoving her snout under his shirt.

“I’m honestly surprised she’s being this hands-on with you, she’s normally very skittish around men.” Sara looked both happy and confused.

“Why?” Feral asked a little confused, “Oh... were your people very mean?” He looked up at the fathier.

“She came from an illegal breeding situation, she was being used as breeding stock for the black-market animal trade, luckily she was rescued and brought here.” Sara said sadly, “Isn’t that right girl.”

“What... what’s her name?” Feral asked gently.

“Mara.” Sara smiled.

“He... hello Mara, you have a very pretty name.” Feral petted her nose once she’s stopped trying to shove it down places, “And a very interesting smell.”

“Sawbones informed me that you have a great fondness for animals?” Sara asked and Feral nodded, “Would you like to meet more of our residents?”

“C... can I?” Feral looked between Crosshair and Sara, Crosshair could hear him smelling the air, which made Mara bump her snout against his mask in confusion.

“Of course, come, we have a wide variety of different species residing here.” Sara said happily.

Crosshair smiled as Feral said goodbye to the fathier before taking hold of Crosshair’s hand, “Bye friend!”

There were a lot of animals here of many different species, Crosshair guessed were seized from the black-market or exotic pet trade, each of them were incredibly interesting to Feral and his nose, he didn’t know what ninety percent of the species were but he wanted to say hi to all of them, even the scary looking ones, “C... Crosshair! It’s a nexu!” He motioned to the feline in an enclosed peg, “She... she’s so pretty!”

“You can tell she’s female?” Sara asked in confusion.

“Yeah!” Feral bounced happily, then paused as he smelled the air, “She... she has kits?” Sara looked to Crosshair with a raised eyebrow but Feral was distracted by the sudden appearance of two small bundles of fur and teeth that just appeared from under their mother, “H... hello.” Feral said as he crouched down, “You’re so small.” Crosshair smiled, even when faced with an apex predator, Feral saw the good in them. Crosshair was happy that Feral could because that meant he saw something good in Crosshair... and Crosshair needed that more than anyone knew, he needed to be loved and accepted, he had his new family and all the love and acceptance they had for him... but he wanted it more from his brothers, from the other defectives like him, “You are so small and so floppy!” Feral smiled as the two came up to the barrier to investigate him, “Ori’vod! You really do look like a nexu!”

“I’ll take that as a compliment ad’ika.” He replied, “Do you get a lot of nexu through here?”

“Not so much since the end of the war, there’s been a big crackdown on the smuggling of illegal goods and that includes animals.” Sara replied, “One good thing I suppose.”

Crosshair frowned a little then paused when he saw something that would one hundred and ten percent make Feral’s day, “Is that a bantha?” He asked Sara quietly, Feral was still distracted by the nexu and her kits.

“Indeed it is, she’s here for medical care, then she’s being brought back to Tatooine to be with other members of her kind.” Sara smiled gently, “Why?”

“Hey ad’ika, what’s that over there?” He looked to Feral, the young clone looked to him in confusion then followed his pointed finger, he chuckled when Feral froze then started bouncing like a ball.



“A... a bantha?!” Feral asked quickly, “Can... can I go say hi?”

“Of course you can but be gentle, she’s not well.” Sara nodded and Feral all but ran to the mighty beast.

He smiled as Feral started talking to the bantha, saying hi and telling her all the compliments and letting her smell him and examine him, he felt sad that Wrecker wasn’t here to see her with Feral, they had promised way back that they would someday see a real life bantha...

But Wrecker wasn’t here.

He couldn’t share this with Feral...

“Wrecker.”

“Feral wants to tell you something.”

“She’s a bantha!”

## Bad news

Crosshair knew full well that Stitches was exactly happy that the Batch made a surprise visit but Feral wanted to share meeting the animals with Wrecker, he wanted to meet a bantha with Wrecker because they'd promised each other that they would one day... and Crosshair would do everything in his powers to make that happen because Feral needed it more than Stitches would ever understand, this was a promise made when Feral was falling to his lowest point and he needed this so much! He was happy that more of the Batch got involved and it was a nice day all round, maybe some short, day visits would be the best course of action for them, when the Batch isn't on a job and Feral wanted to meet with them... "I am not happy about this Crosshair but I can see the good it has had on Feral's mood." He looked to the medic as he came to stand beside him, "I told you, you will be an amazing brother."

"I... yeah... Feral and Wrecker promised that they'd meet a bantha one day, Feral was already on his spiral into darkness and he had that one bright light to look forward to... so I couldn't take that away from him... not when he still needs that light." He replied as he returned his gaze to the group who were standing in the backyard talking with everyone but Feral and Wrecker were so happy and talking a mile a minute about their experience with meeting one of the majestic beasts, "Apparently Minnow doesn't do them justice."

"She is to scale after all." Stitches shrugged.

"How are you feeling?" Crosshair asked gently, the medic hadn't been anywhere close to one hundred percent since the fireworks, after he was released from the clinic, he had been one loud noise away from completely breaking down again, his hands were shaking near constantly and he'd spend long moments just... staring into the void.

"I..." Stitches started but stopped to sigh, "I'm not one hundred percent but I'm getting better."

"I... can't even imagine what that was like." He didn't want to think about it to be honest, to feel that much fear and panic and emotions, to be forced back to the most painful moment of your life? Crosshair had nightmares about Bracca, he could smell it all over again but those were relegated to his dreams, which he could easily come back from... now with the help of Feral, the small clone would always lie beside him when he was having a restless night or if the nightmares were back, sometimes Feral would lie on him when he got agitated, making it so Crosshair had no option but to calm down because while Feral wasn't heavy, he was stupidly light, he was a comfortable weight to have lying on him... Feral made giving comfort look so easy.

"It is not a good experience." Stitches replied softly, "I miss my brothers dearly... so I am glad you have made the leap in at least attempting to repair the damaged bridge between you all. I may not be happy about it... but that's more on me than you, so... so don't take my words as my truth, I just have issues that I am unsure I will ever fully work through." He smiled when Stitches put his hand on his shoulder, "Be a better man than me." Was the last thing Stitches said before vanishing inside.

Crosshair blinked and looked to Sawbones quickly, the other medic looked so sad, “Stitches, ori’vod, wait.” He followed after the man, “What do you mean?”

“Crosshair, look at me.” Stitches sighed, “I...”

“I am!” Crosshair replied quickly, “And I see a man who took a gamble on me, a clone who had fallen off the path, who would have turned you in had I wanted to but you gave me a chance, a home, you’re the one who decided to go to Kamino after a call... I would be dead if you hadn’t followed your gut. I would be dead and would never have learned so much, I would never have found a safe place I could call home, I would never have found this...” He motioned to the house around them, “All of this, all of you! I wouldn’t have a safe place to help Feral, we need safety and you helped me do that!” Stitches didn’t reply, he wouldn’t hold eye contact, he wasn’t holding himself as himself and that made Crosshair scared, “This is something more than just the fireworks, than you feeling suddenly awash with so much self-doubt, so what is it!?”

“I’m sick Crosshair... I’m very sick...” Stitches replied weakly.

“W... what?” Crosshair felt the air leave him.

“It’s treatable but... the damage to my skull from the incident... I was trapped for hours with an open hole in the back of my skull, I had to have three operations to remove masses building up in my skull... look... Cross’ika, I won’t lie and tell you that there is a one hundred percent guarantee that I’ll be okay, there is never a guarantee in the field of medicine.” Stitches said after a moment, “We’re playing it by ear but...”

“Does... does anyone else know?” Crosshair asked gently.

“Sawbones of course but... only you and Feral know.” Stitches replied with a sigh, “Feral sniffed me out before we even got the test results back, there was never any point in trying to hide it from him I suppose.” Crosshair couldn’t think, was this real life? Was this happening? How could someone like Stitches... look so small and tired? “We learned it two days before the fireworks, I am starting treatment tomorrow, with luck it will work... and Maker knows we need all the luck we can get in this house.” Stitches continued, “I’m not out of the fight but... it won’t be an easy fight, I...”

Crosshair hugged him tight, “Don’t... please don’t go...”

Please!

## Not out of the fight

“Stitches?” He blinked and looked to Sawbones as he appeared, “It’s cold out here, come inside... are you alright?”

“I...” He started but stopped to sigh, “I don’t know...”

“Hey... you can talk to me remember?” Sawbones sat down beside him on the bench and took hold of his hands.

“I’m scared... and sad and... and angry.” He looked away from Sawbones’ soft and confused face, “I’m angry at myself for missing the signs.”

“They didn’t show up until it already took hold.” Sawbones replied gently, “We saw this the last time as well, the tumour didn’t give away symptoms until it was pushing against your brainstem, there was nothing we could have done differently but it’s not inoperable, we caught it quick enough that we can start your treatment and you will beat this again, you’ve done it before and you can do it again cyar’ika.”

“But...” Stitches squeezed his eyes shut but opened them again when Sawbones cupped his cheeks and lifted his face to meet his kind and warm gaze.

“You have a family who needs you, if you showed up to wherever we go when we die, you know full well that Sticker would kick you right back out so you could raise Crosshair and Feral like a responsible parent.” He softened a little and Sawbones’ words and gentle chuckle, “You aren’t getting out of this parenting gig that easily.”

“You...” He sighed a little, “You’re right cyar’ika... like always.”

“Of course I am. We will walk this road together, like we’ve done each and every time it gets bumpy.” Sawbones chuckled again and kissed his forehead, “Now, come on, it’s cold out here and the bed is calling us.”

“Mm.” He nodded and followed after Sawbones, who was holding his hand gently... he couldn’t leave this behind, he had to fight this for his family, all of them. Crosshair had been the most heartbroken of the family, it hit him so much harder than Stitches and Sawbones thought it would, Feral had been upset but he knew something was up before they even said anything to him, Crosshair was all but falling apart when Stitches told him, he had grown far closer to them both than he portrayed and that was... almost more difficult to bear than the actual diagnosis for Stitches. He had seen the signs of how emotionally invested Crosshair had become in this environment but this outburst was against any characteristic expression that Crosshair had ever displayed before, even with Feral... the boy was devastated at the idea of losing Stitches, he was trying to deny what he was being told even though he knew full well that what he was being told was the truth, it had taken both Hunter and Sawbones a long time before they could get anywhere close to consoling him. Crosshair didn’t show up for dinner, Stitches wasn’t sure if he’d eaten at all but he did know that Feral brought some food up to him, it had been an amazing day for Feral and Crosshair but the news just

completely ruined it and that made Stitches feel horrible, he hadn't wanted to tell Crosshair anything until he'd started his treatment, when he'd tell Sawbones' brothers but... Stitches couldn't stop his crumbling emotions and just made Crosshair jump on his case.

"Shh." He hadn't realised he was crying until Sawbones cupped his cheeks and massaged away the lines of pain with ease, wiping away his tears before they even fell, "You're okay cyar'ika."

"I... I ruined Crosshair's and Feral's day... they were having so much fun before I..." He replied weakly.

"Come here." He was enveloped by Sawbones' arms as he cried into the other medic's shoulder, "It's okay cyar'ika, everything will be okay... shh... it's okay."

He wasn't sure how long he'd been crying for before he heard a small voice speaking, "I... I heard you... crying and I... I know that you should drink water... so you don't get a dehy... dehydration headache..." The looked to the small form of Feral, "So... so I brought you... some water... and I... I made my first attempt at... at baking... earlier..." Feral was losing his grasp on his words again, "I made sugar cookies and... and Madcap says they're good so... I brought you one because I sometimes get... hungry when I've been crying."

"That's very thoughtful of you vod'ika." Sawbones smiled to the boy, who's pale face was enveloped by a blush.

"I even decorated some of them...!" Feral said as Stitches took the offerings, "I... I added some hearts but on... the ones I wanted... to give to you two... I put the medic symbol on so the others knew that... they were for you!" Stitches smiled gently as he looked at the shakily drawn on icing symbol, obviously Feral was drawing from memory because it wasn't quite correct but that didn't matter, the effort that was put into making it mattered and it was very clear that Feral put a lot of effort in, "I... heard from the nice man next door that... his wife would always bake when... someone was sad or... if the day was going bad... so the house would smell warm and like... well like a home... he told me that food... is a great way of helping people because... when you bake something you make it with love and that love is easily transferred!" Feral smiled widely under his mask.

"Thank you Little One, this means a lot to me." He said gently to the boy, who bounced happily, he didn't condone the consumption of sugar but these were treats, these were made to be comfort food and Maker knew that Stitches needed a lot of comfort right now.

"Crosshair is really sorry for... how he reacted... but you're the closest thing to a buir he's ever had... and he doesn't want to lose you." Feral said softly.

"Nor I him." He sighed, he wasn't done fighting...

Not yet!

## Light through the trees

“Ori’vod!” Crosshair blinked and looked to the young clone who met him as he was about to leave for work, “I made you lunch!”

“You... what?” He blinked and looked at the outstretched lunch pail in front of him.

“You... you need a good, filling lunch and I... I made everyone lunches so here’s yours!” Feral grinned behind his mask.

“Oh... thanks ad’ika.” He smiled in return, “You... made everyone’s?”

“Mm!” Feral nodded happily, “I even snuck a treat in for everyone!”

“I... I’m sorry for yesterday...” He sighed a little, “I ruined our day and...”

“It’s okay ori’vod.” Feral replied gently, “I know why you reacted that way... I’m me remember? And Hunter knows why too” Feral knew exactly why Crosshair reacted the way he did because Feral had done it so many times now that he could write a book on it... if he could write that is, “We know how to deal with this because we’ve done it so many times... that it’s not even funny... so don’t worry about it, I explained to Stitches for you and wished him good luck for you also!”

“Thanks... thank you ad’ika.” Crosshair hugged the young clone tight, he was terrified of losing Stitches, he was terrified of this safe home being damaged...

“He’ll be okay.” Feral hugged him back, “Sawbones said he would be and I believe his scent because it wasn’t lying.”

“Y... yeah, he’s in the best place possible!” Crosshair nodded as he released the hug, “He’ll be okay... he’s Stitches.”

“Exactly!” Feral bounced, “Now, you should get going! Work won’t stop because we’re sad!”

“See you later ad’ika.” He smiled and gave Feral a kiss on the forehead, earning him a happy sound and another bounce.

“Bye ori’vod!” Feral called after him and he caught the young clone waving him off, he couldn’t stay sad or anxious or scared because Stitches would give him a grueling on the terrible work performance he’d show because of it, he’d tell Crosshair off for letting him be the reason for his bad behaviour... Crosshair just had to remember that, he just had to remember that if he let this affect him then Stitches would give him a verbal beat down that would make a physical beat down look like a mercy.

He smiled at the contents of his lunch when he opened up his pail for his break, there was a whole lot more in here than he’d normally have, “Aw man, you got the fruit salad?” Madcap said from beside him.

“Trade you for the pasta.” He said motioning to the object of his attention.

“Deal!” Madcap said quickly, this was nice, this was much better than whatever came before.

“Feral is fitting into domestic life like a custom-made glove!” Speedy said happily, “First laundry, now meal prep!”

“I agree.” Grim nodded, “I’m wondering how he’s getting these recipes if he can’t read.”

“Mr. Mier’s son Kyle is helping him, they’re working together on a lot of things.” Speedy explained with a soft smile.

“Oh.” He smiled gently, he’d seen Feral practicing more and more of his sign language with Sawbones.

“Less talking, more eating, break’s almost over.” Grim said in his Sergeant voice.

“Yes sir!” The three of them replied and they fell into comfortable silence as they ate their lunch until the chirping of Grim’s comm drew them back to conversation.

“Grim.” The Sergeant said when he answered, tension had made its way back into them all, was it bad news? Was it Sawbones calling to say Stitches hadn’t made it through his surgery? That he’d died on the table because something went horribly karking wrong?

“Sawbones here, I thought I’d inform you all that Stitches had just left surgery and everything is looking very promising, I won’t say it was a complete success because it’s still early but he’s just been moved to recovery.” Sawbones’ voice came through and the four of them deflated as all tension left them, “We will be starting his chemo tomorrow, so he should be home sometime this week.”

“That is amazing news vod, have you told Feral?” Grim replied with a weak sigh.

“I’m with him right now!” Feral’s voice appeared.

“He was bringing me lunch and arrived just a moment ago.” Sawbones chuckled, “Now I have good news and a good lunch.”

“We’re just finished ours so we’ll talk to you at home?” Crosshair smiled at the thought of Feral arriving just in the nick of time to see Stitches being moved, the young clone knew something was up and Crosshair could guarantee it was because his nose was made of magic.

“Of course, have a fun day at work!” Sawbones replied, “Sawbones out.”

“Well that’s made my day so much brighter!” Madcap said with a grin.

“Same.” Crosshair replied, Stitches was over the first hurdle, over the most difficult hurdle but the race wasn’t over and he had a bumpy road ahead of him... he had all of them though, he had a big family to help him through this, they didn’t have to worry about credits because all but one of them worked, the didn’t have to worry about housework because Feral had that

covered and Stitches wouldn't be alone in the house because Feral was there... they weren't out of the woods yet but the trees were thinner here and they could see the sky.

"Back to work." Grim smiled as the whistle went off.

"Yes sir!" They replied again.

Crosshair was just closing his pail when he saw the treat Feral had put in with his lunch, it was two cookies, one had Crosshair's tattoo design on it but the other had a weird design on it that looked kinda like a nexu... if you squinted and looked at it sideways, he smiled softly when he realised the meaning, "Thanks ad'ika." He said to himself as he took them out.

"Hey! You got two cookies!" Madcap said quickly, "No fair!"

"I'm his favourite."

"Clearly."



## Home again

“Welcome home!” Feral appeared the second Crosshair opened the door so the four of them could enter, “How was your day?” He asked once he hugged them.

“Same old, same old.” Grim replied, “Any word on Stitches?”

“Yeah! Sawbones says he’ll be home today!” Feral bounced happily and smiled, Crosshair felt his whole form relax at the news, he’d been terrified when Stitches was forced to stay in the clinic longer than they thought, he’d caught an infection and by the time it was cleared up it was time for his next chemo session, “But... he says be very gentle with him, he’s... well he’s starting to feel the side effects of the treatment...”

“Right, okay.” Grim nodded, “That’s both good and not good news.”

“Yeah... wait... does this mean he might lose his pride and joy?” Speedy asked quickly and Crosshair felt his stomach drop, he hadn’t thought about that and apparently neither had the others, given their faces.

“Kark... he’s not going to be a happy camper.” Madcap said after a moment.

“Well, the best thing about not being able to look myself in the mirror... is that I won’t be able to see most of my physical symptoms.” They all froze at the sound of the voice behind them but it was Feral who moved first.

“Ori’vod!” The small clone said happily and hugged Stitches, who looked like absolute crap and yet... he held himself like he always had, he wasn’t letting this knock him off his pride and strength, even though his body was fighting him the whole way.

“Hello Little One, I hope you’ve been keeping the house to my standards?” Stitches replied as he returned the hug.

“The floor is as reflective as my disks.” Crosshair replied with a shrug as Feral let go, “Probably ricochet blaster bolts at this point.”

“That’s good.” The medic replied with a chuckle but he obviously saw that Crosshair was trying very hard not to run straight to him so he could hug him, “You can hug me too if you want.” The medic said, “I don’t bite.”

“No, you glare.” Sawbones chuckled as he arrived, “And judge.”

“Hm.” Stitches frowned but softened when Crosshair wrapped his arms around him, “Easy Cross’ika, I’m okay.” The medic said gently but Crosshair couldn’t find his words so he just hugged him like he’d vanish if he let go, “I’m not going anywhere.” Stitches continued, “No need to fret.” Crosshair buried his face in Stitches’ hair, he was safe and solid and real and he was still alive! “Unfortunately you won’t be able to do that much longer.” Stitches sighed,

“Whole damn lot is falling out.” He seemed to be handling it well for someone who’s physical difference as a clone was tied to his hair and beard, “But oh well.”

“You... you’ll look like Feral.” He chuckled weakly.

“Indeed I may.” Stitches replied, “Now, I need to sit down.”

“Okay.” Crosshair nodded and they released the hug.

“I have asked that Sawbones cut my hair so that it doesn’t end up everywhere.” Stitches sighed a little again, “I refuse to clean the shower drain of it.”

“Yeah, that’s the grossest house chore I think.” He replied.

“It’s going to be very... very weird, I haven’t had short hair since I was a very young cadet.” The medic sat down with a tired sigh, “Back when Sticker refused to let me grow it out.”

“Why did you grow it out?” Crosshair asked as he ran his hand through his own hair, it had come back very well after being burned off, it didn’t cover the scar... well the long strands covered it when he tied it back.

“A great thing called paranoia.” Stitches huffed a laugh, “I was so paranoid that whoever was cutting my hair would somehow stab me in the back, that after a few horrible barber experiences Sticker just said kark it and let me grow my hair out. Same with my facial hair, once that started to come in, the Kaminoans really didn’t like that though, I stood out way too much from the other clones, I never listened to them anyways and this was my own little, unintended, rebellion against the way we were raised.”

“With all your behavioural issues... it’s like you’re a defective clone like us... without actually being one.” He said, he didn’t know if he was pushing his luck with that statement but it really did make him that much closer to Crosshair and Feral.

“Hm... I suppose you could think of it that way.” Stitches replied after a moment’s thought and Crosshair spotted a tired smile on the medic’s features, “I take it that idea makes you a little happier?”

“Y... yeah... kinda does.” He smiled in return, “How are you feeling?”

“Absolutely horrible, it’s taking so much more energy to do basic things... I’m tired and I get nauseous...” The medic replied as he massaged his forehead, “I didn’t have to go through this level of attack last time... it was a quick procedure but this time it’s come back with a vengeance.”

“Last time?” Crosshair blinked in shock, “How... how many times have you...?”

“For this? This is the second time but I’ve had surgery three times before because of bacterial infections.” Stitches explained with another sigh, “I was stuck in a collapsed building for hours with a hole in my skull, I have no idea what materials were used to construct the building, so for all we know something used could have been karking carcinogenic... mother-karking...” Crosshair looked to him again and noticed Stitches had tried to run his

hand through his hair and unfortunately a chunk of hair came with it, “Hm... should donate it, they make wigs for people like me.” Crosshair could almost laugh at the way Stitches went from completely unimpressed to logical in a split second.

“I made you tea!” Feral appeared, “Just how you like it!”

“Thank you Little One.”

“No problem!”

## Laundry and collapses

Stitches hadn't expected great reactions to his sudden lack of both head and facial hair but Feral had completely freaked out, apparently he still smelled like himself but he didn't look correct and that was extremely upsetting to the boy, they had told Feral many times before it happened that it was going to happen but for some reason it didn't register correctly and Stitches was more very, incredibly confused by the reaction than upset by it, he had come to terms with his sudden hair loss but Feral's reaction made him question everything he thought he was okay with. "I'm sorry if I upset you Little One." He said gently once the others had all gone to work, leaving him alone with the young clone who had finally calmed down once it was explained again what happened and why it happened.

"N... no... I'm the one who... should apologise." Feral replied as he fidgeted with his fingers, "Be... because I should have remembered... that this'd be happening."

"No need to apologise Feral." He replied gently, "It's as big a shock to myself as it is to you, I've had long hair since I was a child and facial hair since I could grow it."

"I... I've never had hair... at all..." Feral replied, "Tech said it's something... called alopecia universalis... I think."

"You have no hair at all?" Stitches blinked and Feral shook his head, "I was aware that you had no eyebrows or head hair... but this is an interesting development."

"You... you don't think it's weird? Or gross?" Feral shrank as though trying to make himself smaller than physically possible.

"Why would I...?" He started but stopped very quickly when he caught on, "Did other regs mock you for it?" Feral nodded slowly and Stitches felt anger burst in his chest, he managed to squash it down before it made him nauseous, he hated when his emotions got out of control because he always felt sick but now it was a million times worse because of the treatment he was on, "I see... well I think it's incredibly interesting, I don't believe I've ever met someone with full body alopecia in my entire career as it is quite rare in humans."

"R... really?" Feral asked, looking to him with such big, hopeful eyes.

"Really." He smiled in reply, "Now, while I still have energy, how about you show me how you spend your days?"

"You... want to know?" Feral blinked in confusion but smiled when Stitches nodded, "Oh... okay!" It wasn't the most outstanding, mind-boggling or glamorous work in the galaxy, it could be classed as mind-numbingly boring by their reg soldier brothers because ninety-nine point nine percent of them absolutely despised domestic work of any kind. It was a little funny watching Feral try to get the clothes on the line, however, because even with his steps, he was still rather short in comparison to the line, "Sometimes I hate being so small but... it makes my brothers smell softer when I try to do things like this." Feral looked to him, "Even when Crosshair's having a bad day, he always smells better when he sees me doing this... he

hasn't realised I only do it without my steps when he smells sad or angry... he even helps sometimes because he's an extra-large beanpole and I'm a fun-sized beanpole!"

"You do it to help him? Even though it makes your work more difficult?" Stitches blinked.

"Mm. Helping me helps calm him down... and sometimes he needs help like that. He doesn't like asking for help but I think he likes having a family that actively tries to help him, who aren't put off by his temper..." Feral smiled softly, "You... you are the best thing to happen to him, he... he feels like he belongs here and he... he feels safer here than he ever did with the Batch."

Not a lot slipped by Feral apparently, years of abuse seemed to make him so finely attuned to people and their temperaments, that was without taking into account his nose, "I like housework because it... it's nice to come home to a clean home and... everyone smells softer when they realise they have fresh clothes and the others all like having a big lunch with them and... I like helping, even if I can't do it in big, amazingly awesome ways because even small things help too." He bounced as they finished hanging up the laundry.

"Indeed they do Little One." He replied gently... he groaned a little when his head went funny, his stomach cramping weird...

"Ori'vod!" He realised he had passed out when he opened his eyes and realised he was on the ground, "Ori'vod?" Feral appeared in his vision, "Are... are you okay? I... I tried to stop you from falling but... but you're so much heavier than I am and... I only stopped you a little!"

"What... happened?" He asked as he slowly sat up.

"You... scent went wrong and you fell down and... you weren't conscious when you went down, I... I was so scared!" Feral replied quickly, "But... I managed to stop your head... from hitting the ground but...!"

"As long as you did that then I'll be okay." He replied, then noticed Feral's clothes were dusty, "Feral... did you use your body to cushion my head?"

"I... I couldn't stop you falling so I... y... yes..." Feral stammered as he fidgeted with his fingers, "Was... was that wrong?"

"Did you hurt yourself?" He asked quickly, he was a much bigger person than Feral, going dead weight on top of him could have caused him any number of injuries.

"N... no." The young clone replied but Stitches knew that tone, he'd heard it far too many times in his career.

"Where is it hurting?" He needed to know.

"I... I hurt my legs on the ground." Feral mumbled.

"Cyar'ika! What happened?" Sawbones appeared.

"I'm okay." He replied quickly.

But was Feral?

## Shower time

“Ad’ika? I’m getting a shower, want to double up?” Crosshair said to his brother, who looked at him very confused, Feral didn’t enjoy the idea of showering and Crosshair wasn’t sure why, he didn’t shower that often and just used wet towelettes for his head and armpits, perks of having no hair to be fair.

“O... oh... I don’t...” Feral blushed and looked at his feet, it was then that Crosshair realised why Feral didn’t shower regularly... he didn’t want to waste water on himself.

He felt he didn’t deserve it...

“Oh ad’ika, you won’t be wasting water.” He sighed and walked over to his brother, “Unless you intend to stand in the shower and contemplate life, the universe and everything.”

“B... but...!” Feral started but stopped when Crosshair smiled to him.

“Come on, there’s enough hot water for us both to have showers.” He held out his hand, as an invitation to follow and after a moment’s hesitation Feral took his hand, following after him in silence and Crosshair wondered how many other things Feral didn’t do or have because he didn’t think he deserved to have any of them... it made him sick to think of the abuse Feral suffered to make the small clone believe all these lies, these thoughts that were so wrong and damaging! He blinked and realised something else, he’d never actually seen Feral completely out of clothing, he’d shared shower time with his other brothers, naturally, seeing as they grew up together and it would be weird to be embarrassed by a naked body when you’d seen all of your brothers naked at some point... but Feral had never had a batch of his own, no brothers to share anything like that with, so he was probably a bit more self-conscious about that sort of thing. The most he’d seen of the younger clone was down to underclothes, he had left Sawbones to help Feral to go grab the comforter out of the airing cupboard and by the time he’d come back Feral was in Crosshair’s offered clothing, Sawbones hadn’t said anything or given away anything through facial expressions, so there probably nothing too weird or bad... now that he thought about it, he wasn’t sure if any of them had see Feral completely naked, he was always covered by blacks except for his random stints in medical and that one time on the beach but he’d been wearing a tank top on both occasions.

“I’m...” Feral was trying to make himself look smaller than physically possible.

“I can look away if you’re embarrassed, I won’t take offence.” He said as he started to remove his own clothes.

“It’s... not that I’m embarrassed... per say...” Feral replied, his face enveloped by a blush.

“Per say?” Crosshair asked with a raised eyebrow, “Is... Feral is there something you don’t want me to see?” Feral didn’t reply, there wasn’t crying or anything, just Feral all but shutting down, “Hey, it’s okay, whatever it is... you can tell me, I won’t judge you.”

“But...” Feral’s voice was so small and soft that Crosshair wasn’t sure he actually heard him.

“Hey, can you look at me? Listen to me?” He said gently and smiled when Feral looked to him, “I won’t judge you, I won’t mock you or do anything to hurt you, can you smell that?”

“M... mm.” Feral nodded slowly, “Okay...”

Crosshair felt his stomach drop when he saw what Feral was hiding, “Oh ad’ika... what happened?” He asked, his hand hovering over the scars on Feral’s small back, it looked like he was hit by something like a belt... several time... on multiple occasions... “It was those regs wasn’t it?”

“They... Commander Jute... I did a bad and he...” Feral hiccupped.

“Feral... I...” He hugged his brother tight, “Does anyone else know about them? Like Hunter...?” The small clone was shaking from his emotions and Crosshair wanted nothing more than to take away Feral’s hurts... then go find those disgusting regs and use their karking heads as target practice!

“Only... medics.” Feral’s voice was quiet again, “S... Sawbones knows now... but I’m not sure Stitches does...”

“Well... I know now and you don’t have to be ashamed anymore, okay?” He sighed, he hoped Feral would take this as a good thing, that he could go to Crosshair with anything, that he would know that Crosshair was safe to talk too. He was a little bit smugly happy that Feral had shown him something that he’d never shown Hunter, that Feral felt safe enough to show him this, he was safer than Hunter was... but it was disgusting of Crosshair to have this reaction, this was Feral, this was a horrific part of his past and he had shown trust in Crosshair! “You want to go first?” He asked after a moment, then chuckled, “Seeing as you have no hair to wash, in theory you shouldn’t take as long!”

“Well... being completely bald... has its upsides I suppose!” Feral replied with a small bounce, it really was weird to see and hug some one with literally no hair, “Just... don’t look at anything... you know...?”

“Feral, I’ve seen each and every one of our brothers naked, I know what not to look at.” He smiled in return and Feral nodded again.

“Why... why does Stitches shower with the lights off?” Feral asked when he stepped into the shower, “Wouldn’t... that make it hard to do?”

“I don’t know honestly, could be something to do with his inability to look at his own reflection, no idea about that either to be fair.” He sighed as he leaned against the countertop.

“May... maybe it’s to do with his... past? He... smells wrong sometimes... like when he’s showering or... if he has to trim his beard or hair...” Feral replied.

“Nothing gets past your nose does it?” He smiled.

“N... not really.” His brother was clearly blushing.

He was like a blushing maiden from one of Wrecker’s stories!





## Comfort

The sound of Stitches throwing up in the middle of the night was now so common that even Feral was getting used to it, he stopped being woken up by his own stomach wanting to evacuate itself, he was nauseous in the morning but no where near as bad... but Stitches was seriously starting to look like absolute crap, he was losing so much weight that he had barely any energy, some people didn't suffer from extreme symptoms of the therapy but Stitches was being hit like an angry rancor. More times than Crosshair could count he'd found Stitches asleep somewhere but sometimes he barely had the energy to go to sleep, it was so hard to watch such a strong person like Stitches be reduced to... a mere shell of what was once there, he still had his main weapon, his words, but he couldn't physically back them up anymore, "It will be okay Cross'ika." Stitches looked to him as he joined the older clone on the couch, it was still dark out and everyone was in bed but he couldn't sleep and just wanted to be beside Stitches, "Only two more months of treatment... should be on the up and up after that."

"I... I hate seeing you like this..." Crosshair sighed a little, "And I'm... I'm scared..."

"Scared? Why are you...?" Stitches asked after a moment of confusion, "Oh Cross'ika... I'm not going to die, sometimes I feel like I might but I'm going to be here for many years yet." He looked to the medic again, "Besides, my brothers would throw me back out of wherever we go when we die if I left now, I have a family to maintain and discipline after all." Crosshair looked away, down at his hands that were still calloused but not from the constant use of his rifle, his shoulder was no longer constantly discoloured from the recoil, he was a civilian whose hands were calloused from hard labour... not war. He looked back to Stitches when the older clone put his hand on Crosshair's shoulder, "Come here." Stitches said gently and Crosshair didn't even hesitate in putting his head on Stitches' lap, he knew he should have hesitated, should have questioned this affection because he was a hardened soldier of both the Republic and the Empire... but he just wanted to make sure that Stitches was really still with them, that he was warm and real, "It's going to be okay, no need to fret."

"But..." Crosshair wanted to believe it one hundred percent but Stitches' legs were thinner than before, he was so thin now and there was nothing Crosshair could do to help the older clone, there was nothing anyone could do to help him through this except being there and making his life a little more comfortable.

"Don't you remember who you're talking to? I stood against much bigger threats and Death can shove my supposed expiry date up his bony sheb." Stitches replied, "I'm not out of the game yet, I may look like and have the energy of a slightly warmed up corpse but I still have fight in me." Crosshair chuckled weakly, "I probably smell like one to be fair, honestly surprised Feral can stand to be close to me."

"He... he says you smell cold but... it's like there's a tiny fire still holding on." He replied softly.

“Your brother has a very interesting way of experiencing the Galaxy.” Stitches chuckled gently, “I think that your enhancement has hindered how you see that same Galaxy, you are a designed sniper but that means you tend to laser focus on things, like my illness. You see my deterioration and see nothing but my death... you need to stop looking through a scope and see the bigger galaxy.”

“Yeah... you’re right.” He replied, “I... I should try experiencing the Galaxy like Feral does.”

“You’re like me, you need help to take down the walls you built up around yourself, so do I...” Stitches sighed a little, “We have a family who want to help us and I think it’s really time to let them.”

“Mm.” Crosshair knew he was making great steps towards healing and taking down his walls but he still carried his defensive nature, his distrust for the Galaxy that hurt him... but it had hurt Feral too and the young clone was willing to put himself out there and meet people, maybe it was because of his enhanced sense of smell and he could tell who was and wasn’t a good person but if Feral, someone who was almost completely destroyed by abuse, could experience the Galaxy with innocent wonder... then Crosshair could too!

“You should head to bed, you have work in the morning.” Stitches said after a moment of calm and gentle silence, “And I refuse to be the reason you have a poor work performance.”

“Yeah... okay... are you going to go back to bed?” He sat up and looked to the medic again.

“Once I regain the strength to tackle the stairs.” Stitches huffed a laugh, “Don’t worry about me Cross’ika, I’m still here and I intend to be for many years to come.”

“Okay.” He nodded and wrapped his arms around Stitches’ unpleasantly narrowing frame, “Night ori’vod.”

“Night Cross’ika.” He released the hug and made his way back upstairs.

He smiled at the sight of Feral sprawled over his bed, limbs everywhere and Minnow lost somewhere in the tangle of bedding, the small clone was snoring softly before making a small noise, wiped his eyes, sighed and stilled again, obviously happy with the scent report, “Don’t worry ad’ika, I’m okay.” He said gently as he untangled Feral’s limbs and pulled the comforter up over his small frame, “So is Stitches.” He knew that now, their eldest brother would be okay because he said he would be and Crosshair trusted him, so did Feral and Feral’s nose was never fibbed or fooled, ever.

Everyone was okay.

## Hats for the cold

“Ori’vod!” Stitches looked to Feral when the boy appeared in front of the couch, which Stitches was using as an impromptu bed, he felt like complete and utter crap today and was curled up around Tech the Tauntaun, he was still confused and unnerved that he called the plush that long before he even met the young man who shared the name... or did Tech take it from the plush? Not likely, seeing as he was a closely guarded secret... he sighed, the house was warm because of the return of winter but he couldn’t shake the cold inside him, he was freezing because he didn’t have any fat reserves or hair left on his body and could barely move around the house, “I made you something.”

“You... made something?” He asked as he wiped his eyes before attempting to sit up slowly.

“Mm!” Feral nodded, “Mr. Mier said that people on chemo treatment can get really cold because as a bad side effect, he said his wife would get really cold but she made some hats and scarves for herself! So I asked Mrs Oda across the street if she could teach me how to knit! I always see her knitting something when she sits out in her front garden, so I thought I’d learn so I could help you if you got cold.” Stitches blinked, “So! I made you a selection of hats! They’re not the best by any standard but Mrs Oda says I’ll get better!” He looked to the bag that appeared in front of him and took it while Feral plopped down on the couch beside him, Stitches wondered how Feral managed to stay warm, seeing as he was running on a smaller frame with little fat reserves or mass with absolutely no hair, “I didn’t know what colours you liked but Sawbones said you don’t really appreciate pink, said it makes you really sad... so I used every other colour I could find!” He put the bag on the floor and started taking out the knitted headgear, they really were a selection of colours, some of them had pompoms on top also, “I had Sawbones’ help with sizing, seeing as you two have the same sized head, mine is a lot smaller because I’m small!”

He smiled and put one of them on, it was green like Needles’ armour accents, “What do you think? Fashionable?”

“Yep! But I can guarantee that Crosshair wouldn’t be caught dead in them!” Feral bounced happily, “He’s weird like that.”

“Indeed he is but then again a lot of clones have a weird idea of fashion.” He smiled, “Crosshair is just more vocal about his fashion choices.” He chuckled, which earned him a giggle from the small clone, “You want to know something Little One?”

“What?” Feral blinked.

“You chose the colours of my friends.” He said, there was even two that had Script’s garish colours.

“Really?” Feral asked, he sounded a little surprised with himself.

“Indeed.” He smiled, “You would have liked Script, he enjoyed really awful colour combos, these were his colours.” He picked up the two hats and put them together.

“Oh wow... that is horrible!” Feral giggled again.

“You have no idea! You could spot him a click away!” He chuckled, “Thank you little one, not only for giving me some warmth but for reminding me of those I held dear for so long.” Script and Needles had been on Kamino with him when the Order went out and he’d managed to help them but they got separated on Coruscant when Stitches went back for Sawbones and his brothers... he didn’t know if they were alive anymore... he wasn’t sure about Cane and Buttons either.

“No problem ori’vod.” Feral replied and wrapped his arms around him, “I should let you get some more sleep, you need a lot of it!”

“Indeed I do.” He smiled as he returned the hug, he waved to Feral who returned to doing house chores, the boy was fitting in almost as easily as Crosshair did.

“Stitches?” He was roused from sleep by a hand on his shoulder, he sighed and looked to the owner of the hand, realising it was Crosshair, “Hey, Madcap said dinner is almost ready, think you’re up for eating?” The sniper explained in a soft voice.

“I should eat but...” He massaged his forehead, he still felt like crap, he didn’t think he could even will his body to sit up, let alone put food into it... he was exhausted and queasy and just wanted to sleep for years, “Okay, help me up.” He said and took Crosshair’s offered hand which was used to help him to his feet.

“You sure you’re up for it?” Crosshair asked quickly when Stitches almost went straight back down, involuntarily but he nodded, “Okay.” Crosshair was still acting like Stitches would drop dead on the spot but too be fair sometimes Stitches felt like he would drop dead on the spot also, “Love the hat by the way.” The sniper grinned as he bopped the pompom, “Where’d you get it?”

“Your brother has taken an interest in knitting and mass made a whole bunch of them for me.” He replied as they walked to the kitchen, “In a very wide variety of colours.”

“You have been getting cold really easily.” Crosshair was frowning, “Is that caused by the treatment? Or the disease?”

“The treatment.” He sighed, “Barely being able to eat has put a large strain on my body.”

“Oh... Want to know a trick me and Feral have for how to stay warm while being beanpoles?” He looked to Crosshair, who now wore a grin, “Layers and heat-packs.” Was the answer to his raised eyebrow, “Sharing body heat works too but that’s if you have someone to do that with.”

“I see, I thank you for this information, I will need to invest in some heat-packs.” He nodded, so that was how Feral stayed warm... and Crosshair...

Apparently.

## Knight in shining armour

“Get off me! I’m not going with you!” Crosshair blinked and looked out onto the strip, where a young woman was being dragged by an older man, “Let me go father!”

Crosshair didn’t know why no one was helping... he bit his lip and summoned his inner Stitches, “Hey! Let her go!” He said loudly as he walked up to them.

“Stay out of this.” The man hissed but backed down a little when Crosshair glared and grabbed his arm in a strong grip.

“She doesn’t want to go with you.” He said slowly, carefully and as measured as Stitches’ words could be, “So unhand her and I’ll unhand you.”

“Wait until your mother hears about this you little whore.” The man wrenched his arm away and stalked to the ship he was aiming for.

“Are you alright?” He asked her, she was clearly shaken up and upset, “Did he hurt you?”

“N... no I’m...” She was barely able to make words but Crosshair could see the forming bruise on her face, he felt his stomach drop when he realised why he reacted the way he did, this situation was so painfully similar to Feral’s before he found safety.

“I know the owners of the nearby clinic, so if you need aid, they’ll get you sorted.” He now knew why he was feeling so protective but... she was very pretty too, “Do you have anywhere to stay for a while?”

“I... my friend’s mother lives nearby, she will... hopefully take me in.” She sighed a little, “Thank you sir, you didn’t have to do that, you put yourself in harms way for me... someone you don’t know.”

“I know what it’s like to be in that situation, my brother just recently got out of an abusive situation, very similar to what I saw here.” He replied gently, then looked to the foreman who was staring at him in disapproval, “I should get back to work but if you don’t want to wait for me, then head to Cabur medical clinic and tell them Crosshair sent you over, they’ll look after you.”

“O... okay.” She smiled slightly, “Thank you Mr... Crosshair?”

“Yeah, what can I call you?” He asked.

“I’m... Lilian Lollvas.” She smiled wider then chuckled, “You should get back to work, your boss is glaring daggers.”

“And I do not want to be in his bad books.” He smiled, “Good luck Miss Lollvas.”

He waved to her as she waved to him, watching her leaving the port area, “Get back to work.” He was forced out of his head by a thwack across the back of the head, “I don’t pay you to be a knight in shining armour.”

“Yes sir...” He massaged the back of his head but smiled a little.

“Good work son.” The man said before walking away and Crosshair felt pride bubble up in his chest, he never got to meet the people he helped in the war, the people he helped save... let alone be told he had done good by acting to help someone... it was his job to destroy clankers and their higher-ups, he never got to see the people beyond his scope.

He really did need to stop looking at life through a scope... “She was blushing like one of those damsels in the stories.” Madcap grinned as they arrived from the back.

“Good work vod.” Grim said with a soft smile, “Should polish up your armour so it suits your new role.”

The three gave some form of laugh when his face was enveloped by a blush, “I... I don’t know... where it is.” He mumbled, “Besides, I just... did what no one else was willing to do.”

“Whatever you say vod.” Grim nudged him, “Back to work, nearly home time.”

“Yes sir.” The three of them replied.

He smiled a little again, he was glad he could help her, that he could save someone from that situation before it got so bad that they either broke or fled, he wasn’t sure if she had anywhere to go if the second option was taken, he knew what could happen to someone in that situation, he was so unashamedly angry at Hunter for what he did, he would be for the rest of his life probably but Feral was working towards healing and Crosshair would follow his foot prints.

“You’re home!” Feral said happily as the four of them entered the house, giving each of them a big hug, it was almost like he didn’t expect them to come back and was both shocked and happy that they continued to do so.

“Yep, how’s Stitches?” Grim asked.

“He’s sleeping, I had to put an extra blanket on him because he’s getting really cold a lot, more so now that the weather is cold.” Feral replied, looking to the couch, upon which was a softly snoring medic who was wrapped around his tauntaun. bundled under a heavy comforter which had another blanket on top, one of the hats Feral had made was on his head, “He needs a lot of sleep but I’ve been keeping a sense on him and he’s okay, just tired and sore.”

“Has he been taking anything for the pain?” Madcap asked softly, not that he had to ask because they all knew full well that Stitches had not, in fact, taken anything, no matter how bad the pain got, he refused to take anything willingly, so they had to stealth shot him when he was dead asleep and he generally knew they did it but not always.

“No... he’s just trying to sleep it off.” Feral sighed a little.

“We’ll call him for dinner later, you should congratulate Crosshair here!” Speedy grinned, “Regular knight in shining armour!”

“Like... the ones from Wrecker’s stories?” Feral asked quickly, “Did... you save a princess?”

“Wouldn’t go so far as princess...” He blushed.

“Was she beautiful? Like in the stories?” Feral continued.

“Yeah... yeah she was very beautiful.”

“Congratulations!”

“Thanks ad’ika.”



# Nightmares

*“Crosshair... ori’vod... please...”*

*“Stand down Feral.” It was a slur again, “Good soldiers follow orders.”*

*“Ori’vod please! I... I know this isn’t you... I...” He watched as the traitor went flying as the bolt hit him, skidding until he was out in the rain.*

*“But... but now you don’t have one! You can come back! But... but if you don’t want to stay with us... I could go with you!” He couldn’t!*

*“I can’t go back, things will never be the same, how they used to be.”*

*“I just want you back...”*

*“Feral. Go back to the ship.” Hunter... was so angry... “That was an order trooper, a direct order! You know what one of those is right? Do I need to spell it out for you or is this direct insubordination? Go. Back. To. The. Ship.”*

*“Feral!”*

*“Feral please! Don’t leave me!”*

*“I’m sorry! Please come back!”*

*“Crosshair...”*

*“Crosshair.”*

“Crosshair!” He bolted awake, pain stabbing his brain, “Easy, it’s okay, it was only a nightmare.”

He looked to the form of Stitches, to his eldest brother’s gaunt face, “I...”

“Come here.” Stitches said as he sat on the side of the bed and opened his arms, which Crosshair didn’t hesitate in filling, “Shh, it’s okay.”

“I... I hurt Feral so... so much!” He sobbed into the medic’s shoulder, “I... I shot him and he was hurt so badly! He has the scar!” He didn’t know where Feral was because he couldn’t hear the young clone throwing up or anything but it was bright outside so he could have gone somewhere, “I shot him and called him... his name as a slur!” He sobbed uncontrollably, holding onto Stitches like he was the only thing keeping him from breaking beyond repair, the medic didn’t say anything, just let him vent his pain and anger, “I... I didn’t want to be left behind! I wanted to go with them!”

“I know Cross’ika.” Stitches sighed a little, “I know.”

“Why did they leave me!?” He choked a sob, “I wanted to go home!”

“Because sometimes one’s family hates the choices they make, they hate it so much that they abandon their loved one and... never come back for them.” Stitches hugged him a little tighter, “A very dear friend of mine, Script, his batchmates... the people who were to stand with him through thick and thin... abandoned him because he was training to be a medic, I don’t know exactly why because he never told us.”

“What... happened after they... left him?” Crosshair hiccupped past his crying.

“He found comfort and brotherhood with me and the other medics in our friend group, we took him in and made sure that those shebs knew exactly why you don’t piss off medics.” Stitches replied, “My friend Cane shaved off all of their hair when we stealth sedated them when they’d gone to bed and I took all the stitching out of their clothes, left enough in their shorts that it was wearable for a little bit before they fell apart. His Captain-in-training was in the mess when his fell apart... Maker we got in so much trouble with Cody and Fox but it was a hundred and ten percent worth it just to see his face when he was left naked in a mess full of cadets.” Stitches chuckled, the action making his chest rumble against Crosshair’s frame, “Would have done it to your sheb of a brother if I had the chance.”

Crosshair snorted a laugh, “Please don’t.”

“I won’t but the spooky ghost might and we all know how petty that guy is.” Stitches replied gently, “Now, do you want to take something for the headache?”

“Y... yes please.” He said in a small voice, he didn’t like showing such vulnerability to people... but this was Stitches, this was the closest thing to a parent he had, him and Sawbones had taken to parenting like the ducks took to water, it seemed so natural to them, like they were made for it.

“Okay, come downstairs, you should eat something too, will stop any nausea from the painkillers.” Stitches smiled to him when they released the hug, “Never forget Cross’ika, you have a family, it mightn’t be the one you were decanted with, like it isn’t the one I was decanted with, it’s small and full of broken people but we will do anything for each other and nothing will break our bonds.”

“Even... a chip?” He asked as he touched the scar on his head.

“I had to knock Sawbones out when I got to Coruscant, after the order went out, I had to punch Grim because he attacked me when I sedated Sawbones...” Stitches sighed a little, “Managed to get the hyper duo before they could cause damage... had to do surgery in their bunk room because I couldn’t risk going to medical with four unconscious troopers.”

“You... got to Coruscant? How did no one notice your chip didn’t activate?” He blinked in confusion.

“Best thing about being known as the scariest medic for a decade is that, even with an active chip, survival instinct is still in effect.” Stitches chuckled again, “They were terrified of me before the order and that was a lesson that stuck, so I literally walked right into the Coruscant

Military Base and no one stopped me. I think they were afraid of what I would do without the directive of our Jedi Generals, if I was off the leash of honour and duty.”

“Oh... that makes a lot of sense actually.” He replied, he was confused on why he had obeyed Stitches’ statement on looking away before he was knocked out again, it was a survival instinct he didn’t know he had.

“Come on, Feral made breakfast before he left to go talk to Mrs. Oda.” Stitches stood up slowly.

“How... are you feeling?” Crosshair asked as they walked downstairs.

“Like complete and utter crap.” Was the reply, “But I’ll be okay.”

“Really?”

“Of course Cross’ika.”

## Embarrassing first talks

“Ori’vod!” Crosshair blinked and looked up from his book to see Feral standing in the hallway, “There’s a lady asking about you.”

“A lady?” He asked.

“Yeah! She’s staying with Mrs Oda and she heard me talking with Mrs Oda about how are family is getting on, how Stitches was.” Said medic was asleep on the couch once more, bundled up like they were on Hoth, “And she said she met a guy called Crosshair at the port, said he saved her! I think she’s the princess you saved!” Crosshair’s face was enveloped by a blush, “You were right, she’s very pretty.”

“I... well...” He stumbled over his words.

“Go talk to her or so help me...” Stitches grumbled but he wasn’t completely awake.

“That’s you told!” Feral grinned with a bounce, “Come on!” Before Crosshair could say anything Feral somehow managed to get him to his feet and was pulling him along behind him, “Found him!”

“Hello Crosshair, how are you feeling today?” Mrs Oda asked with a smile, Miss Lollvas was sitting in the garden seat beside her, a blush enveloped her face also.

“I’m okay.” He replied, “And you ma'am?”

“Still chugging along.” She chuckled, “I have been hearing all about your daring rescue of Lilian, she may not be my blood but she is family, so I thank you for your aid.”

“It’s... I couldn’t stand by and let someone be forced to do something they didn’t want to do.” He replied in a small voice, he’d been forced to work for the Empire in the start, Feral had been forced to obey Hunter’s every order, it made him so angry that it happened at all in the galaxy... he blinked when Feral’s small hand appeared on his shoulder, “I apologise, I am still coming to terms with a lot of my past.”

“That’s quite alright, your brother here has been doing the same.” She motioned to Feral, who bounced a little, “Now, Feral here has his knitting lesson, so why don’t you two go for a walk, get to know each other, you’ll be living in the same neighbourhood after all!” Both he and Miss Lollvas were blushing like crazy now, this was not how he intended to spend his day off!

“You got this ori’vod.” Feral said gently with a smile... why did Crosshair get the sneaking suspicion that Feral and Mrs Oda were trying to get the two of them alone?

“O... of course, shall we?” He looked to Miss Lollvas, who nodded and stood up, he fell in step beside her as they walked.

“I think they’re plotting something.” She said finally.

“Knowing my brother? Yeah, they’re plotting something.” He sighed a little, Feral had finally started to show his playful and cheeky side, now that he felt completely safe, that their families were safe, “And they’re not really being subtle about it.”

“No, I suppose not.” She chuckled in response, then looked to him with a smile that lit her face up like the sun, “So, Mr. Crosshair, what shall we talk about?”

“Oh... um... I’m not exactly great at the whole... small talk thing.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

“Well, what do you like? Or enjoy?” She didn’t seem put off by him, it was nice to be honest.

They walked and talked for so long they’d ended up in the market area, “Do you... want to go get something to eat?” He asked, he hadn’t eaten since breakfast but he hadn’t eaten a wild amount because he was nauseous from the nightmare, he ate more than Stitches did though but that wasn’t really an achievement.

“I could go for something.” She smiled and they entered one of the cafés, “So, why did your brother call me a princess?”

“Oh... oh um... the rest of our brothers were joking that I was like a... knight in shining armour for helping you... and Feral has a limited databank for these kinds of things but he knows a lot of the fantasy stories... so he...” He was blushing a whole lot more at this point.

“Well? What do you think of that phrasing?” She smiled warmly.

“Oh... I...” He lost his words again... how could he phrase this without coming across as creepy or weird? “Y... yeah... I think he might be correct... about you I mean... I’m not so sure about me...”

“Your work clothes aren’t exactly shining.” She chuckled softly.

“No... I suppose not.” He smiled a little.

“Ori’vod!” He was enveloped by Feral the second he arrived back, “Mm!” His brother hugged him tight.

“You’re a cheeky little clone, you know that right?” He grinned to Feral but his brother merely bounced and grinned back, he was about to speak again but he spotted the huge scar on Feral’s chest from under his shirt, the one he...

“Crosshair?” Feral asked and Crosshair realised he had tears dripping down his cheeks.

“I... I had fun but...” He carefully placed his hand over where the scar was.

“This?” Feral blinked and put his hand over his, “This wasn’t you, this was the chip... but you came through long enough to make sure it wasn’t a full power shot, if... if it wasn’t for you, the chip would have killed me.”

“How can you be so okay with it?” Crosshair tried to wipe away his tears, “I almost killed you.”

“You always ask me do you smell like you’re lying but this once I want you to trust that I don’t smell like I’m lying when I say... it wasn’t you, so I don’t blame you, it was the chip... in the same way it was Hunter’s and Wrecker’s chips that made them hurt others.” Feral smiled to him, “So... when’s the next date?”

Crosshair’s tears were instantly replaced by a blush, “I... um...”

Feral giggled at his blush, “She smells like she really likes you.” He said gently, “And you smell soft with her.”

“Yeah... I guess I do...”

## Pancakes?

“Crosshair?” Feral’s small voice came from his bed.

“Yeah?” He replied.

“I... I’m sorry if I... upset you.” Feral replied as his voice became muffled by his comforter and Crosshair blinked in confusion, “I... thought you and Miss Lollvas... you really smell like you like each other and Mrs Oda said you look like it... and I... I know I... but I... I just wanted to help.”

Crosshair was on his feet and at Feral’s bed in an instant, “Ad’ika.” He said gently, carefully pulling the comforter away from Feral’s face, “You can smell me, right?” Feral nodded slowly, “Do I smell upset?” A head shake, “Or angry?” Another head shake, “Then I’m not angry or upset, I’m a little embarrassed because you both caught me in less-than-ideal clothes.”

“B... but...” Feral was falling back into that comfortable embrace.

“Oh ad’ika.” He sighed a little, “Scoot over.” He lifted the comforter and lay down beside Feral, who hesitated for a split second before he hugged Crosshair and rested his head on his chest, the comforting device was a good idea but it would never beat the real thing, “Get some sleep ad’ika.”

“O... okay.” Feral replied as he pressed his ear to Crosshair’s chest, just above his heart, he wondered what his heart felt and sounded like, how different was it from Hunter’s?

Surprisingly Feral was not already up when Crosshair woke, he was still cuddled up beside him, “You must have been so stressed.” He whispered, using his thumb to massage Feral’s thin shoulder.

There was a soft knock at the bedroom door and Sawbones appeared at the top of the stairs, “There he is.” The medic smiled as he walked over to them, “I was concerned when he wasn’t up before me.”

“I think his stress is getting bad again.” He replied, then looked to Feral when the small clone made a small noise, wiped his eyes, sighed and stilled again.

“Oh dear.” Sawbones replied with a sad expression, “We’ll have to work on that I suppose... and yours I imagine. Oh don’t give me that look, ever since Stitches got sick and you saw Feral’s scar, you’ve been falling down the dark path you were on when we met you.”

“I just...” He looked to Feral, “I don’t want to lose another family because I...”

“Crosshair, this isn’t your fault.” Sawbones smiled gently, “We knew Stitches would have a relapse, we just didn’t know when, and Feral knows that it wasn’t you that shot him, it was the chip, but it was you who made sure it wasn’t a kill shot, he’s alive because you fought it

long enough to make sure you wouldn't kill him." Crosshair still fought with himself over having shot both Wrecker and Feral, Feral... wasn't as sturdy as Wrecker, none of them were but Feral was smaller than Wrecker's arm was, so getting hit by a shot that could down Wrecker... should have killed him outright, "He told me that your smell was trying to grab on again but the wrong smell wouldn't let it."

"I could never lie to him, he always knew I was lying... he knows me better than any of my brothers..." He laughed a little, earning him a happy sound from his brother who wiped his eyes again, "Isn't that right ad'ika?" He smiled and rested his hand on Feral's head and massaged his scalp.

"He seems to know everyone better than their family." Sawbones said gently, then gave Feral a little shake, "Feral? It is time get up."

"What... what time is it?" Came the small voice as Feral wiped his eyes.

"Eight o'clock Naboo standard time." Crosshair replied.

"Oh!" Feral was upright in under a second and Crosshair was surprised his brain didn't crap out at the sudden altitude change, "I... I didn't mean to sleep in!"

"Don't worry about it vod'ika." Sawbones smiled, then chuckled, "Stitches is still asleep so he won't know we haven't done any housework yet..."

"Why... is there... pancake batter on the floor?" Came the voice of said medic, he wasn't fully awake and was in his delirious stage of waking up, where he didn't see things as they actually were.

"Oh dear, I should go help him." Sawbones sighed but was still smiling, "I think he's got a craving for pancakes."

"I... I'll make some!" Feral bounced as they both got out of the bed, while Sawbones disappeared down the stairs, "I think Kyle gave me a recipe... come on brain... yeah! I do!" Crosshair smiled a little, his brother was quite good at remembering things he saw or heard, well... things that he thought were important, like maps and schematics.

"You're getting almost as fast as Tech is with getting information out of your brain." He smiled and gave his brother a one-armed hug, earning a blush from Feral, "I'll help you with making them, never made them though so you'll have to show me."

"O... okay!" Feral bounced again, "It's not... that hard actually."

"You overestimate my ability to cook, I'd burn cereal!" He laughed, earning a giggle from Feral, "I think Stitches will forever be confused by your giggle, I don't think he's ever met a clone trooper who did it."

"I... is it bad?" Feral's voice was small.

"Nope, it makes you even more unique!" He hugged Feral a little tighter.



“O... oh! That... makes me a little happy.” Feral smiled as put his glasses on, unlike Tech, who had to keep fixing his, Feral’s mask prevented his from slipping down, “You... you like the idea that Stitches could be a defective clone, without actually being one... don’t you?”

“Yeah, makes me feel closer to him, like he’s... well I think I like the idea that we have a reg brother who has some understanding of what it’s like to be different.” He smiled also, he knew he loved his new family so much... but Stitches was more than a brother...

He was a buir.

## Lucky

“Ad’ika? What are you doing?” Crosshair asked as he walked into the kitchen.

“I just finished making you all lunch but today is Stitches’ last day of chemo!” Feral said happily, “So I want to set up a little something to congratulate him on making it through!” Crosshair blinked because he’d completely forgotten that it was Stitches’ last chemo session, “Not only that but it’s his decanting day! It’s the best decanting day present! So, I made the cookies he likes and I got his favourite tea! I was thinking of something bigger but he doesn’t want that, Sawbones said his brothers died the day before his decanting day, so we should make this a small thing.” Crosshair smiled and put his hand on Feral’s head, earning him a happy sound and a bounce.

He was a good kid and Crosshair couldn’t understand how anyone could hate him, “Something smells good, you making us lunch?” Grim asked as the three of them arrived.

“Yep!” Feral bounced again, “I gave each of you your favourites so you don’t have to do tradies!”

“Aw, that’s the best part!” Madcap laughed, “You use some of the left overs?”

“Mm. Still loads left for me to make Sawbones’ lunch.” He smiled, “Oh! Did Sawbones tell you what today is?”

“Uh... probably.” Grim frowned a little, earning a giggle from Feral, Crosshair smiled a little at the sound.

“It’s Stitches’ last day of chemo and his decanting day.” Crosshair explained with a smile.

“Kark! I forgot!” Madcap said quickly, “I have nothing to make a decanting day dinner! Right, you lot delay them while myself and Speedy go grocery shopping after work.”

“Don’t worry ori’vod, Stitches won’t be home till after you all get back from work, Sawbones wants to make sure everything is okay.” Feral sighed a little, they were all worried about the medic because of how frail he’d become, he’d gotten the tar kicked out of him by the treatment but... hopefully now that he was done, he’d regain his strength, return to being the man they knew, the one that helped save Crosshair from himself, “Sit down, eat your breakfast and get going to work! Stitches refuses to be the reason you’re tardy!”

“Even as fragile as he is now, I won’t put my money on my face.” Speedy laughed.

“Same.” The three of them replied as Feral giggled again.

Crosshair felt so at home, he wouldn’t have thought that he’d ever find it, especially when his chip activated and his family abandoned him, when he shot Feral... but here he was, he had older brothers, what basically equated to parents and he had Feral, a vod’ika who actively wanted to stay with him, who wouldn’t be swayed by their brothers into hating Crosshair, to

be angry at him, who let him be an older brother again. He could help in raising Feral in a safe environment and Maker knew Feral needed all the safety he could get but Crosshair did too, "Come on vod, home time." He blinked out of his head when a hand and a voice appeared, he looked to Grim and spotted the gentle smile on his face.

"The other two already gone?" He asked as they got their stuff.

"Off like a shot." Was the chuckled reply, they walked in silence for a bit before Grim spoke again, "Man, I really hope Stitches will get through this okay."

"He's made it this far... I think he'll be okay." Crosshair replied gently.

"Yeah, he's a stubborn old fart if nothing else." The older clone huffed a laugh.

"How did you all meet him? Get to know him?" He'd been wanting to ask that for so long now.

"Well, originally it was Sawbones who interacted with him because he was training under him, he had a choice between Stitches or Reaper and he chose Stitches because there was a chance of being liked." Grim huffed a laugh, "He did like him and soon they got really close, started with Sawbones bringing him caf and snacks, Stitches covering Sawbones with a blanket when he fell asleep in residency... they were practically inseparable." He sighed, "Then Stitches lost his brothers, Sawbones almost lost him... initially to his injuries, then to his trauma, his friends and 99 tried to help as much as they could but other medics were classing him as a lost cause, that he would never be stable enough to return to active duty, jokes on them though. He went back out into the field when medics were needed for FOB Field Hospitals, returned to duty in Tipoca and helped those who were going through he did, giving them a shoulder to lean on when they had no one..."

"What about you three?" He smiled a little.

"Well, Madcap and Speedy were instantly drawn to Stitches' youngest brother Tail-Gaiter, TG for short, we called them the hyper trio and nothing any of us did could control them indefinitely, we all tried but nothing could contain their energy!" Grim chuckled again, "We met a lot of other squads through them, built friendships and connections, I can guarantee that Stitches' eldest brother Sticker would've adopted you and your brothers so fast it wouldn't be funny... would help train you and raise you so you won't be victims of abuse from us regs."

"I... don't think I would have trusted him, I didn't trust regs at all when we were growing up and that carried over to when we were grown, I thought that because we were enhanced clones that we were above the regs, that we were superior to them... but living here... with you all..." He sighed, "I don't think I would have survived as myself if I went back to the Empire... or went with my brothers, I wouldn't have a safe home to come back to and I wouldn't be able to help Feral..."

"He's lucky to have you vod."

"And I'm lucky to have you all."



# Thank you for the happiest year of my life

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Welcome home ori’vods!” Crosshair looked up when Feral greeted the two medics as they arrived back, “Missed you!”

“Missed you too vod’ika.” Stitches said gently, the man looked like absolute crap, he always looked worse directly after a session, he wondered if Feral could smell the chemo coursing through the older clone’s frail body? Crosshair didn’t even say anything as he moved to the older clone and wrapped his arms around him, he had to make sure the man was real and here and not dead because of a complication, “Easy Cross’ika, I’m okay.” Stitches hugged him back, “I’m here.”

“I...” He didn’t know why he had become like this in such a short amount of time.

“You’re okay.” Stitches affirmed, “You’re alright, I’ll never leave your side Cross’ika.”

“I’m okay... you’re okay... everyone’s okay.” He tightened his hug a little.

“Exactly.” Stitches tightened his hug also, then chuckled, “Now, I need to sit down before I fall down.”

“Oh, sorry.” He released the hug with a blush, “How are you feeling?”

“Gross, I need a shower in the worst way.” The medic sighed as he plopped down on the couch, “Right now there is no signs of any malignant cells or any symptoms of them, so I am in what we call complete remission, however, given this there is a chance that it will come back again... I was in remission before and this was a recurrence, so it may come back again...”

“So... you’re not completely cured?” Crosshair felt his stomach fall through the floor.

“If it doesn’t slap me in the face again after five years, then yes, I am but until then Sawbones and myself will need to monitor me for any signs of a recurrence.” Stitches sighed again and leaned back into the couch, “Kark me I feel like crap.”

“Madcap has dinner on, you feel up to eating?” He asked gently.

“Not really but seeing as this is made for me then I should at least try.” Crosshair blinked and spotted the sly grin on the older man’s features, “I may feel like crap but I know the smell of my favourite food, Madcap doesn’t make it that often, only for special occasions involving me.”

“No idea how they plan surprises around you.” He chuckled in reply.

“They try and I pretend I didn’t know it was happening...” Stitches sighed again, “I suppose we should celebrate the completion of my treatment.”

“Well, it is an important occasion.” He wondered if Stitches only intended to celebrate that and not the other thing, did Stitches even remember it was also his decanting day? “So... how old are you now?” He laughed at the positively murderous glare from the older clone, if he didn’t remember before... he did now!

“I’ll have you know I am not sick enough that I can’t whoop your sheb boy.” The man hissed but Crosshair knew it wasn’t an actual threat, “Stop laughing boy, you know I’ll do it.”

“Mom! Stitches is threatening me with violence!” He called to the other medic who came over chuckling to himself.

“Cyar’ika, please stop threatening Crosshair with grievous bodily harm.” Sawbones sat down between them to split them up.

“He started it.” Stitches grumbled, earning a laugh from the two of them.

“Be the adult in the situation cyar’ika.” Sawbones smiled warmly, “Now, Madcap says dinner is just about ready, so head to the table.”

“Fine.” Stitches grumbled again and with help from the two of them, got to his feet and they went to the table, Grim and Feral were already there.

“I save you your favourite seat!” Feral said happily, the young clone had continued to sit beside Stitches ever since his first meal with them, it was his safe spot at the table because he still had issues with eating in a group, so it was more Feral’s favourite seat for the medic but Stitches seemed happy that Feral found safety in him too.

“Dinner is served!” Madcap appeared from the kitchen with Speedy and soon the table was full of life and conversation, Crosshair smiled as Stitches relaxed, he was enjoying this, he wasn’t tense and waiting for something bad to happen, obviously he wasn’t stupid and knew what was going to happen but he felt safe enough to just... let it happen.

“We... got you something small ori’vod.” Feral said in a small voice, “And I made you the cookies you like...”

“You...?” Stitches blinked and took the small package, “Ah, I see you all remembered my decanting day also.”

“Yep!” Madcap grinned.

“Some of you forgot, didn’t you?” Stitches looked at everyone but Feral and Sawbones.

“Uh... only briefly.” Speedy said in a small voice as he massaged the back of his neck.

“I see.” The older clone frowned, “Well, you remembered eventually, that’s all that matters I suppose.” Crosshair had absolutely no idea what Feral and Sawbones got the medic other than the treats but whatever it was, he hoped Stitches would like it, he needed safety and

happiness just as much as anyone else, more in Crosshair's opinion, "Oh good, not another bundle of hats, have enough to give to the whole GAR at this point."

"I ran out of wool after the last one." Feral grinned.

"Thank you all, for everything." Stitches smiled gently, "I feel very loved right now."

"Group hug!" Madcap yelled and Stitches was enveloped by bodies.

-

"Stitches? Sawbones?" He said as he approached the medics as they enjoyed the night air.

"Yes Cross'ika?" Stitches looked to him with a raised eyebrow.

"Thank you for the happiest year of my life." Crosshair smiled gently as he sat between them.

"I'm glad you spent it with us." Stitches softened and they embraced.

"You deserve safety my dear vod'ika." Sawbones said gently sandwiching him between the two, he'd never felt safer in his entire life than he did at that moment.

"Thank... thank you buir and... buir."

He was safe now.

Forever and almost always

## Chapter End Notes

Happy fin

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