Agent 2319: An operative responsible for countless known/unknown successes relating to the First Order. It was only a matter of time before Agent 2319 received a mission from Supreme Leader Snoke himself. It was only a matter of time before the agent would have to work alongside Commander Kylo Ren. And, let it be known, if you are an agent of The First Order, you are in far too deep to back out now.

(Written in First POV, but OC is a potential self-insert, no physical traits, no name, etc - does not use "Y/N")
The Assignment

Chapter Summary

“You get a job, you become the job.” -Taxi Driver, Martin Scorsese

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I’ve been to many clubs in Nar Shaddaa, but never one quite like this.

First of all, it’s massive. I can’t imagine how many credits it takes to even own this kind of property. Working here would be a complete mess. Navigating this place on a daily basis would prove to be an unruly task, one that I’m quite frankly annoyed of just after stalking around for a few moments. Plus, the only people I can see seem to be too rich for their own good. It’s a shame that such successful people still find enjoyments in the slums of Nar Shaddaa. They’re all loud, obnoxious. Basically indiscernible between each other. I luckily started following Stowford before I got here. Him, nor his goons, didn’t notice a thing.

What a waste of money, to hire people who will eventually fail to protect you.

I look down at myself, making sure everything is exactly in place. My hair is tousled, and dress is tight enough to reveal that I am just some fun-loving gal (with a rich father) engaging in nightlife, but bold enough to get this guy’s attention. For the amount of time it took me to lace up my boots, he better not take this look for grated. I take one final breath and look upwards at Stowford.

Then, I approach him.

I don’t let my eyes leave his. My legs extend out, peeking through the slit of my dress. He notices me when others start looking over my way. I allow the air moving past me to slide my hair off my chest, flowing behind me. He smirks.

Finally, I’m in talking distance to not make myself sound like I’m screaming above the music. I say with implication, eyeing the guards around him, “You must be a pretty important guy to have all these people looking out for you safety.”

He stares at me, his smirk spreading wider. He has clean cut facial hair, framing his thin lips. His hair is red, skin is pale and freckled. I try not to notice the yellow of his teeth when he speaks, his voice not much more than grumble, “You could say that, sweetheart. How about you? Who’s here keeping you safe from the mean men of Nar Shaddaa tonight?”

I look down, then back up, sliding my bottom lip against my teeth. “Perhaps I don’t want to be safe tonight.”

He chuckles deeply. “If you’re trying to sell me, you got me already. What’s your price?”

I slowly approach him, carefully walking past his guards. They don’t suspect a thing. I reach my hand onto his shoulder, whispering into his ear, “Zero credits if you make it worth my while.” My hand moves to the front of his chest, rubbing against his thin silk shirt. “I haven’t had a good time in a long time. And something tells me a powerful, wealthy man such as yourself - you could meet all
my needs.”

He wraps an arm around my waist, pulling me down to sit on his lap. I feel his belly move against my side as he talks. “Your wish is my command, sweetheart.” He growls into my ear. I can almost hear gravel in his croaking voice. He looks up at one of his guards, nodding slightly.

The guard doesn’t even give me a second look before walking off, Stowford dragging me along to follow him. The rest of his guards form around us, carefully watching the crowd. I feel Stowford’s hand move lower and lower on my waist, until he’s resting his palm against my ass. This room they are taking me to couldn’t be close enough.

As soon as we’re inside, all five guards on the other side of the door, I press the button on the device under my dress. I know I don’t have much time now. Anno will be here any moment.

I quickly push Stowford onto the couch. He stares up at me, so proud of himself that he’s fucking someone so early in the night, let alone for free. I slowly mount myself on top of him, trying not to project the sense of urgency Anno’s arrival brings me. He immediately grabs my face and begins rubbing his lips against mine. His breath isn’t very appealing. As his hand feels up my leg, I quickly grab it and place it on my breast, before he can reach my garter. He looks up at me with lust, squeezing my skin. I moan roughly, pushing his face into my cleavage.

As his kisses intensify, I grind my hips against him. My eyes look over to the window. Anno is there, hanging from a rope, like promised. I give him a nod.

Deep breath.

In that moment, Anno blasts through the window and I grab the knife from my garter.

I plunge the knife into the back of Stowford’s neck, right between his skull and top of his spine. He limply slouches backwards, dead.

Before Anno can react, I jump off of Stowford and scream at the top of my lungs. The guards immediately rush in, tackling a confused Anno to the ground.

I yell, pushing the guards in front of me, shielding me from Anno, “Oh my god! Oh my god!” I force tears into my eyes as I cover my gasp with a palm.

Anno sneers through the bodies of Stowford’s guard, “I didn’t touch him! I didn’t fucking touch him, I just wanted to interrogate him!”

I hear a guard mutter to him, “Save your sob stories for the Nar Shaddaa court system, and to all the people Stowford’s death pisses off.”

I just sob into the back of the guard’s shoulder. “I just saw a man die, oh my god.”

Anno continues, helplessly, as he’s handcuffed and pulled to his feet, “Listen to me! I’m with the Resistance, I didn’t want him dead, I needed him alive, you’re making a mistake! She killed him, I don’t know why but she-”

I stumble backwards, running out the room.

I hear him yell after me, “Who the hell are you!? Catch her!”
Merging myself into the crowd, I disappear into the assortment of drunk people who have no idea a man in the other room just died and another man just lost his freedom to a few years in prison.

I ignore my swelling feet from the uncomfortable shoes as I exit.

Back in my ship, I lean backwards in the my chair, mesmerized by the stars flying past me in hyperspeed. The stars don’t even look like stars. They are just lights that exist for one single moment, then cease to even be seen. I sigh, rolling my neck.

“Master, your mission was a huge success.” 5D-R8 says from the doorway. I turn my head over to the droid to see his regular, proper figure walk towards me, asking, “Can I get you anything? You have not eaten today, I could make you anything from your meal plan. Or perhaps you would like some entertainment. I could supply any broadcast coming in from The First Order Fleet system.”

I nod, waving the droid off. “No thank you, R8. That will be all for now. I wish to be alone.”

5D-R8 complies happily, just as he’s programmed to do, “Very well, master.”

The ship returns to the First Order fleet, my body jerking forward at the sudden change of speed. I reach to the control console and allow the ship to be taken into the hanger through the tractor beam.

Missions like that one make me feel so overwhelmed afterwards. The crowds, the loud music, and then the dramatic innocence act I have to put up after I killed the target. It all is draining. I suppose I did receive extra money from Anno for luring Stowford alone. I got him to pay upfront. Maybe I could go shopping or travel somewhere on a day off.

I run my hands through my hair, pulling it back into a tight bun that fits the Finalizer’s protocol. As my ship parks into the hanger, I reach over to the dress and boots I wore tonight, throwing the pile into the disposable system. Even though the galaxy is so vast, I’ve never risked wearing-or even owning-the same thing twice while I’m undercover.

I straighten out my grey, pleated uniform across my chest, making sure the finely pressed material is to whatever picky general’s liking. As my ship’s doors open, security droids enter, scanning around the ship. I walk out to be met with General Marven.

He’s an older general. Someone who’s been around since the golden era of the Empire. In these times, people like that are few and far between. The First Order seems to be comprised of people who either are young, naive children who want to fulfill their ancestor’s legacy or old men who some how survived the war to try to relieve their glory days. I don’t know what I prefer. Both sides seem rather naive to me.

The General begins walking with me out of the hanger. I can tell from his more laid back expression that he is relieved. It wouldn’t surprise me if he doubted me. No matter what I do around here, everyone still thinks I’m incapable. He debriefs, “Excellent work, Agent. Everyone here on base is quite pleased with the results of your work. Stowford’s corporation still is in business with us, without any details out to the Resistance. They have no clue of the weapon we’re creating. We bought time. The man, Anno Anadisa, was a dangerous threat as well. We’re expecting him to remain in prison for quite awhile.”

Anno, without a doubt, will be imprisoned for at least 4 years, with the way that the Nar Shaddaa court system is. When I frame people, I try to make sure they’re locked up for a significant amount of time. That way, they can’t easily track me down. But I can’t help but go to bed at night wondering if
someone has a significant resentment towards me, one that they’d be willing to place a bounty on. I suppose it's nothing to worry about. It's not like they could find me, even if they had a bounty on my head. The First Order ensures that. I respond to the General, “I figured as much, Sir. Does that conclude my mission?”

“Yes,” He slows down his pace, his words more hesitant than before. “That concludes that mission.” I try to remain as still as possible. I know that tone of voice. And he knows that I just want one day of rest before I have to go out and lie, cheat and steal for The First Order again. So he regretfully says, “But there’s another situation.”

I really don’t reject missions ever. But it’s been a month since I’ve had a day off. And it’s not even like I was undercover for only one position for a month. I’ve had upwards of fifteen personas I had to fulfill in such a short amount of time. I just want to be alone to myself for at least a full 24-hours. “Sir, I believe that I would be more use to the Order if I could take a day off, to regenerate my mind. I hope you do not mistake my dedication to a clear mind as laziness.”

General Marven completely stops walking in order to face me, his voice lower. “I would grant you the day off in any other circumstance. There is a mission that comes from a… position higher than I.”

I look down. “If you could get me in contact with this person, I’m sure I could-”

“It’s Supreme Leader Snoke.”

I freeze. Working for the Supreme Leader himself is something so many people can only dream of doing. Knowing that Snoke picked me shows that he noticed me. He recognized my hard work and values it. I push down all my excitement, only to be able to respond, “Oh.”

The General apologizes, “I deeply regret putting you into this position.”

I shake my head, reassuring, “It is truly fine, sir. I have never worked with the Supreme Leader before. I see this opportunity as an honor.”

He seems surprised by my reaction. As if I should not be reacting in this way towards my new mission. His voice is low, cautious, when he responds, “I do not disagree that this is a huge accomplishment. But you must understand the stakes of this mission, if it is coming from the Supreme Leader himself.”

“I do, of course.”

He sighs, reaching for his holopad. He begins typing away. “I’m sending you the coordinates to the room where you can contact the Supreme Leader. He requested your presence immediately, so I would suggest going there now.”

There’s two stormtroopers who escort me to the room that has Snoke’s holocron. I can tell the troopers are high in rank because of their weapons. Their blasters have a piece of leather outlining the handle. I really don’t see the point in the elaborate escort to just go to a room with the holocron.

But that’s until I see the room.

I can’t believe a room like this exists in the Finalizer. It’s huge, taking up an unprecedented amount of space. There is a large throne that sits empty at the end of a runway, lit with lights outlining the edges. I look back at the troopers, as if to ask them if I just walk in.
They nod.

I sigh, walking into the room. The emptiness of it all seems so paranormal. There’s so much space, but the only thing occupying it is me and my footsteps. Chills scatter across my spine. I attempt to recollect myself my pointing my chin up, walking a bit faster, with more deliberation.

At the end of the runway, I stand and salute the empty throne. I hope that this is correct procedure, that I don’t need to do anything in preparation to talk to the Supreme Leader. I just stand, my hand up to my perspiring forehead, trying not to visibly show any insecurities.

There’s a flicker of blue lights and then his image appears.

Any fear I once had is ultimately multiplied.

I can’t tell what kind of species of alien he is. He barely even looks alien. But he’s definitely not human. His skin is grey, tattered into scars that stretch across his sullen face. He has an indent in his forehead that doesn’t move with the rest of his expression when he narrows his dark eyes at me, studying me. I look into his eyes and only find an oil black abyss. His whole face is asymmetrical. His left ear is a few inches lower than his right. I complete my salute and stand steady, awaiting my debriefing, arms folded behind my back.

He just continues staring until his thick voice commands, “Bow.”

I try not to jump at the sound his voice creates in the room. It was so quiet for so long, loud noises seemed so foreign. I drop to the floor immediately, bowing before him. I wonder if Snoke commanded whoever is running the holocron to put his audio up loudly, only further adding to his intimidating presence.

“You…” He sneers down at me. “You are the spy that has been responsible for so many of The First Order’s successes. As I look back at many of our military operations and how they have been victorious,” I don’t see him. All I see is the darkness of the floor as I’m bowing, but I know he’s leaning forward now. Looming over me. “And your name has always been the at the base of it all. You set it up, seamlessly, then cleaned it up without any evidence.”

Only now do I realize that I have not taken a single breath this whole time. I inhale a steady stream of air. “Thank you, Supreme Leader.” I am not sure if that was the correct response. He wasn’t really complimenting me, just stating my achievements. Dammit.

“How much confidence do you have in your craft?” He asks.

I still cannot quite get over how intimidating his voice sounds. How loud it is, despite the fact that he’s not even remotely yelling. His words leave a ringing throughout the room. I respond, looking at the floor, “I am very confident, Supreme Leader.”

“Arise.”

I do, staring back into his eyes, trying not to allow my own eyes to linger on his scars or odd facial structure. I observe that he is completely bald and rather lanky. I don’t think he has anything in between his skin and bones.

He continues, finally getting to some sort of a point. “You are aware of my apprentice, Commander Kylo Ren. I have begun a group called the Knights of Ren, led under his supervision. But I am greatly burdened by the… emotional inconsistencies Kylo Ren undergoes.”

I am aware of Commander Kylo Ren. And the Knights of Ren. They all make me want to throw
myself into a Sarlacc Pitt. They parade themselves around the base with the demeanour that their religious practices makes them better than the rest of us. I don’t understand the Force. Or how they use it. I think it’s interesting, though. I even acknowledge the importance Force users hold in the outcome of wars. But I also acknowledge that merely having these special powers does not replace the importance of experience and expertise.

Kylo Ren is fairly new around here, yet he’s become Commander within just a year. And I’ve seen how he carries himself. He is rather aggressive with those underneath him. I have heard stories of him throwing temper tantrums whenever his strategies do not play out, then blaming the failure on the stars-forsaken troops below him. Overall, he seems like a pretentious bastard that doesn’t know how to command, but thinks he can because he can move objects with his mind. Personally, I do not see the correlation between his Force powers and his ability to lead the First Order. I wonder what kind of man he’d be without the Force, what troops he’d be in charge of. I wonder if he could even be a trooper himself.

Supreme Leader Snoke continues, “Kylo Ren’s past self is known as Ben Organa-Solo, the son of Republic heroes Leia Organa and Han Solo.”

This was new information to me. I have heard of Ben Organa-Solo. A long time ago. Last time I heard about him, he was referred to as a child. Last time I heard about him, I was a child, in the Academy, absorbing rumors about the Rebellion and their assets. I overheard other children create stories of the force-filled boy, speaking about him as if he was some kind of a monster, uncontrollable and wild. He was merely a bedtime story, a child of evil, bred for evil. Some said objects would rattle when he entered a room. They said he could rip apart your insides from within, pulling your stomach from your throat with the Force. I never believed them. And the stories stopped. Some wondered if the boy had died. Most assume he just imploded from all that power. There was never a story of a teenage Ben Solo, nor an adult one. At least, none that I realized were stories about Ben Solo, and not Kylo Ren.

“Kylo Ren, underneath his uniform, is merely a boy, easily influenced and pursued by his emotions. I found that The First Order can use this to our advantage. But it needs to be carefully monitored.” He purses his lips, which are basically non-existent. His mouth is small, barely opening when he talks. “You are to join his crew, accompanying him during his missions. I have seen to your role on these missions and trust that you will be able to find ways to improve his strategies. You also are to eliminate any messes he tends to leave behind on missions.”

I nod. “Yes, Supreme Leader.”

“Also, you will monitor Kylo Ren’s loyalty to his cause. He was a traitor to the Resistance, I do not want him to betray us as well. And if he begins to show any signs of straying, report to me and eliminate the source of his second-thoughts.”

I allow all the information to register into my mind, like a computer reading codes. I’ve had so many debriefings of missions before, but nothing quite as vague. Nothing with such formal presentation for such lack of information. “I understand, Supreme Leader.”

He nods, finally leaning back. It’s as if he’s been studying my every move, my every feature, this whole time. “Report back to your ship to find any information on your holocon. Remember, Kylo Ren must be treated as a weapon The First Order has obtained. Losing control of this weapon could be vital to our successes.”

I nod once more. After a wave of the Supreme Leader's hand, with a slight mumble, “Go,” I turn on my heel, exiting the room.
Just as I am almost to the door, I hear Snoke add, his voice laced with venom, “And Agent,”

I turn around, facing his figure again, now so far away yet still so prominent. “Yes, Supreme Leader.”

“You do realize what any failures on this mission will entail, correct?”

I swallow hard. “I do, Supreme Leader.”

“Then you are dismissed.”

Back on my ship, I begin to pack all my belongings up. According to my holocron, I will be staying in a quarter on Kylo Ren’s ship. I don’t really have much to pack. Just some uniforms and extra food portions. Anything that accumulate, I immediately throw into the decimator. It’s an attempt to make myself have no history whatsoever. That way, there’s nothing to clean up before a mission, to ensure my identity is completely hidden. There’s always a clean slate. But just in case, I look over to my R8 droid. “Scan the ship for any items I missed.”

The droid projects a green laser from its eyes and begins walking around, looking up and down the walls of my ship.

It doesn’t find anything.

I am to meet with Commander Ren as his ship lands in the hanger. I suppose he just got back from a mission. I wonder if anyone has informed him about my new role in his squad. Part of me likes the fact that I was put with someone like Kylo Ren. It will not be difficult to not become emotionally invested in such a sad excuse for a Commander. Avoiding sympathy is the main importance in any Agent’s tasks, but another importance is understanding it. I just hope the stars grant me enough patience to not call him out for his unprofessionalism.

I stand on the second level balcony that oversees the hanger. His ship is not here yet. I look to R8, “Check Commander Ren’s ship scheduled arrival time.”

R8 responds, “12:00.”

I roll my eyes, looking towards the clock that reads 12:15. Maybe I am nitpicking. It’s only fifteen minutes late. He may have run into some trouble.

Another hour goes by of me waiting until his ship finally shows up. I found myself sitting against the nearest wall, just hoping no one in authority would see my sature. His ship is shaped like a tall pyramid, as it’s wings come inward to land. I dust myself off, and stand up straight, tugging down my uniform, flattening out any wrinkles.

I can see from my stance that the door of his ship slowly opens. A line of stormtroopers form around the entrance, standing at a salute. As the door opens, smoke fills the perimeter. I wonder if it’s an actual necessary mechanic of the door opening, or simply just for dramatic effect. The Force must make you specifically more theatrical.

Kylo Ren, in all his dark, glorious might, emerges from the fog. He doesn’t walk out with poise, or
any form of elegance. He basically stomps with a huff, clomping down the line of troopers. The lights of the hanger reflect off the sliver and black of his helmet while the draping of his black capes flow behind him as he moves. I am so used to seeing order and uniformity on this ship. Whenever Kylo Ren is around, all of that changed. It’s like a masterpiece painting with a large splotch of oil right in the middle of it. I walk down the steps of the balcony, down to his level. My dainty, calculated steps contrast his heavy, stomping.

“Your expression reads as frustrated and impatient.” R8 says from behind me. “I suggest you change it before we come in contact to Commander Ren.”

I sigh, relaxing the muscles in my face. I didn’t even realize that I had any expression at all. Usually I can catch that stuff. This is going to be a long mission.

Before I even make it all the way down the steps, Kylo Ren freezes. I find myself frozen too, hesitant to move. His head whips to a stormtrooper to his right and he just glares at him. I examine the stormtrooper. The trooper looks normal, nothing seemingly wrong with his uniform or stance. He followed procedure fine. Ren still glares.

Only a few seconds into my task and I am already afraid of Kylo Ren killing someone.

Immediately after I finish that thought, Ren’s head snaps to my direction. I maintain composure as I make my way down the rest of the steps, approaching him. “Commander Ren,” I have never been this close to Kylo Ren before. It feels like stepping into a minefield and hoping I do not detonate any bombs with my footing. I tilt my head upwards, looking right into the darkness of the slits in his mask that allow him to see. “My name is Agent 2319, I have been assigned to assist you on upcoming missions.”

He doesn’t respond immediately. It gives me time to just look at my eyes in the reflection of his mask. I maintain eye contact with myself, rather than with him. He only gives me a quick, uncaring, “I know.”

He doesn’t do anything else. Or say anything else. I decide to say, cutting through the awkward, but very tangible tension, “My belongings are ready to be imported onto your ship, as well as my droid.”

It’s now that I realize that he hasn’t just been doing nothing while he remains silent. He’s been studying me. Analyzing me. He tilts his head slightly, methodically. I decide to analyze him as well. There is no sign of who he is under the mask. You could barely tell he’s just some boy in his late teens, probably still struggling with acne and picking up on social cues.

With that thought, I feel a pressure form around my skull. A pinching inside of my mind.

I remain standing, trying to look unbothered, but I can’t help but to think back to the horror stories I’ve heard about Commander Ren. Ones of him reading minds, killing people with his own thoughts. The presence of the troopers staring at us becomes more and more apparent. I feel as though my temples are being pressed by two hot metal plates, pain searing deeper into my head as each long second passes. I don’t move, though. I don’t show the pain. I know I can’t look weak around these troopers. Plus, I did not spend so many years teaching myself how to build up personas and alternative responses to situations to benefit me for nothing.

Then, the pressure stops.

Kylo Ren says almost hushed, his words sounding more like a threat than an order, “Then go put your things on my ship.”
I tighten my grip on handle of my small case. Cautiously, yet still somewhat confidently, I step around him and walk up the ramp of the ship. When I turn the corner, sure he cannot see me, my hand goes to my temples to rub away any discomfort. I look around the ship, checking for rooms that look like they would be mine. There’s a few storage rooms, the main loading room for troops to equip, and then the pilot’s cabin. I wander around the halls of the ship, noticing how clean it is, shiny. Even though Kylo Ren may not seem very military, his ship would exceed all expectations of an inspection. I find a bathroom, and also a large room with a bed and desk. I’m assuming that is Ren’s quarters. But there’s no sign of any room for me.

I sigh, deciding to setting my bag into the corner of the main room. I’m sure there’s just a secondary room that I haven’t found yet.

R8 states, matter of factually, “My human interaction analyzer has determined that Commander Ren does not find pleasure in your company.”

I glare over at the droid.

R8 continues, “But I have also determined that the feeling is mutual.”

Chapter End Notes

im taking a break on my other fic! this one is a lot like it in regards to snoke's order, but the OC/readers are very different from each other (pretty much opposites), ultimately making a lot of things different. plus now that ive kinda done a trial run with "a knights retribution" i feel like i can make something better and more thought out. i hope u all like it! let me know what u think <3
"And as I watch you disappear into my head
Well, there's a man who's tellin' me I might be dead" -Miss Nothing, The Pretty
Reckless

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

I have cherished every moment prior to going to the briefing room. Specifically every moment not
around Kylo Ren. In a few minutes, those moments will be few and far between.

With a deep breath, I open the door. I expected to see Kylo Ren here, but I am definitely not
surprised when I do not. He does not seem very punctual so far. The officers in the room jump at the
sound of the door opening, but then look at me, relieved.
One of them jokes, “Oh, thank the stars, we have a few more minutes to live.”

While the others chuckle, I sit down.

Another officer banter, “You think we should get some refreshments out for him, just to soften him
up?”

The one to my left responds in a similar, husky voice, “How’s he gonna drink anything with that
bucket on his head?”

They all laugh at that. I sit, picking at the skin bordering my finger nails. I find myself wanting the
presence of my droid. Every time I look upwards at the clock, time seems to lag more and more. The
men next to me are sitting in terror, but I feel more impatient than scared. 

I should be scared, though. He used the Force on me after I pondered the thought that he had acne.
What if I actually think something truly offensive sometime? Is he constantly reading my thoughts?
How do I stop him from doing that? Did Snoke give Kylo Ren any orders to not harm me? I hope he
did. I would like to think that I am not expendable to The First Order, but I may be. Being an agent
means that I had a few people in Intelligence train me, but I never really work around others
commonly, nor do I know any other agents. I know they exist out there. Maybe they’re just as good
as me, or even better. I hope they aren’t. I pray to the stars that they aren’t. I like many things about
The First Order. One thing being that they do not waste time, or waste resources. So if I were to
become a waste, or god forbid, a loose-end, I know that I would be immediately killed.

I have had to kill too many loose ends myself to doubt that.

The men around me immediately stop their banter when the sound of the door sliding open cuts
through the icy air.

I look upwards to see Kylo Ren, walking quickly, impatiently into the room. So far I have assessed
that he is impatient, probably impulsive. I guess that is one thing that makes him so intimidating, his
unpredictable nature.
He sits at the end of the table, opposite to the main Communications Officer. He definitely stands out, being the only one still masked at the table. I do not stare at him, but I do not make any effort to look away from him either. I still don’t know how he wants to be treated. I can’t tell if he wants to be completely left alone, due to his superiority, or worshiped, due to his superiority.

I wonder if he can hear my thoughts right now. If he can hear all of our thoughts. I rather not test it by thinking too loudly. The Communications Officer arises, his grey mustache hiding his upper lip as he greets, “Good afternoon, Commander.” He nods at Ren stiffly. Ren doesn’t react whatsoever. “Agent,” He looks towards me and the corner of my mouth twitches. “And Officers.” The men around me nod at him. “My name is Officer Nolrey, I will be debriefing you for your upcoming mission concerning an old droid factory located at the moon of Jabiiim.”

Kylo Ren, surprisingly enough, says, “The abandoned one.”

The man, eager to confirm Ren’s comment, replies, “Correct, sir. The First Order has put up surveillance droids on the moon, just for safety repercussions. A lot of the factory is still operational, so if someone were to trespass, they would have access to the equipment there.” Officer Nolrey presses a button and the holocron comes on, in the middle of the table. An image of the moon is shown, a red dot towards the equator. “Our droids have acquired trackings of a ship landing on the moon, a ship under Resistance coding. It will be your job to not only shut down the factory, once and for all, but also find and kill all Resistance members involved.” He looks towards me, chin up, “Agent, you are to investigate what exactly the Resistance was doing there. It could be as simple as them wanting to attack the facility, mistakenly thinking it was in use by The First Order, or them using the facility for their own operations.”

“Understood, sir.” I respond, my voice dry.

“Your usual equipment will be available in the armory for you to pick up after the meeting is concluded.” Officer Nolrey looks towards the Officers now, on both sides of the table. I notice how each and everyone of the men are sitting up uncomfortably straight. Not in a uniform way. They look like they’re trying to hard to stay still. I glance at Kylo Ren, sitting back, relaxed, confident, yet not quite slouchy. Such a difference than the men around him. It appears that Ren is watching Nolrey give the Officers their orders, but something in the fact that I cannot see his eyes unsettles me. I may as well get used to it, I suppose.

In the equipment room, I arm myself in my usual attire for non-undercover missions; dark grey jumpsuit with black armor lining the chest and shoulder. My black boots reach up to my knees, providing light armor to my legs. I clip my belt across my hips attaching knives and grenades, then two small pistol blasters to my thigh holsters. My fingers hook the comm system around my ear securely. The men around me robotically equip their weapons, off to some other mission. With everything from their movements, to their uniform trooper look, it’s hard to distinguish them from anything more than First Order droids. I find myself staring blankly at their movements as I reach for my rifle from the top shelf, then swing it over my back.

Kylo Ren is waiting outside the artillery for me. So I don’t waste much time. I readjust my hood so that it hangs off my shoulders and I stand up as poised as I can manage.

As I walk outside the room, I notice Ren standing impatiently with his arms crossed. As soon as I approach him, he turns on his heel down the hall. I follow.
We don’t say anything whatsoever. The awkwardness is terrible. For me, it is at least. I have no idea what he’s thinking. But I can guess that it has something to do with the fact that he does not want to be walking next to me. I notice how every time I catch up next to him, he walks a little bit faster, so he’s always a step in front of me.

I am decently high int the rankings of The First Order. Walking behind a commander is below me. I roll my eyes. In Kylo Ren’s mind it's not.

With what I think is a scoff, Ren turns into the hanger.

It takes me a few seconds to be able to muster up the will to ask about my quarters on the ship. Kylo Ren immediately heads to the pilot’s cabin and begins pushing at buttons and pulling at levers to start the ship. I begin, standing in the doorway. “Where is the location of my quarters, Sir?”

He doesn’t react at all to my voice. At first I think that he didn’t hear me at all. Just when I am about to repeat myself, he responds, “This ship does not have a room for you. The loading dock is spacious, however, so the floor in there should suffice.”

I am seething. “Is there an extra cot? Sleeping bag?”

He snips, “Agent, I assumed that in joining my mission, you would come prepared.”

“My necessities are provided for me by The First Order when I change locations.” I say, matter-of-factly.

The smug, robotic voice, responds, his head slightly turning from the control panel just enough so that half of his mask is in my sight. “Unfortunate.”

My teeth grind.

“Hello, Commander Kylo Ren!” A voice I know all too well chirps from behind me. Good god, I am terrified for this droid’s circuits. “Er, um, Lord Ren. Master Ren.”

Ren turns even more to look back at R8, who is standing in the most gentlemanly posture, as droids do. I hear a slight sound come from Kylo Ren’s mask, a huff of pure vexation.

Before I can personally respond, R8 teeters past me, straight to Ren’s personal bubble. “I am R8, droid of human psychology and interaction analysis. My job has been assisting Agent 2319 in maintaining undercover positions and organizing missions. I can assure you that Agent 2319 is a valuable ally and has never failed a mission. Statistically speaking, she will succeed in whatever orders you provide. However, due to my analysis of-”

With a wave of the Commander’s gloved hand, the droid flies into the left wall of the ship, some sparks igniting from RB’s joints. I feel my fists clench and unclench before I reach out towards the droid, grabbing it before it falls to the ground, preventing even more damage.

Kylo Ren doesn’t budge from his seat. He just nonchalantly starts up the ship’s hyperdrive and orders, “Are you going to continue finding ways to irritate me, Agent? I am running out of patience.”

I heave the droid out the doorway while exhaling frustration from my nostrils. I say through gritted teeth, “No, sir.”
It is hard to tell if he’s smirking cockily, or rolling his eyes. Either way, his words are laced with a condescending tone, “Very well.”

Now, I fully understand why everyone hates Kylo Ren so much. At first, I was ready to give him the benefit of the doubt, assuming he’s just some kid who likes to play dress up in some fancy armor, like he’s playing war and everyone below him is just pawns in his game. But he’s directly an unbearable ass.

I lay the droid down on the ground with a sigh. It doesn’t look like anything I cannot quickly fix. Hopefully nothing is broken, just few joints out of place and bolts that need replaced. There must be a tool box on this ship somewhere. My eyes shift upwards to the compartments against the walls.

In any other circumstance, it wouldn’t be past me to just simply ask where the tool box is, but I’d rather respect Ren’s request to not “annoy” him.

On my tiptoes, I stretch up to each compartment. The first few compartments only have a couple of books and holopads. I might snoop more later, but for now I need to repair my droid. I manage to go through the rest of the cabinets, finding a first aid kit, some extra cables for the ship, and dried food. But no tool box.

This is what I was afraid of. I sink back down to floor level, relaxing my once stretched muscles. With a deep breath, I enter the pilot’s cabin, once again.

As soon as I enter, I feel Kylo Ren’s gaze snap towards me, a signal telling me to walk away; fast. I avoid his gaze and stroll directly towards the shelf across from the co-pilot’s seat (a seat I should have been invited to sit in). As each millisecond passes the stare from Ren gets more intense, I feel the heat of his anger radiating off the walls of the room, it almost feels like a liquid. My skin feels droplets of his boiling rage popping away from around him. I try my best to not seem bothered while opening the glove box, concentrating on relaxation to keep my hands steady and expression blank. I see a small red toolbox with a silver handle, issued to each and every First Order starship. Exactly what I was looking for.

As I reach to grab it, a gust of energy comes up from under the compartment’s cover, slamming it back shut, nearly smashing the bones of my fingers into shards. I didn’t even realize how quickly I snatched my hand away, into safety until a beat passes and my head whips to Ren.

My voice, raised, as if I were talking to an incompetent lower rank, scolds, “I believe it is within your best interest to not do things that put my personal well-being in danger, Sir.”

He’s already turned back onto the control panel, pressing buttons and overviewing the course to Jabiim. The modulator of his mask create a booming tone I didn’t notice as apparent before. His voice must be raised now. “You put your own well-being in danger the moment you decided to irritate me once again, after given an initial warning.”

I exhale, collecting myself. I was quick enough to resist his jab against me. I don’t have to be afraid of him. I am okay. I am just here to do a job, to play a role. And that role is Kylo Ren’s partner, Kylo Ren’s observer. Spying on Kylo Ren while being Kylo Ren’s spy. I look to the glove box opening it once again and quickly grabbing the toolbox, holding it behind my back, remaining at an attention position. I say with confidence, with steady strength, “I apologize for your irritation towards my presence, Commander. However, I would appreciate for you to act more professional.”

He finally pulls his attention away from the controls. He turns toward me, his head cocked. Curiously? Amused? I am not at all sure. But I do not let his stare waive me. He stands to his feet, his boots creaking from the shift of his weight. As he steps towards me, I notice how much he towers
over me. How much he’s trying to size me up, like when we first were acquainted. His broad shoulders, his stature is so obnoxiously consuming me, like a building casting a shadow. I tilt my head upwards, adjusting so I still am looking him in the silts of his masks.

He speaks with a low tone, his words pressing against the skin of my face, “Giving me requests? That is no way to talk to your superior.”

Superior. Barely.

Ren continues, leaning closer, “Perhaps you wouldn’t be as brave if you were made more aware to how... replaceable you are.”

Kylo Ren just threatened me. I don’t know what I expected. It was bound to happen. I sneer, “I will take that into consideration next time, Commander.”

“As you should.”

Ren doesn’t move after he speaks. He waits. He wants me to be the one to walk away from him. It’s like he’s a child, instigating a sibling. I give into his game, stepping around his frame and returning into the loading dock with my droid.

I glance to the closed door to the pilot’s cabin then unlatch the toolbox and mutter just loud enough that the droid can pick up my words, “What an unnecessary thing to do, to damage you. And then to act like it’s my fault for annoying him? He’s impossible to work with.” As I screw the bolts back into place I notice R8’s eyes flicker. I turn my wrist hard, making sure the screws are have a more difficult time coming loose. “No wonder Supreme Leader assigned me to babysit him. He’s probably killed more First Order troops out of temper tantrums than the Resistance has in this whole war.”

As I set the elbow joint of the droid back into place, R8’s fingers start twitching. I readjust it’s head and re-stabilize it’s neck. R8 chirps, startled, “Master! I have gathered that Commander Kylo Ren does not like either one of us! At all!”

I help the droid up, scowling. “It’s okay. We don’t like him either, R8.”

“Maybe, Master, you should get on his good side! It would make the situation more pleasant for both of us. Where is that classic special agent charm? You have a substantial amount charismatic skills, Agent.”

I glare at the droid, beginning to regret repairing it. “Kylo Ren does not have a good side.” I regain my footing, grabbing a hold of the handle above the opening hatch of the ship. “Nor do I care to be on it if he did.”

Upon landing on Jabiim’s moon, I stand ready at the ship’s landing ramp, two pistols drawn. I would assume if enemies were nearby, I would be warned by my Commander, but I am not taking any chances. The ship’s theatrically slow moving door opens, revealing the muddy landscape of the planet. In the distance, I see the small factory, formerly First Order owned. Kylo Ren stomps past me, making his way towards the building without any acknowledgement of me and without any assessment of the situation.

I sigh, following him, pistols still drawn. As I step out from the ship, I feel the cool rain hit my scalp, seeping through my hair. I reach behind me, pulling up my dark hood over my head. To my left and
right are merely a collection of gathered rocks and small pools of water. With each step, my boots sink into the floor of the planet, my legs working hard to extend outwards, free of the mud. But I manage to keep up with Ren. I watch the droplets of rain slide down the back of his oil black mask. The darkness mask stands out in the grey-ish surroundings. Kylo Ren’s hand reaches to his belt, grabbing his lightsaber. For a moment, I merely just revel in its presence. It’s an iconic thing, I suppose. I wonder how many people it’s killed, how many important people it’s killed. How many people it killed that it wasn’t supposed to kill.

Looking at Kylo Ren holding his lightsaber, ready to ignite it at any moment, doesn’t give me the sensation I was expecting. I don’t know why I expected to feel marveled by the sight. Did I think I’d be starstruck that I’m working with the highest ranking, fiercest Commander of the First Order? My eyes focus away from Kylo Ren, now focusing on the factory in the distance, getting closer and closer. I wonder if I’m supposed to feel proud, to feel special, to feel like this is better or more important than any other mission I’ve been on. I wish I felt that way. But I do not.

The factory looks like it’s covered in rust. I feel like merely inhaling around it will give me some sort of infection. Peeking above the factory’s roof, I notice the wing of a ship. The Resistance is still here. Upon the front door of the factory, the ground turns into concrete. My foot drags across the surface, scraping away any clumps of mud.

Commander Ren reaches to the door’s handle and I intrude, whispering, “Do you think the front door is a good strategy?”

An inaudible noise comes from his mask before he proceeds to swing the door open, igniting his saber simultaneously.

At first, the reveal of the saber’s blade takes me aback. It’s loud. Booming with baritone-esque reverberation. Immediately, Ren begins barging into the room, swinging the thing everywhere. Sparks and fragments of metal fly in all directions from him. I shield my face with my forearm, trying to get a good look inside the room to assess the situation. A sharp scream comes from my right, but before I can even aim, the scream is cut off by Ren’s saber slashing whoever it was in half.

It’s chaos. Completely disorganized chaos. We need to gather intel from these Resistance members. My eyes narrow as I slide behind Ren, carefully and quickly avoiding the path of the saber until my crouched stance meets the corner of the wall. I click on the flashlight on my right pistol, scanning the room. There’s a staircase straight ahead. Everything else is almost nearly demolished, due to the Commander’s entrance. Body parts are scattered across the room; severed arms, halves of bodies, legs. I don’t waste the time to try to mentally put the pieces together to estimate how many Resistance members Kylo Ren just killed.

I click the light on my pistol off and scurry upstairs, light footed, quiet. There’s sets of footsteps fleeing while another set of steps is running my direction. I slide into the doorway to my right, guns pointed to each corner of the room. It’s clear. The room is just full of old carts with spare droid parts.

“OPEN FIRE!” A voice yells from outside the room.

Commander Ren doesn’t have the upper-hand in this situation. He’s a level lower and there’s several of Resistance members, from what the sounds of the blaster shots tell. I whip my body out of the doorway, ready to fire, but I don’t. My finger remains ghosting over the trigger.

The blaster shots are deflected from Ren’s position, shooting back up at the Resistance members. He’s handling it fine. If anything, it’s just a distraction to my purpose on the mission. Maybe Kylo Ren is more of a strategist than I perceived. Maybe he’s setting up an elaborate plan and merely expected me to go along with it without needing to waste time reviewing it with me. If so, I find his
high expectation for my understanding of the situation rather refreshing.

I turn back into the room of droid parts and grab the largest plate of metal I can find. It’s about one foot by one foot, but it will suffice. My blasters are returned to their holsters at my thighs and I hold the metal outward, in front of me.

Running with a side step, I make my way behind the Resistance members, shooting at Ren from the railing. A blaster shot bounces from Ren’s saber, straight towards my shoulder. Quickly, I shift the metal plate into its direction, bouncing it back towards Ren. My feet carry me faster across the corridor, reaching the last of the Resistance members, right before one whips his head towards me, screaming, “There’s another!”

At that moment the man is swept from under his feet, crashing into the other men to his left.

I dart into the first room on my right, nearly running straight into a soldier. Before we make contact, I grip the metal plate firmly and swing it over his head, lowering his face down as my knee comes upward. There is a distinct crack of his nose against my knee cap. With the movement of my knee, I reach to my thigh to grab my blaster, shooting him down the spine.

My ears perk at the sound of more footsteps in the hall, all running towards Commander Ren’s arena. I make my way further into the room, looking around at the many different blueprints around me. Written documents and holopads. This definitely is not just information on the droid factory.

I hear a click come from behind the counter, then a small canister with a blinking red light is hurled my way. Without any second thought, I catch it and throw it towards the window to my right. It shatters the glass and plummets towards the ground, not quite making it before an explosion lights up the window’s view, rattling the ground and causing the building to creak weakly.

With my blaster pointed, I walk to the pathetic sight scrunched behind the counter. It’s a woman, crouching, hiding under her arms in fear, shivering. I reach down, pulling her up as she lets out a held in sob.

I let my voice become delicate, friendly, kind, “Mam, you need to tell me what all of this is.”

She attempts to slide from my grasp, but only exhausts herself. She spits, “I’ll never give you what you want.”

I roll my eyes, exhaling before I hold her at eye-contact. Urgency. Kindness. Selflessness. “Please, you must tell me before the Knight of Ren catches up. You can trust me. I am a spy with the Resistance, undercover with the First Order. If you give me the Intel the First Order is looking for, I can forge something fake into their data systems and then send the real Intel back to the Resistance. But I need to know what this all is.” I beam up at her with the eyes I imagine all the Resistance members have. Eyes filled with child-like stupidity. Hope, to be more optimistic. Hope is something her eyes are devoid of in this moment. Her stringy brown hair hides most of her face. But from what I can see she’s dirty, with mud and dust. Her expression is weary.

Tears escape from her eyes as she turns away. “I do not trust you.”

I shake my head, grasping the sides of her face with my hands. My brows furrow. “But you must.” My thumbs brush away the constant stream of tears racing down her face. “Kylo Ren will be here any minute. You do not want to go through his interrogation processes.” I shake my head, looking away. “I have seen terrible things while I have been away. Terrible crimes he has committed to those he finds who are part of the Resistance.” My eyes trace back into hers as I desperately plead. “I need to protect you from that. The only way to do that is for you to tell me what all of these blueprints
are.”

She sighs, searching my eyes. She inhales as I look back at her, my own eyes welling up with tears. She reaches into her pocket, removing a data drive. She grasps onto it tightly, even while placing it into my hand, still unsure. Under a breath, she mummers, “This drive is the Intel on all the imperial droids once created at the facility. But these blueprints and maps, must be destroyed at once, at all costs. This building has been used as a trading post for Resistance members across this side of the galaxy.” She pauses, another stray tear falling from her eye. “Please send us all this information back quickly, bring hope back to us at the Resistance. We need it. We’re becoming so exhausted, I don’t know how long you’ve been gone from home, but it’s become so difficult these past months.”

That’s all I need to know. I let go of the woman, relaxing my expression once again. She slumps to the ground, looking up at me, confused. I point my blaster between her eyes and respond to whatever awful thoughts she can’t manage to speak about me, “Thank you for your contribution of intelligence to The First Order.”

I fire.

My comm link breaks in, an officer issuing the warning, “Resistance fleet is landing soon, in response to an outcry.”

I swear under my breath. Perhaps if we took care of this more quietly and Kylo Ren didn’t make such a scene about the attack, there wouldn’t be any Resistance distress calls. Speaking of Kylo Ren, I haven’t heard much from him. At all. Whatever. He must be killing people or getting the ship ready. He doesn’t seem like the type to help me carry things or give me a heads up on what his next move is. I notice a small wooden crate beside the body of the Resistance woman.

My arms scramble to stuff as many holopads and blueprints into the crate as possible. It’s fairly heavy after the room is empty and crate is full, but I can manage it.

The sound of a ship catches my attention. Not a ship entering. A ship leaving.

I exhale. It must be the Resistance members, trying to escape. It surely can’t be-

Immediately, I feel my legs sprinting outside the factory before my thoughts can process what is happening. My knuckles turn white, desperately clutching onto the crate.

I stand in the doorway to the factory, rain slapping my face, it feeling more like humiliation than anything else.

Kylo Ren is in his ship, flying away.

Chapter End Notes

thank you all for reading! i really appreciate all the comments and kudos on the first chapter. i was going to wait a bit to upload again, but i am honestly so pumped to publish the chapter three. the next chapter really demonstrates what the rest of the fic is going to be like, so i cannot wait to get past these kind of introductory themes and really dive into the story. please, if you have any suggestions or criticisms hmu! i’d love to hear it! thank you all so much again <3
Without second thought, I drop the crate, swinging my rifle over my back and into my hands. I don’t have to aim. I just fire, over and over and over at his godforsaken, ridiculous ship. I know it has no damaging effect on the thing. No effect on anything, really. To my right I hear a separate ship, entering the atmosphere; the Resistance reinforcements.

“Goddammit!” I swing the rifle to my back once again, grabbing the crate. Then I run, hissing an assorted amounts of words that consist of something like, “Goddamn you, Ren, goddammit goddammit goddammit god...”

As the Resistance ship begins to land, it immediately starts shooting at Ren’s ship. Naturally, Ren shoots back. My eyes dart around the perimeter, catching the sight of the previously landed Resistance ship behind the factory. The fact that I have to even do this is ridiculous.

I hitch my leg upwards, grabbing a pistol from it’s holster. It securely sits in my palm, in between my hand and the crate. I hear the whooshing of the ships above me, their missiles launching at each other. But I can’t look. Focusing on getting to the Resistance ship is the only thing I should be doing.

Despite knowing this, my thoughts of wanting to beat Ren to a pulp distracts me.

I sprint around the perimeter of the building, mud splashing against my legs with each stride. My knees basically have to reach hip-level to even be released from the sludgy, stickiness of the ground.

Beautiful. Kylo Ren didn’t even manage to kill every Resistance member down here, in his epic fit of slashing around his glowing sword. As I turn the corner of the factory, a soldier races towards the Resistance ship, which is what appears to be a smaller sized frigate. I turn my body towards him so that I can get a sufficient shot. The blaster wound strikes his back, knocking him to the ground.

Suddenly, a high-pitched whistle comes from the sky.

“Fuc-”

Before I can further react, my body slams into the mud in front of me. Heat runs across my body, my ears ring from the loud explosion. My gut is sore from falling right into the sharp corner of the crate I was holding.

Groaning, I flip myself over, squinting at the sight of the factory, half of it blown up, the other half in flames. He destroyed it. That was his second task. He accomplished his mission. And he destroyed it, while I, for all he knew, was inside of it. The heat of the fire burns against my skin through my jumpsuit. It's a mixture of the burning factory and my pure and utter rage. In the distance of the sky, I
I can see Kylo Ren’s ship blast out of the atmosphere while the Resistance begins to land. I'll be damned if that's the last thing I see before I die.

I have to move. Now.

I force myself upwards, readjusting the blaster and crate in my hand. I can barely run in a straight line. Everything’s spinning around me. My legs feel like they’re unstable. My mind is dizzy, unable to focus.

As I stumble up the ramp of the Resistance fleet ship, I turn the corner and let my hands drop the crate, firing lazy shots at the several unsuspecting Resistance soldiers inside, just about ready to make their escape. The pounding on my head of the blaster shots is loud. I fall into the wall beside me.

One Resistance member, that I only managed to shoot in the leg leans upward. I point the blaster his direction, before he can grab a weapon, shooting several times until his body is completely void of movement.

“The factory is destroyed and all Resistance members have been eliminated.” Commander Ren’s annoying voice buzzes through the Comm Link, back to the control station.

Suddenly, a blast comes from the doorway to the pilot’s cabin, knocking my leg from underneath me. I scream in pain as I fire towards the soldier, taking him down with a shot to the head.

“Shit…” I glance down at my leg as I hobble forward, each step causing it to ooze with blood.

Upon entering the pilot’s cabin, I basically fall into the seat. It’s only a freight ship. It shouldn’t be too hard to pilot. Plus, the Resistance pilot already started it up. I just have to get this thing in the air. I study the controls for a moment before beginning to start the lift off process.

Commander Ren buzzes once again through the comm-link, “Mission was a success. We suffered one casualty of Agent 2319. But all objectives were met.”

I laugh. Hysterically. It’s a completely psychotic site. My leg it throbbing in pain, bleeding more by the minute. I am completely covered in mud. But I am sitting here, in this Resistance ship, surrounded by dead bodies, hysterically laughing.

Ren thinks I’m dead. He’s telling everyone that I’m dead, that I died after this ridiculously simple mission.

I could buzz in right now to break the news to him. To rain on his parade, to prove him wrong to the crew right now. But I don’t.

If I’m going to humiliate him, like he humiliated me, I need a much bigger audience.

I press the comm-link’s main command button on my ear. I hear a chip, a robotic voice answering “Please enter your request.”

I say smoothly, trying not to let my smile make my words unclear, “Disable communication with Commander Ren.”

“Communication with Commander Kylo Ren disabled.”

My finger clicks the button again, reconnecting me to the mission’s officers. I speak, “This is Agent 2319. In order to escape the scene, I had steal a Resistance freighter. I am sending you the coding for the ship now, in order to allow me to re-enter the Finalizer.”
My fingers dance gracefully across the keyboard to my right, eyes scanning the screen as I transfer the information.

An officer, Nolrey, I’m guessing, replies, stunned, “Commander Ren pronounced you KIA.”

I smirk, entering the information with a click, the ship now exciting the moon’s atmosphere. “I am not surprised. I have came to realize that he does not know what he’s talking about, more often than not. I’ll explain the circumstance to him upon his arrival back at the base, no need to inform him now.”

“Oh- very well, Agent. We are happy to hear that he was mistaken.”

In the very far distance, I see Ren’s ship, preparing for hyperspace. I don’t want to run into him in that manner. Plus, I have to get back to the Finalizer before he does.

Without a doubt, Ren will take the simple, quiet path back. Whichever is easiest. I may have to do a shortcut or two. Am I willing to risk my life going through a few asteroid belts to simply beat Kylo Ren back to the Finalizer and rub it in his face that I am alive and did an amazing job completing the mission?

Fuck yes.

The Resistance freighter is barely even operational by the time I have docked it into the Finalizer. I ran into some trouble, but I do not see Kylo Ren’s ship anywhere. Before the ship even sets foot on the ground I open the hatch, grab the crate of intel, and run out on the ramp, jumping a few feet to the ground. Pain shoots up my injured leg.

Officer Nolrey looks startled, confused when he sees me. With a twitch of his gray mustache, he begins to speak, but doesn’t quite create words. He almost seems to be scared, perhaps.

I slide the crate of intel to him, stating, “Here.” Then I run to my right. I think there’s a shower station on this level, if I remember. “Estimated docking time of Commander Ren, Officer?”

Nolrey squints his eyes, bewildered, then checks a holopad. “Five minutes.”

I can manage that if I start sprinting now. Plus, Kylo Ren is always late. Thank the stars.

Nolrey yells out, after me, “Your leg needs medical attention, Agent! Is that a blaster wound?”

I laugh turning to him, but not slowing down towards the shower station, “After that shitshow, I think I need psychological attention, Officer!”

His mouth drops open, as he stands, dumbfounded at either my profanity or statement or both.

I nearly run into a trooper before I make it to the showers in excitement. I order at him, “Go grab me a finely pressed standard uniform from the supply room. Then drop it off in the shower station.”

The trooper, taken aback yells after me, “What size?!”
I throw my arms back, giving him a look at my figure, “Make a guess!”

I stumble into the shower station, approaching behind two men in robes, making small conversation. I notice one has a bottle of soap, so I snatch it from him, pushing past. He stares at me, pissed, and begins to approach me.

I wink, with a flirtatious swing of my hips as I step around him, “Let me shower now and you can join me next time.” An empty promise, but the suggestion is enough to change his feelings towards me from anger to confused but turned on. Which is enough.

I hop in an open shower and turn on the water full-blast, not caring about the heat or lack thereof. My fingernails tear at my urgency to rip off the lid of the soap. As water hits my blaster wound, tears of pain form in my eyes. But I simply can’t feel it. I can only manage to feel the time ticking down of my opportunity to make Kylo Ren looks like the ridiculous asshole he is.

The soap comes out in globs and I pour it all over my head, it seeping onto my muddied face. I rip off my jumpsuit, shimmying out of it as quickly as possible. The water coming down and going into the drain is completely brown. I groan with annoyance, scrubbing the soap viciously into my skin and hair until I cannot feel anymore caked mud.

The blaster wound on my leg is awful. I’ll get that checked out soon enough, I suppose.

“Agent? I have your uniform.” The trooper calls out.

I fling my hand upwards, “Hand it to me. And grab me a towel.” My hand shoots up over the curtain rod, anxiously waiting to be supplied with my garments. I turn off the water with my foot, kicking backwards. As soon as the trooper hands me the clothes, I dry off and throw them on.

They fit fairly well. They smell good and are clean too, just like me after that refreshing shower. I exit, pushing my way through half-naked men to catch up with the trooper, now exiting. I smile, “Thank you, trooper.” Hurriedly, I rush back down the hall, gathering my hair into a tight bun before securing the black flat hat to conceal how wet it is.

A line of stormtroopers are ahead of me making their way to the docking bay. I know why. Anyone would.

They line up, like usual to greet Commander Ren. His ship pulls in, dramatically while everyone around me waits with terrified anticipation, hoping he’s not unkind or specifically scary today. They are as careful as I was when I first met him. Cautious to be very uniform, follow all the First Order rules.

But Commander Ren couldn’t care any less about that. Or anything that you do. He’ll be an ass no matter what. So I have nothing to lose.

I command Nolrey, “Greet him after me, Officer.”

He nods, stepping into the line of the troopers, “Of course, Agent.”

The ship causes air to fly my direction. I straighten my uniform out one last time before taking my place, opposite to the ship’s ramp. I want my face to be the first thing he sees when he expects to see so many people here, succumbing to his almighty bullshit. But I do not stand too close to his entry way. I stand pretty far away actually, all the way at the end of the line of troopers. I want him to have to walk with me, dreading each step, making each stride seem like forever.

I stand straight, shoulders up and legs slightly agape. My hands remain behind my back, opening my
chest towards him. I’m not afraid of him. And I want him to know that, I want him to absolutely hate that about me.

Then, finally the ship opens.

He’s wearing his mask, but I know he’s stunned when he starts a step, but then freezes when he sees me. From all the way over here, I can see him clench his fists.

I tilt my chin up.

He just stands there. For a long time. Unable to move. Unable to process me. And I love every single second of it.

He puts one foot in front of the other, then the other foot in front of the next, his mask facing the surrounding troopers, then darting to the ground, then to the ceiling. Everywhere and anywhere but towards me. I know that I’ve spent so long teaching myself how to hide and replicate emotions when it’s necessary, but I have never faced the challenge like the one of not laughing at him in this moment.

This is the teenage Ben Organa-Solo Snoke was talking about.

When he reaches the end of line of troopers, he tries to walk around me, but I side-step in front of him. I smile graciously, my voice as clear cut as possible, “Commander Ren, did you run into any trouble? What took you so long with your return? Was the Resistance fleet a factor in your delayed arrival?”

He can’t even respond. I want to squeal.

I begin again, “Commander, is anything wrong? You seem very distracted.” He tries to push past me again. I side step in front of him again. “Do not fret! I brought all the Intel I collected from the site over on my ship. We are very fortunate to not have left such valuable material behind.”

He almost hits me, I think. He doesn’t even bother using the force. Ren raises his clenched fist, but then he lowers it slowly. He straight up almost decked me. God, I wish he would’ve.

I can’t hold in a small chuckle this time. I look over to Officer Nolrey, “Sir, I think it’s fair to say that Commander Ren earned a well deserved recess after such a successful mission. I think I speak for him when I say that he is exhausted from his wonderful work, you know being such a great leader and all. I can’t imagine. He’s probably not in the mood to go into another long meeting.”

Officer Nolrey looks as if he’s about to piss his pants. Kylo Ren’s shoulders are heaving aggressively from anger. I have never felt so amused in my life.

Nolrey croaks, “Very well. Overview is scheduled for tomorrow at 800.”

Kylo Ren darts away at that news.

I catch up to him, nearly skipping.

He stomps. When he finally talks, I hear his anger, his embarrassment. “Are you her twin? Some cloning experiment gone wrong?”

I smile. He still doesn’t believe it’s me. “If I had a twin or clone, it would certainly not waste time pulling practical jokes on you, Commander.”
Kylo Ren is absolutely simmering mad. He looks around, his head darting to doorways. Looking for an escape, maybe? I’ll just follow him.

I edge him on, “I wonder what our next assignment will be. We should probably get used to using our comm-links more often. I think you had trouble with yours for a while today, I never received the information that you were going to leave me to die on that moon.”

He reaches out, his hand extended to use the Force to throw me against the wall. In the middle of a public hallway. I breath out through my nose. I’m sure any other time, this would hurt. This would be scary. But I can’t feel any of it. He approaches me, words leaking through gritted teeth, “I didn’t want you dead before, I merely just didn’t care to see you live. You were taking far too long to complete your part of the mission.” He looks me up and down. “But after today, you can be assured that your death is something I would very much be humored by.”

I raise an eyebrow as a cocky smile spreads across my face. “Supreme Leader really knew what he was doing when he paired us together…” With that, the Force lets me down. I add on, tilting my chin up to Kylo Ren’s level, “I mean, you want me dead, and I haven’t despised a single person more than I despise you. And we just met today. I’m just dying to see what the future holds for us.”

With that, Kylo Ren stomps away. This time I don’t chase after him. I think today has been fun enough.

Chapter End Notes

*insert anime theme here* i feel like this is where the pilot episode would end and the credits would roll. thanks so much for reading! i can't wait to upload more!
"By what right do you dare to say that there's a superior few to which you belong?" - Rope, Alfred Hitchcock

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Blast,” the word is harsh under my breath as pain shoots up the length of my thigh. I can almost feel each individual vein pounding from beneath my skin.

The medic gives my leg a grimace as she removes the towel once more, soaking the cloth into more medicine.

R8 stands in the corner of the room, glaring down at my stretcher with judging eyes, if droids could have expressions. They can’t. But I know R8 is judging. He always is. On cue, his proper, but passive aggressive, chirp of a voice contributes, “Agent, if you did not strain your wound so intensely, I do not believe this would be as painful of a process.”

My fists clench as the medic reapplies pressure. The once dulling pain returns stronger than before.

Despite the distraction, I manage a response to the droid, “I regret to inform you that I did not have time to patch up my leg as I was escaping that death trap Kylo Ren stranded me in.”

R8 tilts his head, “But you did, Master, when you returned. Instead of reuniting with Commander Ren, the logical solution would have been to report directly to the medical facilities to avoid further injury.”

I scoff. “How did you survive the flight home with him?”

The lights of R8’s eyes flicker, as if to mimic blinking. “I hid.”

“Figures.” I sigh, reaching to the bedside table for my holopad.

The medic begins to wrap the leg up in bandages, careful to not cause any pain. I admire her caution. Her precise movements. A strand of her blonde hair falls forward, across her sharp cheekbones. She purses her thin lips, blowing the hair out of her eyesight. Timidly, she offers, “You’re welcome to stay here until the numbing medicine kicks in.” Her voice is soft, dainty. Pretty.

I nod, forcing my tone low and smooth, “Very well.”

We lock eyes. Her’s are wide and grey. Sparkling with the artificial lighting from above us.

I watch as she breaks the eye contact and turns to exit.

Once she is gone, I stare down at the holopad. The only thing on the screen is my reflection staring back at me. I look away. I do not even know where to begin with my report to Supreme Leader on Kylo Ren. I cannot just say “I have found that your own, personal apprentice and choice for the
Commander of The First Order is an unprofessional asshole who I want to strangulate with my own bare hands.” I opt for a different wording. Something more along the lines of, “Commander Kylo Ren shows promise in his combat skills, but lacks in social skills. He exhibits no effort to protect his team. Perhaps this self-preservation is something the Dark Side of the Force favors, my training does not permit me to learn such things. But as for our success of the mission, he greatly compromised it by abandoning the battle without collecting the intel and leaving without me.”

I go on to type some more, elaborating on the situation. The pads of my fingers tap relentlessly on the holopad, fingers moving at an unprecedented speed.

The ending sentences read, “Although this is my first mission with Commander Ren, I can conclude that I do not see any sort of light in him, any sort of conflict whatsoever. He has been nothing but absolutely headstrong. But I will continue searching as long as the matter concerns you, Supreme Leader. I will send an additional report after the follow-up mission in the upcoming days.”

Just as I am about to put the tablet down, R8 chirps, “Master. Do you wonder why you were chosen for this mission?”

I do not respond immediately. I am not sure, to be honest. My mission is to practically spying on Commander Ren then tattle on him to Supreme Leader. But why would I need to if Supreme Leader is truly as powerful as he says he is? Doesn’t he know what Kylo Ren is doing already? Shouldn’t Kylo Ren be open with his Master if Snoke doesn’t know? I flinch at my thoughts. I cannot question the Supreme Leader’s intentions. “I imagine it is because Kylo Ren is temperamental. I am not. He needs someone to chill him out, show him a neutral mindset. The whole report for Snoke is most likely for good measure only.”

R8 begins walking out of the door, processing my input before stating, “Your recent actions and expressions have created outliers in my overall assessment towards your psyche. You have analyzed Kylo Ren’s behavior over the mission. Now, I suggest assessing your own.”

I have not seen Commander Ren since I told him that I despised him more than anyone else in the whole universe. He did not attend the review meeting the following morning, no surprise there. So perhaps right now is a chance to start a new. Do not get me wrong, I am in no means hopeful. I have no clue why I would even entertain myself with the thought.

The halls are just as busy with marching troopers and squads as usual. With each pace towards the debriefing room, I feel more and more annoyed with what Kylo Ren will do this time. I know must remain professional. And I can. But in my mind, I am sure that I’ll want to rip his mask off and deck him. I cannot help but amuse myself with the image of how hideous he must be to have to wear that mask constantly. He surely doesn’t need it, medically wise. Just another thing that makes him unbearably extra.

When I arrive at the interrogation room, I open the door with a deep breath, expecting to see a few other officers already in their seats, nervously awaiting the arrival of Kylo Ren. And half of that is what I do see; a few other officers.

But they aren’t waiting. Kylo Ren is already here.

I check the time on my holopad. I am five minutes early. Meaning Kylo Ren is more than five minutes early. He was so late last time. I know he has a reputation for being late, so why is he here
early? It’s unheard of.

All the officers are sitting in seats away from him, not making banter like they did last time. I scan the room, examining extra seats. Kylo Ren is looking right at me. I know it. I can’t see it, but I feel it. It’s so next level, the way that he sat right in front of the doorway, so he’d be the first thing that I’d see when walking in.

Whatever. I choose to sit right beside him. I swallow a breath. I am not afraid, that would be ridiculous. Nor am I intimidated. But I am not feeling secure either. Pushing the conflicting emotions in my mind away, I muse, “Commander Ren, how was your morning?”

He doesn’t move. I sit up straighter. He answers, “Decent, Agent. Yours?”

“It was nice.” I am lying through my teeth. It sucked, to be honest, writing that report, having to go down to the med-wing.

I feel an odd pulse push through my mind. As a reaction, I nearly flinch. The sensation was only present for a moment, but now it’s gone. I hear a sound project from Ren’s modulator. A chuckle.

That bastard just entered my mind.

That fucking bastard left me to die yesterday, compromised my mission, and now has the audacity to intrude inside my mind to-

“You seem unsettled, Agent. Are you sure you’re alright?” His inquiry is seething with sarcasm.

My response is as well, “Would you like to invade my mind once more and tell me yourself, Commander?”

Just now do I notice the Officers in the room around me. They’re petrified, some looking at me like I’ve gone insane and others not able to look up at me at all. They are afraid he’s going to kill me here and now.

Commander Ren makes that chuckle noise again. “For another time, perhaps.”

I also only now notice the white-knuckle grip my hands subconsciously created, clenching in fists. I slowly relax my hands, resting them on my thighs. As much as I want to snip back at Ren, I can’t find any energy to. Am I letting him win? Does he see this as a victory?

At the moment, Officer Nolrey returns to the conference room, looking notably surprised that Kylo Ren is here already. I am not the only one, I suppose. He immediately greets, wasting no time, “Good morning, everyone. Commander,”

Kylo Ren responds, “As to you, Officer.”

Nolrey is stunned by the formal response. Nolrey chirps to me, “Agent,”

I don’t respond. My mouth is too dry. And my mind is too confused as to what Ren’s angle is.

The Officer takes his position in between me and the lieutenant beside me, still a seat away from us both. He begins uploading information into the holocron sitting at the center of the table. I try to focus on the way Officer Nolrey’s fingers move across the holocron during the process, but sitting so dangerously close (even though it’s not that close at all) to Kylo Ren is distracting. His presence alone provides a wave of dread.
Nolrey stands, beginning, “First off, Congratulations everyone on a job well done to everyone involved in the previous mission. Things went extremely well.” I shift in my chair. “But as you all know, opportunities may pass us by quickly. So we must move fast to keep up. Luckily with the Intel retrieved by Kylo Ren and his team,”

I zone out. Kylo Ren and his team? It was just me. Kylo Ren didn’t do anything to retrieve that information. I did it all. I begin to pick at the skin surrounding my fingernails.

Tuning back into Nolrey’s words, I hear, “-upon examination of this specific document, we found that the Resistance is planning to negotiate with senators of Ryloth to form an alliance.” The holocron flickers on to display the planet of Ryloth. I’ve been there a few times. It’s known for housing the Twi’leks. “Kylo Ren and Agent 2319 are to invade the Resistance ship, scheduled to meet Ryloth senators tonight. Kylo Ren is to eliminate all representatives while Agent 2319 is to take up the identity of one. Steal their clothes, interrogate them, do whatever you have to to become this person and attend the negotiations. Then, once you are in, sabotage it all. Make Ryloth come crawling to The First Order, just to spite the Resistance.”

Sounds easy enough. Out of the corner of my eye, Kylo Ren leans forward.

Nolrey continues, catching a breath, “While the Agent is in the meetings, Kylo Ren is to maintain the functions of the Resistance ship, making sure everything seems as normal as possible. Then, after Agent 2319 has returned, Kylo Ren will destroy the Resistance ship, staging the situation to be as if the representatives met with Ryloth senators, then ran into Kylo Ren’s ship and were assassinated. We want the Resistance to think we infiltrated the meeting too late.”

It sounds like an exciting mission, to be honest. Safe enough to where I am not worried, but dangerous enough to where I am not bored. My only trace of hesitant thoughts come from-

“Officer, I am not sure how I feel about one aspect of this mission.” Ren’s voice booms throughout the room. I lean back, letting myself relax. Maybe he’ll give a constructive criticism to the plan. A new idea. Something helpful.

Officer Norley gulps as nonchalantly as possible. But I notice. Nolrey queries, “What aspect worries you?”

“Are you sure, Agent 23-” he hesitates. “What was the girl’s call sign again?”

My whole body tenses. He’s speaking about me like I am not even here. Also, he referred to me as a mere “girl”.

Nolrey answers, “2319, sir.”

“Ah, yes,” Ren acts like it’s merely a slip of his mind. But I know he knew my call sign. I know he did. I think he did. My teeth grind harder with each word he says, “Is it worth our relationship with Ryloth to risk the Agent 2319’s cover being blown? If Ryloth senators find out she is with The First Order, they will have no forgiveness for us.”

I immediately begin, my words stringing together quicker than I mean, “Our relationship with Ryloth would be compromised no matter what if they discovered we killed the Resistance ship, which they likely will. We have to sabotage their Resistance relationship, one way or another. We cannot get by with only killing the representatives, we must do something more thought out.” Then, I do something irrational. Something I never do. I blurt out, “I believe your doubt in my skill is blinding your judgement towards our mission’s objectives.”
The room grows evermore silent.

Normally I would never talk so out of turn. If someone doubts me, which happens often, I use my actions to prove them wrong. I never feel as though I have to talk myself up.

Ren’s head turns towards me slowly. I expect him to lash out at me. I don’t understand why he doesn’t. He only states, “Careful, Agent. A formal meeting is no place to display your arrogance.”

Then, in that moment, everything clicks. I can’t hear Nolrey’s instructions anymore. All I can think about is my epiphany. Kylo Ren is trying to bring out aspects in myself that I hated in him. He is trying to switch our roles. That’s some type of thing, I would do. I would totally do that to get inside someone’s head. My whole body slouches. I am supposed to be the logical, calm one. The one who is at meetings on time, the one who never speaks out of turn, the one who is formal. Not Kylo Ren, the impulsive, arrogant teenage boy. I stare blankly at the table in front of me. He’s playing with mind. And I fell for it for just a moment. My eyes slide towards his gloved hands, fingers intertwined and laying on the table. I won’t let him get to me. I refuse. No one has ever broken me.

And I will be damned if I allow this asshole to do it.

When I arrive on Ren’s ship, I place my blanket from my quarters on the ground, where I assigned to be sleeping.

R8 paces about the ship, getting in position to greet Commander Ren. I push my blanket into a cubby hole and join the droid, standing as straight as possible with my arms behind my back.

R8 eyes me up and down, then returns to his original stance. Always judging.

I suppose that’s his job. I just never noticed how annoying it was before today.

Kylo Ren enters his ship with his usual strut. Dramatic as ever. I push away those thoughts and just see him as I’m supposed to; a superior.

His gaze is directly on me with each step. When we come face-to-face, he stops, eyeing me up and down.

I remain at attention, staring a hole into where my eye level meets the folds in his cowl around his neck.

“Agent…” He begins. I can feel the vibrations of his voice against my forehead. “Are you feeling more respectful today?”

It kills me to not roll my eyes. R8 breaks attention to analyze me, once again. I say evenly, “Yes, Commander.”

He nods. “Great.”

“If you need anything done on the ship during the travel, I am available for assistance at any time.”

He sighs, stepping away while looking up and down the walls of the ship. “No thank you, Agent. This ship is quite more advanced than what you have worked with before. We wouldn’t want you to
While he's looking away, I take the opportunity to reset my jaw, then clench and unclench my fists. “Understood, sir.”

He looks back to me, seemingly surprised at my compliant answer. He was looking for something more rebellious, more interesting. I’m not giving him any of it.

He returns to the cockpit.

I say under my breath, letting my body relax. “I hate him.”

“Oh, you have made that quite clear.” R8 responds, pacing about the ship.

Desperately, I snap at the droid, finally relieving my tension about the situation, “It's not just that he's an insufferable human being. He's going to get me killed, R8. Sure, he annoys me and all, but the root of this whole problem was that stranded me. And he’s going to do it again; or do something even more fucked up.”

R8 cocks his head curiously, “I find it confusing why he hasn’t killed you yet. When you surprised him with your survival of the Jabiim moon, Ren had the perfect opportunity to kill you, in front of all your peers.”

“He was in too much shock to kill me.”

“The shock has worn off, and you are still here, Agent.”

Pulling the blanket from the cubby, I wrap it around myself, slumping to the ground. “He’s waiting for the right time. To where it would be painful, awful.”

“According to my data on Kylo Ren, he is not a sadist.”

“Well, according to mine, he is.”

R8 beeps, a robotic noise to replace the human sound for the laughter, “I am an analytical droid. I analyze people exceptionally well.”

I wrap the blanket around me tighter, my fingers sliding against the rough cloth. It’s not by any means cozy. But it is better than nothing. “So what do you think, R8? Why does he keep me alive?”

R8 doesn’t have an answer.

Of course he doesn’t.

So my mind goes back to my original thought: Kylo Ren is going to get me killed.

Chapter End Notes

thank you all so much for reading! again, i would love to hear any thoughts you have on it so far! idk man, i get so pumped when i get comments and kudos and stuff so yea, thanks so much. <3 im feeling blessed!
Boarding The Resistance Ship

Chapter Summary

“Just because you don't understand it doesn't mean it isn't so.” — Lemony Snicket, The Blank Book

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I have been half awake, half asleep the whole night. The floor is harsh, cold. Even something as simple as a second blanket to lay on would make the world of a difference. This amount of discomfort keeps me from slipping fully into a slumber, but at the same time, my body and mind might as well be sleeping. It’s an odd sensation. Almost like a dream. Thoughts reach my mind like visions. I desperately try to rid myself of any thoughts concerning The First Order. But I find that I don’t have anything else to think about. To relate myself to.

I curl into my body more.

I hear the cockpit’s door open, then footsteps walk down the hall towards me.

Assuming it’s Kylo Ren, I pretend to be completely asleep. R8’s footsteps would be lighter, with more of a creak distinctly coming from it’s metal joints. Ren’s steps are heavy. I do not think he means it to be this way. It’s just how he walks; tensely, trying to convince others that his steps hold purpose.

And then, I feel the steps stop in front of me. A creak. Is he crouching down? What the shit do I do? Remaining as still as possibly, I pray to the stars he isn’t looking at me. I know he is. But I still pray like there’s some hope he isn’t. I imagine the mask peering down at my figure, eyes behind the mask probably imagining killing me in my sleep.

I hear the modulated voice say, quieter than usual, “Wake up your master. We are within range of the Resistance ship.”

He’s talking to R8.

R8 responds, immediately, “Right away, Commander Ren.”

My whole body jerks to the feeling of a metal foot kicking my shin. I curse under my breath, my eyes catching Kylo Ren quickly regaining a standing posture above me.

Ren states blatantly, “I assume you are prepared to board the ship.”

I sit up, grabbing my weapons from the drawer beside me. As I begin clipping knives on my belt, I respond, trying to sound as awake and alert as possible, “Yes, Sir.”

With that, he immediately returns to his cockpit. But the door doesn’t close. I peer inside as I swing my rifle over my back.

Ren’s voice returns to it’s natural, snide state. I didn’t notice how relaxed he sounded before in comparison. “You’re even more useless when you stand around staring.”
An invitation to join him in the cockpit, perhaps? A rude one. One where he called me useless. Despite the fact I have done everything useful for our last mission. I join him, having to concentrate on not creating a stomp of frustration in my strides.

He stares out the window at a small gleaming dot far ahead. That’s the Resistance ship. I notice that the blinking red light on the control panel. Ren already put us into stealth mode. Good. They can’t pick up our location unless they actually see us with their own eyes. The control panel does look fairly advanced. But with my prior knowledge, it wouldn’t be impossible to figure out. Only a mere puzzle to pilot.

“Take down their communication fields.” Ren orders, leaning back in his chair.

Does he not know how to? Is that why he called me in here?

He quips, responding to my thoughts defensively, “I am fully capable.”

I cannot put a filter on myself before the words draw out, my tone harsh, “Aren’t you worried I’m going to break your ship?” I shouldn’t have said that. It means that he now knows that I remembered the words he said to me from before we left for the mission. The words of belittlement. He probably thinks that he hurt my feelings or something. That what he says matters to me.

Ren taps his fingers across the metal ends of the chair, impatiently. “Exactly. When you fail, we can simply destroy the Resistance ship as they attack us, and be on our way. Not waste time with your whole dress up game.”

“Commander,” I smirk sitting down at the co-pilot’s chair. “You may dislike me as a person, but constantly doubting my skill, which has been provided to me through The First Order, only shows your lack of better judgment.”

I hear the amusement in his voice, “It did not take too long for the whole obedient inferior front to wear off.”

“Odd, it stays on for most of my superiors.” I begin tapping into the ship’s mainframe. If I can establish a connection to the Resistance ship for just a second, I can freeze their communications systems.

Ren steadily watches each switch I flip, each button I press. “You do not respect me, then. You do not see me as their equal.”

“Are you trying to pick a fight with me?” I try to put my conversation with Ren on the backburner while I work. “Is this your attempt to distract me, making me fail so that we’re forced to just blow their ship up and leave?” Although these controls are somewhat different, I can figure them out pretty easily with some prior knowledge of control boards and common sense.

“Some small conversation should not do as much as to distract you.” His words linger. He wants an answer as to why I disrespect him. Which is completely ridiculous. It should be quite obvious.

I made it into their communications wall easily. Now I just have to put it into a sleeping mode. “I generally do not respect people who try to kill me, especially if that person is supposed to be on the same team as me.”

“Again, I did not try to kill you, I just did not go out of my way to ensure you would stay alive.” I open my mouth to respond but Ren quickly interrupts, “I grow tired of speaking with you. That’s enough for awhile.”
A puff of held in laughter escapes from my nose. He’s just being an ass now. No reason whatsoever. I wonder if he only began talking to me so that he could only tell me to stop talking to him halfway into conversation. It wouldn’t be past him. And I’m being an idiot for talking to him like I did. I let him play his dumb games with me again, stringing me along in conversation just to get a response from me so that he could respond back to feel better, to feel smarter, to feel more witty. I need to stop doing that. Only ‘yes, sir’ or ‘no, sir,’ or ‘right away, Commander’. But it’s so damn hard to be like that with Kylo Ren.

I break up my thoughts. It doesn’t matter. I successfully froze the Resistance’s communications. I validate the signal, informing Ren, “We have thirty minutes until their communications come back online. It should not be a problem if we eliminate them all quickly.”

“Thirty minutes is the best you could manage, Agent?” Ren grumbles as he prepares to approach the ship.

I stand to my feet, exiting the room. I say in the most robotic, orderly voice I can manage, which is in fact quite military, “Yes, Sir.” Part of me wanted to say that thirty minutes is all I need. But that part of me is pushed down with a brutal shove. I’m not giving him any more of that.

While freezing their communications should also cause some communication on board. Which should make boarding easier. Without warning my body is hurled into the side of the ship as Ren blasts the engines. The machine roars. I find myself on the ground, trying to remain steady.

I should’ve stayed in the cabin with him to make sure he didn’t do anything too stupid.

On cue, I hear blaster shots come from the Resistance ship. But Ren doesn’t return fire. I stand to my feet, about to stomp in their and do it myself. We need to take down their shields if we are boarding.

Suddenly, my body flies down the aisle of the loading down, back crashing into the ship’s exit ramp. He just rammed the Resistance ship. There is no grace in his tactics. No thought. Just pure impulsion. He didn’t even inform me on doing anything of this sort. He just did it, because he can.

My spine pounds from the collision into the hard, slick wall. Gushes of pain rush to my head. Before I can even think to try to stand up, the ship’s side door opens, the ship already extending its hall to the port of the Resistance’s ship. I quickly grab my two pistols from my thigh holsters and secure them into my palms, sliding up the wall with my back to a standing position.

Ren nonchalantly exits the pilot’s cabin, simply unprepared to fight. No weapon in hand. His lightsaber is still securely latched to his belt. I raise an eyebrow at him.

The door to the Resistance ship opens with a swoosh, blaster shots immediately pouring outwards. As Ren stands on one end of the doorway, I stand on the other, the red shots separating us. He doesn’t look remotely interested in what’s going on. He looks like he’s not even going to fight. I grumble a few select words about him, then grab a smoke bomb from the back of my belt. My fingers pull on the latch and chuck it into the Resistance’s ship. Slowly, the blaster shots stop with their sight being consumed by smoke. I stay low as I make my way through the hallway, reaching the first object I can make out to my right; a supply crate. I let the smoke around me dissolve into thin air, only leaving a hazy look to the ship before I peek up. Immediately, blaster shots overwhelm the area around my cover. There’s a lot of them. More than I expected. The crate is blaster resistant, thank God, but I have no clue how I’m going to get a shot off at any of them.
I take a deep breath, carefully focusing on one blaster shot. It came from approximately 40 degrees to my right. The same direction, immediately following, a blaster shot is given from 37 degrees. There has to be someone within that range. Quickly, I fire my pistol at the blaster shot’s origin. With the sound of a man’s scream, I know I hit something.

Footsteps race my direction. I allow my pistols to follow the noises until a soldier is right above me, jumping over the crate and sending two blades towards my throat. Luckily, my gunshots reach him before he can reach me.

The close call causes adrenaline to shoot through my veins, giving me enough courage to scream out, ordering, “Get out here, Ren!”

I continually begin to fire shots to where I think blaster shots are coming from, but the men from across the ship are making their way closer towards me. It’s only a matter of time before they completely outnumber my position.

Suddenly, some blaster fire adjusts to my right, towards the door. Towards Ren. He slowly patrols through the hall, avoiding the blaster shots effortlessly. He knows where they are going before they even fire it. He dodges ahead of time. And his dodges aren’t even dodges of effort, just mere movements of his shoulders and sidesteps.

Distracted by it all, I barely even notice the steps of a man running at me from my right. Not skipping a beat, I bend around the crate, firing at the man, shooting him right in the chest.

When I return to cover, Ren is standing there. Bored as ever. I see countless of blaster shots going towards him at a direct angle, but then miss their trajectory, curving around him. Is he doing that? With the Force?

“What did you need, Agent?” He yells above the shots, looking down on me.

I feel absolutely humiliated. I’m trying my absolute hardest not to be shot at, while he looks as if this is a complete waste of time. That’s how he wants me to feel. I can’t let him get to me.

I grunt, whipping myself upwards to get a good look at the scenery. There’s six more soldiers. I shoot at one, knocking him to the ground and get back under cover just as a blaster shot flies over my head.

Ren watches the blaster shot fly into the wall, all while he curves the shots coming at him.

“What the hell are you doing?!” I scold, trying to wait until the right moment to try to get another shot.

Ren simply answers, normal sarcasm spilling into his words as the sentence goes on, “You seem to have the situation under control.”

I sink lower into the ground, trying to ignore how infuriated I am because of him. “Commander!” I reach up to get a shot, but quickly have to duck down again to avoid a blast. “Kill them!”

“Now, you are in no position to order me.” Ren shifts his weight, getting more impatient with the situation. I notice that with each bullet that comes at him, he lightly directs it with a twitch of his fingers that lay at his side.

It doesn’t make any sense whatsoever. He could end it all right now. He could kill all of them. What is he waiting for? My teeth hurt from clenching my jaw in frustration so hard. “I apologize-” I peer to the side of the crate, only to immediately have to regain cover. “-Commander.”
He ponders it for a moment. Each second seems like an hour of avoiding gunshots. Finally, he concludes, “I do not work well with people who do not respect me.”

No kidding. I roll my eyes. “Commander Ren, initiate attacking.” I look up, awaiting his approval, “Is that better?”

He still doesn’t fight. He just looks down at me, waiting for me to say something else.

A blaster shot nearly grazes my side with my next shot. I avoid it. But it’s close enough for me to feel it’s heat. “Ren!”

Still nothing.

I’m getting a hunch of what I’m supposed to ask him to get him to finally kill them. But if it works, if I’m right, he is completely ridiculous. I inhale deeply before I utter with desperation, “Please.”

Everything in the room stills. Only the sound of reverberation of energy buzzes against the wall.

I peek up to see one of the oddest things I’ve seen in my whole life.

Everyone is frozen. Completely frozen.

I refuse to believe this is real, that he’s actually doing all of this with the Force. Perhaps his suit gives him the power, the mask, something. I don’t know. It can’t just be his weird cult beliefs.

However he’s managing to do this, he could’ve been doing this from the moment we arrived on their ship. Standing to my feet, I release my frustration with scolds as I approach Ren, “You just wasted all that time, making me fight, while you could’ve stopped them! Why the hell are you agonizing me when we’re supposed to be completing a mission!”

He crosses his arms, looking down at me. I expect his movement to release the soldiers from his spell, but they remain completely still. “For someone who seems so worried about conserving time, you seem to want to waste away from bickering.”

As I inhale to lash out again, I hear a clattering footstep from behind me. One that isn’t threatening, one that I know too well. “Agent,” R8 states, “I suggest you continue your mission.”

My mouth drops open. I look back at Ren, completely in love with being validated by a stupid droid. “Both of you are completely ridiculous,” I bitterly mutter while approaching the first soldier. The only thing not frozen about him are his eyes. His iris’ dart around, trying to beg me for mercy. For an escape. I never noticed how much is said based on one small thing, like the movement of eyes.

I shoot the man before I can delve further into any thoughts about it.

I look to my right to see a woman, and two men towards the back of the crowd. They are wearing different uniforms than the soldiers. Uniforms of prestige. I nod towards the woman, then R8. “Scan her.” I order. She’s young for her position. Around my age. Her black hair looks soft against her shoulders, eyes creased in her frozen state with determination. She looks like she thought for a minute that she could’ve defeated Kylo Ren and I. She had hope.

That’s the thing that is the saddest about the Resistance. I shoot the man beside her, he falls to the ground, dead. They hope in things that are impossible. They think that just believing in their cause is enough to succeed in their missions. I shoot the other two men remaining. The woman is the only one left, still frozen as R8 scans her. A green laser extends from R8’s eyes and slowly examines the woman from left to right, then back again. I am one of The First Order’s best and I haven’t hoped in
anything before, I don’t recall. And I definitely haven’t ever relied on believing in The First Order’s cause.

R8 backs away from the woman, confirming, “Scan complete.”

I grab the blaster from her frozen hand and Ren releases her, so she falls on the ground.

Through her dark hair, she glares up at Ren, out of breath. Her creased brow shadows her eyes with anger, sadness even. It all contrasts the beauty and delicacy of her dress. Purple silk, laying around her halfway limp body like liquid. The amethyst jewels from her neck scream desperation to be noticed as someone noble, someone important.

I begin the interrogation with a straightforward command, “Name.”

Her scowl grows, “Ask your friend.”

I turn to Ren, his gaze looking down at her. He knows her. He says, blatantly, “Iris Nisedge. You look more pathetic than I remembered.”

She doesn’t even try to fight me, or him. She now knows it’s no good now. It's a lot different than what she was like just a few moments ago. The girl only spits up to him words filled with poison, “Tell me, Ren, do you wear the mask because you can’t stand to see your face? Because you cannot stand to see what you have become? Or just to trick yourself into thinking you're half the monster Vader was.”

I notice Ren clench his fists at that. I hear R8’s joints turn to Ren, analyzing his response. He ignores her words, redirecting the subject, “It’d be within your best interest to tell us everything about these negotiations.”

“Negotiations?” She’s playing dumb. “I don’t know much about that. But do you know what I do know a lot about?”

“Tell me about the negotiations or I will force the thoughts from your mind myself.” He interrupts, growing impatient, more angry.

As if Ren never interrupted her, she answers her own question, “General Leia Organa.” The girl bravely raises her head with the power of the name. “She’s so strong. After everything that’s happened to her, she still carries on with the Resistance, acting like her son never existed. Wouldn’t that have been nice?”

Suddenly, she lets out a blood curdling scream. Her head is whipped back to the floor, slamming into the ground with a thud. Objects like random ship parts, tools and the dead bodies begin to shake. My feet feel unstable over the rattling ground.

The girl screams again as Ren takes another step towards her, his arm extended towards her skull. Tears begin streaming down her face, only progressing more with time. Her voice is drowning in a gargling sound, “Do you see her, Ren?”

That’s the last thing she says before a cracking noise takes over the room and she falls limp, neck broken.

The room isn’t shaking anymore, but my hands are at my sides. I quickly shove them behind my back, standing up straight. The energy in the room is muggy. My thoughts swirled within my own mind, pure sludge. There's a searing heat that I recognize in the energy. Adrenaline. Flre. Passion. But mostly, death. I know death well. But somehow, I've never felt so intimate with the sensation it
brings. Kylo Ren has intimidated me before. Kylo Ren has irritated me before. But this is the first time I felt genuinely scared of Kylo Ren. This is the first time I’ve felt that childhood nightmare-like fear in years. The fear of the unknown, the fear of a monster under my bed.

Ren says, as if nothing happened, “I have all you need.”

I look down at the dead body. I need to wear her clothes, but I do not even want to touch the corpse. I’m afraid that if I do, whatever energy, whatever invisible thing killed her will kill me too. I feel as if some of that energy seeped into my own mind, rooting itself into the depths of my imagination for later. I don’t know how the Force works. And I don’t want to know. After today, I want the Force to stay as far away from me as possible.

I force myself to walk around the body, trying to act unbothered by the sight. I grab the girl from under the arms and haul her away, into bathroom of the ship. Out of the corner of my eye, I catch myself in the bathroom mirror, tugging the body across the floor. I look away immediately.

As I begin to undress the girl, I focus on Kylo Ren’s voice giving data to the droid. I try to memorize what he’s saying, but I mostly just use it as a distraction to think less about the still warm body under my fingertips as I unfasten each button across her back. Iris. That was her name. Now it’s mine. I am going to be Iris for awhile. I exhale slowly, trying to get myself into a clear mindset again.

It doesn’t take me long to get there.

After the tedious buttons have been undone, I slip the dress over the body, throwing it to the side for myself. The bathrooms small, not giving me enough room to change. I sigh in frustration as I kick the dress in the corner and lift the body up, halfway rolling and halfway tossing it into the bathtub and closing the curtain to separate myself from the sight.

I strip down from my clothes, carefully placing my belt and weapons beside the tub. Reaching up, my fingers pry at the hair tie, keeping my First Order standard bun out, causing my hair to spill around my face in waves. I then, step into the dress pulling it upwards and sliding my arms into the sleeves. Reaching back, I try to grab the buttons, which is a task in of itself. I can barely do that, let alone guide the buttons into the designated hole. I inhale, sucking in my stomach, trying again. I grab a button, pushing it through the first hole I can. I sigh. It doesn’t feel right. I look at it in the mirror, the button at least in three holes above where it’s supposed to be.

I call out, “R8, can you help me with this?”

R8 chirps from the northern room with his response, “Currently 13% through uploading ship’s data. Cannot be interrupted at the moment. Sending Commander Ren to assist you.” He calls out, “Commander Ren, Master, would you please go assist Agent 2319 while I am uploading the ship’s data?”

Dammit.

I already hear his nearing footsteps approach the door. I can’t tell him no thanks. I can’t be like, “No, nevermind I got it.” Because I don’t. I need help. And I really don’t want Kylo Ren to break my neck or possess me with his evil Force magic, taking offense to me refusing. Why should I even care? It’s just dumb buttons.

I hear door slide open and I immediately look down. He stands in the doorway, silent and clueless.

I mumble, “Can you button these?”

Hesitation. Then, he side steps behind me. Now I know why I don’t want him to do this. He’s an
asshole. And now he can see my whole exposed back. I really don’t need any snide remarks made about my body, about anything of my physical appearance.

But he doesn’t say anything. He just positions himself behind me, creating as much distance as the room allows. Still close though. I can feel the cloth of his robes brush against the silk of my dress. He begins at the bottom buttons, his fingers somewhat clumsy. The button slides out of his fingers a few times. I can feel the leather of his gloves brush against the small of my back every now and then. The nerves of my spine seem on edge by it all.

Ren grumbles under his breath, taking off his gloves with frustration, and throwing them on the edge of the sink. Only for a second do I catch the sight of his hands. His hands are large, fingers lean. The main thing I noticed was how pale his skin is. And how his nails are short. His nails are recently clipped, all even. He has healthy hands, groomed hands even. I glance down at my own hands. I have a bad habit of picking at hangnails, causing my fingers to constantly look rather beaten up. In that moment of realization, I pray to the stars I’m not more emotionally unstable than Kylo Ren. I reassure myself I’m not emotionally unstable at all.

The next attempt, the button easily goes into the corresponding hole. As he begins working faster, buttoning everything up my back, I feel his knuckle moving upwards, ever so slightly touching my spine. It seems to be an accident, because every time he touches my bare skin with his, he pulls it away immediately.

He makes it to the very last few buttons and I feel a pull at my scalp. I flinch. He curses quietly. The word against is modulator was frustrated static against the back of my neck. Such an odd thing to hear him do. Such a human thing. He unbuttons the previous button and then uses his pinky to push the hair lying against the nape of my neck over my shoulder. I can’t help but shudder at the feeling. Something about all of it just makes me want to leave the room, run away. I don’t know if I’m embarrassed or just confused. Right as he buttons the last button, he reaches for his gloves on the sink, but my body already began exiting, causing my stomach to collide right into his arm. He pulls back immediately.

I mutter with my head down as I exit, “Sorry.”

I patiently sit outside Ren’s room, waiting for him to get done whatever he’s doing. He’s been in there for awhile. Plus, it’s been taking R8 a fair amount of time to tap into the Resistance ship’s data. R8 ran into a few walls, but I could easily get past them with a few different codes.

Finally, Ren exits the room, not even bothering to look at me while he heads back over to the Resistance ship.

He slides the door shut behind him with a slam. The only glimpse inside of his room I can manage is a look at his bed. When I first entered his ship that’s all I saw in there. Did he only go in his quarters to lay down?

I look back towards the hallway to the Resistance ship. He’s all the way in the other ship. I could totally go snoop in his room right now if I wanted.

And I do.

Quickly, I stand to my feet, pressing the button next to his door before I can change my mind. I block
out any fear I have. Any second thoughts. I’ll just be in and out.

Inside Ren’s room is a bed. Completely made, completely clean. A nightstand with a holopad and lamp. I’ll look at the holopad some other time, perhaps. I look to the left and there’s a doorway. One that was locked when I first came onto his ship, but now is opened. I quickly peer inside.

There’s a table with something on it. It looks burnt. I don’t know. But whatever it is, it draws me in. I take a step closer to examine it. The air in the room is buzzing with energy. With the same energy I felt when Ren was interrogating Iris. I squint down at the thing in the center of a table.

It looks like the head of a burnt droid. Maybe a burnt mask. Whatever happened to the thing must’ve been brutal.

Suddenly, I hear a door open in the hallway. “Shit,” I mutter, slipping out of the room, and then running to the door to exit Ren’s quarters.

I reach the hallway, the door sliding shut to be greeted with R8, looking in the doorway across from me.

I slide past its analyzing eyes, collecting more data about me and my actions.

There’s something about that mask that can’t escape my mind. I don’t know what. The look I got wasn’t great, but it was prominent enough to leave an imprint in my memory. I push it back as far as I can manage.

I have a mission to worry about.

Chapter End Notes

ahhhhh! thanks so much for reading guys! honestly all the comments make me feel so giddy inside like dang im blessed <3 i have a lot planned for this fic and i can't wait to share it all!
First impressions are important. That is why, when I first was acquainted with the senators of Ryloth, I rejected shaking their hands and I scanned their clothing with my nose crinkled, unsatisfied. I’m Iris Nisedge, of the Resistance. And I am a complete prick.

After the general first impression, I tone it down a bit. I do not want them to think I am incapable of being a decent person. I just want them to think that I choose not to be.

“The Resistance base I was raised at is beautiful. My house overlooked a lake that stretched for miles against the most gorgeous sunset. The color of the clouds reminded me of candy as a child.” After the statement, I take a sip of the wine in front of me. It tastes good. Sweet, even. Everything here is surprisingly nice. I can appreciate the architecture of the buildings, spiraling up the canyons of Ryloth. The rocky staircases ascend into the golden sky, almost mirroring the imagery of the rapture. I’m in a building, the Senator’s building, at the top of the canyon. The dinner table is dressed with fine meats and fruits, ones that I noticed they picked out to specifically show the best of Ryloth’s culture. They really wanted to impress this Iris person. They really wanted the Resistance bond. I can’t help but wonder why. If I could figure it out, I can really ruin this relationship. The senator smiles at me, naive that he’ll be disgusted by the Resistance towards the end of this all.

It’s been nearly forty five minutes of pure small talk. About their everyday lives, about the different ships my parents have owned. Ren told me slightly about what Iris’ life was like, claiming he received the information from reading her mind. I genuinely do not believe him. He did not mention the words she said about General Organa, or Ren’s past life. I know that he knew her at some point in his past life, but I did not press it. He still is probably naive enough to think that I do not know, nor care about who Ben Solo was. It seems like a touchy subject for him, so I’d rather not delve into it. I do not really need to for the success of my mission.

“Now, Ms. Nisedge,” The senator leans forward. A weight place onto a conversation now. His orange head tails lightly drag across the table with the movement. “Shall we discuss the means of negotiation?”

I pat my lips with the embroidered handkerchief next to my plate of food. Some kind of meat with a squiggle of blood red sauce. “I’d be delighted.”
my victim overcome their flaws or fall to them within their interactions, depending what my mission calls for. When Ren described Iris Nisedge to me, he used words like “privileged” and “uppity.” Ironic he would say that. From just the few seconds I had with her, I could tell that she’s overconfident. These are more than enough traits for me to go off of from here.

“Well, Ms. Nisedge, I really do believe that you have convinced us. Your intelligence and charm has been nothing but even more of a reassurance of our decision to work with the Resistance.” The Senator says, relieved.

I smile across the table to him. “That’s truly wonderful to hear. The Resistance is proud to be fighting alongside you. I was hoping to also negotiate additional benefits with this allegiance.” Patience is the biggest thing to remember when trying to make a conversation go the way you want. I had to sit here, talking to these senators for hours just to get to finally ruin relations between the Resistance and Ryloth. “We were wondering if you could send us a supply of Twi’lek women, along with your pre-proposed trading deal. They are highly valued in many planets and could give us a substantial amount of revenue, ultimately giving you a great profit.”

The Senator’s face drops. “These are my citizens, Ms. Nisedge. My people.”

I chuckle, trying to make light of the request, “I fully understand that. But do you understand the worth of these women across the galaxy? They are adored by so many men-”

He raises his hand, to silence me. “That is enough. Let’s continue settling other terms of our negotiations.”

“Very well,” I sigh, slightly annoyed at his declination. I notice a crease in his brow that was not there before. Perfect. Out of the corner of my eye I notice his wife, shifting in her chair uncomfortably. She fiddles with the bronze jewel that hangs against her smooth, violet collar bone. I have them right where they need to be; uncomfortable and second guessing. But making them feel uneasy is not going to be enough to have them call off their whole plan to join the Resistance.

“Now,” The senator continues, trying to forget my recent request. “To the topic of our agriculture-”

“What if I give you a number on how many Twi’lek women we need? Would that assist your decision on my proposal?” I interrupt, my wandering expression indicating that we are no longer on the same page.

The wife speaks up this time, one of the first times she said anything the whole day. Perfect. “Please, we do not have any interest of selling our people like slaves.”

My head snaps to hers. I blink. “I’m sorry, what is your role in this negotiation again?”

She stands to her feet, her voice raised with authority. “To have you know, I am the First Woman of Ryloth.”

I treat her action as silly. A waste of her energy. I wave her down, “Now, now, no need to get all excited, Senator.” I turn to her husband with a sly smile. “Your husband and I have everything under control.”

“Ms. Nisedge-” The Senator begins.

Quickly, I interrupt once again, “What I am truly trying to press is that your crops, your inventions, even your lovely wine,” I take a sip. It is lovely. “Is worth nothing to the Resistance. Truly, we do not care for it. But your women are fetishized greatly among our troops, and among citizens of other planets where we reside.”
The woman Twi’lek is infuriated. Her hands clench the table cloth beside her as she looms above her half-eaten meal, still standing tall, “Ryloth is not a planet that will stand with such sexist and dehumanizing ideals. What would your General Leia Organa say about these proclamations?”

I wince at the words. Sexist. Dehumanizing. If I can get them to think that those things are the backbone of the Resistance, my mission here is complete. “You truly believe that General Leia Organa has any political voice in the Resistance anymore? She is a great leader, true, but she is even a greater face we can use to coerce planets and people like yourself to join us.”

“Please, let’s forget about your trading proposal and-” The Senator man begins.

I cut him off immediately, “I do not know if the Resistance wants to form an alliance with people stupid enough to pass up such a deal, to be honest.”

“Guards,” The woman calls out through gritted teeth. Her eyes stay locked on me. “Escort our guest back to her ship.” She broke. Perfect.

I begin, hectically, “Please, do not allow your predispositioned ideals to get in the way of creating a great deal, Senator.” The Twi’lek guard approaches me, wondering if it’s serious enough to begin removing me by force. Should I push it further? Would Iris Nisedge? Angrily, I continue, “How dare you pass up this opportunity with the Resistance for your selfish reasons. The Resistance will not forget this!”

The guard says, getting between me and the table. “Mam, you are going to have to leave.”

I stand, dramatically, fists clenched. My eyes dart between all the characters in the room. Then, I allow my body to relax and I dust off the front of my dress. I smile, politely, “Have a nice evening, without your alliance, Senators.”

As the guard escorts me to the Resistance ship, I can’t help but feel relieved. The mission went great. Kylo Ren did not enter into the equation with any disruptions. Now all I have to do is fly that Senator’s ship out of here, re-board Ren’s ship, and we’re good to go. Mission accomplished.

The guard basically shoves me up the ramp of the ship, before turning to leave. This necklace is so heavy on me. I begin taking it off as I enter the ship, turning to the pilot’s cabin.

“R8, go ahead and power-up the-”

Suddenly, a figure steps out of the doorway. He’s a Bothan. Outdone in a grimy spacesuit, tattered up and down. The leather straps that reach across his chest, down to his belt almost looks slimy. He’s absolute scum.

“Iris Nisedge.” He states, blatantly. The name sounds unnatural to his language. I doubt Iris would have known this man. And if she did, she must have some weird, shady past Ren did not inform me of.

My eyes catch the assortment of guns around his belt. Random guns, from all different parts of the galaxy. There’s no order to him. No rules or regulations he has to follow. “Shit.” I mutter, backing up. He’s a bounty hunter. He must be. And I am completely unarmed.

Before I can even begin to strategize my attack, I hear footsteps emerge from behind me. I whip
around, only to come face to face with the barrel of a stun gun. There’s a flash of light and then nothing at all.

Wherever I am, it smells absolutely vile. I debate whether I should even open my eyes to see the hideous sights that await.

But I do. And I wish I kept them shut.

The first thing I notice is the floor, full of dirt and gunk that I’d rather not begin guessing the origin of. From there, I notice the steel bars that enclose me from all sides. I’m in the middle of this room. These dumbass bounty hunters literally bought a cage and dropped it in the middle of their ship for their prisoners. The room is bustling with activity from the crew. Two of them, both Aqualish men, sit around a booth playing Dejarik. I doubt they’re actually playing. They seem too enthralled by the pretty lights the holographic figures provide. Their ship is littered with wrappers and uneaten remains of food. With another inhale, I nearly choke on the air. God, it’s vile.

“Someone’s finally awake from their beauty sleep, Captain!” A shrill voice says from behind me.

I sit up, glaring over towards the voice. The Rodian muses, her head cocked at me. The thin green mouth turns upwards. I turn away only to see the Bothan man who greeted me before emerge from the cockpit.

“Ah,” He speaks, trying to adjust his regularly Bothese voice to Basic, “Finally awake, Princess?”

“Unfortunately,” I mumble, wincing back at the Aqualish men, now basically scrambling towards me to get a look. Despite this all, I still have to continue being Iris Nisedge. If word gets out that an Agent of the First Order, posing as Iris Nisedge, tried to convince Ryloth to begin a sex trade to benefit the Resistance, I’m screwed. That wouldn’t be a mission failure (which I have never even experienced to begin with); it would cause a whole separate strain of issues in of itself. If I am going to get out of this, I will have to do it while being Iris Nisedge. I stand to my feet, brushing off the once lilac gown, now covered with dirt and smudges of dust. With the movement, all the blood rushes to my head, causes spots of darkness to overwhelm my vision. How long have I been out? I ignore the painful sensation and begin, “May I ask why you deemed it necessary to have burdened me with the absolute displeasure of this experience?”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see the Aqualish men emerge from their table game, inspecting me while trying to conceal laughter amongst themselves. The Bothan man approaches the cage, his thumbs tucked in his belt. “Now, didn’t your filthy rich parents give you a bunch of credits to get an education? You should know why you’re here.”

Shit. Iris Nisedge would probably know. I might as well play it off, as if I knew the whole time and I just wanted to comment on how displeased I am to be here. “So how much am I worth? A thousand credits? Ten thousand credits?”

The Rodian girl breaks into a fit of laughter beside me.

The Bothan chuckles, “What you’re worth? A better question would be who you’re worthy to.”

They all exchange glances, agreeing with each other. “Getting on their good side is what we’re concerned about.”

If it’s a Hutt, I am going to be unbelievably pissed. What did Iris Nisedge even do to cause someone
to place a bounty on her? The only thing she is known for is her political power. I can’t even think straight because of that Roadian still hysterically laughing. The only people that Nisedge would be worth anything to would be-

On cue, the docking door to the ship opens, revealing two stormtroopers marching in front of a man in grey. I can make out the top of the General’s hat.

What a completely disorganized mess.

The troopers stand at the entrance to the cage, to reveal General Hux. I almost laugh. General Hux; new leader of The First Order placed a bounty on Iris Nisedge without consulting with The First Order itself. He needed to find her, and instead of consulting with anyone, he lazily placed a bounty on her.

Which is against the rules of his very own organization.

The Aqualish open up the cage so the stormtroopers can grab my arms, hauling me out of the ship. I do not fight it whatsoever.

Once I am away from these bounty hunters, I can explain the situation to the General, and figure out what to do with Iris Nisedge’s ship. The troopers pull me down the ramp, both of them pinching the skin of my arms in between their fingers. I watch General Hux’s stature as he makes his way into his ship, across the docking bay to wherever the hell we are. We must be on some backdoor planet where they could meet without anyone, without The First Order, finding out.

As soon as I’m led into the ship, they throw me against the interrogation table, strapping in my ankles and wrists. I roll my eyes, calling out to the General, “I request the company of General Hux!”

The trooper says, knowing the procedure already, “He will be with you shortly.”

He’s truly not wasting any time.

I scan the well-lit, metallic room. Nothing is in here whatsoever. Completely empty, like the standard interrogation room. I wonder how Hux cleared a whole interrogation ship without First Order clearance. I do not really know General Hux. I know of him, the same way I knew of Kylo Ren. Through stories, through the way people talk about him. General Hux’s story is very much of the inspirational one for many of my correspondents. They want to rise to his power, just like he did. He didn’t do it through the Force, so surely it’s possible. As if it has nothing to do with Brendol Hux, the General’s notorious Imperial father.

He glides in, confident, self-assured. He does not need a mask to show those traits. His face is enough. His pale skin is that of stone and his eyes are cold, dead. I forgot that the blankness of looking into Kylo’s mask is not a foreign feeling here. It’s how everyone’s eyes are. Dark. Emotionless. All of Hux's movements are quick, very to-the-point. Which is why he doesn’t waste time in beginning with me, “Senator Iris Nisedge. There has been reports of you planning to tour the galaxy to rally planets to align with Resistance beliefs. Is this correct?”

“General Hux, I am Agent 231-”

“This is a yes or no question, Senator. Please answer it the way it’s intended to be answered or I will have to begin with more painful methods.” He quips quickly, looking as impatient as ever.

I swallow. “No.” Before he can respond, I quickly add, “Permission to speak, General?”

He rolls his eyes, “Only because I’m curious to see what you want to share that you deem worthy to
share.”

I begin slowly so that everything is even and able to process. This should be the easy part. No person to pretend to be anymore. I just need to convince him that I am me; myself. “I am a First Order Agent. My call sign is Agent 2319. I was on a mission to pose as Iris Nisedge to sabotage Resistance relations with the planet of Ryloth.”

The General goes from completely deadpan to laughing in my face. He actually turns to me to laugh in my face. I twist my head to avoid it, but my restraints only allow so much movement.

Hux sneers, sarcastically, “Agent, then? That’s why your Ryloth negotiations went horrendously? Because you purposely sabotaged them and you’re not truly Iris Nisedge?”

This is getting redundant. “Yes, that is exactly why.” The only reason this is a problem is because the General did not clear anything through The First Order, like he was supposed to because he was lazy. I could be back on The Finalizer by now, if it weren’t for this complication.

He still seems so amused by this, just feeding the dialogue with questions he thinks are going to stump me, “And were there any troopers assisting your mission? Anyone who I can contact to verify this.”

“I have a droid. An R8 unit with the-”

“Of course, the most basic imperial assistance droid. One you could easily say you have.”

I swallow, looking down. “The only other person on the mission was Commander Kylo Ren.”

This doesn’t make him laugh, like I would originally thought it would. He just stares at me, in utter disbelief. “You need to become a better liar before you attempt to utter such a ridiculous altercation of the truth, Senator Nisedge.”

I can’t even tell him to contact Ren. Ren would lie and say that he never even heard of me, just to get me killed. Dammit. This is the one time I’m telling the truth in my whole career, and I can’t get him to believe me.

General Hux begins walking out of the room, before leaving, stating, “You’re execution is scheduled at the next abandoned moon. We’ll just drop you off there.”

I tug at my restraints, “Nolrey! Officer Nolrey gave the debriefing of the mission, talk to him.”

This causes the General to pause. He looks back, considering it.

I go on, "Ask me anything about the Order. About the Empire. I excelled in the academy. Trained under Lieutenant Leven, first of my class, and-"

"Shhh..." He harshly shushes, cutting me off. I stare back at him, confused. He steps closer, taking on a more considerate tone, despite the venom being the words he speaks, “So I see I have two options; Ms. Nisedge or Agent. If you are Ms. Nisedge, I am to eliminate you. If you are an Agent, you know of me calling in a bounty hunter to bring Nisedge to me. Something that The First Order would prohibit me to do.”

Shit. I reassure, “General, as an Agent of The First Order, my job is to keep secrets. You honestly think that I would tell anyone?”

“You honestly think I’d be foolish enough to let you live to be able to?”
Shit. I scramble under my restraints. “You have to keep me alive,” I begin, trying to think of any leverage I can use, “I’m paired with Commander Kylo Ren. That has to be some proof of my skill.”

A wave of disgust forms over the General’s face, “Working with Ren makes you even more of scum in my eyes.” The sound of Ren’s name sounds bitter on his tongue. It surprises me. Someone might hate him even more than I do. "And I'm still not entirely convinced that you-" he eyes me up and down. "-are and Agent of The First Order."

With that, he’s gone.

And I am a dead woman.

I roll my eyes, leaning back into the interrogation chair. What a ridiculously dumb way to die. I succeeded in my mission, succeeded in every mission and what killed me was my own commanding General. There’s no ship leaving me this time, in the rubble of an exploding building. There’s just this empty, boring room and a hatch that they’ll throw me out off on some godforsaken moon.

And if, somehow, I am able to manage killing these troopers and General Hux, it'll only be a matter of time before The First Order finds me and kills me, with the help of R8’s information and Commander Ren. The crime of killing General Hux will outdo the crime of him killing me, an Agent. That's the whole point of Agents; to die for the higher ups. We do the things too risky that would get important people killed. And then General Hux gets to take all the credit for it. Because his name is on it. Kylo Ren’s name is on it. It’s the way The First Order brands their successes.

Don’t get me wrong. I do not want the credit they get. I do not want the attention. God, I have no clue what I want out of this and I have been doing this for my whole life. That’s exactly how they trained me to be; not wanting anything so that they can take everything without me getting in the way.

I can’t be angry though. I knew exactly what I was doing. Back when Kylo Ren left me on that moon, I could’ve just took that Resistance ship and flew it anywhere in the galaxy. But I went right back to The First Order.

Was I too scared to do anything else? Too scared to face myself outside of what The First Order created me to be? Too scared to think like I am right now? Because right now, I am dead to The First Order, The First Order dead to me. Soon, I’ll just be dead. So there’s nothing left but to face what I am, who I am, without them. And it’s sad. And it’s scary. And I don’t want to think like this.

My scoff turns into a laugh as I call out, hoping my voice can carry beyond the door, “Hey! Can you just kill me now and then dump my body off later!”

Suddenly, the whole ship veers to the right with a jolt. I sniff, recovering from whatever mental episode that was, “Now what?!?” I’ve already dealt with politicians, bounty hunters, and General Hux today, what corner of the galaxy is left to irritate the living hell out of me?

The ship jolts again, suddenly. Is someone ramming Hux’s ship? I try to listen to the troopers conversations with Hux, but it’s all too muffled by the closed door.

Finally, the ship stabilizing and the boarding doors open. Who the hell would be boarding our ship?

There’s a red beam of light that penetrates the metal door, flicking sparks up to my face. I squint, unable to see the figure, but I know exactly who it is. The only person who would opt out of opening a door with a button, just for dramatic effect.

The one person I’d never think it would be.
After the door is demolished, I see him standing through the doorway, unconscious (or dead) stormtroopers behind him.

An exhausted, hysterical smile spreads across my lips, “Ren.”

Chapter End Notes

it's been WAYYYY too long! i'm so sorry, you guys. i just graduated high school tho, finally, so that's what was holding it up; some shitty exams and grad party stuff and ahhhh all that. but i'm glad to be updating again! hope you all enjoyed! sorry for the lack of kylo in this one, but i think that it was necessary, like i dont wanna force anything the plot wouldn't allow for, you know? more kylo next time and BOI is there some good kylo dialogue shit coming up! thanks so much for reading! also, i made a pinterest board for Agent 2319's character, just for some inspo, it's a work in progress so heres a link to that: https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
also im working on a playlist inspired by this fic, and ill give out the deets once its a little more refined.
thanks!!! :)}
"Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction." — Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Airman's Odyssey

“Ren!” The General storms into the interrogation room to Kylo Ren, who is now undoing the restraints around my ankles and wrists.

I can barely see straight. The whole absurdity of this situation is too much for me to even handle. Commander Kylo Ren just boarded General Hux’s ship, where I was held prisoner as a Resistance senator, because I was turned in by bounty hunters. I exhale deeply, trying to recollect myself.

R8 must’ve helped me. He was on that Resistance ship when I was captured. He probably hid, then piloted the ship back to Ren, and somehow tracked down the Bounty Hunter’s ship. How R8 would have convinced Kylo Ren to come and get me is beyond my thoughts.

The General is absolutely fuming. His face is bright red, veins bulging from his neck. He doesn’t say anything. He merely boils at the now, lightsaber-shredded, door. Then glances at Kylo Ren. Demanding an answer, an explanation.

Ren doesn’t give him one. He just turns away from my side, to face the General to say flatly, “Why is my agent detained on your ship?”

“Your agent?” Both I and the General say this in unison. His words said with the raise of an eyebrow, mine said with my eyebrows lowered. Both shocked by his word choice for completely different reasons.

“Supreme Leader Snoke specially assigned Agent 2319 to assist my missions, The First Order’s missions.” Commander Ren stays standing, arms at his side, in between Hux and I.

I squint my eyes. What the hell is he talking about? Why is he just now choosing to be reasonable? He was insufferable the other day. Absolutely insufferable. Did Snoke talk to him? Snoke wouldn’t have stood up for me. I’d be foolish to deny that I am replaceable, especially after today’s events.

Hux swallows, his throat contracting as he examines the damage Ren did to the ship, assessing the situation. “Take her and all is forgiven.”

Ren looks back at me, then tilts his head, as if to tell me to go ahead. I do. My legs wobble to the boarding hallway from lack of activity.

Before I can make it past General Hux, I feel his forearm extend, smashing into my collarbone, pinning me against the wall. I swallow, resisting any urge to fight back. Despite the harsh, quick action, Hux remains looking formal. Standing straight, movements snappy, his face still that of stone. He states, “And if you speak of this, to anyone, you will wish that today was the day you died.”
I make my voice as clear as possible, as professional as possible, when I respond, “Yes, Sir.”

I can feel the heat of Kylo Ren staring at me, pinned against the wall. I don’t know what he’s thinking. Feelings of embarrassment, of weakness, creeps throughout my body as he watches.

Slowly, Hux removes his arm from my collarbone and I sidestep around him.

Ren follows behind me, but before exiting, he turns back to the General, saying in the cockyshit attitude that I have grown to know, “General, next time you commit solicitation, consider hiring decent bounty hunters, at least.”

The first thing I do when I return to the ship is find R8. If it weren’t for that droid, I’d be dead. The thought makes me wince. I spent so long being taught that relying on something for safety is a huge red flag of an inadequate agent. Which, I suppose is true. I had no clue that General Hux would try to kill me. But I needed to be more prepared. If I could’ve gotten away from the bounty hunters, I wouldn’t have been stuck in that interrogation room. I would not have needed R8. Silently, I curse myself.

I find R8 in the cockpit of Ren’s ship, his location taking me off guard. The right corner of my mouth raises at the sight of the droid, looking out the window of the ship, already preparing to fly away. The sight is odd. Ren does not seem like one to let others pilot his ship. “R8,” I begin, “I am thankful.”

“Getting the Resistance ship back to Commander Ren was vital to complete the mission.” R8 states, orderly as ever.

“It is a relief that you handled that,” I admit. The mission was a success, despite my own, personal complications. Which is all that’s important, I suppose. “I’m talking about finding me, after those disgusting bounty hunters captured me.”

R8 tilts his head. Analyzing. Trying to configure how to respond. “The odds of getting caught while tailing the bounty hunter’s ship was high. Along with the odds of never actually retrieving you. Along with considerations of the time and money involved to travel. I advised against it.”

My face freezes. My once relaxed posture stiffens. “You wanted to abandon me?”

R8 leans backwards. “Putting the cause of The First Order before human life is not meant to be personal.” He analyzes me again, eyes scanning, wondering what has changed in my reaction, what I’m feeling.

That doesn’t make any sense though. If R8 did not save me, Kylo Ren did. To even suggest that Kylo Ren went against all suggestions to find me, especially after he admitted to not only hating me but saying that the thought of my death would be amusing, is ludacris. I scoff at the droid, “You’re lying to me.”

“I beg your pardon.” R8 turns his body completely away from the control panel to face me entirely.

“I know what you’re doing.” I begin contriving up solutions in my mind, vomiting the words as they come to my tongue, “You’re trying to get me to not hate him as much. You’re trying to make me forgive him, or whatever, for him being an asshole. It’s not going to work. Just because he helped me
once, doesn’t make his initial attempt to kill me disappear.” Is this another one of Ren’s mind games, an attempt to prove he’s better than me? He knows I would not have saved him, so maybe he saved me to show me up. Would I have saved him? Snoke said that he is vital to The First Order’s success. I shake my head, beginning pacing. What situation would we even be in where I would have to save him; someone who can just kill people with the power of concentration. My temples pound with confusion. It’s just a hypothetical, but wondering what I would do is distracting me so much, causing me to be lost in my stream of thoughts.

“The fact that you’re suggesting that I am making this up leads me to further conclude that your dissatisfaction in working with Commander Ren has affected your judgement. It has altered who you are as an Agent of The First Order.” R8 admits, pulling me away from my own mind.

R8 used to always be on my side. R8 would have saved me, but ever since Kylo Ren came into the equation, I feel so hostile towards the droid. “Now, I’m beginning to think he reprogrammed you behind my back to be one-hundred percent more irritating. You never used to be so annoying before.”

Quickly, the droid snaps back, “I haven’t changed. I was programmed by The First Order, permanently under The First Order’s coding. Perhaps, you are the one-”

“Whatsoever, I don’t-“

Despite my intrusion, R8 continues, a harshness in his words that is not quite audible. But I pick up on it with his lack of movements, with his analysis on myself stopped, as if he has reached a conclusion. “You were also programmed by The First Order, since birth, Master. But you are a human, I am a droid. Your emotions can get in the way of what The First Order wants. I do not have emotions. I only have The First Order’s intentions. This is how you were supposed to be as well. This is how you have always been until we began working with Commander Ren.”

For some reason, the statement just makes me more angry. Everything from the recent events seems to be boiling over. “Goddammit, R8, can’t I just have this one thing? For all of my life, I’ve been exactly what The First Order needed me to be. I still am. I have been perfect. I have never felt anything for myself. I didn’t know how to. Let me just feel this one thing because I, me as an individual, actually feel it. I hate Kylo Ren. He makes me infuriated. It won’t get in the way of my missions, and it hasn’t. I just want to be able to feel that without without you shitting on me every time I-“

“As a droid, I do not excrete fecal matter.”

“Oh my god.” It only now occurs to me that I am arguing with a computer. Nothing’s going to change the way it’s been programmed to think. It’s useless. If I continue this encounter, I think I may explode. The urge to forget about this whole mission overwhelms me. I have to get out of this dress and back into my regular uniform. Reset.

My feet lead me out of the cockpit and right into the stride of Commander Ren. My shoulder collides with his chest, only causing another wave of anger to rush over me. More embarrassment, as well. “This is all of your fault.” I mumble, without thinking, as I side step around him.

Before I can make it into the bathroom, I hear his snippy response, “Now, that’s no way to talk to a person who saved your life.”

Fine. I’ll give in. Maybe what I need is to let my anger out. And arguing with R8 is helpless. Kylo Ren may be a masked military Commander, but it’s not hard for me to humanize him. I see through it. I think to myself: scared teenage boy. That’s all he is. I dig deeper into the conversation, turning
back towards him, “What happened to being humored by my death, Commander? The narrative you once used to threaten me does not hold true with your actions.”

“I see it does not.” He says blatantly.

I could leave it at that. I could easily just walk away right now, accepting he’s an unpredictable asshole. But I find myself stepping towards him, egging the conversation on, “I would love to hear an explanation, Commander.”

“No explanation...” He stays still, patient. Looking me up and down.

It’s driving me insane. I stare back up at him, now realizing my feet have lead me right in front of him. Only a foot away from his figure. I wait for an answer, still.

He begins, unwavering, “I know exactly why I saved you. And I will tell you why. But only after you take a guess.”

He knows I’m going to guess incorrectly. That’s why he wants me to guess, to just prove me wrong. He’s setting me up for a failure and himself up for success. I could call him out for it. But he should know I’m smart enough to realize what he’s trying to pull. Part of me thinks that’s why he’s playing this game, because he knows that I know the rules of it. I give him what he wants. My best guess, “You’re manipulating me. You’re trying to trick me into being dependent on you, because you know that I don’t need you nor do I even want to be around you. You’re so desperate to be in control, you pride yourself on saving my life just as much as you do on taking it.”

His head tilts upwards, considering the answer. He pauses for awhile before he responds, almost making me think that I was right in my assumption. “I really don’t think it’s that deep.”

I scoff.

He counters, ”What if I told you that I saved you because I have grown to find indulgence in your jabs at me? I think it is all quite amusing. And my usual mundane responsibilities of being the Commander have grown rather boring.”

A second doesn’t pass before I quip, “I would say you have an awful sense of humor and you’re an asshole.”

“Ah,” He laughs, the sound so odd coming from the filter in his helmet, “there it is.” He specifically does not acknowledge the fact that I called him an asshole. I called Kylo Ren an asshole to his face and I am not dead. ”So refreshing, you are,” He jokes.

“Don’t even pretend like I do not make you just as livid.” He hates me. How could he so quickly disregard that?

“You most definitely infuriate me.” He admits, not denying my claim.

I stick up my chin. An attempt to meet his height, if not in my physicality, but in my confidence. “I can say, without a doubt, your acquaintance is the least humoring thing I have ever experienced.”

In a response to my movement, he tilts his head downward. Just bringing us closer. Trying to intimidate me, trying to make me feel smaller. I stand my ground as he tests me, “You are not at all relishing in our partnership at all?”

“Most definitely not.”
He continues, voice smooth and musing, "You don't find yourself bored of going on mission after mission, alone, no moving up through the ranks, no end of the tunnel in sight? When you're not pretending to be someone else, you're trapped in a boring dormitory on some sterile space station, alone with your boring droid, eating your nutritious, boring food, waiting to be summoned by the next boring officer."

"I like my food." I seethe.

"I think you're just as bored as I am."

"I'm not."

“I do not believe you.”

My hands fold behind my back. I challenge, sneering, “Read my mind. The only thing I'm finding rather boring at the moment is this conversation, to be frank. But I love being an agent of the First Order. I will never bore of such an honor.”

“I know I’m right.” He brags. “Perhaps you should search your own mind, sometime. There's no need for me to invade.”

I exhale out of my nose sharply, my breath visible on his helmet. “How kind of you.” The sarcasm is palpable.

His sarcasm is, as well, “The least I could do, Agent.”

We just stand there like that. I do not have anything else to say to him, but I do not want to let my guard down at the same time. Tension in the room only increases with each second that passes us.

Surprisingly, he’s the one to back down, tilting his head back upward, pulling me out of his gaze. He looks towards the bathroom door as he says, “Your standard uniform is where you left it.”

I allow myself to breath, not quite fully yet, but more than I was breathing before. I turn, walking towards the bathroom, looking back to say, “Very well, Commander.”

I find myself in the bathtub of my temporary quarters at the Finalizer. I have 24 hours until my next debriefing. My first full day off in over a month. I slowly submerge down to my nose into the water, staring at the ripples my movement has caused. The worst thing about being off is being so stressed that I’m not enjoying my time enough. The pressure to be more relaxed puts me even more on edge.

I can’t help but think about what my next mission will be. And I still need to file the report to Supreme Leader about the previous mission. General Hux made it very clear that me being captured was not to be brought up, to anyone. Does that include the Supreme Leader? The man just became General, am I about to demote him if I say he sent out a bounty for Iris Nisedge? I sink lower into the tub, tilting my head back so I can stare up at the metal ceiling. If I mention Kylo Ren saving my life, does that indicate that he was tempted by the light side? I have no clue how the Force works. More importantly, if I decide to not include my capture in Snoke’s report, therefore not including Kylo Ren saving me, am I keeping vital information from Supreme Leader Snoke?

“R8!” I summon, sitting up straight in the tub. “Can you grab me my holopad?”
The droid strolls in, delivering the device in no time. I can’t help but still feel awkward around it, after the argument we had on the ship. It hands me the holopad and leaves. I’ve never argued with R8 before. I’ve never argued with anyone before, unless I was undercover, purposely arguing. I feel exhausted from all the conflict. There really isn’t that much conflict, compared to most people’s lives I supposed. I assess my situation; I was paired to work under a man who is rather rude. We are incompatible partners. It sounds like such a small inconvenience. Something that is easily dealt with using patience and self-control.

So why does he irritate me so badly?

The emotional side of my brain answers that question easily. He’s an asshole who doesn’t deserve his position. Yes, he’s powerful. He can do things that no one else has the capability to do. But he does not hold the leadership skills of a Commander, the poise of a Commander. He’s more of a weapon to The First Order than anything else. Not to mention he tried to kill me, then went out of his way to save me because I “humor” him. The mere thought that he finds satisfaction in my annoyance drives me insane. Sadist. I told R8 he was a sadist and he didn’t agree with me.

I pretend to be typing up the report I haven’t started as I call R8 out once again, “R8!”

R8 returns in no time, standing in the doorway, waiting for directions.

Lying to R8 is something that I rarely do. But doing it proves to me that I am a good liar. If I can fool a droid, I can fool any human. I ponder the thought, as if it were vital to my writing, “What is your analysis of Ren’s recent behavior? He stated that he was humored by my jabs at him.”

R8 retracts his mind, playing images of Ren over to come up with a hypothesis. I’m just waiting for one word: Sadist. That’s all the validation I need. R8 finally responds, “Commander Kylo Ren is a very hard subject to analyze, Master. Due to his mask, I have been making note of his body movements and dialogue. We have not been around Ren enough for me to form any conclusive data, but his actions could mean a multitude of things. Your responses to his behavior, have been unprofessional, as I have expressed.” The statement is hard to listen to without rolling my eyes. “He could be satisfied in this because most people are too frightened by him to be unprofessional around him. He may find comfort in your lack of fear.”

I pose the question, as if it just popped up in my head, “Do you think that it is possible that he finds enjoyment in my personal suffering? That he’s sadistic?”

“Doubtfully,” Dammit. “But it is far too soon to make conclusive statements.”

Are people really that afraid of Kylo Ren? Sure, I felt pretty on edge when I first met him. But after awhile, his act wore off. Maybe it’s the mysteriousness that got to most. I know that he’s just some teenage boy. A kid. For all everyone else knows, he could be an old man, genetically infused to live forever. I tilt my head, considering. “Can you send me the file that Snoke gave us on him?”

“Sending now,” R8 obeys.

“That is all,” I dismiss.

Snoke gave me this file on Kylo Ren that I merely skimmed. It all seemed unimportant. Just extra information, information that I didn’t even need to know. I suppose I still do not need to know it. Now, I’m just curious. As soon as it comes through I open it.


I nearly drop the holopad in the water.
I thought he was eighteen or something. This whole time, I assumed he was a kid. Snoke described him as a child. But he’s older than me. Sure, he’s not old, he’s still quite young to be an elite member of The First Order, but he’s older than me and this whole time I have seen him as a teenager? I continue reading.

FAMILY TIES OF BEN SOLO INCLUDE: Leia Organa (mother), Han Solo (father), Luke Skywalker (uncle), Darth Vader (grandfather).

My eyes stare down at the name. Darth Vader. He’s Darth Vader’s grandson and I called him an asshole. Darth Vader lead the Empire as one of the most powerful men ever known to the galaxy and I called his grandson an asshole.

What the hell did I get myself into?

I pull away from the file and begin typing my mission report, trying to make myself not think about how I should be dead fifty times over.

I ended up not informing the Supreme Leader on General Hux’s actions. Or Kylo Ren saving me. That part wasn’t vital to the mission. I have convinced myself that it was not needed to be sent to the Supreme Leader. But when I sent the mission report, I couldn’t help but feel my stomach fill up with the swelling anxiety of what would happen if the Supreme Leader found out that I left that part out. Would he think that I did it maliciously?

I walk down the hallway of the Finalizer with my head high, despite my worrying thoughts. I slept well last night. I had time to myself to relax. My hair is done up in the standard First Order bun, my clothes are freshly pressed and steamed to perfection. I am the image of orderly. But my mind feels so cluttered.

As I enter the briefing room, I am not sure on whether to expect to see the Commander or not. My eyes scan for him, first and foremost. When I do not see him, I sit down, opposite to the chatty officers and lieutenants. I find it odd that they find companionship in each other. Agents never see or work with each other. And once we go down the career route of an Agent, we are basically separated from the possibility of forming any friendships. Working with Kylo Ren so often is so different for me, even. Watching the men talk amongst themselves with such friendliness seems so foreign. There’s a weight that seems to press against me from the empty chairs around me. I find myself looking down to my hands placed on my lap, watching as I pick at my cuticles.

As I eavesdrop on the men, they talk about the food issued through the cafeteria. How it always seems better on some days than others. How you can tell when the more talented cooks are working. I try to think of ways that I can contribute to the conversation, but I find myself concluding that I don’t even want to be included in such a boring dialogue.

The door opens and my head darts up to catch Commander Ren in the doorway. The room falls quiet, any of small talk immediately shut down. Ren’s gaze fixates on my direction and he begins walking, sitting down at the chair to my left. Silence falls over the whole room, everyone too afraid to talk now that Ren has entered.

I remember R8’s words to me. That Ren feels comforted by my jabs because everyone's too afraid to be normal around him. I begin to see it. He merely walks in a room and everyone is immediately
silenced by fear. Not that I have compassion for him. If he didn’t want to be feared, he wouldn’t have such a pretentious attitude, nor wear that daunting mask.

I glance at him out of the corner of my eye, breaking the silence to greet, “Commander,”

“Agent,” He responds immediately.

I look up at the officers, staring blankly at each other as if they weren’t just complaining about the food a moment ago.

For some reason, I feel compelled to bring it up again. The cowards are too afraid to talk about food in front of this man that they’ve made their own assumptions about. They have no clue he’s Darth Vader’s grandson. If they only realized, then they’d be scared. I look to the men, “These men were just explaining how the food was in the cafeteria was distasteful today, Commander. Was it to your liking?”

The men at the table look at me like they’re pleading for their life. Ren responds at a normal pace and tone, “I would not know, I have my own food.”

I smile at the responses from the other men. I decide to push it further, seeing how terrified I can make them, “My apologies, Commander, I should have known. You are far above eating regular food.”

“Apology accepted, Agent.” He responds, coolly. He glances up at the men around us, then directs his attention back at me. “How silly of you to think otherwise,” A nudge at me. Instigation.

I nod, going along with it, “What more can you expect from such a lowly subordinate as myself?”

“Exactly,” He continues, relaxing back into his chair, “So unreliable, I wonder why I even allow you in my presence.”

I laugh at his sarcasm. His words are something I acknowledge as a joke, but the other men around me take as a threat. There is something amusing about the nature of it. I realize that this is the only time I have been on the side of the table engaging in conversation while others feel uncomfortable, unsure. Ren seems so self-aware of how I see him. And he’s using his cocky attitude to crack jokes about it.

My smirk relaxes when Officer Nolrey enters the room, holopad in hand, ready to debrief.

He looks up, noticing Kylo Ren, and nearly jumping out of his skin, “Oh!” As he recovers, he greets, “Commander, Agent. I did not expect your presence. A memo was supposed to be passed on to the two of you.”

“I did not receive it, Officer.” Ren says, on edge. No more fun, playful sarcasm. The returning tone of his voice sends a chill down my spine.

Officer Nolrey nods rapidly, explaining with urgency, “I apologize, Commander. The memo was for you and Agent 2319 to report to see Supreme Leader Snoke.”

I feel my stomach drop.

Ren stands to his feet immediately, his hands frustratedly pushing off the arms of his chair, “I do not enjoy my time being wasted, Officer.”

The poor guy continues his rampant nodding motion, “Yessir, I apologize again, Sir.”
Quickly, I follow Ren out of the room. He walks so fast, with such long strides, usually. But his walk right now is fairly slow. Meanwhile, all I want to do is get to the Supreme Leader as soon as possible. My palms feel damp already. Did Snoke find out about me being captured and keeping it from him? Is this why we’re being called down, so that I can explain myself before I am killed.

“You’re nervous.” The deep, robotic voice breaks through my thoughts.

I swallow, slightly shameful of him pointing it out. “Are you also humored by random intrusions of my mind?”

He explains, looking at the walls of the hallways as we walk, peering through open door as they pass, observing, “It does not work like that. Whenever you feel an emotion with intensity, you project it. It becomes something the Force merges with, meaning it’s something that I can feel. If I invaded your mind, I’d not only be able to see how nervous you are, but also see what you’re nervous about. Or I’d see any repressed emotions.”

“That sounds…” I struggle to find the word to describe it. “Loud, I suppose. What if there’s a bunch of people feeling strong emotions close to you?”

He looks straight forward once again. “Then your description of loud proves to be correct.” He continues on, after I think he has stopped, “You are one of the most quiet people I have encountered.”

My eyebrows crease. Half of the time, I do not even know how to describe my feelings. Yet, he can pick up on them. I wonder what he sees, what he feels. Most of all, I am surprised by his openness about the issue. I decide to not push it, and elaborate on my nervousness, “I merely think that we should not keep the Supreme Leader waiting.”

“It cannot be that urgent.”

“Why do you assume that?”

A sound, something resembling an exhale or a sigh, before he responds, “Do not concern yourself with it.” He says it like there’s another thing he’d have to explain. Like there’s something he doesn’t want to explain to me. I suppose I shouldn’t take it personally.

Finally, we reach the doors to the room I once talked to Snoke in. There’s two stormtroopers standing outside, on guard. The extra precautions seem slightly unnecessary.

I follow Ren through the doorway, but the trooper immediately extends his arm, blocking my path. His monotonous voice says, “You are not granted clearance to this sector.”

I eye the trooper up and down, confused, “I was given a memo to speak with The Supreme Leader, alongside Commander Ren.”

Ren turns back to me, eyeing the complication.

The trooper elaborates, “Only Commander Ren was granted the presence of The Supreme Leader.”

Ren assures, stepping back towards me, “Just stay here. I’ll report back to you.”
I sigh, casting aside anything telling me to keep pushing the issue. I watch Ren as he walks further down the pathway to where the holocron of The Supreme Leader will be lit before my gaze is interrupted by the door, sliding abruptly shut.

I suppose I should be relieved. I do not have to speak with Snoke. His presence made me so terrorized the first time I met him. I do not have to go through that. But as I sit outside the room where he and Kylo Ren speak, I still feel myself break in a cold sweat. They could be talking about nothing that concerns me. Or they could be talking all about me, how I was lying to Snoke, and how to rid of me quickly and quietly.

I pick at the corners of my nails, waiting for what seems like an eternity for Ren to return.

When he does, I ask, “What’s the plan?”

He answers smoothly, “Korriban.”

I’ve heard of it before. Full of Sith Relics, and stories from the ancient force users. No one lives there, as far as I know. I ask, skeptical, “What’s on Korriban?”

He begins walking back down the hallway, making way to his ship. “The other Knights.”

Great. I hurriedly pick up my pace to catch up to his once again long, quick strides. There’s more of him.

Chapter End Notes

thank you all so much for reading! i love reading all the wonderful, kind comments and seeing all the kudos and ahh it just makes me feel so happy, i’m so grateful! :) please leave me any feedback you feel is necessary ! until next time :) <3
As I lay on the ground, looking up at the cool, metal ceiling of Ren’s ship, only one thought passes through my mind:

I fucked up.

The reminder of not telling Snoke about my encounter with General Hux is haunting me. If Snoke finds out, he will kill me. Or tell someone else to kill me. Maybe even tell Kylo Ren to kill me. Then again, the alternative was to tell Snoke the full story and have General Hux find out, meaning that General Hux would kill me.

Either way, important people will want me dead.

I switch the side I am laying on for the millionth time tonight. Everything in my body is screaming at me to go to sleep, so that I can do whatever I need to do on Korriban when we arrive. But the discomfort combined with my anxious thoughts is overwhelming me tonight. Ever since I began sleeping on this hard floor, I’ve felt a pinch in my lower back. Plus, my uniform is so uncomfortable, I just took it off and decided to sleep in my under garments; black shorts and a grey tank top. It’s more comfortable, but significantly more chilly. I should have made a scene to Officer Nolrey, demanding a bed, or better yet my own ship. But I suppose that wouldn’t be in the best interests of my main mission, the mission that I honestly am getting sick and tired of.

I sit up straight, giving up trying to sleep on that floor. It’s not going to happen. If it would, I would have been asleep hours ago. My eyes are drawn to the door of the cockpit. The chairs in there would probably be a step up from the floor. I know how Ren feels about me going into his beloved pilot’s cabin, but I think that we’re at a point in our relationship to where me going in there would just be considered a “humorous jab” at him. I scoff at the idea.

With a yawn, I bring myself up to my feet. I trudge to the door of the cockpit, fumbling sloppily for the button to open the door.

When the door swishes open, I see the mask of Kylo Ren sitting on the console. Suddenly, it flies across the room, toward the pilot’s chair. I hear a slap of the metal as it lands in his gloved palm. Then a click. “What are you doing in here?” Ren interrogates, his voice fuzzy while adjusting to the modulator.

I swallow hard, sleepily replying, “I thought that I would get better sleep in the chairs.” I stare blankly at the back of the chair where he sits. “What are you doing in here?”

He doesn’t move into my gaze of sight as he responds, his tone on edge “I figured this room would
be less boring than my own.”

I roll my eyes, “Must you always need to be entertained? Why don’t you just go to bed?”

He doesn’t respond to me.

Which makes me assume. He can’t sleep himself, perhaps. He doesn’t want to sleep, maybe. I passively prod, “If I had a perfectly good, king sized bed, I would take advantage of it, using it to get all the rest I could.”

Sneering, not nearly as playful, he replies, “Sleep in the bed for all I care. If that eases your despise towards me and gives you the comfort you look for.” A pause. "I won’t be utilizing it tonight.”

His words cause me to retract, confused. Did he really just give me what I wanted? Without me even having to try to fight him for it? There has to be some reason. He’s probably doing this to get the mental upper hand on me. He wants me to trust him, just so that when he does something awful again, it will be significantly more effective. “No.”

He laughs bitterly, “Why?”

“Because,” I begin, moving to the empty seat, “I can sleep on a chair fine. I do not need your pointless luxuries.”

He mummers, scorning, “You are beyond immature.”

I feel a small grin spread across my face. I’ve never been called immature before. I rub at my eyes, curling into the form of the chair. Ren is sitting with his arms crossed and back slanted, looking out at the stars. For a moment, I just watch him. The stars are so bright, I can see small reflections of light in the silver of his mask. My eyes trace the outline of each dent the mask contains, each scratch. I wonder if the origins are all from the same place or if they were all gained on separate occasions.

He grunts, adjusting his neck. “If you are in here to sleep, then go to sleep.”

“Give me a second,” I turn away, my back to him, “Jesus.” I close my eyes, attempting to rest once again. To be honest, the chair is not much of an upgrade. My rough, scratchy blanket does not reach to the parts of the cool chair that holds my bare legs. Chills race along my shins, all the way up to my thighs.

“How’d you get shot?” His voice cuts into my mind, pausing any progression of thoughts.

I turn my head to see him looking at the blaster wound in my thigh, still a deep red color. Today is the first day I could even remove the stitches and bandage. I giggle sloppily, exhaustion evident in my voice, “Some asshole left me on a moon, forcing me to infiltrate a Resistance freighter.”

I expect him to respond with angst. He is in an awful mood, I can tell. But he sighs, tilting his head slightly. The movement reminds me of a pet, confused by the owners instruction. He speaks, the voice containing a more gentle nature despite the modulator. “You really sped across the galaxy, ignored a blaster wound and returned to the Finalizer just to show me up.”

When he says it like that, it makes me sound absurd. I laugh into my shoulder, peaking up to him, “I suppose I did.”

He reciprocates by laughing at my acceptance of the fact. I stare into the darkness of his mask, picturing what he could look like. His laugh slowly deteriorates, until he is only looking at me, me looking at him, in complete soundlessness. With the mask, it looks as if he is scanning me like R8
would. But I wonder what it would look like without the mask. What kind of expression he has as he
watches me in this kind of silence.

Eventually, the silence is broken by him stating, “Go to bed.”

I blink, “I am trying.”

“No,” he nods outside the room, “Go to bed. You need to be alert for tomorrow.”

I sigh. Who am I kidding? I am exhausted. He’s giving me what I want. I’m too tired to care about if
this is a game of his or not. Honestly, I do not think it is. I joke, giving into my exhaustion, “I
suppose I cannot deny an order from my Commander.” I stand to my feet, trudging out of the room. I
reach the door, turning backing to the chair he sits in. Before I think twice, I mumble softly,
“Goodnight.”

I do not expect a response. So I exit.

But before I do, I hear, “Goodnight, Agent.”

As I make my way to his room, I feel like such an intruder. I cannot help but feel like I am not
suppose to be in here, like this is forbidden. Despite my prodding curiosity, I’m too tired to peek at
the display in the conjoined room of the destroyed mask. Yet, I still feel it’s presence so near to me. It
is an odd sensation.

The bed has silk black covers, still unmade to where Ren must have got up from. I can tell from the
creases in the silk, how his body curled into itself. His white pillow at the head of the bed is still
indentated with the weight of his head. I climb into the spot he once laid, pulling the blanket up, over
my shoulders. Immediately, comfort rushes over me. The bed is wonderfully made, forming perfectly
to my body. I inhale deeply. With the action, I catch scents of cleanliness. It smells like soap. I nuzzle
my head into the pillow, taking in the comforting smell. It somehow makes it easier for me to fall
asleep.

I open my eyes once last time, just to look across the landscape of the bed. When I do, my eyes catch
an outlier against the white pillows. I squint my eyes and my fingers reach up at it for examination.
It’s a strand of long, black hair. I feel my mind fit more puzzle pieces together of what he looks like.
Pale skin that I saw on his bare hands, yet jet black, long hair. Somewhere in the confusion of the
contradictions, I find myself asleep.

Waking up is like an odd dream, one that I often feed my imagination with. If I am in a different
setting, whether that be a fancy hotel or a some random politician’s bed, I pretend that I am not there
because of The First Order. For some reason, I enjoy creating an alternate reality in my mind of my
life in that location. I imagine what my job is like there, what I do every day, where I go to pick up
groceries. In this scenario I pretend I am traveling the galaxy as an explorer. I booked a ride with
some guy I met at a casino. He wears a mysterious, mask because he was shot in the face and
miraculously survived. Due to his injury, he now likes to just do jobs like this to get him enough
credits to relax.

“Agent!” A voice booms from outside of the room.
I sit up, scrambling out of the bed. “I’m coming!” It’s almost painful to leave the comfort the silk
sheets and foam pillows provide. My body aches to return under the warm sheets as soon as my
body hits the brisk, cool air of the ship. I tip toe, my feet feeling especially sensitive to the cool floors, back into the ship’s main docking room.

Immediately, I’m met with R8’s face. “Now what on earth were you doing in the Commander’s quarters?” The droid is hectic to find answers.

I ignore the query while I grab my uniform. I hurriedly slide into the suit, placing the plates of armor in their intended locations. While lacing up my boots, I give the droid the response he wants, “I was ruining my status as an Agent because I hate Kylo Ren too much and it apparently get’s in the way of everything.”

The droid audibly is done with my shit. “My human interaction analysis says that your response is sarcastic, but based on your recent actions, it is likely that your answer is not far from the truth.”

I shrug.

Ren exits the pilot’s cabin, looking prepared as ever. I grab my pistols from the top shelf of the ship, shoving them into the holsters strapped at my thighs. Then, I grab the rifle above, sliding my neck through the strap, so that the weapon rests soundly against my back. I contemplate asking Ren about potential threats of this planet, but I decide not to. I suppose I’ll find out soon enough.

Without hesitation, Ren opens the door to the ship, a gust of wind from the planet sweeping inward. The heavy gravity of the atmosphere immediately causes my body to feel so much more heavy than before. Cold air hits my face like a slap, dust particles piercing at my cheeks. If any part of me wasn’t awake before, I am completely awake now. I follow Ren out, grabbing my hood to cover my head. I can’t get a good look at the planet, due to the wind. But everything is orange. I make out the outlines of rock formations in the distance.

I just focus on following after the dark form of Ren ahead of me. Every now and then, I glance back, to see R8 trudging behind. He’ll be fine, I reassure myself. He’s specific built to maneuver in all different kinds of weather.

In the distance, I see what looks like a cave ahead. I squint my eyes, attempting to get a better look. It’s not just a cave. It’s something so much more intentional. The entrance resembles that of an ancient palace. I cannot tell what the engravings are around the entryway is, but it’s so intricate. As I get closer, the ground becomes more stable, the once rough ground fading into carefully designed stone. My gloved fingers reach out towards the railing leading to the entryway, tracing the carved symbols as I walk forward, each step leading me to less hectic and less windy conditions.

I enter the cave behind Ren, completely piqued. There’s something about this place that seems so deserted. So abandoned. Yet, you can tell that at one time, it was far from not populated. Why would someone create such intricate architecture for no one to see? I assume that Kylo Ren has some sort of vision aide in his mask that assists seeing in the dark. He walks into the black corridor with no hesitation. I pull my rifle from behind my back, flicking on the light. The light reveals a neat, spacious tunnel. I scan the stone walls to find unlit torches, each placed a few yards from the next.

Ren warns, continuing, “Do not shine that anywhere except ahead of us.”

“Why?” I remain examining the walls.

“I’d rather not alert any creatures I do not have the patience to deal with.”

I shine the light only ahead of us on that note. I remain following, carefully keeping the light from shining down any separating corridors. It’s like a maze in here. Some kind of tomb or catacomb.
We approach a room that opens up widely, compared to the hallways we once traveled through. Following Ren’s orders, I do not examine the space around us. But I hear things. Scratching of claws against the stone floor. The gnawing of teeth. My jaw clenches at the noises. I grip my gun tighter. Ren does not seem bothered. Sure, he wouldn’t, I suppose. He could just use his Force to throw whatever it is into the wall. Can you imagine, being able to do something like that? I wouldn’t have to worry about anything. I wouldn’t worry about carrying all these guns. I could just freeze everything, like Ren does, and then get out of whatever situation I am in.

The thought of it all entertains me as I tune out the noises of whatever creatures surround us.

Finally, we make it to a series of steps, leading upward to the exit of the cave. I feel comfortable enough to return my rifle against my back, but I still make mental note of the pistols at my thighs, if needed. The stairs seem endless, but we reach the top quickly enough. And when we do, I find myself stunned.

It’s not nearly as windy as wherever we landed the ship, allowing me to get a full view of the sight before me. In the canyons around us are carved and smoothed into humongous walls extending towards the skyline. The walls are bordered by more intricate designs with burgundy, tattered flags hanging against the rock. The flags so are distressed, I cannot quite make out what it represents. The walls extend, leading to a large pyramidal building that towers over it all. It’s so old, yet looks so modern, in a sense. The intentional pyramid looks so exquisite against the surrounding jagged mountains. The sun of this solar system reaches the point of the tower, perfectly aligned in between two prongs at the top of the pyramid. At the base of the tower, larger than life stone sculptures of men hold up the pyramid on their backs, while they kneel on a bended knee.

I can’t help but stand there, completely awed by the sight. Ren and R8 begin to tread onward, but I take in the location a bit more. The cool air feels so nice against my skin, the sunlight providing just enough warmth to not make it miserable. I reach up to pull down my hood, now just noticing the remains of more statues cluttering the aisle toward the pyramid. I cannot tell if the statues have been destroyed by weather conditions, age, or by man. But each option interests me.

On my way to catch up to Ren and R8, I continue examining the other caves that surround the border of the landscape and the remains of smaller buildings. The atmosphere is incredible. I find myself imagining again, imagining that I’m an explorer. I am exploring this Sith planet to find ancient artifacts to take back to civilization. These artifacts hold no political importance. They just will provide more culture to everyone back home. Everyone will think it’s interesting, it’s beautiful. They won’t exploit it for their own personal gain. They can just appreciate it.

I walk up the stairs to the pyramid alongside Ren. I can’t find any sarcastic remarks to make because every time I think I took the whole sight of the place in, there’s just more that my eyes catch.

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch Ren watching me drag my hand across the metal railway of the stairs. Part of me tells myself to seem unimpressed, to look more professional. But I feel no need to hid my awe for this. I swear, I thought I have seen the most the galaxy has to offer, but I have truly never been to a place like this.

The inside of the pyramid is surprisingly well kept, with few exceptions. There’s two battered statues of guards holding swords that barely look capable to remain standing. The stone has eroded and chunks of their support has been blown away by something. But the area around them looks good as new. The First Order left their imprint here. Or maybe were inspired by the aesthetics by such a
place. Everything is metal and shiny. Bright lights are built into the walls, illuminating the aisle, giving everything an artificial filter. I follow Ren around the statues and further into the building.

The hallway suddenly opens into a huge room, with so many things for my eyes to take in. The first thing I notice is the bronze pyramid in the middle of the room, stretching up towards the ceiling, a ceiling that extends a couple stories up from the ground. At first, the etching into the bronze seems like effortless swirls, but after a blink of my eyes, I notice the faces that the swirls form into. Faces with expressions of rage, of wrath. All of these figures are being watched by one face at the top of the pyramid. The face is covered from the nose up by a hood. Something about his overall stalking nature on the other expressions leaves my stomach feeling knotted. The other expressions are sounded by chaos of the bronze, all melting together. But the face at the top is so distinct. So clear. Powerful.

My attention is directed towards the people sitting before us. Seven people sit, legs criss-crossed, with their heads bowing. Their hands lay peacefully on their laps in silence. With the fluorescent lights projecting from the walls, their black robes almost look like they glow.

Ren approaches them, strolling across their neat line with his hands behind his back. I can’t make out what any of them look like, due to their bowed heads. But I do notice, one peer up at me, once Kylo Ren has passed her. I catch her head raise ever so slightly enough so her eyes can catch the sight of my presence. She looks surprised, worried even, when she sees me. Quickly, her dark eyes flicker back downward, resuming her procedural bow.

Ren begins, studying their form, “I would hope that even with my time away, you all have remained productive in your training.” With a turn of his heel, he comes back the other way, “We shall see how productive it was. Report to the training rinks and we will immediately begin. Dismissed.”

They all rise in unison, making their way down the hallway towards the right. As they pass me, their eyes pull away immediately, as if I am something that is not supposed to be seen. The girl who I locked eyes with first doesn’t even look my direction a second time. Her head is slumped lower than the rest of the Knights. Her black, curly hair blocks my view of her face.

Ren waits until they are all out of the room until he turns to me, for the first time since we entered. “You’re not going to introduce me to the cult?” I ask, calling him out.

He looks towards the door the Knights exited from, making sure they didn’t hear that. He grumbles, “You need to go talk to Snoke.”

I feel my gut drop. “What?”

“Go talk to Snoke. You can contact him up those stairs, the room in the far right corner.” He nods to the stairway to my right, each step leading towards the balcony level. I must look concerned, because he elaborates, “He instructed me to tell you to do so once we arrived.”

I nod apprehensively, looking towards the stairway, noticing how the steps contain the same lights that the walls do. Why didn’t Snoke want to talk to him on The Finalizer? Why did he wait until I arrived here?

“What?” The Commander’s voice breaks me away from my anxieties. He does not sound even the slightest bit concerned for me. But his words hold a weight towards the situation. His voice is Commander-esque, grave. Slightly suspicious. “You normally would not be this uneasy.”

I attempt at convincing, an attempt that may have been fair if it were anybody but Kylo Ren, “The
Supreme Leader is intimidatingly powerful, that is all.”

I begin walking away, but suddenly am stopped by the feeling of a hand wrapping around my arm. Although the grip isn’t too tight, too forceful, I’m taken by so much surprise that my body is nearly yanked towards Ren. The leather of his gloves relax around my bicep, but still linger. I face him, looking up to the mask, forced to stare into the black abyss of where his eyes are supposed to be.

“Whatever it is you’re hiding from him,” He warns, “it will be brought to the light.”

I jerk my arm away, despite him already pulling back. I turn, walking up the stairs with a newfound ease. My words contain a certain venom I did not anticipate, “I am not hiding anything from the Supreme Leader, Commander Ren. Your judgement has failed you.”

I do not look back as I walk up the rest of the stairs and head into the room. No stormtroopers to stop me from entering this time.

Only a certain part of my mind that is telling me to steal Kylo Ren’s ship and get the hell out of here while I am still able to.

As always, I ignore that part of my mind.

The room has a surprisingly warm feeling to it. The lights are tinted orange while there’s a burgundy rug with golden embellishments spread across the floor. The First Order flag hangs against the right and left walls. I approach the empty throne hesitantly, feeling so unaware of protocol. I examine the throne first and foremost, climbing up the few stone steps that leads to it’s platform. I notice a black button on the floor, in front of the throne. I do not notice that my hands are shaking until I reach out to press the button.

Immediately, there’s a holocron that appears on the throne, now just blue static. I scramble down the steps and kneel on the carpet, bowing. A lesson I learned from when I first talked to Snoke. I steady my breath. I was trained by The First Order to conceal my emotions. I am very good at it, better than anyone else. I can do it now, even with Snoke. I just need to disconnect myself from worries. Disassociate. I am Agent 2319. I am here to serve Supreme Leader Snoke. There is nothing more to it.

“Agent,” The old, weighty voice greets, “Arise.”

I obey, standing to my feet slowly, hands behind my back and chin up. The holocron of the Supreme Leader is less intimidating than I anticipated, as it is much smaller than the one that was on The Finalizer. The blue image of the Supreme Leader leans back in the chair, taking me in. I remain steady. I do not analyze his expression. I do not even study his appearance. I just stare straight ahead.

“I have received your previous reports, Agent.” He begins, settling into my company.

I respond, evenly, denying any urge to be urgent towards question, “Were they to your standards, Supreme Leader?”

He pauses, almost as if he’s toying at me with suspense. Finally, he nods. “Yes, yes they were. You have been excelling with the tasks at hand. I have expected nothing less from an Agent of your achievement.”
The approval in his voice sends a wave of relief through me. There’s something so pleasing about such a terrifying person giving me validation. I slightly bow, “Your words are cherished, Supreme Leader.”

He continues, arms tapping at the armrests of the throne, “I know Kylo Ren better than anyone, so I understand that he can be hard to work with. I appreciate your patience with the boy. He often fixes problems by destroying them, which had me worried for your...” He pretends to choose his words carefully, but I’m sure he does not think I need the situation sugar coated, "well-being. But you somehow have managed for him to spare you.”

I nod again. It’s so odd, he talks about Kylo Ren as if he’s a child. No wonder I had the impression that Kylo Ren was a teenage boy after first speaking to Snoke.

The Supreme Leader sits up, pulling himself back into his priorities, “You are probably wondering how to be productive here, where the Knights Of Ren are trained. I informed Ren that you are here to oversee training and formulate a course that could help people withstand force-user mind tricks, shall the Jedi return.” He sits up straighter, “But that’s unnecessary. Purely a cover up for your true intentions, so do not invest too much effort in the idle tasks Ren gives you with the Knights. Just enough to convince.” He pauses, eyeing me up and down. His forehead wrinkles, a signal of his eyebrows raising (if he had eyebrows). The scar down the middle of his forehead creates an odd texture of creases skin. “I take it that you are skilled in assassinations.”

The word takes me off-guard. I respond, “Certainly, Supreme Leader.”

“Excellent.” Snoke’s small mouth curves upward, making his deranged face look even more strange. “Then this next task should be easy. I need you to terminate a Knight.”

I feel my breath catch. I’m killing a Knight of Ren. One of Kylo Ren’s students. Someone who could use the Force to squeeze my intestines through my throat if I posed a threat.

Snoke continues, either not noticing my shock or completely unbothered by it, “Eeson Ren. He has not been showing me much promise. And based on where he is at mentally, I do not see him ever improving. He’s always been indecisive about what he wants. You know well that being indecisive in a war is one step away being a traitor. I need his death to be staged as him running away. I can handle planting the thoughts and worries in the others’ minds that he is considering it. I merely need you to handle the body and make sure it will never be found. You must complete this task while still reporting on Kylo Ren’s state.”

I nod. “Understood, Sir.” I force myself to ask a pressing question, just to make sure, “And Kylo Ren is to know nothing of this?”

Snoke sighs, “Kylo Ren takes training his Knights very seriously. He takes failure very harshly. But failure has always pushed him towards greatness. Which is exactly what I have foreseen he needs.”

I nod, pretending to agree.

“And,” He adds, “If you are not successful, it would be quite unfortunate. You have been doing so well up to this point...” The Supreme Leader lingers on that threat for what seems like forever.

I do not respond.

“Go now.” He orders, nodding towards the door.

And I do.
You guys! I’m super excited, so I signed up for my college classes and I had to choose a humanities class, so I signed up for a creative writing class! I didn’t anticipate doing it, nor did I anticipate being excited about it, but I really am! Even though I have all summer to get through and this fic may be concluded by then (maybe not, there’s a bit to go), if I write any more Kylo fics, it could really help me improve. I’ve never taken any courses or had anyone read my work other than all of you, despite how much I enjoy writing. So yea, all of the comments and kudos are really appreciated, more than you know and more than I can express. It all really encourages me. As someone who is often insecure and overly critical about everything I make, it’s so reassuring. Thanks so much again! This chapter was a lot of introduction to the new setting, but I hope it was still enjoyable! Bless!

Also if your feeling the vibe of the story, here’s an inspired playlist I’m working on (pretty much all of the songs are fairly literal representations of the plot lmao):
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC27TCO
and a Pinterest board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
The Knights of Ren Pt. 1

Chapter Summary

"The best way of keeping a secret is to pretend there isn't one." — Margaret Atwood, The Blind Assassin

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Eerson Ren.” His name on my lips feels less like a name and more like a code. Like it should feel. “That’s our target.”

R8 processes it. “Very well. All of your belongings have been placed into your quarters.”

I walk down the hall, where the Knights were sent. That’s my best guess to where Kylo Ren went. It would’ve been nice if he told me, but I’d be foolish to expect as much. As I walk, I peer into the doors, just finding various empty rooms. Giving in, feeling lost in the maze of halls, I order to R8, “Do a search for them.”

“Initiating body heat scanning.” R8’s head rotates, eyes flicker to a red light.

I lean against the nearest wall, waiting patiently.

The droid locks his head towards the northeast. “Body heat recognized.”

I motion, “Lead the way.”

The droid begins down the halls, carefully stopping to readjust his coordinates every few yards or so. As he walks, he attempts conversation. Though, any conversation with the droid is just an attempt to get information on me. I know this full well. The droid begins, “The quarters seemed quite comfortable. I trust they will be towards your liking.”

“Allright.” I acknowledge, continuing walking.

“Although, the bed is slightly smaller than the one you slept in last night.”

There it is; the catch. I drone, “A shame. I slept well.”

The droid continues down the hall, no waver in its voice, “You never did disclose why exactly you were in there.”

I state, factually, “Because I was having trouble sleeping on the floor and there was a cozy bed in there. Truly, it’s not as interesting as you are trying to make it to be.”

“Kylo Ren’s bed.” The droid elaborates, walking into the room to my right. I begin to hear noises of grunts and fists pounding into some sort of punching-bag material.

I grab the arm of the droid, pulling him back out into the hall with me. “What exactly are you suggesting?”
The droid states, as I can almost visualize the information running through his cables, “According to my studies on human psychology, many humans who are between the ages of 16 and 30 are in their sexual prime.”

I burst out laughing, unable to contain it. I wave the droid on, “Continue.”

The droid pauses, processing, then goes on, “Also, your relationship with Kylo Ren has been all but pleasant. Many humans find sexual pleasure in angst and fetishize their hatred, utilizing the negative energy to engage in sexual intercourse.”

I find myself gaping at the droid. “You think I had hate sex with Kylo Ren?”

The lights in the droid’s eyes blink.

I look into the doorway towards the noises. I catch Kylo Ren stands in front of all the Knights, watching as they punch into bags hanging from the wall. His arms are crossed, analyzing. Suddenly, his head turns, now facing me. We exchange a glance for a moment before I quickly turn back to the droid.

“The quicker you get that out of your head, the better,” I order the droid. Mumbling under my breath, clenching my fists, I continue walking into the training room, “Even the thought of that repulses me. He’s my commanding officer, a superior. Do you realize how inappropriate that is? Plus, he probably wears that mask because he’s so hideous. He’d be awful in bed too, he’d be such an asshole that hate sex wouldn’t even be an enjoyable thing, he would probably finish super early and then-”

“I apologize, Master.” The droid interrupts. “It was merely an assumption based on the data I collected.”

“I do not want to hear anything of it again.” I snarl, approaching Ren. I find myself scanning the line of Knights, looking for any who look like an Eerson Ren type. That’s my one priority. Not convincing R8 that I didn’t have relations with Kylo Ren. I clench my fists. Is that really what the droid thinks of me? This droid that’s been with me for years thinks that I would do such things, not only with someone like Kylo Ren, but out of my missions with The First Order? Technically, it’s forbidden for employees while on base or on duty, but people break that rule very often. It’s barely even a rule. Agents are slightly different. For Agents, we’ve been trained in the whole art of seduction fiasco, so as long as we’re having sex to progress our missions, it’s fair game. But outside of the good of The First Order, it’s not only forbidden, but just a bad idea. It makes things messy, creates problems where there doesn’t need to be problems. And the last thing I need is more problems right now. I don’t know about the other Agents, but I’ve always followed that rule. Does the droid think I’ve strayed so far from my teachings that I would break it? For Kylo Ren?

“Agent,” Ren’s voice comes in, almost like a cue. “I believe Snoke informed you of your mission here.”

I almost forgot. The bullshit mission to get data to start a training program for stopping Jedi mind tricks. “He has.”

Ren nods, leaving it at that.

I ask, “Which Knight is going to assist me?”

Ren retorts at the idea, “I would prefer for you to stay as far away from the Knights as possible. I will assist you with the mind invasion prevention. Alone.”

Out of the corner of my eye, R8’s eyes light up.
I shoot the droid a dirty look before responding to Ren, “So what am I supposed to do in the meantime?”

He crooks his neck, trying to exaggerate his boredom in our conversation. “Have you seen your quarters yet?”

I nod.

“You could go in there and not bother me.”

“No can do,” I shrug, my eyes catching the nearest punching bag. “I want to get the full Knight of Ren experience while I am here. Snoke’s orders were also to accompany you, so I’m not leaving your side, Sir.” It’s not a complete lie. Perhaps an exaggeration. But I’m not beyond doing that to gather the information I need about Eerson.

He grumbles a curse word to himself. In a moment of forgetting his mask is on, he lifts his hand towards his head, seemingly to grab at his temples. When realizing his mistake, he lowers his hand in a clenched fist. “Just refrain from speaking with them.”

I lie, somewhat blatantly this time, “Snoke also ordered for me familiarize myself with them.” I smirk back at him on my way towards the punching bag. “So if you don’t like it, you might wanna take it up with the boss.”

I glance towards the man next to me. It’s an older, middle aged Zabrak, his face tanned and tattoos tracing along his jaw and forehead a tree bark brown shade. Horns placed around his head protrude inward. His eyes remain focused and breathing is distributed steadily with each set of punches into the bag.

I return my attention at the brown leather bag before me, lightly pushing outwards to estimate the strength and power I need to exert. I exhale, getting in stance my usual stance and beginning. I exercise the combinations the academy tattooed on my mind. I still remember them almost perfectly. Something about training like this is nostalgic.

Shortly, it’s cut off by Ren saying, “Let’s move on.”

The Knights turn around, all in unison and file out of the room into the next. I continue getting a good look at each of them, all of them peeking at me as they pass. Except for the one girl I noticed from earlier. She remains shielding me from her view with her dark hair. I analyze her while I have the chance. She’s young, compared to the other knights. Perhaps my age, maybe a year or two younger. I purse my lips. She’s built, but still has a lean femininity to her. The angles on her body remain elegantly curved, rather than the harsh angles found in other, quite muscular Knights. I wonder what she does, or doesn’t do, to not be as built. Maybe she’s new. Maybe she’s Eerson? Which would explain why Snoke wants to get rid of Eerson, if she’s inferior to the other knights.

At this point I have no way of knowing.

I walk beside Ren, following after the Knights into the next room. The room is smaller, having a large padded mat in the middle. There’s pipe railways, blocking off the padded area from the regular floor. I’m guessing it’s some kind of fighting ring.

Ren examines the group of Knights, patiently waiting for him to give orders. I decide to take my place at his side. When I said I wanted the full Knight experience, I didn’t mean being submissive towards his tyrant nature. Which, in fact, doesn’t seem as intense here. On the base, he seems more forceful, more intimidating. Here, he seems so much more respected. The Knights listen intently
when he talks. They stand at attention, but they still remain somewhat relaxed.

Ren ponders for a bit before ordering, “Maes and Volos are first. We have been working on what fighting style suits you best. I want to see you use the strengths we have decided on for you and give it you absolute all. They should be very refined since we last spoke.” Ren adds on, encouraging, “All of you are equally strong. It is a matter of who uses their strength with the most intelligence.”

Two of the Knights step forward, ducking under the metal pipe railing and into the ring. One is the Zabrak I was boxing next to. I’m guessing he’s Volos. He stretches his arms out, preparing. The other, Maes, seems pretty confident. She has tawny skin and intense features. Everything from her cheekbones to the tip of her nose to the corners of her eyes look razor sharp. Her sleek black hair is pulled back into a high ponytail, hitting her shoulders as she statuetes into the ring. She’s slightly taller than him, but he seems more agile than her. However, there’s something so naturally intimidating about the Zabrak. Often, when they fight, they utilize their horns, which hurts like hell when they headbutt you in the gut. Sadly, I know from experience.

Maes and Volos don’t even need Ren to tell them to start fighting. They just go right at it. She swings at him first, but he dodges, leading them into the beginning of their fight.

From what I can tell, she is all force, him more agility. He’s not as powerful, especially against a brute like Maes, but they last long in the ring together due to his quick hits, more subtle, at her. It’s more about endurance than anything. Which, I suppose proves you have a good match.

I find myself wincing as they throw themselves at each other. They’re brutal here. At the academy, were trained with more finesse. So I never really saw two people beating the shit out of each other like this in an organized event. And the fights weren’t as long at the Order, for sure. Ren watches them, unmovning. He glares at the scene analytically. It’s an action of his that I’ve grown to sense, almost. He’s always observing. I catch myself back into previous thoughts of last night, wondering what he would look like right now in this moment with his mask off. It’s so odd that I basically been living with this man and I do not even know what he looks like.

Suddenly, I hear a jarring grunt. My body instinctively flinches, breath catching in my throat. Maes somehow got Volos on the ground, pinning him with all her limbs. That’s game.

Ren acknowledges the victory, “Very well.” Maes holds a hand out to Volos as she stands. Volos takes it, without hesitation. They exit the ring together.

The next two Knights to go are Solaw and Trant. Solaw fights with the same brute force Maes did. Which makes sense. Solaw is huge, his biceps nearly the circumference of my head. He’s a human, with ashy blonde hair and tanned skin. His face looks like it’s chiseled, that made of stone. Trant seems more of the wise type. He can block a large amount of Solaw’s punches, while timing out the perfect time to strike Solaw in a critical zone, rather than wasting energy on relentless offense. He’s a Twi’lek with long blue lekkus. I can tell that the man is older, just like Volos. But they both seem pretty fit.

After another lengthy fight, Trant manages to take down Solaw, merely by wearing down his stamina while conserving his own energy. I glance towards the three remaining Knights. One of them is Eerson. It’s just now a matter of who.

Ren calls out the next name, “Lex.”

The girl who I noticed first before enters the ring with a calm demeanor. She reaches to the tight curls her long black hair, once blocking my view of her face from the side. As she ties the hair back, her arms above her head and hands pulling at her hair, I get a full view of her face. Her skin is young and fresh, something uncommon for anyone involved in this war. Her large brown eyes remind me
of an animal’s, seemingly so innocent, yet alert. I find myself staring at her.

Ren’s voice snaps me out of it, “Eerson.”

Eerson Ren separates himself from the remaining Knight. He’s just as muscular as the rest, but right from the start I can see insecurity in him. A lack of confidence the other Knights possessed. His eyes are wary as he looks at Lex, standing in the ring. He brings a palm to the back of his neck, rubbing any knots out of his olive skin. He looks middle aged, the skin around his eyes and mouth slightly sagging. He’s the shortest of all the Knights. His bald head reveals the beads of sweat forming on his scalp.

As they begin to fight, I analyze his tactics. The information could be useful if things get messy. He could pass any fighting class. But there’s nothing special I can pick up on in his style. It’s all quite predictable, while Lex’s style is spontaneous. She’s quick, zipping around his punches to strike at him in weak spots, a skill she must rely on due to her lack of physical strength. Eerson doesn’t use her obvious weakness to his advantage, though. He could easily overpower her. He just seems too hesitant towards anything he does, unable to keep up with her quick jabs. There’s something about Lex that is explosive, her fighting passionate and full of energy.

In no time, she gets him on the ground with a kick to his jugular, one that he could’ve easily blocked. I bite my lip, awaiting Kylo Ren’s scorn on the man.

However, it never comes. Instead, the two exit the rink without a word. Lex helps him up, apologizing quietly to him. Eerson looks away from Ren and I as he passes us.

I notice Ren shift his weight, before calling up, “Tiru.”

The last Knight approaches the ring. He’s a Kel Dor, with the classic apparatus made for his species surrounding his mouth and eyes. This makes him near impossible to read. All there is to go off of is body language. And his body language is confident. Shoulders back, almost boasting. He seems thirsty for a fight.

Ren scans the Knights, “Who volunteers to go twice?”

All of them step forward, willing. I catch Eerson glancing away, afraid of being picked.

“Master,” The Kel Dor interrupts. His voice sounds more like a snarl with that mouth piece.

Ren responds, “Yes?”

“May I request a fight?”

This is the cockyshit attitude I expected from all the Knights when I came here.

Ren, just as impossible to read as ever, replies after hesitating, “I don’t see a problem with it.”

For a moment, I think he’s going to pick Eerson. Just to be an asshole. Eerson is obviously the weakest and Tiru is obviously the most pretentious.

But he doesn’t pick Eerson. He merely raises his index finger, pointing directly at me. “I want to fight the First Order girl.”

I have to admit, I definitely wasn’t expecting that. I stand stilled, looking towards Ren.

Before Ren can say no, Tiru bargains in his gravelly voice, “It would provide me with a chance to go
against someone who is trained with the academy. Fighting against the military is something we often do. I feel that it would be beneficial to my training.” I don’t feel anything towards the challenge, really. I don’t care to agree to it. Until, that is, he adds, “If she does not last long, I could fight a Knight as well.”

Immediately, as if it were a call to action, I approach the ring. He thinks there’s a chance I won’t last long? I know Ren is fuming at this. He doesn’t want me to engage with any of his Knights, let alone fight them. But Ren can’t tell me no. He knows I’ll just reject his demands in front of all his Knights, and then they’ll be forced to see their Master being disrespected. Not only disrespected, but being disrespected and letting the one who disrespected him walk away alive. For some reason, me knowing this about Ren only fuels me for the fight more. Not that I feel like there’s something I need to prove to him. But there’s something I want to prove to him. He knows this Tiru guy. I wonder if he thinks I can take him.

I step over the piping around the ring, something the other Knights went under. I tuck stray hairs back into my standard First Order bun with a sly smile at Tiru. “We’ll see.” I taunt. The other Knights look towards me as if I’m insane. The same look the Officers gave me when I spoke with Kylo Ren. I glance towards Ren briefly before looking back at Tiru.

I raise my fists into position and relax my knees. Tiru looks me up and down before raising his fists as well. I give him a nod, as if to tell him to get on with it.

Exactly as I perceived, his fist goes for my waist, right side. I sidestep away, into the path of a following punch at my left side. It’s easy to dodge with a pivot of my foot. He punches upwards, for my face, but it’s stopped by my forearm. Another punch to my face stopped by my other forearm. I take the opportunity to punch up at his nose. He blocks it traditionally by using his forearms as a shield. Quickly, I use the chance given to uppercut, under his defense, striking his chin.

He retaliates back, catching a breath, as I feel the shock from the metal of his mouth piece race through my knuckles up my whole arm. “Damn,” I exhale. I shake out my fist, smirking at the man, realizing such a small defeat already picked at his fragile ego.

He continues staying distanced, almost as if he’s letting himself seethe before striking at me again. I could push forward, but I choose to play it cool. I think that if I seem more bored of the fight, it’ll only piss him off more. It’ll make him more messy, which I can easily counter with my more intelligent fighting. I raise my eyebrow, as if to ask if he’s ever going to return to the fight.

With that he charges back at me, as if to tackle me. I sidestep out of the way. He turns back towards me, swinging his arm around. I punch at his inner elbow and his arm going limp at the impact. I swing my fist towards his jaw. Left first. Then right. Both are blocked and he grabs onto my arms. His fingers close tightly around my biceps and he swings me around, an attempt to corner me. I plant my feet and his leg kicks up, towards my abdomen. I focus my keeping my core firm as his foot makes impact with my stomach. I push my body forward onto his foot, then flip myself up. As he falls back onto the ground, I flip over his body and my back slams on the ground out of the corner, out of his grasp.

I stand back up, turning around and I am meant with him hurling a fist towards my midsection. I use his momentum to grab his arm, pulling him downward into my knee. I knee him once, twice, and then one final time before he pushes my other leg out from under me. I almost fall, but I manage to keep my grounded while ducking under another one of his swings.

He goes into a left-right-uppercut combo that I recently used. I block them all. When he swings at me again, I duck, colliding my fist into his gut. He grunts before lunging at me again. I step around, kicking his gut, adding more pain to the area. His anger is evident on his face, forehead wrinkling
down towards his eye piece. He kicks up at me from the right. I block it, spinning off of his leg into another kick at his exposed jaw. His body wavers, standing perpendicular to mine. I kick at his gut from in front, then knees from behind, then face from the front.

Stumbling backwards, he turns back to face me. Exhale. I flinch my right fist downward, causing him to block his lower section. This opens up his upper body with perfect access. I swing my upper body with perfect access. I swing my left foot up, placing it on his shoulder, then throw my right foot upwards, twisting his neck between my ankles as my body twirls. He slams to the ground, while I roll away, returning to fighting position.

The man heaves on the ground, consumed by frustration. By humiliation. I crack my knuckles together, waiting for him to return.

“That’s enough.” Ren’s voice booms from across the room.

Tiru struggles to pull himself off the ground, onto his feet. He practically begs, “I can finish her, Master. Using your guidance, I can-”

“I said that’s enough.” Ren’s voice is full of a poison that even I nearly flinch at. “You are blinded by your arrogance.”

I lend Tiru a hand, reaching down to his crumpled body. He teeters onto his feet, ignoring my offer. Just now do I realize how out of breath I am. A drop of sweat drips down the length of my back. Exiting the ring, I notice the muscular blonde human, Solaw, grin slyly at me in approval. I turn my head to the side, somewhat flattered by the expression. The Knights have seemed pretty distant, it’s so odd for one to be friendly towards me.

Ren impatiently interjects, “We must eat before meditation.”

I catch up to him, leading the Knights out of the arena room.

He hushes his voice, scolding, “Do not fool yourself into thinking you are eating with them.”

I roll my eyes, going along with the whispering conversation, “Oh, you allow me to beat them up but draw the line at some fine dining?”

Ren’s agitated by the response, squeezing his fist then releasing it at his side. His quiet nature indicates that he doesn’t want the other Knights to hear our encounter, something I already knew full well. “Would it really be so difficult for you to just take your food to your room and not be such an inconvenience?”

I test the situation, raising my voice, “You can’t just lock me away from them, Comma-”

“Shhh,” He shushes, his steps forward increasing in speed. “Fine. You can eat with them. But if you embarrass me or The First Order, just for your own entertainment or whatever it is that you’re doing-”

“I thought that I was the one humoring you, Commander.” I correct. “Is this not funny to you anymore?”

The only response he has is an exasperated, “Just…” He mumbles, “Please.”

The request takes me off guard. He’s always order me to do things, or not do things. That’s how he is with everyone. I wonder when the last time he said that word was. And to who he said it to. I say, unable to mask the soft sincerity in my voice, “I won’t.”
The food is complete shit. Just the usual bread and water portions. There’s extra protein supplements that the Knights take, but I pass on it. I catch Ren grab the package of bread from the counter out of the corner of my eye.

I approach him, leaning up against the edge of the wall, looking out towards the long table the Knights have spread themselves amongst. There are some obvious groups of friends. Maes, Solaw and Eerson sit together. Further down the table Lex and Trant sit across from one another. And Tiru basically is pouting at the end of the table by himself. I ask Ren, eyeing the bread in his hands, “How do you…” I glance at the mask, “Is there a tube or something you can just suck up food in or what?”

Ren looks at me, silently.

I didn’t mean to be an ass, I am slightly interested and trying to make some conversation. “How do you eat?” I simplify.

“Alone.” He states, turning on his heel to exit the room. He orders the droid on his way out, “R8, this way.”

Damn. I snatch a piece of bread from the basket and make my way towards the table. I feel like I’m in the academy again, during lunch break. An odd, overwhelming sense of self-doubt creeps into my mind as I approach the Knights. I do not care for their approval. I’ve blocked out that yearning years ago. But the trivial nature of the situation is one that I did not expect. Especially the nature including me not having a role to play. I just have to be here and learn about Eerson. There’s no one I need to pretend to be, no character to hide behind.

I decide to sit down, slightly distanced from Maes, Solaw and Eerson. I look up to the group, “Mind if I sit here?”

Solaw is the first to respond. He grins warmly. “Be our guest.”

Maes eyes me up and down, nodding her head. The light above us reflects almost blindingly against her sleek, black ponytail. She leans across the table, saying under her breath, “You fucking killed it against Tiru, we were all dazzled.”

I shrug, flattered, “He asked to fight me, I do not know what he expected.”

Eerson contributes, “He expected to win.” He chuckles, “But you showed him.”

“So,” Solaw says, his mouth stuffed with a chunk of bread. He turns away from me, across the table to the others. “Are we gonna ask her?”

Maes responds, exasperatingly, “We haven’t even established our bets yet.”

“What are we even going to bet with?” Eerson interjects.

I lean back in my chair, “What exactly are we betting on?”

Solaw swallows the bread, then sighs deeply. He turns to me, looking me dead straight in the eye. With the direct eye contact, I notice how intensely green his eyes are. It is only brought out more by his tawny skin. “We’re making bets on what Master looks like.”
I marvel, genuinely surprised, “You all haven’t seen his face? Not even once?”

“Well, the three of us haven’t.” Maes explains. “The only one of the Knights to see his face is Lex.”

I look over to the girl, picking small bites of her bread. Her fingers are slender, nails all clean and rounded with precision. She listens to Trant talk across from her intently, nodding, and then taking another bite.

Solaw continues, explaining, “She had to go on a mission alone with him once, because she’s super talented with healing. She can just fix open wounds and broken bones with her mind.”

I pull my eyes away from her, turning back to Solaw, “That’s amazing.”

Solaw leans his head onto his hand, leaning in closer to me, “Well, when she came back, we asked her how it went and all and we eventually got out of her that she saw his face. But she wouldn’t tell us more than that.”

Interesting. I look away from Solaw to Lex again. There’s something truly mesmerizing about the way she looks, the way she moves. She has an effortless grace to her, her eyelashes long and curly, fluttering as she blinks. Her lips full, ripe, stretching with small, shy smiles. Rounded cheeks, rounded eyes, everything about her geometrically sound. I can’t help but wonder why Kylo Ren would have his mask off around her. The answer seems obvious to me, but the answer I’m thinking of seems… I don’t know. For some reason my mind rejects it.

My eyes travel further down the table to catch Tiru. His gaze is locked on mine, unwavering. I look away, only to be left the with the remaining feeling of his glare.

Eerson says, “So what information we can’t get out of her, we figured we could get out of you.”

I shrug my shoulders, admitting, “I haven’t seen him without the mask either.”

Maes gapes at me, “Why the hell are you dating a man who you haven’t seen unmasked!? It’s sweet and all, but how can you do that?!”

A piece of bread gets lodged in the back of my throat at the presumption. I cough to the side, nearly passing out. “I’m not dating him.” I wheeze, trying to regain steady breathing.

Eerson elbows Maes, scolding something under his breath.

Solaw tilts his head, “Then why did he bring you here?”

“I’m here to study some of your training and develop a program that can help First Order soldiers resist Jedi tricks.”

Solaw winces at Maes, “Way to make rash assumptions.”

Maes crinkles her nose. “You were the one who first suggested it, very disappointedly, might I add.”

Solaw waves her off. I raise an eyebrow to him, curiously. He redirects the conversation, “That means that there’s still hope for our conspiracy theory about Master and Lex.”

I try not to look overly interested.

Eerson smirks at me, elaborating “She’s definitely his favorite. Just watch how he treats her compared to the rest of us. And she looks at him with such conviction, you know? We all truly
respect the Master, but she is so… It’s hard to explain, man.”

Solaw tilts his glass to Eerson. They click the glasses together while Solaw says, “Love is hard to explain.”

I bite into my bread, trying to keep my mind away from any thoughts I have about Lex and Ren. I’m sure it’s not actually a thing. Just Knight of Ren gossip to keep them amused. “So,” I spin the subject 180 degrees. “Tell me what it’s like to be the infamous Knights of Ren.”

I eventually depart from the Knights. The three I talked with seemed like fun loving people. They all got along fairly well with each other. Like best friends. There’s a certain unity between them that I didn’t expect from what seemed like such a scary cult. I sigh, walking through the halls of the temple. I should go up to my room to rest while they meditate. Meditation is something I really don’t want to intrude on, nor can I be a part of. I turn the corner, towards where I remembered the stairway and come face to face with Kylo Ren.

Ren stops in the middle of the hallway. “Agent,”

I turn to him. “Yes?”

“I’ll meet you in your room for your mission tonight.” He states.

I nod, “Very well.”

He continues walking back down the hallway without any formal send-off. I watch as the black cape flows with the momentum of his body. He tilts his head downwards, looking down at his feet while he walks.

It’s an odd thing to notice, but I’ve never seen him do that before.

I turn the other way, walking back to my room.

Chapter End Notes

holy fucking character introduction. damn. also we're 40k in this and reader still hasn't seen kylo face let alone kylo dick. damn. i hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, despite all the expository stuff going on. comes with the change of settings and change characters, i guess. thanks for reading!!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
The Knights Of Ren Pt. 2

Chapter Summary

“People are more complicated than the masks they wear in society.” — Robert Greene, The Art of Seduction

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I sit in my room for hours, waiting for Kylo Ren. Which, consequently gives me time to think. To analyze. Something that I haven’t done much of in awhile.

I find myself back on the Finalizer, when I first was assigned to meet him. He was late. I was pissed. Not much has changed, despite whatever I fooled myself into thinking. I’m not sure what I should think of our partnership. When Ren saved me, revealing that he was amused by my quips, it was like a permission to engage in this cat-mouse banter with him. It’s a relationship that I’ve never really had with anyone before. I know that if I were to talk to others the way I talk to Ren, I would be executed for disrespect on the spot. I don’t think I enjoyed it at all, at first. But now, I feel as though it’s grown on me. Not like the spreading of warmth provided by a sun inching itself into my skin through the clouds, more the spreading of a disease. One that gives you rashes and boils and makes you feel like shit when you reflect on it’s manifestation in your body. Most of all, I hate myself for craving more of the conversation. I think it’s oddly fun only calling him “commander” out of sarcasm. I love not being under this constant pressure to have droid vocabulary with him. I wonder if this is how people feel with others outside of the war all the time. If they have conversation that doesn’t have any purpose whatsoever, no agenda, and they are just able to enjoy it.

I glance to the droid standing in the corner of the room, currently in rest mode. I clear my throat, waking R8 up. His joints slowly bend and his eyes light up.

“R8,” I find myself relaxed at the familiar sight for it. “thank you.”

“May I ask what for, Master?” The droid politely responds.

I exhale, laying back onto the bed, falling comfort in the sheets that pillow up around me. I stare at the metal ceiling. “You’re a very good droid. Even when I haven’t been the best Agent.”

The droid pauses before approaching me, kneeling down at the edge of the bed. It begins, “I have analyzed a lot of self-doubt in you since we began this mission. More self-doubt than I have ever caught with you. I know this mission is a difficult one, with the nature of it. It sounds so easy, but the things that you have been enduring are nothing like you have faced,” There’s empathy in the droid’s voice. Something that is quite rare for anyone I’m around, especially a droid. “Just be aware that I truly believe that no one else could be doing what you do, with such perfection. I have data of every single member of The First Order. I thank the stars that I was assigned to you, out of everyone.”

Without thinking, I sit up to wrap my arms around the droid, burying my head in it’s shoulder. For a moment, when I feel the coolness of it’s metal plating, I remember how it’s just a computer. But when I feel it’s arms wrap around me, that thought floats away. I remember back when I was a child, first assigned to the droid. I was such a harsh child, feeling so pressured to hide the fact that having
my own droid excited me. I never could express it, but the familiarity the droid provides has always been home to me, in the whole mess of this war.

Suddenly, there’s a knock at the door.

I pull away from the droid, smiling warmly before rolling off the bed and approaching the door. My fingers linger over the button to open it for a moment. Before I could press the button, I pull my fingers back, so that I can adjust my uniform to perfection. I then press the button.

But Kylo Ren is not the person I see.

“Hey!” Solaw presses his forearm against the doorway, leaning forward. His smile is just as kind and inviting as usual. “Are you doing anything right now?”

I hesitate, slightly stepping back into my room. “Why?”

“A few of us were gonna start up a Dejarik tournament, you wanna join?”

Sighing, I consider it. Eerson might be there. And the sooner I get closer to him, the easier it will be when the time comes to kill him. Additionally, it’s been a long time since Ren and I last spoke. I had no clue meditation would take so long. Wait. My attention goes back to Solaw. “How long have you been done with mediation?”

Solaw shrugs, estimating, “A few hours. Why?”

I narrow my eyes, “Where’s Commander Ren?”

“He’s still doing individual meditations. I don’t think I’ve seen Tiru or Lex around, so one or both of them are probably still with him.”

Of course Lex would be the one to still be there. It’s so odd to imagine such a tough, angst ridden man having a crush. Especially on what seems like such a polite, quiet girl. Before I can delve further into the thought, I step out of my quarters, calling out to R8, “If Ren stops by, tell him to contact me through the Comm-Link.”

“Very well, Master.” R8 replies, happily.

I begin down the hall, following Solaw. “Does it usually take this long?” I elaborate, “Mediation?”

Solaw tucks a thumb into his belt, holding the fabric of his dark robes in place. With each step, the fabric sways back and forth, somewhat like a metronome keeping time. “Not usually. You pissed Tiru off a lot though, so that might explain why he’s still there. Who knows with Lex.”

Yeah, who knows. My eyes look downward, watching my boots with each step.

Solaw changes the subject, “I don’t think I got your name by the way. I apologize for being so impolite to not ask for it before.”

“You’re fine,” I look up, glancing towards the man. He’s looking at me with eyes of sincerity. I clear my throat, “Agent 2319.”

He chuckles, “That’s your name?”

I look away, “Yeah, for now. It gets changed with my rank, but I don’t see my rank changing anytime soon.” I don’t tell him that my rank won’t change because Agents never progress. Once you become an Agent, that’s the end of it. You’re destined to die on the job somehow. It doesn’t make for
very good small talk.

He guides me through the hallway, briefly placing his hand against the small of my back. I straighten up at his touch. With that, he pulls his hand back, rubbing his neck. “Well, Agent 2319, I hope you’re ready to get your game on. I’m actually the undefeated champion of Dejarik.”

“You’re on.” I respond to his banter with playfulness, but I can’t help but continually reach for the comm-link in my ear, readjusting it just in case Ren calls.

I find myself on a couch in between Solaw and Eerson Ren, watching Maes and Trant battle their monsters or whatever. I’ve never been a Dejarik fan, really. It seems easy enough. I suppose it looks fun. I just never really sat down to play it.

I have to admit, I have not been paying much attention to the rounds that have occurred here either. What I have been doing is trying to talk more to Eerson. Get a relationship established with him, so I can eventually get him alone sometime. I haven’t decided how I’m going to do it yet. I don’t think I want to kill him too soon, or else it’ll be too much of a coincidence that he disappears a day after I arrive. Plus, Snoke said something about helping me cover it up, making him disappearing seem suspected. I have no clue what he intends on doing, but I’m going to make sure I give him enough time to get that situation dealt with. I want all my bases covered.

Maes defeats Trant’s next monster, pretty ruthlessly too. I join in the howling of the Knights next to me, doubling over in excitement. Eerson glances my direction, watching my reaction just as excited as his. I catch eye contact with him for a split second and he remains smiling at me. His face is speckled in dark facial hair, standing out against the olive of his skin. I smile back, but only for as long as I can before I feel sick to my stomach.

Suddenly, I feel an arm reach around my back. My attention turns to Solaw, leaning down next to me. He mummers, more in my ear than at my face, “Me and you, up next?”

I pull myself up and out of his reach, off of the couch. “Unless you’re too scared.”

His eyes look me up and down, then he smirks. “Sweetheart, you’re gonna have to do better than that if you’re trying to scare me.”

I find my seat at the game table. A thought in the back of my mind ponders the fact of how he’ll react when his best friend disappears. I wonder if he’ll suspect anything suspicious. I wonder if he’ll be scared. I sigh, looking across the board of the table. “Give me the lowdown on how to play.”

Maes’ eyes widen at the request. “You’ve never played Dejarik? Ever?”

I shake my head, lips pursed.

Looking down at the holographic pieces and round checkerboard, I’m brought back to the Academy. The game was huge there, especially with all of us kids. I never had time to play it, with all my studies and coursework. But in between my classes, or during the free time I spent studying, I almost always saw groups of kids raving over the game. Part of me was drawn to it, to how happy they became over such a silly competition. Competition with no real consequence.

“Well,” Solaw begins, pulling me out of my head. “Each monster has different movement, defense and offensive capabilities. The computer will assign you your pieces at random. Basically, you want
to destroy my pieces before I destroy yours. Each turn you can choose to attack or move. You can move around the orbits and/or up and down the rays. It’s really easy once you get into it.” He explains.

“Got it.” Is that really what everyone raves about? It seems so simple. “You go first.”

He presses the button on the side of the table, randomizing our players. I ended up with the Strider, Molator, Glhkkh and Houjix. I hear the Knights back at the table already muttering about my line up under their breath. Solaw decides to move his Molator forward, towards my K’lor. I shrug, going ahead with my K’lor to attack his Molator. I search the option on my projection screen and click “to-the-death.”

Solaw leans back, cackling as the two monsters fight vigorously. He glances up at me, his eyes even more crystal clear blue than usual, due to the lights of the holocron. “Usually people don’t start the game off with a to-the-death fight.”

I lean my head on my palm, looking across at him, “Well, I’d like to think I’m more spontaneous than other people.” I’m not. At all.

“Oh, you are?” He leans back, stretching his arms behind his head. “I can respect a girl like that.”

I look down to the board right as my K’lor is ripped in half by his Molator. That is exactly why I am not spontaneous. Spontaneous actions lead to unpredictable consequences. The room laughs at the early defeat and I just smile at Solaw. “I’m giving you a head start. You'll thank me later.”

Solaw knows I clearly do not care any less about this game. If I did care, it would get competitive and ugly and I know these people don’t want that. They want someone likeable. So I begin creating this character in my mind, this Agent that is designed just for them. Someone they’ll think is cool, sexy and badass.

Solaw chuckles, pointing at my Strider. “Move this guy up to defend your other monsters.”

I raise my palm to him, silencing. “I don’t need your help, everything is going as planned.”

“Well, I’m looking at your placement and I know exactly how to annihilate you.”

Teasing, I move my Houjik forward. “How about now?”

“That was the worst thing you could’ve done for yourself.” He laughs, moving his Molator back, sparing me.

“I just don’t think you understand the strategy of the game very-”

The door opens with a swoosh and I look over to see Lex walk in, greeting her friends with a warm smile, then looking up and catching me. She tries to make it not obvious as she looks away, not smiling anymore. And I try to make it less obvious as I clench my jaw to see Kylo Ren standing in the doorway behind her.

Ren is looking directly at me, I know it.

Before he can say anything, I rise to my feet, out of the chair, nodding towards the Knights. “I regretfully must leave this game.”

Solaw chuckles, “You lucked out, Agent 2319.”
I feel my cheeks heat up, my feet feeling cemented between Kylo Ren and Solaw. I laugh, somewhat too obnoxiously, “You wish.” I manage to drag my heavy steps to the doorway, towards Ren.

As soon as I’m fully out, Ren closes the door behind me, slamming his thumb on the button. I follow him down the hallway in silence. Neither of us say a word. I think of ways to engage in small talk a few times, but then decide better of it.

When walking into my room, I find a plate of steamed vegetables and meat on the counter. I look at R8, standing across the room and sigh, “Oh my god, how’d you get me real food?”

R8 doesn’t answer, merely looking at Kylo Ren.

Ren crosses across the room, straight to the kitchen table. He says, so obviously unattached, “The Knights are on a very strict diet, one vastly different than the Agent’s. I figured that you would be in a better mood if you received food more like your regular meal plan.”

I don’t mention that I don’t have a regular meal plan. Nor do I ask if he dropped it off with Lex. But both of the thoughts linger. I take a bite of the veggies, bringing it to the table to sit across from him. The food is seasoned, like something you could order at a restaurant. “This is really good,” I say, my mouth full. “Thanks.”

He quips back, defensively, “Supreme Leader Snoke ordered me to do it.”

I swallow my bite, pulling my eyes away from the food to the dark slit in his mask. “Supreme Leader of The First Order commanded you to take the time to prepare fine dining for me, rather than just tell me to eat the food provided here already?”

Ren scoffs, looking away from me, breaking whatever kind of eye contact we held. “I know it’s absurd. If you have questions, take it up with him.”

I don’t mention to him that I know he’s lying.

I start cutting into the meat. “So what is involved in training the mind to be resistant to Jedi or whatever?”

The roll of Ren’s eyes is evident in his voice. “Hurry up finish eating, I don’t want to spend all night here.”

“Right,” I sneer, “I’d hate to intrude on your plans.” I wonder if my accusation was too obvious. But I don’t think it was, due to his lack of response. I bite down on a piece of the meat, the juices immediately filling my mouth with such a rich flavor. My eyes flutter and I basically melt into the seat. It’s very excellent. I tease, shoving another piece into my mouth, “Did Supreme Leader Snoke cook this himself?”

“Would you just eat your goddamn food?” There’s the Commander harshness in his voice I’m so used to only hearing other people get the worse of.

I look down, not feeling like fueling the conversation. If he wants to be an ass, I don’t feel as obligated to deflect it today. Especially knowing that, most likely, the whole reason he’s impatient with me is just to continue whatever it was he was doing with Lex. I stab another piece of meat and stuff it into my mouth, angry at how delicious it is. Maybe these are leftovers from his “mediation” date with her. My fork nearly bends at the pressure I use to grab the next piece. What girl would even put up with this shit? How could she do it? Whatever part of me that missed Ren’s presence earlier has vanished. How could I forget how much I despised the man?
I finish the plate, Kylo Ren still sitting across from me, silent. I hand the dish to R8, to walks outside with it, taking it to a place Kylo Ren must’ve already told him about. Ren has been with my droid often lately. Just one more thing he’s trying to make unholy in my life.

“You wish to know how to avoid Jedi mind tricks?” He asks, leaning forward in his seat.

I really don’t. But for the sake of me needing to, I nod.

He responds, “Don’t be a weak-minded fool.” He stands to his feet, exiting the room.

I protest, lunging in front of the door before he can exit. “I don’t think the stormtrooper program has any anti-weak-minded fool classes, so you’re going to have to elaborate.”

Ren grunts, his annoyance so dramatic, “This is the most ridiculous excuse for bringing you to Korriban I have ever heard of.” The statement isn’t necessarily said to me, just to the situation.

Responding nevertheless, I squint my eyes “Obviously not if Snoke thinks it’s necessary.” Which, I suppose Snoke doesn’t think it’s necessary. He straight up told me it was just an excuse for me to be here, which Ren clearly can see. However dumb of a reason it is for me to be here, if Snoke ordered it, it’s to be. That’s the one thing this plan has going for it. No one dares to question Snoke. So Snoke can say whatever bullshit he wants and everyone will go with it.

Ren starts pacing back and forth in my room. Each step is more like a stomp, one that I can feel in the soles of my feet from all the way to where I’m standing. “You’re just going to have to stay in your room from now on.” He mumbles, not quite announcing yet.

I blink, my mouth a gape, “Excuse me?”

He finally stops pacing and turns towards me, crossing his arms. “I am not allowing you to associate with any of the Knights, ever again.”

I huff, unable to formulate anything else other than, “Are you joking?”

“No more talking to them, listening to them, or even looking at them.” He stands there like stone. There’s nothing human in the way he’s looking at me. No head tilt. I can barely see him breathing.

This truly pisses me off. I approach him, fists clenched at my side, “You are explicitly ordering me to not be friends with them. Do you realize how…” I search for the word, finally just deciding on, “mean that is? How completely malicious you are?”

Ren merely laughs at the accusation, stepping away from me, “Don’t be ridiculous. I could not be bothered with who you decide to make friends with.”

“Why then? Their training is fine, I’m not distr-”

“You are distracting them.” He cuts in, his voice full of pure bitter.

He’s being over-dramatic. Maybe overprotective of the Knights. Whatever it is, it’s not fair for him to blame it on me. “I am not.”

He side steps around me, making for the door, “I can hear their thoughts, Agent. They are distracted.”

I yell back at him, before he can leave. “What are they thinking that’s such a huge interference that you decide to take such unnecessary measures?”
He just snorts, reaching out to press the button of the door.

I do something that I don’t even think about. Spontaneous. I feel like I’m back in Dejarik, deciding to press the “fight-to-the-death” option. I grab Ren’s wrist before he can push the button, turning him back around to face me. He obliges, not fighting back at all. Perhaps due to his shock by my movement. The gathered fabric of his sleeve is tough against my fingertips. I practically throw his wrist back down at his side. I snarl, my neck craning to reach his mask, “Don’t do that, you have to tell me. Or I will ask them myself. You wouldn’t want to make a big deal of this, especially to the Knights, would you?”

He pauses for a long time. He knows I have him cornered. Now, it’s just a matter of him unable to face the defeat in the situation.

I push the threat further, ordering, “Tell me.”

I can hear his breathing now, it’s heavy at first and then it stops all together. He looks away, unable to look me in the eye as he utters, “Lust.”

An uncontainable burst of laughter emerges from my gut.

He stands there, unmoving. Unamused.

My words fly from my mouth, in between hysterical laughter, “Are you twelve fucking years old?”

He begins, absolutely boiling, “I wouldn't have to take such drastic measures if you-”

I interrupt immediately, “You secluded a bunch of sexually active adults on this godforsaken planet. Are you honestly surprised that the moment they see another girl for the first time in god knows how long they feel somewhat lustful?”

His arms clench tighter around his chest. I can basically feel his angry tension radiating off of his presence. “Don’t act like you knew nothing of this.”

I could somewhat tell that Solaw was coming on to me. But I didn’t want to mistake his kindness for advances, so I just ignored it. I roll my eyes, “Solaw is going to go back to his quarters, get one off, and then be over it.”

“It’s not just Solaw.” He barks.

This makes me go quiet for a moment. I just stare at him, catching the light reflect in the silver lines of his mask. I have to admit, I am genuinely surprised. It’s an effort to not seem too pleased with myself when I ask, “Who else?”

He doesn’t respond.

I swallow. “Well?”

He shifts his weight. He tries to say it so military, but I can feel the insecurity in his modulated voice, “Eerson, Tiru and Maes.”

Another laugh escapes from me, so much more intensely this time.

“And you accuse me of being twelve,” Ren scowls, stomping across my quarters back to the kitchen table. He leans against the edge, sitting down like a defeated child. A scary, tall, dark defeated child.

My mind yells at me that four out of the eight Knights of Ren are attracted to me. Eerson being one
of them. This makes my job so much easier than I anticipated. Sighing, I smile back at Ren, saying warmly, “I think you’re overreacting.”

Ren’s head snaps towards me, “What do you want me to do?”

“I don’t even see why it’s a problem. Are they not allowed to be… you know-”

Before I can elaborate more, he interrupts, “They’re encouraged to. Passion is a source of power.”

“Wonderful,” I joke, an attempt to lighten the mood, “I’ll go show them a good time and they’ll be more powerful than ever! What’s the problem?”

Ren’s obviously uncomfortable by the comment, shifting against the table. I make note of it. “Grow up, please.” He spits.

I stare at him blankly.

Suddenly, I hear the door open behind me. R8 walks back into the room, teetering towards me. “Master, is everything alright?”

“Oh, I’m great!” I answer, beaming at Ren.

“Master Ren?” The droid asks.

Ren grunts, mumbling under his breath, pushing off of the table to stand. He sneers at the droid, “Tell your Master to leave my Knights alone.”

R8 tilts his head in confusion, questioning Ren before he can leave my quarters, “Master was ordered by Supreme Leader Snoke to survey and study your Knights. I’m afraid that she cannot obey your request, due to Supreme Leader’s position.”

I stand where he once was, cockily leaning against the table. It’s nice to be on the right side of R8’s facts, for once with Ren. I summarize, trying to wrap my mind around Ren’s behavior, “So, let me get this straight: you don’t want me to associate with them because they’re attracted to me. Even though they’re allowed to be attracted to me. And even though it makes them more powerful.”

Ren looks at me like that’s exactly what he intended to communicate, despite it not making any sense.

“Wait,” I glide a hand into my hair, pushing back the messy stray hairs. “How do you even know it’s me they’re attracted to? You told me you only can see what emotions others are feeling. That the only way you see details is when you make the effort to enter their mind or whatever. For all you know, they could just be attracted to you.”

He groans, the cringe evident in his voice. "No, stars, I know it's you. During meditations I can see..." He painfully gets out the words, "I go deeper into their psyche.”

Oh. I have to bring the back of my hand up to my mouth to conceal another laugh. The whole situation is quite hysterical. “That’s so embarrassing for them,” I exhale, composing myself. “What did you see? Like what were they thinking?”

“We’re done here.” He growls, exiting the room for good.

With his presence gone, I only hear the humming of the lights above me. There’s a sort of energy
that’s exited the room. Everything clicks. It wasn’t about the Knights. It was about Ren having to hear the Knights think about me. I grimace at the awkwardness of the situation, feeling so utterly humiliated for the Knights. And, I guess it's sort of embarrassing for me too. I shake my head at the thoughts, my eyes catching my bed. The mattress practically calls for my body to lay down. Piece by piece, I shed off each garment of my uniform, tossing them into the far corner of the room. Reaching up, I pull at the band that keeps my hair gathered, letting my hair fall down, brushing against my back.

I crawl under the covers of the bed and pull the blankets up to my chin. “Can you grab the lights?” I ask, glancing towards R8.

R8 crosses across the room, switching the lights off, leaving only darkness. He then returns to the kitchen wall, powering down.

I stare up at the pitch black ceiling, my eyes adjusting to the change of light. And I am back into analyzing and thinking. Right where I left off, but this time I have quite more things to think about.

The main thing I go over is exactly how to kill Eerson Ren.

And now that I established how, it is now only a matter of doing it.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter is alternatively called "some memey angst before the shit hits the fan". thank you all sooo much for reading, the comments make my day and encourages me to write write write. i love to know what you're all thinking about it, it helps me out so much. and i especially can't wait for you guys to read this next chapter! it's gonna be crazyyyyy hopefully maybe im hyping it too much but we'll see i guess! thank you all so much again!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
Perhaps It's Both

Chapter Summary

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all." — William Shakespeare, Hamlet

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The obnoxious sound of a banging on my door awakens me.

Nearly jumping out of my bed, barely managing to gain my footing as I stumble towards the noise. Another set of slamming fists attack the door. “I’m coming!” I hiss, dragging the blanket I slept with with me. I wrap it tightly around my body, using my elbow to poke the button to open the door.

My sleepy eyes adjust to the two people in front of me. In the front I see Maes Ren, in her training robes, her sleek black hair in the regular high ponytail. But behind her I see the last person I’d expect to be here. Lex Ren. Her big doe-like eyes examine me carefully. Before the eye contact can last more than a second, she looks to Maes.

“Hey!” Maes greets with energy, “Ren wanted us to go out hunting for Tuk’atas. He told us to take you, show you the way of the lands.”

“Did he?” I lean into the doorway curiously, trying to act like his order is completely unexpected. Like I don’t know why he ordered it, and like it doesn’t infuriate me.

Maes reaches out, patting my forearm. The gesture is supposed to be friendly, but her strength is makes it unintendedly forceful. “It’ll be fun!”

“I’m down.” I smile at the two girls, then look down at the blanket wrapped around my body. “I’ll quickly get dressed.”

My fingers reach to press the button to close the door again. As soon as it’s shut, my body whips over to R8, who is starting up. He stands from his resting position, his knees once curled up into his chest now stretching out. “Who was that?”

I throw the blanket back on my bed, crossing over to the dresser with a stomp. “Ren planned a hunting trip for me and the female Knights of Ren.”

R8’s eyes slowly flicker on, his head turning around the room to loosen his joints. “There is a high probability that his orders are not coincidental.”

I grab my uniform from the floor, slipping each part on piece by piece. “Kylo Ren has the audacity to try and regulate his Knight’s feelings towards me by making me stay away from them. Does he realize how childish his behavior is? Who does he think he is?”

R8 responds, “Commander of The First Order and leader of the Knights of Ren.”

Catching myself in the mirror, I notice my own scowl. Exhale. My face relaxes and I fluff out my hair, combing through it with my fingers. I don’t see a need for it to be up in my bun today. There’s
no one to write me up for violating dress code. And if Kylo Ren has the nerve to comment on it being unprofessional, I will fight him in front of his whole following. I slip on my thigh holsters for my blasters and secure them. Then, I grab my rifle leaning against the wall. I don’t know much about Tuk’atas, but I’m not about to go out there unprepared.

“You can stay here.” I tell the droid. “Maybe you can meet with Ren and the Knights. Get me more info on Eerson, if you can. If not, I’ll be alright. But anything to make things smoother will help.”

“Of course, Master.” The droid begins to make my bed for me, straightening out the blanket I once wrapped around my body.

I find myself adjusting my hair one last time before opening the door. For a moment, I think about the last time I wore my hair down, without playing a role, in front of other people. I honestly cannot think of the last time. It is a silly thing to concern myself with, but there’s an odd sadness that manifests from the realization. The feeling makes me grimace, at how stupid, how useless, whatever part of my mind produced it. Stupid.

Maes and Lex are talking against the wall of the hallway, nonchalantly. They look so normal. It’s so weird to think that they’re Knights of Ren. Or what my preconceived idea of the Knights of Ren was. Maes catching me in the doorway, “Ready?”

“Let’s go.”

Maes asks me how I slept and makes some small conversation as we walk down the hallway. But I notice everytime Lex talks, it’s directly to Maes, not to me. I glance at her, standing at my right side. It’s curious. Her vendetta against me. I assume that because I got assigned to being conjoined to Ren at the hip, she thinks I see whatever she sees in him. Which brings me to ask myself: What does she see in him? Maybe she’s turned on by the fact he’s her teacher and she’s a student. Or maybe she thinks his mysteriousness is something sexy and not pretentious or annoying at all. Maybe he likes her and she’s just reciprocating. I swallow hard, realizing how dry my mouth is.

I ask her, my voice cracking slightly, “So, you can heal people with the Force?”

She hesitates. “Yeah,” Her voice is so light. “That’s my speciality with the Knights.” There’s such a warm femininity in her tone. It’s pretty.

Maes contributes, her ponytail swinging around as she looks back at us, “It’s so awesome to watch. I tried to do it once, but I think that destruction suits me much more than restoration.”

We continue walking down the hall and I hear the familiar sounds of fists slamming against punching bags.

Ren’s voice stands out so prominently despite being a room away, “Alright, let’s move into sparring.”

I can’t help but look in the doorway as we pass them. They all stand with Ren, about to go into the next room. The Knights all seem so relaxed around him. To think that anyone on the Finalizer can barely even speak straight around the man. Ren seems so much more relaxed around them too. As relaxed as Kylo Ren can look. I chuckle to myself at how even around his friends he looks so out of place in his brooding mask and dark uniform. He looks so scary compared the friendly bunch of people surrounding him.

Solaw glances over, noticing me. He waves kindly, “Hey, Agent!”

I didn’t even realize I paused walking to study the scene. I notice the other Knights looking over to
also greet me with the same smile. I can’t help but let out a small giggle when they begin to wave at me, joining in with Solaw.

“Hey, guys!” I greet.

I see Ren behind them, standing completely still. I just want to see Ren’s face, only this one time, to see how pissed he is at me. My smile settles into a smirk as I look past all the other Knights directly towards Kylo Ren. I tilt my chin up to greet, “Commander.”

He almost remains completely still apart from a single finger twitching at his side. Even a slight movement such as that seems so much more than his previous, frozen stance.

“Have fun hunting!” Eerson says, walking into the other room.

“I will!” I pull my gaze away from Ren to look back at Eerson, acknowledgingly, as I walk away.

As we walk towards the cave in front of the temple, my finger lingers securely around the trigger guard of my rifle. Maes and Lex’s weapon choice is a bit concerning. Lex just has a metal staff while Maes has a long, sharp blade. Both close-ranged weapons. I usually do not associate hunting with close-range combat.

The scuffing of my feet causes dirt to pillow up around my steps. I cringe at how much I’ll have to scrub these boots before we get back to the Finalizer, returning them to their original shiny, oil-black condition. The Knights wear sandals. Something else I would not think to wear for hunting. It’s rather primitive for such a high up position with The First Order. Everything they do is.

Maes stops walking, suddenly, planting her hand from the hilt of her sword to her hip. She looks towards Lex.

I try not to seem overly cautious of the action. I hide my analysis of what her look means.

Lex looks back at Maes, still not stopping her stride, “Come on.” Her tone is about as commanding as I feel like she could make it. Still frail, vulnerable. “I want to get back before lunch.”

Maes rolls her eyes at the girl, urging, “We’re away from everyone. Away from him.”

Him. I can’t help but immediately think of Kylo Ren. My intentions are to keep walking with Lex, but my slight curiosity slows down my steps, trailing behind as if I’m tied to the stubborn Maes behind me.

Maes continues, unwavering, “You can talk to her about it. The Agent isn’t like the rest of The Order.”

This causes me to raise an eyebrow back at her, now completely intrigued, “What’s that suggesting?”

Maes snorts, “You know. Those people can be quite uptight arses.”

I swallow. Being uptight arses is what makes us strong. We don’t have any predispositions, anything that would distract our emotions. We just have our duty and we take it very seriously. I avoid the unnecessary conflict, “Some can be quite high-strung.”
“See?” Maes nods towards Lex, who is still walking away. “Lex! Ask her what you wanted to, she’s cool!”

Lex finally stops walking, crossing her arms across her chest insecurely. She makes her way back towards us, mumbling towards Maes, “Let’s just stay on task.”

Maes reminds her, giving me insight onto a certain conversation they had before we left, “You’re going to feel so much better when you do.”

I look to Lex, who is now looking desperately at Maes. Still, unsure of what they’re referring to, I chew at the corner of my lip. When Lex’s eyes shift to me, I reassure, “Whatever it is, I’m completely all ears. Most people find me to be quite impartial.” Despite my curiosity, I add, “But if you don’t feel comfortable, that is perfectly fine.”

She sighs, giving into whatever it is that was urging her to confront me. She crosses my direction, pointing towards the cave at Maes, “You meet us there.”

Maes walks towards the cave’s opening with satisfaction.

Lex is now just a few feet away from me, still unable to make eye contact. Now, she seems more self-conscious than she ever did, previously. “Uh,” She rubs at her neck, mumbling, “How long have you and Kylo worked together?”

Her words somewhat throw me off, just because I have never heard anyone address Kylo Ren as just “Kylo”. I answer monotonously, “A few weeks.”

She nods, looking as if she is about to walk away all together, giving up on whatever she was going to confront me on. But she holds her ground, stammering out, “But why?”

“Why what?” I try not to seem impatient, for her sake.

“Why are you working with him?” She exhales, finally making eye contact with me. There’s something particularly ethereal about the way she looks. Especially in her eyes. They are so warm, so bright. Everything about her radiates. “You can tell me, I won’t tell anyone. I just would prefer to know for myself. For personal reasons.”

I swallow hard. “I’m not involved with him, if that’s what you’re inferring.”

Quickly, she retaliates apologetically, “I did not intend to infer anything, it’s just that it does not seem… normal. For him to have a partner. It seems unnecessary for his line of work, you know?”

It isn’t normal. It does seem unnecessary. She’s probably the first one, other than myself and Ren, to point this out. I can’t tell her that Snoke assigned me to monitor each one of his actions. That’s the last thing in the world I could say to anyone. I just sigh, trying to cater to the way the Knights think as much as possible, “Snoke assigned us to work together. I am unsure why, exactly. I think that he sees a divide in The First Order, between The Order and The Knights, so he paired us up so we could understand each other's operations more.”

“Ah,” She processes the information. “I apologize for the disruption, Agent.”

“Don’t,” I assure. I do not quite want to go back to hunt yet. I still feel like I want to talk to her, to get information from her. I am now the one feeling unsure, uneasy in the situation. I’m sure I could talk the information out somehow, but that feels somewhat ingenious. How do genuine people usually speak about such matters? I basically have to shove the words from my throat in order for me to ask, my cluelessness resulting in a blunt, “Do you have feelings for the Commander?”
She immediately blushes from the question. I can’t help but smile at her response, so beautiful and pure about having feelings for such a cruel and dark man.

I push further, avoiding any part of my mind telling myself that engaging in such a conversation is ridiculous, “May I ask why?”

Her delicate fingers push her hair behind her ear. “Well,” She begins, sounding like she is going down a list she’s exhausted in her mind, “I think he’s quite thoughtful to all of us Knights. His passion for training us, as well as his passion for The First Order is very respectable. I really wasn’t born into anything important. I come from a planet, from a lineage of rather disadvantaged people. When the Supreme Leader found me and introduced me to Kylo, he was my way out of it all.” She looks up at me, almost to ask for permission if she should keep going.

I oblige with a warm smile, one I did not even have to tell my face to produce.

She continues, her hands now relaxed at her side and slightly swinging with each inflection in her words, “Having him in my life has shown me adventure, shown me things I didn’t even know I was missing out on. I love watching him do the things he’s good at. The things he can do are so inexplicable. It really never ceases to amaze me.”

Her answer causes me to almost melt at the genuine nature of it. Something that lacks any sense of manipulation or personal gain. I look away, suddenly startled by the comfort I’m finding in the idea of it. No wonder Agents are not allowed to find such admiration in others. Because I know, that if those feelings were to manifest in me, I could be so consumed by it. Controlled. Blinded. Just like her.

“Do you?” Lex’s voice pulls me away from my thoughts. “Have feelings for him?”

I nervously let a breath escape from my chest. “Well,” I respond, trying to focus myself, “I have some feelings for him.”

She smiles.

I quickly retort, “Bad feelings though! Like, the Commander and I do not quite get along, at all. We have this relationship where we hate each other deeply and try to constantly show the other up to prove that we are superior. But yeah, we despise each other, actually.”

She giggles into the back of her hand, as if she’s questioning me. As if she doesn’t believe me. She says, “I’m afraid that he does not reciprocate those feelings.”

My eyebrow creases. “Of course he does. Sometimes I am worried that he hates me more than I hate him.”

She begins, “The Commander and I have a closer relationship than many of the other Knights. He confides in me for his own, personal meditation when Supreme Leader Snoke is unavailable. And although I am sworn to secrecy, I will assure you that as often as you do cross his mind, I do not see any sign of hatred.”

I nod, “He’s probably toning it down for you.”

She looks back towards the cave opening, at where Maes is patiently kicking the dirt in the distance. Lex smiles back at me, once more before starting off towards Maes, "I don't think so, truly."

I follow her.
If you could see Kylo Ren’s pure hatred for me, it would be disturbing. That’s probably why he made Lex think otherwise during meditation. It has to be. He doesn’t want to seem hateful to her, someone so pure and kind. That has to be the explanation.

The rest of that day was quite uneventful. We went out, killed the Tuk’atas, then returned back with the meat. Maes and Lex hunted with complete passion. They didn’t bother sneaking up on them and killing them with swift poise. They basically ran into the cave like banshees to rip the poor creatures apart.

I also spent the rest of the day hanging out with Eerson, Solaw and Maes, like yesterday. Eerson Ren is what I need to concern myself with. Not with Lex and Kylo Ren. They do not matter to me. As each moment passes, I push them further from my mind and think through killing Eerson Ren more and more. Now it’s just a waiting game, until I feel like everyone has settled into my presence enough to not suspect anything. I pray to the stars that Snoke did his part of the plan that he said he would.

I let a few more days pass after that.

Kylo Ren has avoided me the whole span of time. He let me back into training with them, but he has not spoken to me even once. I don’t even know if he’s looked at me because of that damn mask. But one thing has caught my attention; that he’s been spending a lot of time training Eerson specifically. Maybe Snoke has warned him about Eerson’s training, dropping hints that he may try to escape or give up. Whatever it is, it’s my opportunity.

“Master,” R8 begins, who has been watching me sit on the bed thinking this plan out over and over again. “I am getting suspicions that you are anxious about this task.”

I look to the droid and try to make my voice at ease, “I am, somewhat. The stakes seem awfully high.” Also, Eerson Ren is a good man, from what I have gathered. I have never had much of a moral problem in what I do, but then again, I rarely get to know the people I have to kill before I kill them. And when I do, they are usually scumbags. And when they aren’t, I can always manage to find an excuse, a reason that my actions are justified. This time, I feel like I’m digging so far for a reason. Snoke ordered for it to be. So it must happen, for the good of The First Order. This will better The First Order.

R8 reassures, “The stakes have always been high for you. I would not let them get to you now.”

I give the droid a thankful nod. The comm-link seems hot against my ear, searing against my skin. With trembling fingers, that I did not even realize were trembling until now, I turn the dial on the device. I hear a beep and I respond, steadying my voice, “Contact Eerson Ren.”

The comm-link beeps every second Eerson doesn’t respond. I didn’t notice how loud this damned thing was until now. How high pitched the beeping was. I feel myself getting light headed from my stiff posture. Relaxing my body, I lay down against my pillow.

The beeping lasts forever.
“Agent?” Eerson’s voice finally interrupts the artificial noise of the device.

I swallow, focusing on the metal ceiling above me. “Hey,” I say soothingly, my voice low. “Am I interrupting anything?”

"No, no, of course not. I'm glad you called. Is everything okay?” The worry in his voice is tangible.

"Yeah, I'm fine." I force a blush, my tone bashful. "I'm glad that you're glad I called. I can imagine you'd be pretty tired, after training all day."

I can hear him laugh on the other side of the connection, before responding, "Not tired enough to refuse talking to you, I suppose."

I laugh at that.

"What?” He asks, defensively.

I suggest, "Are you flirting with me?"

"Oh!” He stammers, "No! I'm sorry, I didn't mean to suggest anything - uh - er, inappropriate, I just think you are interesting, and easy to talk to. Plus, it's nice to meet someone new for a change."

"Oh.” I add disappointment to my voice. I meant to infer I'm disappointed in his lack of flirting. But he must misinterpret the information.

He says, "Yeah, we don't get a lot of new faces around here. So seeing yours was refreshing. How's the world on the outside?"

I roll my eyes, painfully allowing the casual conversation, "Not too great. Wars and all.” I force my voice more optimistic, like Lex's, "The situation you got here is nice. You have friends. The Commander treats you all fair, from what I've heard."

He's quiet for a moment. Then a, "Yeah, I suppose."

I don't immediately know how to respond.

I don't have to, because he continues on, "It gets boring, though. Going to somewhere like Coruscant for a day is more eventful than being here for a year."

Not passionate about his cause. Unashamedly dissatisfied in his training. No wonder Snoke wants him dead. "Anything can get boring, if you've been doing it long enough. You're a Knight of Ren. That sounds like the most interesting thing to be, in this war."

"You're right.” He stops, "We should talk about something else. I'd love to get to know you more. Not love - but like, I don't know, you know, I just think-"

I smile, "It's okay."

"Okay,” He says, taking a deep breath, "Tell me about yourself."

I do. Kind of.

I tell him everything he wants to hear. I tell him how I am an agent because I made my way up through the ranks after I enlisted in the Order as an eighteen-year-old. I told him that I left my loving family behind. As much as it hurt to leave them, I felt so passionate about the Order, I couldn't focus on the loss too much. I expressed how I was afraid that leaving made me selfish. He reassured me
that I am not selfish, that I'm brave - I am in the Order because I choose to be, because I want to end
the war, because I want to help people.

He told me that's why he left his loving family behind, too. He wonders when he'll see them next.
Sometimes, he wishes he could just leave this planet and end the war all by himself, just so that he
could be in his childhood home again. He spent a while, describing the home in full detail to me.
He'd get so frustrated at himself when he could not remember the details.

Eventually, I could feel the conversation dying down. A deep loneliness crept into the air, beneath
our words. I let it hang in there for a moment, before saying quietly, "Are you in bed, Eerson?"

He doesn’t respond immediately, making me sink lower into my bed. I hear him exhale out as he
speaks, “Yes. Why?”

I close my eyes, taking a deep breath. The darkness of the back of my eyelids consumes me. “I
just...” Although the beeping of the comm-link has been gone for awhile, it's sound begins to pound
into my head again. “I haven't had someone to speak to like this in a long time. I'm glad I met you. I
feel like there's this connection, between the two of us. I know it's silly, since we just met. But... I'm
sorry, I should stop.”

I can barely make out what he says, because of the blood that I can feel pumping to my temples. But
I am able to decipher, “I feel the same way.”

The pressure moves from my temples down to my gut, making me feel somewhat nauseous. My
breath catches, throwing off my voice from it's low, sexy hum to something much for fragile, "You
do?"

He chuckles, maybe finding my discomfort somewhat charming. “May I confess something to you?
Perhaps it will ease you.”

I nod, forgetting I’m on the call. I quickly recover from the silly action, “Okay.”

He says in a breathy, sensual voice, “I wish you were here, with me.”

I didn’t even realize I was closing my eyes for this whole conversation. I pry them open, any light
that is in the room adding to the sick feeling manifesting itself in my stomach. I can feel each pore of
my skin break into a cold sweat, almost sizzling against my boiling blood. I force the words, trying to
regain a steady voice, “Do you desire me?”

"I... I do."

"I desire you, as well." I wipe my sweaty palms at my thighs.

“How should we attend to these feelings?” His words make me visualize him, sitting around with the
other Knights. The other Knights are quite fond of him. They get along so well together. They will
be hurt by this, deeply I'm sure. I wonder how long they have known each other, what trials they
have endured by each other's sides.

My eyes are pulled to the sight of R8 in the kitchen, collecting data from the conversation. Exhale. I
hum, “Directly, please.”

“If Master is mediating, he’ll feel any intense emotions coming from us when we are together... The
meditation room and his quarters are both close to our rooms.” Eerson says, somewhat worried. He
doesn’t know that I already have considered this.
“Will he be as aware if we go to the hut outside the building?” I ask, directly reciting it from the script of the plan I have laid out in my mind.

He chuckles deeply into the comm-link, “I’ll meet you there.”

The connection is cut off before I can respond. I pull myself up from the bed, already dressed for the upcoming events. I look down at myself, making sure everything is exactly in place. I have my regular First Order Agent jumpsuit on, but without any of the armor. I have the first few buttons already undone and only my two knives attached to the holsters at my thighs. I have one small blaster on the back of my belt, just for extra precautions. Also a flashlight on my belt. Before exiting my room, I tousle my hair one last time.

Then, I exit. Before I can overthink it anymore than I already have.

I don’t let my eyes stray from directly in front of me. My legs extend out, one in front of the other. I focus on keeping the rhythm steady and not slowly down due to any hesitation. When I open the door to the outside, my hair flows back, away from my face. My eyes squint from the cold wind. In the northeast, I see the hut in the distance. I make my way to it.

The wind is pushing me back, my thoughts are pushing me back, everything that I have never had a problem with before seems to now be pushing me back. However, something inside me keeps me moving. What makes Eerson Ren so different than the other people I’ve murdered? The word murdered is something I have never even associated with myself before. It’s something I shouldn’t associate. This is not murder. It’s duty.

Perhaps it’s both.

I enter the hut.

The first thing I see is Eerson Ren’s dark figure, standing across the room. He doesn’t waste any time in grabbing my body, which is completely frozen. He pulls me further into the hut, his hands grabbing at my sides, fingers digging into my ribs. I feel like if he squeezes me any harder, I’ll throw up.

Just as that concern passes my mind, I feel his lips crash onto mine, rubbing against my mouth. I forget how to breath, how to reciprocate. I just feel his hands kneading against my hips, moving down to my bottom. My hands lay against his chest, unmovingle. I scream at myself to gain control over this situation, to get him into a position where I can do what I need to do and then be done with it. I just want it to be over at this moment, that’s all I want.

He pulls away, to hold my hands, staring intently into my eyes. His rough, callused fingers run back and forth against my knuckles. Despite the darkness of the hut, I can make out his kind smile. His olive, worn skin radiates in the moonlight that creeps in from the hut opening. I stare at his crooked nose, exhibiting that it was broken once before. “You’re shaking. Are you inexperienced?”

I shake my head. “I apologize.” I tell my hands to reach up to his face, to caress him. But all my fingers do is twitch. “I’ve done this plenty of times before, I do not know why I am like this…” He doesn’t respond immediately, causing me to add on a desperate, “I’m sorry, I don’t know why I can’t do this.”

He leans forward, his lips brushing mine. It’s a gesture to give me comfort. But it only makes me feel more sick. He whispers, “We do not have to do anything if you do not wish.”
I nod, furiously, telling myself more than telling him, “I want to. This is what I want.”

He seems relieved at that, kissing me briefly once again. “We’ll ease into it, then. Alright?”

I nod again, closing my eyes, finding comfort in the darkness.

His hands run to my back and he pulls me into an embrace. His palms press deeply into my skin as they rub against my shoulder blades, massaging. I allow myself to relax into the touch, opening my eyes. I stare blankly at the wall of the hut in front of me. All I can hear is my head pounding, his heavy breathing, and the whistles of the wind outside. My head pounding is the loudest of the three. If I don’t do this Snoke will kill me, and he’ll kill Eerson himself. I have to do this. There’s no choice. I have to do this and being unsure of myself is only holding me back, making me weak.

He pulls his head down, in between my neck and collarbone, nudging aside the fabric of my uniform with his nose. I tilt my chin up. Inhale. Exhale. He sucks on the skin in the hollows of my bones. My hands rub his biceps, holding me steady.

One of my hands remain there.

The other coasts down to my thigh, to reach for the knife.

My fingers pause when he tilts his head upwards, towards my earlobe to whisper roughly, “You’re so beautiful.”

My breath catches and I quickly remove the knife from it’s holster.

I plunge it into his back before I can think twice.

He limply slouches off of me, falling backwards.

Still alive, his expression is everything. Everything from shocked to confused to hurt to angry.

A weak energy radiates from him, reaching out to my throat and squeezing. Trying to choke me. I already feel like I’m being suffocated. His contribution is not powerful enough to stop me from grabbing my other knife, leaning over his body and thrusting it into his heart. I twist it, exerting the muscles of my wrists until he lets out a brief scream. And then silence.

I remove the knife from his back, careful not to get any of his blood on me. I wipe it clean against his robes before returning it back to my holster. Same with the next knife.

I drag his body out of the hut and towards the cave. My muscles feel exhausted from hauling him there, but I manage to do it quickly.

“Hey!” I shout into the darkness of the cave. I turn on my flashlight attached to my belt, shining it down. I see glowing eyes in the far distance. There’s noises of running. I drop the body, exiting the cave’s entrance.

Something deep down inside me tells me that this action will have consequences. Consequences that will change my life. I don’t know what the consequences will be exactly, but I can feel them lingering over me as I hear the Tuk’atas, snarling, snorting and fighting over the meat on Eerson’s body.
It dawns on me that everything I have done has had consequences. I was always able to escape before seeing them. Did this make me naive enough to pretend that they didn’t exist at all?

Whatever the answer to that may be, there is no way to ignore them this time.

I walk back into the temple, sneaking back up to my room to lay down. I have to immediately stand back up to go sit in the bathroom, just in case the twist in my stomach turns to illness.

But I just find myself sitting across from the toilet for the next few hours staring blankly into the metal floor, paralyzed.

Chapter End Notes

damn. i hope u guys like this chapter. it was a little edgy, so yea, i’m anticipating what you all think! there’s some really heavy parallels between this chapter and the very first chapter in this fic, which i refereed to a lot for writing the moments up to the Eerson death scene. also wow there wasn’t much kylo ren in this chapter, that might mean that next chapter has a lot of him … A lot. again, i am so incredibly grateful for the attention this fic has gotten recently, it makes me so happy that there are people out there reading my work and enjoying it! The highlights of my week are updating this fic and then receiving the feedback. I know i say something about it all the time in the authors notes, but each week the growing support makes me happier and happier gahhh. Thank you all so much for reading. This next chapter is probably my favorite in the fic thus far. I can’t wait to update it!!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
Consequences

Chapter Summary

“Dry your eyes, baby; it’s out of character.” - Notorious, Alfred Hitchcock

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING: character engages self-destructive behavior/self-punishment. If that concerns you, but you are unsure, please read this spoiler to gauge if this chapter is okay for you to read:

!!!!!!SPOILER!!!!!! character goes into cave, unarmed to be attacked by the tuk'atas, as self-punishment !!!!!!!SPOILER!!!!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The walls of this building are thinner than I initially thought. I can tell it’s morning because of the steps I hear from the hall. It certainly helps that my quarters have been completely void of any noise, I suppose. I do not remember the last time I moved. My neck is strained from the position it’s been in from leaning against the corner of the walls in the bathroom. I’ve been staring at a single scuff in the nearly perfect floor. My eyes seem glued to the spot, inexplicably unable to pull themselves away from it.

The steps in the hallway grow more frantic. Walking quickly, transitioning into running, until the noise is out of earshot. I curl into myself more, hugging my knees against my chest. Even the slightest of movements made my joints creak, completely and utterly sore. I know that if I do not go out there to see what’s going on, it will seem suspicious. I should go talk to them, pretend to be just as confused to where Eerson Ren went. But I physically cannot bring myself to do it.

I hear R8’s mechanical legs walk across the bedroom to stand outside the door, patiently waiting for me. He begins, so nonchalantly, like nothing even happened, “Master, I prepared for you breakfast before you go down to meet with the Knights.”

I feel my eyes water from my lack of blinking. “Thank you, R8,” I respond evenly. I still remain planted on the chilled floor.

R8 responds after a few seconds, after giving me a chance to join him, “My analysis of your current condition is that it would be best for you to exit the bathroom now.”

I know it is, I don’t doubt it even the slightest. There’s something in my mind that forces my body up, despite all of my muscles telling me to stay immobile. It’s the same thing that pushed me to drive the knife into Eerson Ren’s back, despite every inch of my body not wanting to comply. As I stand, I catch the image of myself in the mirror.

My knees wobble, causing me to lean forward on the sink for support. I look at myself in the reflection. Pathetic. I look absolutely pathetic. The bags under my eyes are heavier, darker than I ever
remember seeing them. The white around my eyes are barely white, consumed by red blood vessels. My hands clench on the edge of the sink. I’m acting like a complete unproductive failure. I didn’t fail. My mission was a success.

Just like it always is.

I yank at the handle to the sink, almost completely ripping it off with the force used. Something tempts me to stare, hypnotized into the running water. But I manage drag my eyes away. I cup my hands under the water and bring it up to my face, refreshing the dry, chapped skin. From there, my fingers weave into my hair. My hair is horribly knotted from the wind last night. I pull it back roughly, nearly ripping at my scalp. I tie the bun securely, First Order standard. Button up the rest of my uniform. Tilt my chin upwards.

Supreme Leader Snoke is who I serve. He is powerful, he knows the best for this war. And if killing Eerson Ren was for the best, then so be it. I must rely on his wisdom for strength.

I walk out of the bathroom, starting towards the table R8 set out for me. Eggs and bread. A simple meal, yet my stomach seems overwhelmed by the thought of eating. I do anyways, to prove a point to R8; that I’m alright. To prove a point to myself.

R8 walks beside me, stating, “Concern for your well-being is part of my coding. And right now I feel obligated to be at your aid in whatever way I can.”

I continue scarfing down the food, staring a hole into the table’s slick, clean countertop with each bite. “I do not need any aid.”

There’s a pounding at my door. Impatient. Loud. Frantic.

I yell at the noise, my eyes remaining immobile, “It’s open!”

The door slides open immediately at the invitation, footsteps racing towards me. I glance up to see Solaw. He is so goddamned worried. He tries to play it off though, keeping his brow from furrowing too much, concentration on keeping his voice leveled, “Have you seen Eerson recently? Since last night? We’ve been looking for him all morning.”

I shake my head, “I haven’t been out.” I suggest, noticing his hand ever so slightly shaking at his side, “Maybe he’s outside, getting some fresh air.”

Solaw sighs, then mutters to himself as he turns on his heel to exit my room, “We checked already,” The door shut slams behind him. The noise causes my ears to ring with pain.

They ring so badly, I can barely focus on R8 asking me, “May I ask how much sleep you got last night, Master?”

The expression of concern is taken more as an interrogation effort. “Three hours.” I lie. “It’s not a lot, but it will manage.” It’s three hours more than what I actually got.

“Oh, good.” R8 responds.

I don’t know how I’m going to get through today without passing out from sheer exhaustion. I cannot, nor could not, fall asleep by any means and yet I feel like my body is threatening to shut down any second. Hopefully the circumstances of today get me out of needing to be available to any of the Knights. They will probably just leave me be, too busy with what’s going on to even think of me. I pause taking another bite, frozen by the thought of me using their grieving for my own personal
advantage. After a moment, I resume to finishing my food. It’s not until I’m done that I realize I didn’t even taste the meal at all. R8 is usually exceptional at cooking, but this time it tasted like sheer mass and nothing else.

The ringing in my ears fades out. I stand from the table, pushing off of the counter, “I guess I’ll go talk to them.”

“Good luck,” R8 dismisses.

Walking to the balcony above the main room, the Knights are spread out all over. Some talking to each other, others pacing back and forth by themselves. I notice Lex sitting down against the wall. She is so quiet compared to everyone else. Her eyes are closed, giving me a hunch that she’s meditating. I don’t see Solaw anywhere around. Or Kylo Ren. A pit forms in my stomach.

With each step down the stairs, I clutch the railing a little bit more intensely. I never realized these stairs were so steep, with such little room for my feet to land with each step. All I can think about is how Lex said how much Kylo Ren cared for his Knights and their training. Sure, she may have exaggerated. That’s what people do when they’re infatuated. But even Supreme Leader Snoke said that this pain, this loss, would affect Kylo Ren greatly. To make him stronger. He already seems so strong. What more can the Supreme Leader want from the man? He can do things that wipe out entire fleets of armies. Was this whole mission just unnecessary? How necessary does it have to be to the cause to make my actions permissible? I almost trip, completely unfocused on the stairs ending and my feet reaching normal ground level.

I scan the room one last time for Kylo Ren, tricking myself into thinking that my eyes missed him. They didn’t. How could they? Solaw is gone too. Maybe Ren is with him somewhere. I continue walking through the room, somewhat quickly, trying not to look at any of the Knights. The thought of catching their eyes seems lethal. I make it to the hallway, out of the mainroom, allowing myself to breath. I don’t know why I’m looking for Ren. I don’t even want to run into him, I wouldn’t know what to say. And anything I could say without blowing my cover would be completely bullshit.

I manage to pass the room I met with Snoke in. The door is open. The throne awaits, sitting empty with the lights leading up to it.

I look away to turn the corner and make my way down another corridor. Goddamnit, I should have stayed in my room, why did I even come down here? I allow myself to lean against the wall and attempt to calm myself down. Nothing I’m doing seems military-fashioned. Should I be acting more upset in front of the Knights? Should I be acting more professional? If Eerson Ren really were to run away with me having nothing to do with it, how would I react? Would I even care?

“Agent,” I hear a silvery voice.

Jumping at the sound, I whip towards it’s direction.

Lex Ren. Her doll like face isn’t as bright as it was yesterday. Yesterday she was beaming. Today her bright eyes hold something dark. Something full of somber. They’re puffy, red, like she’s been crying. I see her neck tighten, then relax. She begins, her voice somehow even more fragile than normal, “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m okay. I take it no one has found him yet.” I answer, exhaling from the startle.

She shakes her head.
I feel like I’m toying with her, just by having this conversation. I try to ignore the persistent guilt and ask, returning her concern, “Are you…? Alright, that is.”

Her lip quivers at the question. She hesitates to answer, inhaling through her nose slowly. Her eyes look down at her feet as she croaks out, her words so brittle, “It’s my fault.” The confession causes her to reach her hand to her mouth, holding in a sob. The noise, the look of it, shatters my chest. She’s so broken, I have never in my life seen such a person so broken. She seemed so fragile before, giving her such a unique charm. But now she’s completely shattered.

“No,” I croak, the back of my throat aching, “This isn’t your fault, not at all.”

She shakes her head, tears streaming down her baby-faced cheeks and falling against her hand, still clamped over her mouth. She removes it to utter, “You don’t understand, it really is.” She begins to sob, looking down at the ground, her shoulders bobbing up and down with each cry.

My arms cannot help but to extend out to her figure embraceingly, as if trying to hold her together physically will stop whatever she’s feeling. She embraces me back, so much tighter, fingers clenching into my back. I already feel her tears seeping through my uniform’s fabric. Her fingers burn against me. I wonder how she would try to kill me if she knew.

She weeps, somewhat hard to understand with her voice muffled by my shoulder, “It is though. Kylo, he came to me so many times. He was so worried about Eerson, he had visions that he would do this- would run away, because of Kylo failing him in his training.” She sniffles. “I thought Kylo was just being hard on himself. He’s so hard on himself sometimes, so anxious, so insecure. I thought this was one of those times. I- I just told him not to worry about it because I thought Eerson loved it here. I asked him and everything and Eerson said being a Knight is the best thing that has happened to him, he just seemed so sincere. I was sure Eerson would never do such a thing.” A sob escapes her chest before she utters, “I was so wrong, though.” Her hands clench even harder on the fabric of my uniform. “I was so wrong and now it’s all my fault. That’s he’s out there somewhere either- alone and scared or…” She can’t even bring herself to say the word “dead.” She doesn’t need to for it to be communicated.

I find myself staring straight into the wall in front of me. Lex’s curly hair is in my view, from the corner of my eyes, but it’s not in focus. All I can do is to zone at the metal wall, so similar to the one in my bathroom. So similar to the table counter in my kitchen. With each sob she releases, they multiple in volume, in desperation.

The same ringing that I heard when Solaw slammed the door of my apartment returns. It clouds my hearing, it clouds my mind as a whole. Until it’s consumed me. I think any capability of hearing has been replaced with this ringing until I faintly pick up on her words, “I will never forgive myself.”

Hearing it makes me physically choke, stumbling back from her embrace. I try to catch my breath, to remain standing up straight. I barely do. I hold onto her forearms, trying to catch her eyes as she continues sobbing, hiding behind her hair. I squeeze her arms harder, telling her desperately, “Please, please don’t think this is your fault.”

“But it.”

“Lex.” I almost yell it. It’s assertive. Mean even. But it gets her to silence her cries and finally look up at me. The look she gives me almost makes my lungs collapse. I continue, trying to give her the strongest, the most firm look I can. “Eerson made his choice. Ren being validated in his worries would not have saved him. You have to trust me on this.”

She sniffs, looking so unconvinced.
It makes me angry. How distressed she is over something that she had no part of. It angers me how much she cares about Eerson, Ren, and everyone, only to ultimately be hurt by the feeling. I grip her tighter. “Please, it is completely useless to do this to yourself.”

She nods, sniffing again.

I don’t know who I’m kidding. I can’t manipulate her to make her feel better, I can’t do anything fix any of the pain she’s feeling. I wish I knew how, but there’s no way I can think around this. I am helpless.

She looks down the hall. “I’m sorry,” She whispers. Maybe she saw how desperate I was to get her to stop crying. Maybe she felt guilty for even sharing her concerns with me in the first place. Slowly, her composure comes back, in order for her to say, “Kylo went to speak to the Supreme Leader. Maybe he knows where Eerson went, maybe there’s still time to get him back.” She looks down. “My fear has made me pessimistic.” Every emotion she once had is now so repressed. So caged. But still, so present. Just not for me to see anymore.

My stomach drops. I remember just passing by Snoke’s throne room, noticing how it was completely empty. I tell Lex, “You should go return to your Knights. I must get back to my duties.”

Before she can respond, I head back down the hallway, my walking progressing into a sprint once I’m past the main room. Kylo Ren is still not there. Neither is Solaw. I curse under my breath, looking towards the stairway leading up to my room. I don’t want to be in there with R8. But I definitely do not want to be around any of the Knights. The walls seem to get closer and closer to me each second I stand still, each moment the Knights look at me, somewhat oddly at my motionless stance.

The pressure pushes me to make my way outside the building, an attempt to escape all of it.

As soon as my body hits the cool air of the outdoors, a peculiar buzzing begins taunting me. Some sort of energy looming around. I don’t know how to even describe the feeling other than odd. It feels like it’s not supposed to be something I’m feeling, like it’s a secret. Whatever it is, it makes me look towards the direction of the cave. Still out of breath from nothing at all, I stare towards the dark entrance, nearly a mile away from the temple.

It’s so silly, to listen to this gut feeling to enter the cave. It’s not even a gut feeling. It something so much more inexplicable. So much less credible to follow. I suppose it’s just the weather conditions on this planet because it’s not coming from inside my body, it’s pulling me from the outside. For some reason, I feel so drawn to it. It pulls me in so much that I find myself in a sprint down the length of the plain, my rifle slapping against my back with each stride. I reach back, swinging it around to my hip.

Each step causes pain to shoot up through my legs, but I keep moving and I keep moving quickly. The pulling energy towards the cave has grown more urgent that I would’ve ever thought possible.

My eyes are locked onto the place just within the entrance that I dropped Eerson’s body off for the beasts. They left no remains of him. No trace. I should be thankful.

I close my eyes, standing in the dark cave, trying to regain a steady breathing pattern. But with each steady breath, the snarls of the Tuk’ata’s ripping apart flesh grow louder. I cannot tell if the sound is a part of my imagination or coming from the cave. It feels as if my curiosity is begging me to venture further.

I, so idiotically, do; I’m too hypnotized by it all to make a better decision in the moment.
With each step forward, the amount of light behind me grows fewer and fewer, until I look back and there’s just a small dim square of illumination. Still gripping my rifle, I fumble for the flashlight’s switch, clicking it on and holding it out in my path. There’s nothing, at least for as long as the light reaches. Just more dust and stone.

The monster’s snarls only grow more aggressive. More angry. More defensive. As I listen closer, it sounds like a fight. I hear one yelp. Then the others roar aggressively, almost offended.

My mind immediately goes to Solaw. What if he went in the cave to find Eerson and he’s being attacked?

It’s a stupid assumption. The creatures are probably just fighting each other. Or some other type of animal. But my body ignores the logic in that and returns to running, chasing after sounds. I want to shout his name, to let him know I’m on my way, but my lungs are too dried out to even attempt it. All I can think about is running, running faster than I ever ran at the Academy, during training. Running faster than I ever ran during any battle. If Solaw dies too, it’s on me. There’s two Knight’s deaths on me. Two innocent people’s lives. Not to mention all the people it will hurt who are still alive. All because of me.

The path suddenly divides into two pathways, causing me to nearly fall flat faced down from the momentum I built up. The noise is coming from the right. I run that way, shining my light forward, attempting to make out what is there.

It’s so loud by now, their animalistic cries echoing off of the stone walls and reverberating all around me. I steady my index finger over the trigger of my rifle, getting ready for whatever I have to do when I am close enough to make out the shadows in the distance.

It’s not long until I do.

There are three tuk’atas, huge, all attacking one set point. My stomach twists, imagining Solaw being mauled to death. Their algae green skin radiates against the small light I have. Long tails swing back and forth pushing up dust from the ground, making everything so blurry. Every time they’re pushed down by the opposing force, their bodies crash and they let out a ear piercing squeal. This only disorients me more.

It doesn’t stop me from running straight up to the first one I can reach and knocking into to the side, away from the rest of the commotion. It barely is pushed out of the way, but is taken off guard just enough to where I can shoot it in the chest before it’s large jaws chomp at me.

The blast lights up the cave in a red flash of light, causing me to briefly catch the shining of the silver in Kylo Ren’s mask where I expected Solaw’s face to be. The tuk’ata’s horned spikes, fanning it’s face, dig against my leg as it falls to the ground.

Ignoring it, I stare confused at the injured, weak, Kylo Ren. The desperation for an answer overwhelms me.

Immediately, I feel my body slammed to the ground, claws digging into my shoulders, piercing my skin. Pain sears throughout my body, but I manage to wedge my rifle in between me and the beast and fire. It’s weight falls on me, crushing me, it’s claws sliding out of the skin on my shoulders.

It’s warm blood soaks through my clothes, drenching my upper body as the beast heaves on top of me, trying desperately to hold onto it’s life.

There’s a wind-like force that pushes it off of me, causing it to crash into the cave wall. With the impact, that ground shakes and dust falls from the ceiling. I look back to Kylo Ren, nearly doubled
over, his body layered in wounds. He reaches out towards the last monster with a weak arm, merely holding it up in the air so that it’s levitating. With a squeeze of his fist, I hear the brutal sound of bones breaking as the Tuk’ata crumbles in on itself. Ren drops it to the ground, dead.

Dust pillows around my body. Dirt seeps into the fresh wounds on my shoulders, causing my eyes to prick with tears. But the biggest thing I know right now is complete and utter bewilderment.

I try to sit up, only to fall to my side. My elbow supports my body as I pant up at Ren, “What the hell are you doing?”

The voice that comes out of the modulator is so pathetically weak, barely even being projected by the machinery. “Get out of here.”

“I thought someone was dying!” I hiss. I look at the man, up and down. His once so seemingly indestructible clothes are torn all over in gashes on his limbs. Blood oozes from the tears in the fabric. He falls into the side of the cave, unable to stand up completely straight on his own. I pull my weight upwards to straighten my body, bringing myself up. My voice is so unusually shrill as I scold him, “Why didn’t you kill those things earlier? Before they-”

I’m cut off by the sight of his fists clenching, mask turning away from me. His shoulders slump as he falls back to the ground, his legs unable to support him. I quickly disregard every single inch of my own body searing in pain so that I can run to his side, kneeling down to him. My hands ghost over his frame, trying to guide him back up but too intimidated to actually make physical contact to help him.

He tries to sound authoritative, but it’s so weak when he orders, “Leave.”

I blink, somewhat annoyed by his stubbornness. My arms return to my own side and I reply, “I will go if you tell me why you’re doing this.” It’s a lie. Something inside of me knows that I’ll still try to stay here to help him. But I just feel so desperate for an answer.

He slumps further into the ground, coughing. At the coughs progress, his body twitches in pain. He crawls forward, trying to distance himself from me, but he gives up quickly, giving into his physical exhaustion. He sits back against the wall of the cave, still somewhat pulling himself as far away from me as possible. I allow it, not pressing forward. His gloved hands palm the top of his helmet, digging into the metal so intensely that I am almost afraid the bones in his fingers cannot handle the pressure. It’s so dark, but my rifle’s light lays a few feet ahead of us, still knocked down from the Tuk’ata. It illuminates him enough for me to tell that he’s shaking.

I realize in that moment that I am seeing the strongest person in the galaxy bloodied and trembling, curling into himself in a cold, dark cave. Ultimately because of something I have done. The First Order prides itself on having power, but I do not want this power over someone, over anyone.

This is the temperamental Kylo Ren people would joke about, would start rumors about. The one that would break consoles in anger, that would throw temper tantrums out of frustration. It pains me to think that people would see this as something acceptable to banter about; someone in so much pain.

He spits out, “Eerson’s dead. I feel it.”

I don’t respond.

He continues, completely defeated, “I failed him.”

I still remain silent. I don’t know if I’m afraid to try to convince him otherwise or if it’s my intuition.
telling me not to respond, for the sake of my cover. I try not to stare at the wounds ribboning up and
down his arms and legs. The severity of it would be enough to make even the most brutal people
pass out from the pain.

I feel a drop of blood drip down my collarbone from my own wound, down my side. I ask him,
trying my best to sound comforting, some part of me mirroring Lex because I feel like that would
calm him down, “Let’s go back to the temple.”

He doesn’t move when I offer him my hand.

He just remains on the ground trembling, fists clenching and then unclenching. He mumbles, “I don’t
want your help.”

“I have to help you,” The words spill out of my mouth, now desperate.

He just stares at me.

Suddenly, there’s a growl from down the corridor. Ren perks up at it’s noise and starts crawling
towards it, stumbling into a half-standing position. I grab my rifle, urging him, “Ren, we have to go.”

He snarls, “You leave, I need to stay,”

“Why?” I aim my sights down towards the noise, trying not to sound as frustrated as I am.

“Because I deserve this.”

The sentence causes every inch of insanity I have felt in the past few hours to return. The empty
feeling, while the feeling of completely overflowing, the ringing ears, the frozen, shell-shocked body.
I feel Lex’s guilt, Ren’s guilt, weighing down so hard on me. I realize that this may be how everyone
reacts to me killing their loved ones. Every time. I never doubted that I hurt people, badly. But I
honestly thought that it was justified, that it was fair. I believed it so hard that I didn’t even care,
didn’t think twice.

Now I’m thinking far too much.

But I deserve this; what Kylo’s enduring, Lex’s enduring, the pain of hundreds of people I don’t
even know from so many years ago.

Ren pounds against the wall with his fist, causing me to jump. He yells out towards the creature,
“Hey!”

And even after all this pain he put himself through, he thinks that he should have more.

I desperately reach out, grabbing his arms, careful not to touch any open wounds, “Ren, please,
you’re so wrong.” I feel his muscles flex under my touch, despite me being as gentle as I can
manage.

I help him to his feet, only for him to rip away from my grasp. My words obviously have pissed him
off. He snaps, “You’re so ignorant of all of this.”

I grab his arm again, tuging back, warning. “You’re the one who doesn’t understand. Let’s go back
and you can calm down and I-”

He yanks his arm away once again, stumbling back into the wall with a clumsy thud. “What is there
not to understand?” His voice is breaking, so much like Lex’s. The contrast in the two people seems
so large, but right now they are just as fragile. “If I would have been a better teacher, Eerson Ren would be alive right now.”

“No, he wouldn’t.” I snap back.

He huffs, almost stunned by how stupid that answer sounds to him, “Your attempts at empathy are pitiful. Why are you even here to begin with?”

I don’t answer. I don’t know what to say. I can’t tell him that I just felt like walking into this cave off of a hunch. Even though I did. I don’t know why I’m staying either. But the reason is far more than some odd gut-feeling.

He shoves himself off of the wall so that he can approach me, barely even able to stand. But still so towering over me. “Do you enjoy seeing me like this? Does this satisfy your hate for me, does this make you feel better than me-”

“No,” I shake my head furiously, “Not at all, I-”

“Then leave.”

“No without you,” I urge. Each second that passes makes me anticipate more tuk’atas coming. Hurting him even more. All because of-

Ren’s voice interjects, scoffing, “Why do you feel guilty?”

I freeze. He senses it; my guilt. Does he know more? How much guilt am I projecting to him? Does he feel my worry now, my worry that he knows too much? I stumble back from him. I need to get out of here, but I know I can’t leave him to suffer.

He approaches me, limping, head now tilted. I pray to god it’s not with suspicion, but it’s so damn hard to read him. He asks somberly, his anger and bitterness subsiding, “Did you know? Did he talk to you before he left?” There’s just pure sadness now. Sad confusion.

I don’t know if I should make something up to bring closure to him, to get him off my back, or if I should answer truthfully. I cannot think clearly. The way he’s breathing so hard from his injuries, the way he sounds so desperate for an answer, it’s all distracting me. Clouding my vision. It shouldn’t. I shouldn’t let it.

Suddenly, he brings his hand up to the side of my face, as if he were to caress it. But the action does not go that way. I stay frozen, somewhat scared of the ghosting hand at the side of my head. Then there’s a light pressure, nodding at my skull. My breath catches.

He’s trying to get in my mind.

My whole body goes into panic mode, trying to get my story straight, while trying to repress any thoughts of it being a story. My heart pounds in utter terror, afraid my attempts won’t be enough. The pressure builds. It feels as if someone has reached into my skull, squeezing and twisting at the edges of my brain. I wince.

Then the pressure stops.

I can’t help but look terrified, unable to tell what his reaction is. What he’s feeling.

He looks away, slowly bringing his hand back to his side, “I’m sorry,” He apologizes.
I stare, unable to respond due to the lack of context from his apology. Also to the shock of Kylo Ren apologizing.

He continues, “It was wrong for me to try to do that to you.”

I remain staring quietly.

Kylo Ren leans against the wall, weakly. Blood from his back smears as he slides down. “Please,” He begs, his voice now back to the fragile state I first heard it in when I arrived, “Please just tell me if you know anything.”

I still keep staring. This man just thought he was in the wrong for trying to read my mind after I just killed a man. The same nauseous feeling comes back to me that I felt last night. Even though Kylo Ren stopped trying to enter my mind, a different pressure in my skull intensifies. The ringing is back in my ears. Everything is happening all at once. The pain everyone around me is feeling because of me is more evident than ever, after seeing Ren like this. I just want to be free of it. More than I wanted anything. Have I ever truly wanted anything before this moment? Can I stand here and bare to lie to him? Would I be able to live with myself, knowing the pain would fester along with the confusion, the questions, the guilt? I can keep him from it. I can help him.

In the midst of it all I whisper, “I killed him.”

It all stops. All the ringing, the pressure, the over-analyzation. Now, it’s completely quiet. Just the sound of the empty cave, echoing out a single drop of water, falling from the ceiling and dripping to a puddle on the floor. I begin to wonder if Ren even heard me.

But I know he did when his arm extends and I feel any subconscious movement in my body completely stop. Everything seems so fast around me, but I’m unable to react to any of it. I try so hard to throw my body out this trace, but I cannot even get a finger to twitch. I can only watch as Kylo Ren stands up straighter, fueled by something that he didn’t have before. Betrayal. Hatred.

I shut my eyes and open them again.

I thought Kylo Ren wanted me dead before. How silly that seems now.

He looms over me staring down. The pure terror of what he is going to do to me overwhelms my imagination. Probably tear my limbs from their sockets, maybe rip my mind apart from the inside out. Kylo Ren is a lot of things, but merciful has never been one of them. But I find peace in knowing that whatever is about to happen, I deserve it completely.

In the anticipation of pain, I barely even notice that the invisible restraints on my head has been lifted. I open my mouth to take in a breath. The rest of my body is still stuck. Ren still looks down on me, seething. Waiting. He is giving me the opportunity to speak.

He deserves answers. So I give them, “Snoke ordered it.”

There is a pause where Ren and I just look at each. Both of us desperate, our minds in places we desperately don't want them to be. Despite all the pain I caused this man, despite how much he must hate me, I feel a connection with him. A connection bounded by the fact that we are both so weak and we could not possibly act so unlike ourselves around anyone else.

Ren turns away abruptly, walking back towards the wall he once sat against. He suddenly points a finger at me, scolding, "You foolish girl." There is realization in his demeanor, as if he finally understands what is happening. Whatever power the Force once had over me, it is now lifted. But I remain still.
I feel tears prick my eyes, partly from exhaustion. "I am so sorry, I did not mean for-

He raises his voice more, scorning me like I am purely and utterly stupid, "If Snoke finds out that you told me, you'll be executed!"

I do not tell him that I don't care. I do not care about anyone here, I do not care about politics, I do not care about the Resistance or The First Order or Snoke or anything. "Why are you yelling at me? I gave you what you wanted! It is my fault he is dead. Not yours, not anyone else's. Mine. I deserve what everyone is putting themselves through."

Ren retorts, "Snoke gave you the order because I failed to make Eerson live up to his potential. No matter what, his death is on me."

I scoff, astounded by his complete arrogance, "This may come as a surprise to you, Commander, but not everything is at the will of you."

"Of course it is," He spits. "Do you understand how many things have resulted because of my actions? How much responsibility I hold in this war?"

I roll my eyes, "There's so many people with responsibility in this war, you selfish bastard." I don't stray from the harshness in my words once it is present. There's no sense in going back now. "Your special powers do not make you any more of a murderer than I am."

"We aren't true murderers," he grumbles. "Everything we do is for the good of the galaxy."

"So you think that I was right in killing Eerson?" I corner.

He quips back, "I think that I was wrong in training Eerson so poorly."

It is hopeless trying to take any blame off of his shoulders. I look away, "You're too arrogant to see otherwise."

The statement offends him. He replies, defensively, "You know nothing of the choices I have had to make. Choices that hold true consequence."

I respond in bitter sarcasm, "How do I not feel pity for a person who was born with guaranteed power? For someone entitled, someone who has been marveled at since birth?"

"Do you think I wanted that?" He yells. His arms fly at his sides with the question. I'm afraid he is hurting himself from the pure force of his words. "Do you think that I enjoy being raised purely to fight and train and be a weapon and nothing else?"

The statement makes me physically stunned. "Do you have no idea how your own military operates?" I almost cannot believe he just said that to me. I laugh, completely bewildered. "I don't even have a real name! My only identity is the credits my family sold me to The First Order for! Yet you have the audacity to tell me that I do not know what being raised as a weapon feels like." And I was just about to give all that up, my whole past, to make Kylo Ren stop grieving over Eerson. It may be over now; my career as an Agent. Because I was emotional, because I felt guilty. Everything I worked so hard to train myself to never feel. I see that it was all preventable. I could have held my tongue, never confessed to anything. There were plenty of times I could've lied my way out of this situation. But I didn't. Is it even barely possible to hide this from Snoke? I go on, breathlessly ranting at the man, "You're blind if you cannot see what privileges you hold over the rest of the galaxy, the rest of The Order. While you go on retreats with the Knights, while Hux buys expensive wines, the rest of us are shaking with paranoia, worrying that we aren't doing everything we possibly can for this cause. Because if we don't, we don't have any family lineage or special powers to fall back on.
Serving the Order is all we have. That's it!"

Ren just stares at me, his body posture no longer angry. He is relaxed now, shoulders slumped and head down. He seems on my level. Like my equal.

I mumble, my voice much more quiet compared to the argumentative yelling before, "You will never know the fear of being replaceable in the only thing you've ever known."

His head tilts back up. If it weren't for the sliver outlines in his mask, he'd look just like a shadow. I catch a smear of crimson blood on the bill of his mask, reflecting the small light of my rifle. His voice is so soothing, so sure of itself as he counters, "You are not replaceable."

I laugh, "Maybe I wasn't before, but now that I failed my mission..." I failed my mission. For the first time in my life, I failed my mission. Admitting it makes me just want curl up in my bed and cry.

He says, carefully, "Your mission is only a failure if Snoke finds out about it's complications."

The statement shocks me. Confuses me. But most of all, comforts me.

He steps outward, attempting to walk. I support him with the side of my body, letting his frail, yet heavy, figure lean against me. We walk out of the darkness of that cave together, each step easier on us than the one before.

Chapter End Notes

is it even a fanfic if they dont tend to eachothers wounds???? lmao it is inevitable. but thats for next time!!! thank u all so much for reading, commenting and kudos-ing!!!!!!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
Suture

Chapter Summary

"You wear a mask for so long, you forget who you were beneath it." — Alan Moore, V for Vendetta

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kylo Ren is a heavy person.

Hauling him up the two sets of stairs to his quarters is taxing. I try not to make it seem like a big deal that he’s leaning on me so much, just because I know that if I do, he’ll probably tell me to just leave and never come back. I can tell he’s embarrassed, ashamed. He’s not talking to me at all. The only thing I heard him say on the way up was words into the Comm-Link. He ordered for his Knights to go meditate. Just so that they would leave main room and we could reach his quarters without anyone seeing him.

I wonder if he’s angered by me for throwing my cover. He’s so loyal to the Supreme Leader, and I wasn’t. Loyalty to the Supreme Leader is supposed to be everyone’s concern at The First Order, more than anyone else. I’ve had to report people who weren’t loyal before, report people who spoke ill of him. And look at me now. Hypocritical.

Ren mummers limping against me, “That one.” He nods towards the door at the very end of the hall. Of course it would the one the furthest away.

I steady my breath, trying not to think of any of my own pain shooting through my shoulders. The way Ren is leaning on me, the cloth of his tunic rubs against my raw, torn skin. My teeth are grinding, legs trudging forward. It’s especially painful, how slow we’re moving.

Ren suddenly leans away from me, falling towards the wall to his left. It felt like he did it on purpose. His body falls against the hard metal, creating a thumping noise.

When I scurry to go help him, he sneers at me, leaning against the wall now instead, “I can walk on my own.”

I subside any part of his stubbornness that pisses me off to say, “I know you can.” I grab his wrist, the leather of his glove feeling so smooth under my fingertips. I throw his arm around my shoulder, forcing him to lean back on me. “But you don’t have to.” My hand guides him by pressing his back. “That’s the point.”

Ren tries to immediately depart from me the moment we enter the room. I feel something twist in my stomach. Something saddened by his eagerness to be away from me. Maybe he doesn’t want me
around because of his ego, from him not wanting help. Maybe from the fact that I just killed one of
his students. Either way, it gets to me more than it should.

I look around his room, slightly taken aback by it’s luxuries. There’s a spiral staircase to the right side
that leads up to a second platform containing rows and rows of bookshelves. The ceiling itself is a
window, showcasing the sky. Not quite the safest design. But I guess here, they do not have to
worry about attacks or surprise bombings. The orange atmosphere of the planet illuminates the room
in a warm, orange tone. It adds to the general coziness the room provides. Pulling myself away from
the sight upwards, I look back down to where Ren is crossing the room, moving towards a door to
the left.

I move past the sofas, chairs and holocrón, unable to get a good look at anything as I try to make it
back towards Ren before he can fall and hurt himself even more. He clumsily reaches for the button
on the door to reveal his room. I cringe as blood smudges against the button from his thumb.

The smell is so crisp, so clean. It reminds me of the time I showered in Coruscant, with all the
expensive and fancy soaps. There’s a bed in the middle of the room, the black silk sheets much like
the one of his ship. But this bed is much larger. Too large for anyone to need, really. And the silk
also looks so expensive. Are small nightstands sitting at each side of the bed, both with spherical
lamps that illuminate the room.
He makes for the bed, holding his side with each step.

Hurriedly I scan the room, catching a door to the left. Hoping it’s a bathroom, I stride towards it,
opening the door. I’m relieved to see it is. It’s one of the biggest bathrooms I have ever seen, in fact.
Across the room is a large bath and right next to it is a just as large shower. I re-focus myself, my
eyes catching a tall, sleek cabinet against the wall. I grab the black towels, hurrying out of the room
to see Ren about to lay down on his expensive sheets, despite being covered in blood.

I scorn, “Wait.” I cross over, laying the towels out on the bed for him, smoothing them out. He stares
at me. Probably annoyed. Maybe I should just go. He’d probably feel better if I weren’t around him
to be honest. Am I selfish to stay? Am I only here because I feel guilty?

I honestly do not think so. I really don’t feel guilty anymore. At least not as much as I initially did.
My mind is clear, I feel sensible.

Ren drops down on the mattress, cursing under his breath at whatever hurt from the impact. It looks
so silly, him still in his mask yet now laying down in bed. It can’t be comfortable.

He says bitterly, just as I am about to ask him if he needs anything, “You can go now.”

I am not surprised by it. So I shouldn’t be disappointed. I respond, “I will,” I reach up, fumbling for
the Comm-Link against my ear. When I hear the mechanical voice ask who I wish to contact, I say
clearly, “Lex Ren.”

Suddenly, the device is ripped out of my ear and flying across the room into Ren’s weak hand. He
quickly turns the dial with his thumb, powering it off. He sneers, “What exactly do you think you’re
doing?”

I answer, trying to calm him down with a sensible voice, “Lex has healing abilities, she can help
you.”

He relaxes his body, laying back down cautiously. He warns, “She is not to know of this.”

Of course not. He’s too self-obsessed to show himself vulnerable to her. He’s afraid that she’ll not
give him all the validation anymore, that she’ll doubt him. I try not to roll my eyes. I cross towards him, sticking my hand out for the Comm-Link. He doesn’t give it to me. Fine. I grab his fist, trying to pry it from his hand, but his fingers stay clamped around it. Tugging on his fist more, now using both of my hands to try to get his grip to loosen, he remains completely unbreakable. Suddenly, I hear a crunching noise.

He throws the broken pieces across the room, muttering, “I’ll get you a new one.”

Speechless, I remain staring at him.

He doesn’t respond either.

I scoff and return to the bathroom. He might have some supplies in here. Or something I could use to help him. At the Academy, I was required to take basic medical courses. Even though I can’t perform major surgeries or heal him with my mind powers, I can help him a little. More than he’s going to help himself, at least.

I scan the shelving to find the corner of a standard medkit, pushed behind some extra towels and toiletry items. With it in my hand, I return to Ren’s room to see his torn, battered body sitting all the way up, legs swung off of the bed.

I point back towards his pillow, instructing him authoritatively, “Down.”

He obliges with attitude, plopping his body back down to the mattress roughly. It had to of been painful for him. I look over at the broken Comm-Link as I walk towards him. If Lex were here, she could do a much better job. He wouldn’t be as irritable around her. He might even find this all amusing, pleasurable even, with her company.

He notices me eyeing the broken device. “I said I’ll get you a new one.”

I sit down on the side of the bed, adjacent to his body. I don’t even know where to start. He has slashes and scrapes pretty much everywhere. A lot on his limbs went right through his robes, showcasing the bloody gashes. I swallow hard, reaching up for the wide leather belt, binding all his robes together. I begin to wonder what I should say to fill the awkward silence.

But before I can say anything, he asks, “Why do you even have Lex on your Comm-Link?”

I slide the belt from under his back, placing it at the foot of the bed. “I enjoy talking to her, I suppose. I think she likes talking to me too.” I try to think of a word to describe that. The one that comes to mind is “friendship.” But it seems too wrong for my circumstance.

He asks, trying not to sound intrusive, but ultimately failing, “What do you talk about?” I’ve noticed that whenever he asks questions, he always sounds like he’s interrogating me.

I reach up to his upper body, unwrapping his cowl from around his shoulders. I wince when I see a gash the cloth was initially hiding that goes from his collarbone to his neck, all the way up to the edge of his helmet.

As I put his cowl to the side, I answer evasively, “I don’t know, we talk about whatever.”

He gruffs, annoyed at my lack of specific details.

This makes me think even more about their relationship. I wonder if he is now trying to get out of me information about her. If he did like her, I do not see why he would not act on it. Maybe he’s too
insecure to be in that type of a relationship. Weeks ago, the thought of Kylo Ren, Commander of
The First Order, being insecure would have been unbelievable. But right now, I do not only believe
it, but I see it. I slide off his tunic that lies across his chest down to his thighs. I try make sure that as I
move it down his arms, the fabric does not catch any of his opened wounds. He winces, audibly
hissing, when he raises his body to allow the tunic to slide from underneath him.

As I begin taking off his boots, I decide to humor him. By his frigid movements, I can tell he’s
uncomfortable. Maybe this would distract him. “You know,” I begin, “If Lex saw you like this, she
would not think any differently of you.”

He remains quiet, merely turning his head.

I continue, “She’s in love with you. Selfless, pure love. And seeing your vulnerabilities wouldn’t
change any of that.”

I do not expect him to respond. So when he does, I find myself distracted, fingers fumbling at the
buckles of his boots. The mechanical voice states, “It’s blind.”

Can I argue with that? I toss the second boot to the ground, his black socks revealed. I look back up
to him, deciding which garment to remove next. My eyes settle on his gloved hands. I think back to
the way she talked about him, so full of her emotions. Even if her love is blind, I do not necessarily
think that it means it’s wrong. He makes her so happy. So what if she’s too naive to feel otherwise.
Either way, I assure him, “I really don’t think so.” I grab his hand, carefully removing the rough
leather from his skin. As I pull it off, his bright, pale skin is revealed. For just a moment, I feel his
bare palms against my fingertips. The rough skin feels so warm. His whole body is probably
drenched in sweat. Immediately, he pulls his hand back to his side, clenching and then unclenching
his fingers. I move to his other hand furthest from me, slowly pulling it across his body. The same
process repeats. But this time, he doesn’t pull away as quickly. I swallow hard, continuing my
words, “Why do you think it’s blind?” I place his hand back at his side. I know the question was a
stretch for him to answer after I ask.

But he responds, nevertheless, “I know that I could do anything I wanted and she would never
oppose me.”

I laugh, looking down, “Isn’t that exactly what you want?”

“If it was, I wouldn’t keep you around.” He quips.

I look back up to him immediately after he says that, wanting so badly to see what expression lies
behind the words. I desperately want more context I can bring to what he said. I quietly respond, for
the first time during the conversation not doing anything to keep my hands busy as I speak, “You
don’t keep me around. Snoke assigned me to your side, you don’t get to choose.”

“If I didn’t want you here right now, you would be gone.”

The statement amuses me. I let a humored breath release through my nose as I say, “You made it
clear that you do not want me here on the several accounts you told me to leave.”

“Yet you stayed.” Each response has been so quick, so full of confidence. It feels like it’s been
awhile since we’ve had an exchange like this. But looking back, it really hasn’t been too long at all.
"Somehow, I knew you would."
I allow myself to refocus, beginning to unzip the upper part of his pleated armor. “It is my duty to serve you.” The sentence feels gross on my lips.

He assists me in taking off the garment, sitting up and sliding the sleeves off to reveal an undershirt with no sleeves. I wince at the fabric sliding roughly against his wounds. My hands ghost over his hands, but cannot find any way to assist him. I stare down at the length of his pale arms, covered in blood, sweat and the occasional moles dotting along the length of his limbs. I tilt my head, examining his skin.

He tosses the shirt to the pile I made for the rest of his armor. The action causes me to look up, right into the mask that is now so close to me as he’s sitting up. So close that I feel if I were to exhale, my breath would be visible on the bill of his mask. He stays in this position, merely to say, “You seem to have a habit of picking and choosing when you let your duty guide your decisions.”

The room suddenly feels a lot warmer. Slowly, he lays back down on the bed, turning his right arm up to examine the gash on his forearm.

I recollect myself.

He’s a lot more grungy, more dirty than I initially thought he would be. I dig in the med kit to find some antibacterial soap. I stand to my feet, heading back into the bathroom. I remember seeing a large metal container in the cabinet. After grabbing it, I stick it under the sink to fill with warm water. The water pours into the can, so loud at first. But as the water continues to fill, the initial sound becomes less obnoxious.

While it’s filling, I pour a few tablespoons of the antibacterial soap in, starring as the bubbles form with the movement of the water. My mind flips back to my interaction with Ren. How effortless the words came to him. How suggestive his words were, implying that he wants me here. Implying that I want to be here. So much for hating each other. I suck in my cheek, biting on the skin. I hate how I like the fact that he wants me around him. It’s silly for me to find pleasure in it. Childish, even. Do I only enjoy it because he hates everyone else? Does this make me feel special? Whatever the reason is, it’s stupid.

My thoughts are interrupted by the feeling of water splashing on my fingertips. I look down to see the water overflowing, out of the metal container. Quickly, I fumble for the handle, stopping the water. I exhale, frustrated, letting out some of the water from the top of the bucket so that it’s easily manageable. Carefully, I carry it back into Ren’s room.

I catch his figure sitting back up, using his armor I just discarded to rub viciously at the gashes along his arms.

“Ren!” I scorn, my steps growing more urgent as I return to his side.

He looks up, as if to ask what the problem is. He pauses for a minute, then continues rubbing. “I’m helping you,” He grumbles, his words obviously spoken through teeth grinding in pain.

I set the bucket on the nightstand and sit with my hip against his shoulder. I rip his hand away from his wounds, grabbing his uniform from his hand and tossing it back into the pile. I say, as if I’m disipling a child, “You’re going to get it irritated and infected.”

He mumbles under his breath at my concern.

I ignore it, dipping the clean rag from the kit into the bucket, then gently patting it down the length of
his arm. I try my absolute best to keep my hand light. I’ve done this before to many wounded soldiers during battles from earlier days. Then, I was on a bit of a time constraint. But with Ren, I don’t have to fix him up, then immediately send them back out to battle. I can take my time. I explain, carefully touching the first gash with the rag, “It’s best to be gentle.”

As I move down the gash on his bicep, he curses, turning his head.

My hand instinctively goes to his abdomen, as if to keep him steady, to provide some sense of core to him. With the touch, I feel the muscles of his stomach faintly contract. I lightly shush him as I continue, trying not to let his pain distract me from helping him.

I sit up, back towards the bucket of water. The first wound is dealt with. I remove my hand from his abdomen to ring the dirty rag out, then dip it back into the soapy water. I return to my regular position at his side, dabbing the cloth across the wound on his forearm. Then moving towards the wound on his other arm, horizontal across his triceps. The worst one is the one that is on his collarbone, reach up his neck. He’s lucky it didn’t hit any fatal points against his neck. If it were deeper, he could’ve lost a lot of blood.

I begin dabbing the rag carefully across the wound, knowing how much it must be hurting him. His adam’s apple bobs up as I press the cloth down in the crook of his neck. He slowly turns his head for easier access to the wound, but it’s so hard to do with his mask on. Him having the mask on is just silly at this point. I return the cloth to the bucket, eyeing the rim of the helmet, searching for a way to take it off.

Attempting to take his helmet off somewhat scares me. To do so seems like a suicide attempt. I lick my lips, saying dryly, “It’s hard to treat that gash with your mask on.”

He hesitantly reaches up, thumbs latching from underneath his helmet. Quickly, I look away. I was sure he wasn’t actually going to do it. He can’t be taking it off for me, with such little resistance or arguing.

There’s a click, then a hiss.

I stare at sheets across from his body, making an effort not to look at him. Out of the corner of my eye, I see him setting the mask down on the bed, right at his hip.

Blood immediately rushes to my cheeks. He doesn’t have a helmet on. I could look at him right now and see the true face of Kylo Ren. All the rumors I’ve heard, I could finally see the truth for myself. Some say he’s deformed, some say he’s hideous, others say he is ancient, hundreds of years old. I can rule out that one, I suppose.

I could see him for myself right now, and yet I cannot bring my eyes to look. I laugh at myself, unable to contain the sound. I reach back into the water for the cloth.

“What?” He says, offended.

The noise of his voice causes my fingers to freeze as they squeeze the dirty rag submerged into the bucket. His voice is so bare. So smooth. I don’t know why I was still expecting to hear the mechanical voice. I wasn’t prepared to hear something so human. It’s a low voice, still manly. But there is a texture that is much more vulnerable than I expected.

I force myself to choke up the word, “Nothing.”

I try to bring my thoughts away from the sound of his voice, but they just circle right back around to
it. I replay it in my mind, trying to replicate it to a t. When I hear him scoff, I realize that he might think that I’m laughing at him. At his appearance, which I have not even seen yet.

I hurriedly sputter, “I do not care to see what you look like.” I pull the rag to my lap.

“I did not ask you to look at me.” He insists, intrigued.

I find my fingers clutching the rag again, unable to move it from my lap to his wound. Before, I only had one word to replay in my mind. Now I have a whole sentence. I take it in, slowly, inhaling deeply. He speaks so quietly, so gently. I allow myself to indulge in the trace it puts me in, admitting without thinking, “I often imagine your appearance.”

He hums, pleased at the thought. The thought of me thinking about him. “How do you imagine me?” He asks.

With the mask on, it could very likely sound interrogative, like usual. But now, it sounds so curious. So soft. I let my aggressive grip on the rag loosen up. I smile into my lap, “Well, I personally think that you have a ridiculously small head. Like, it doesn’t fit your body at all.”

He chuckles huskily, the sound causing my stomach to flip. “Really?” He muses.

I nod, my eyes settling on my jittering knee. “And you have neon green hair. And tentacles for ears. And all these really gross boils and abscesses.”

He laughs at this, admitting, “Well if you do ever decide to look at me, prepare to be disappointed.”

An urge to fall into the bed, surrounded by the soft sheets, overwhelms me. I do not give into the odd temptation. Instead I just go back to patting the cloth against the cuts I already cleaned. Completely useless to do so. But the anxiety that comes with moving the cloth to the cut on his neck controls me.

I close my eyes. Exhale. This is stupid. He’s just a man, who has a face. If anything he’ll be ugly, that’s why he wears the mask. So many people would pay good money to see his face, why can’t I? I basically have to force my arm to move the rag to the gash on his shoulder, eyes still planted on his arm. Guessing where the cut lies, I move the rag upwards. I pull the rag away, too quickly to seem even the slightest graceful. He probably thinks I’m awful at this. I sigh, tossing the rag back into the bucket, causing the water to splash against the surface of his nightstand.

Next step is the suturing pen. I grab it from the medkit, positioning myself as if I were to draw on his arm. This, specifically requires a lot of focus, a steady hand. Which is why I’m so annoyed to see that my hand is trembling. I wonder if Ren’s watching me, irritated and confused. I don’t look up to him to study his expression, of course. Exhale. It’s just like playing a role. The role I have to fill is a nurse, who needs to suture a patient without being a trembling fucking idiot.

Allowing myself disassociate from my own personality allows me to draw the pen up the length of the first wound. A blue laser projects from the pen, closing up the gash adequately. Ren takes the pain of it pretty well, thankfully not squirming like a lot of people do. Next wound, on his bicep. It goes well again. Same with the one of his tricep.

And now there’s the one that’s close to his face.

He scoots towards me, turning on his side to open the area of the cut to me. Exhale. Slowly, I drag my eyes upwards, scooting closer to him. I adjust my arm to lay on his left bicep, the one free of cuts. Keeping my eyes steady on the wound, I can’t help but think about the long black hair that I see out of the corner of my eye. I focus harder on the cut. And then I notice a strand of his hair lays across
the surface of it.

I inhale, carefully using my index finger of my opposite hand to brush his hair to the back of his neck. My breath stops. As the hair falls, I can’t help but study how dark it is, especially compared to his light skin. The contrast is something odd. Intriguing.

Steadily, I begin at the bottom of the wound, slowly suturing upwards. The buzz from the pen is the only thing I can hear. As I move up the length of the wound, more of him becomes visible. I can faintly make out his jaw while it’s out of focus in my eyesight. I fight hard to keep it out of focus. But not hard enough to not notice how long and lean his jawline is. How soft. I stop pressing the button on the pen, but I don’t move. My eyes stay planted on his jawline, fighting so hard to decide whether or not look upwards.

Suddenly, his head turns and my gaze stays frozen as his face moves into sight. I stare, for what seems like hours, but is probably just one second. And in that second, the first thing I see are bright brown eyes, a long nose, and pink flushed lips. No hideous scars. No hideous anything, really. He isn’t even close to being ugly. I find my eyes settling on his eyes, wondering what the colors in them remind me of. I don’t think I’ve ever seen such a bright brown in my life.

I rip my gaze away, nearly jumping off of him. Coughing into my shoulder, I mumble, “Sorry.” I shove the suturing pen back into the medkit to pull out the bandages.

I feel the bed shift underneath me as he sits up. He asks, leaning forward, interested, “You’re sorry?”

I ignore the prompt to elaborate. I also ignore how foreign the gentle voice sounds. He knows exactly why I’m sorry. I grab the bandages, nearly causing everything else in the kit to spill over. My quick fingers fumble to unroll the gauze and this time I start directly with the one on his neck. I see him watching me as I adjust the position of the gauze. His profile is regal. There’s a slight curve outwards to the bridge of his nose, but not anything too noticeable. His lips remain pursed, full.

That’s the last time I directly look at him for the time being.

We don’t talk for the rest of the time that I’m treating his wounds. I can’t tell whether or not it feels awkward, mostly because I’m so stuck in my head. I should feel lucky that all this is taking away from my own pain, from the claw marks on my shoulders. I barely have even thought about that pain. All I feel right now is embarrassed and confused. And I don’t even know why.

I don’t say goodbye as I stand to my feet, walking towards the door.

But before I can fully exit, I hear Ren shift in the bed, calling out, “Are you leaving?”

I look back, purely from habit, and see his figure leaning against his elbows on the bed. I can see his whole body, completely without armor or anything to hide behind. And yet I’m the one who feels naked, who feels vulnerable. His long dark hair slightly curls as it frames his face. His brow is furrowed. Eyes wide. He’s worried. Reading him is so easy. The mask is a good idea for him.

I glance towards the metal ground, explaining, “R8 is probably worried. I should go check in.”

He starts, “What about your shoulders? You’re covered in blood and you-”

“I’m fine.” I snap, sounding more rude than I intended.
His shoulders drop and he looks to the side, breaking whatever gaze he had on me. He says apologetically, “It’s my fault that you got hurt.”

I shake my head lightly, crossing my arms across my chest. “It was my fault a long time before it was yours.”

His eyes flick back up to mine and we just stay like that for a full second. He's disappointed I'm leaving. I can tell. That fact is enough alone to make me want to stay. But I know staying here is not within my best interest. I break the eye contact when I turn around, walking through the door and back towards my quarters.

Back in my quarters R8 asked me what happened and I explain, specifically leaving out the part where I told Ren about Snoke’s orders. I know if I were to tell R8, it would be in his programming to report me.

After showering and changing into fresh, unbloodied clothes, I lay in the comfort of my bed with my holopad. The open, empty document flashes. I know what I have to do, but I feel like such a complete asshole to do it.

I begin typing, starting out the report:

Supreme Leader Snoke,

My mission was successful. Eerson Ren is eliminated and Kylo Ren has felt the full responsibility of the event. I believe that your methods were effective and this will ultimately improve Ren’s personal training and training with the other Knights.

In the midst of Ren’s emotional distraught from the situation, I found him in a cave, fighting Tuk’atas as a form of self-punishment. His guilt overwhelms him. I took the opportunity to try to become closer to him, to establish a better relationship with him.

I was successful, as he invited me into his quarters and revealed his face without his mask. Although I still have seen no signs of his former alliances still harboring in him, each day the Commander and I growing closer. My goal is if he were to harbor any of these feelings, he would feel close enough with me to speak of them.

The mission is going exactly how I have foreseen so far. I will not disappoint you.

Agent 2319

I find myself going back in the letter, adding more details and more specific summarizations. I perfect it so that there are no holes, no reasons to suspect that I’m a liar. That I’m a traitor.

I sigh as my index finger ghosts across the “send” button before pressing it, confirming all the information.

As I lay down, resting my eyes, it dawns on me that I can still turn everything around. That one slip up, that one error I made, does not have to affect my career. As long as Ren doesn’t speak of it, I’ll be okay. As long as Snoke doesn’t find out about General Hux capturing me and Kylo Ren saving me, I’ll be okay. And as long as I remain true to the cause of my mission from here on out, I’ll be okay.
I’m sure that if I can complete this mission without any more complications, everything will go back to normal.

Thinking about it going back to my normal routine, of slaving for The First Order, makes me want to groan. When will it end? When can I be free of this cycle? Is my contribution to The First Order even worth the people I end up hurting? Maybe this will be my last mission, this will be when they tell me that I can go out into the world and do whatever the hell I want.

But why would they do that? Why would they ever send me out with all the information I have on The First Order?

I turn on my other side. These strains of thoughts always arise during missions. And thinking this way never helps me. I do not know why I continue to do it.

Suddenly, I hear a pounding on my door.

I try not to sound as annoyed as I actually am when I holler out, “What is it?”

The door opens and I see Kylo Ren standing, fully armored, fully masked. Just like he should be. He orders, “Grab your things, we’re leaving.”

I roll out of bed, rubbing at my eyes, “Why?”

“Attack on The Finalizer.”

I stumble out forward, grabbing at all my things. Why the hell would the Resistance even try to attack The Finalizer? Idiots. They’re catastrophically outnumbered. Unless they’re looking for something in particular, it’d be pointless to even try to take down the vessel. I ask, “What are they looking for?”

Ren doesn’t respond.

I grab the holopad from my bed, typing away to try to reach updates from The Finalizer’s main control center. I barely even get enough time to read any full updates before Ren barks at me, “We’re leaving. Now.”

All I manage to read are six words:

“Attack led by General Leia Organa”

I follow Ren out of the room immediately, running straight for his ship.

Chapter End Notes

I’m so sorry this update was kinda off schedule. not even that I have a specific schedule. I usually update every 5-7 days but this time around I just felt like everything I was writing was complete garbage so there was a lot of deleting and rewriting and deleting
again and rewriting and eeepp. just one of those weeks I guess \_(ツ)_/¯ love it! either way I hope this is alright and it's not too boring. it's a decently long chapter despite nothing much really happening other than SEEING KYLO RENS GORGEOUS FACE FUCK ME RIGHT UP FOR THAT SHIT. thank you all again for the support and comments. with shitty weeks like these, it's so nice to go back and read some of them to remind myself to get out of my own head and just write something without wanting to barf all over it.

also, if u haven't check out these! I update them rather frequently:

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/

thank you all so much again!!!
I can’t stop looking at him.

As I sit by his side in the cockpit, he manically pilots the ship through space. It’s impressively done so, in a way where for a moment I am sure I’ll die from the piloting risks he takes to save time. But I always end up pleasantly surprised when he maneuvers through every obstacle with ease. It would make sense that he’s a good pilot. He is Han Solo’s son. It would also make sense that he looks… the way he does. I’ve seen historical holograms of Princess Leia and Han Solo, back years ago. Probably originating from the time they would have conceived Ben. I should have known that Ren would have such an appearance. I should have expected it.

But right now, as I’m sitting next to him, watching his masked face effortlessly, yet urgently, navigate the controls, all I can think about is my regret for not studying his face for longer when I had the chance. I know he has a mole a few centimeters across from his right nostril of his lowset nose. Then one above his left eyebrow. There’s also one in the hollow of his right cheek. But I forget the exact placements of the others. I imagine his brown-copper eyes, so concentrated as they flicker to the lever he pulls down. His brow, slightly furrowed in determination. His full, pink lips. Doing lip things.

“Stop that.” He spits, whipping his head towards me.

The command startles me away from my thoughts. It’s almost as if he heard me. Holy shit what if he did? God, that’s embarrassing. My cheeks heat up, aggressively red, and I defensively snap back, “Don’t read my mind.”

His head tilts. Classic Kylo Ren head tilt. “I didn’t read your mind. I was referring to staring at me.”

Shit.

He continues, exactly in the direction that I do not want him to go, “Why, what were you thinking about?”

I blatantly lie, removing any thread of my thoughts of his appearance, “You just seem particularly more impatient than usual.”

“Would you like me to take my time heading towards the attack of our largest, most vital warship?” Suddenly, he boosts up the engine again, flooring us into hyper space for only a mere second before we’re blasted to another asteroid belt. He navigates the obstacles quickly, too quickly to be comforting. I am guessing that his urgency has nothing to do with The Finalizer and everything to do
with Leia Organa. But I do not dare to reveal my knowledge on that situation.

R8 is thrown across the room behind us for the millionth time in the past minute, clattering into the wall. I yell back to the droid, specifically to get out of the conversation with Ren, “You need brace yourself in the corner or something!”

“I’m-” Another crash with Ren’s sharp turn. “Trying!” Then droid responds after recovering.

Ren’s mechanical voice, back in its normal Commanding state, threatens, “You’re not allowed to sit up here if you’re going to be so excruciatingly distracting.” He flips the ship around a particularly wide asteroid weaving back and forth through the smaller ones to follow.

The ship swerves to the right, all the way vertical, causing my head to fly forward, body thrown against the belt keeping me strapped in. I counter, trying to regain a steady sense of balance, “I’m not being distracting, you’re being reckless.”

He swerves back to a parallel position, finally getting us around the rest of the asteroids with ease. But this just causes him to increase his speed. “The combination of you bickering with your droid and staring at me is only adding to the list of ways you irritate me.”

“Fine! I’ll go back to my blanket on the floor of your loading dock.” I roll my eyes, clipping off the seat belt, only to immediately stumble forward from another one of his sharp turns.

Before I can stumble out of the cockpit, I feel my body being pushed back into the chair from an invisible energy. The seatbelt flies over my chest, clamping me back into the chair. No matter how many times Ren uses the Force on me, it still feels so strange. Ren scolds, “You idiotic girl, do you realize how dangerous that is? Are you trying to get a concussion?”

I gape at him, “You just told me that I’m distracting you by sitting up here!” The ship blasts back into hyperspace, my shoulders slamming against the back of the chair. The wounds from the Tuk’atas shoot pain down my back.

“Goddamnit,” He mummers, looking towards me. “Did you do anything to treat that yet?”

I glare, “Keep your eyes on what you’re doing.”

“Then stop distracting me.”

“I told you, I am more than happy to leave!” Every millisecond he remains looking at me, I feel more and more anxiety of where the ship is heading.

“Don’t.” He finally glances back towards the window, catching another asteroid in our path.

Ren swerves again. Another crash from the back room.

R8 calls out, “MY ARM IS LOOSE!”

“Oh my god,” I press my thumb to my temple.

At that moment, the ship flies forward into hyperspace one more time. I wonder where in the galaxy we’ll end up now. Every time he pulls that damned lever, I brace myself for flying directly into a planet.
Suddenly, the skyline around us morphs from the flying stars, like white streaks on a black canvas, into the busy scenery of a battlefield. X-wings and TIE fighters zoom from all directions, blasting away at each other ruthlessly.

On cue, there’s a familiar voice that overwhelms the ship’s cockpit, coming from speakers built into the console. “Commander Ren, we have received visual on your arrival. We have been infiltrated from intruders on the inside of The Finalizer.”

“How exactly did they manage to board our main, most secure, starship, General?” Ren speeds the ship through the ongoing battle, so effortlessly landing shots on two X-wings in just a single second of flying.

General Hux. I should’ve guessed. He dances around the question, “Currently our priority is eliminating all Resistance members and finding out why General Organa chose to accompany her troops on this mission.”

I examine the expanse of the horizon, noticing two fully armed frigates. General Organa is most likely in one of those. The Resistance Frigates resemble large, grey boats. They focus their bright green fire power on the turrets of the Finalizer. But they can only do so much damage with our shield still functional.

Ren responds snarkily, “Perhaps if you avoided infiltration of our starship as well as you avoid answering my questions, we would not be having as many problems.”

My eyes go wide. I try not to laugh, due to the mics still picking up the noises in the cockpit. I never knew that Ren’s sassiness could also amuse me when it’s directed towards others. It then hits me that he talks like this to others. I’m not the only one who he banters with. I don’t know how I feel about that… Did I think that I was special?

I hear the General make a noise, somewhere in between a sigh and a groan before evening out his voice to respond, “Just return to our ship and assist in taking out any threats before they can complete whatever mission they are set on.”

Ren responds, “Very well, but I’m going to assist your pilots out here first. They seem to be struggling with the situation.”

“Commander, you-”

Ren reaches over, across my lap to press a button, cutting out the General’s voice. He mumbles under his breath, “Boring conversation…” Veering the ship away from his original path to The Finalizer, he steers us right into the middle of battle.

I can’t help but feel my heart pound at the decision. My hands grip a the armrests of the chair I sit in. I’ve been in many different space battles before. And the way Ren is handling this is the exact opposite to what I would be doing.

Immediately, three ships lock on us, trailing us from behind. Bright red blasts fly past us as Ren dodges them. Our ship tumbles to the right, flipping several times before Ren is right in line with an unknowing X-wing up ahead. Before I can recover from the previous movement, he blasts unmercifully at the ship, charging it. The shots land precisely and the ship explodes. We soar through the grey smoke it leaves behind.
In the screen in the top corner of the ship, showcasing the rear, the ships trailing behind us advance in speed, closing in.

“Ren…” I warn, barely able to get a noise out of my tightened throat.

I hear the pure delight in Ren’s voice, so full of child-like joy, “Oh, I see them.”

Each time they let out a round of shots, my heart beats even faster. I can feel the blood pumping through my veins at a nearly unbearable speed. I’ve never had to sit idle in a battle before. I just want to grab the steering wheel from Ren and guide us to a more secure position. But Ren positions us where he is only able to barely dodge the shots fired our way. I do not dare to question it again, unable to even speak because of my breath caught at the edge of my esophagus.

The fighter in the middle fires the perfect shot at us. This is our end, I'm sure of it. Just as it’s about to impact our engines, Ren throws the ship upward, turning us upside down, then soaring straight towards the group of X-wings. He shoots the middle one. Veers right, shooting at the right one. Veers left, shooting at the left one. It all happens so fast, it looks as if they all explode at the same time.

Right as they explode, I notice that we’re heading directly for the first frigate, in the perfect position to fire at their main cockpit. But Ren hesitates, the frigate not responding to his presence whatsoever, holding back any fire power. Ren steers away from it, back on track to board The Finalizer.

I run through the sequence of events that just happened, how Kylo Ren handled that situation. The adrenaline pumps through me viciously just thinking about it. I can’t help but let out a laugh, throwing my head back against the seat I was perked up, on the edge of, just a moment ago. To be able to maneuver that way in battle, to avoid those shots… let alone land his own shots on those ships with such perfection. I find myself completely in awe of how he managed it. I look towards him, absolutely beaming.

“You doubted me.” He says cockily in an ‘I-told-you-so’ voice. He flies through the entrance of The Finalizer.

My smile spreads wider, admitting, “I didn’t think that was possible for anyone.”

He looks towards me, examining for a moment, before quickly returning his gaze to the process of landing the ship. I examine the ship’s empty hanger, red lights flashing and sirens overwhelming the area.

I request to him, somewhat too enthusiastically, “Seriously, get me in contact with who trained you to pilot like that.”

He doesn’t respond to that one. I assume it’s just out of him wanting to be better than me at it. Asshole. I don’t let that waver my utmost awe in his skill though. I feel so giddy playing it back in my mind. I’m silly to think any less of Han Solo’s son. My stomach drops, suddenly remembering what I just ignorantly asked him to do.

I think that’s my cue to leave. I undo my seatbelt, exiting the cockpit. When I enter, the first thing I see is R8’s figure lifelessly slumped on the ground. His right arm and left leg barely hang onto his body, supported by exposed wires. I sigh at the sight and his head turns up to me, eyes dimly flashing.
“Go ahead,” He weakly says, “I’ll wait here.”

I cross over to the cabinet beside him, patting his head lightly, “I’ll make it quick, bud.”

Whatever strength he used to look up at me is released as he relaxes back onto the ground with a clank.

Quickly, I open the cabinet, grabbing the things I piled into my arms disorderly when we left Korriban. I attach my belt, securing it around my waist. I made sure ahead of time it was preloaded with an assortment of knives and grenades. My pistols already are in my holsters at my thighs, so I just slip on my shoulder and forearm armor attachments, gloves, and swing my rifle over my back. Reaching up, I pull my hood out from under the strap of my rifle, securing it over my head.

Ren exits the cockpit shortly after landing the ship, stomping forwards. I follow him, watching his hand grab the lightsaber from his belt with one hand, opening the loading door with the other. Somewhere between running and walking, we exit together, making our way towards the nearest elevator.

I ask Ren, reaching at the pistols in the holsters at my thighs, “Did we receive any information on where the fight is happening?”

Ren responds vaguely, “I don’t need information”

Of course. I forget he has magic powers that give him solutions to everything. I swing the pistols in my fingers, twirling them around as we reach the elevator. Something I often do to regain as much familiarity with the weapons before all the action begins. The elevator’s doors part, revealing two stormtrooper’s limp bodies. I step over them, heading to an open area to stand towards the wall of the elevator. Ren does not give the bodies a second look as he enters, pressing a button to send us to the fourth floor of the base.

I lean into the wall. The elevator is quite plain. Merely metal and artificial lights. I find my eyes tracing the outline of ellipses the lights create on the back of Ren’s helmet. There’s a click each time the elevator moves up a floor. Ren holds his arm out, in a position that he can ignite his saber without slicing his leg off. I notice his foot step outwards, as if he were to block me. To protect me. I know it wasn’t a conscious action. But I notice it anyways.

The elevator swishing open, combined with the ignition of Ren’s lightsaber, causes me to snap into attention. The room we end up in is a large room, one used originally to serve the needs of reception work. It’s usually so boring, so quiet.

There’s a main desk, then an area of chairs to sit on, in case there’s a wait. But here, now, it’s cluttered with bodies. Both dead and alive. Three stormtroopers crouch behind the chairs closer to the elevators, peeping up to send shots at the group of Resistance members that are heading towards the hallway. The stormtroopers glance back at the elevator. It’s hard to tell if they’re relieved or terrified to see Ren. Ren makes his way down the hallway, steps slightly carried with a stomp and shoulders hunched predatorily.

The Resistance members respond to his arrival with a combination of running backwards and rapidly fired shots. Ren advances, swinging his lightsaber belligerently to block any of the blasts. I can’t even make out anything in front of him, due to the swinging of the blade, it’s electric red light blocking my vision. Any adrenaline I once felt before this fight diminishes as I walk behind Ren,
basically useless. By the time I can peek around Ren’s body, the Resistance members are all on the ground, completely destroyed by the reflection of their own blaster fire.

I let a stream of air escape from my nose, loosening the grip on my pistols. Ren walks around the bodies in the doorway. I hear more blaster fire from up ahead, in the hallway. I try to sidestep around Ren, around his left side that isn’t wielding a deadly blade. Ren catches me, immediately stepping in front of me once again before opening the door to the hallway. The hallway is filled with a collection of stormtroopers and Resistance members, all cramped together. I notice how little of stormtroopers there are compared to Resistance fighters, much like the room before. We’re on the fucking Finalizer, why isn’t General Hux sending out more troopers?

Ren advances, the stormtroopers basically parting whatever room they have to allow him through. I grip at the pistols harder, once again left behind Kylo Ren as he swings his lightsaber, deflecting the fire power, occasionally extending his opposite arm to do something that I cannot even see. He’s going to have this wave of troops gone in no time. And I’m not able to make any contribution. My eyes drift to my right, towards the door leading into a filing room. If I remember right, it leads into another exit, towards the end of this hallway. I think. Worth a shot. I cross towards it, entering, closing the door behind me. I don’t even think Ren notices me leave. He’s slightly preoccupied.

I dart through the rows of filing units, stretching for what seems like miles. Now, I am sure there’s an outlet on the other side. As I reach the last row of cabinets, I see the door, but I also see a Resistance member sitting against the wall. Blood spills from his abdomen, dirtying the mustard yellow jumpsuit. He wheezes, hanging onto whatever life he can manage for the time being. He reaches out to me with an extended, trembling arm, pleading with desperation in his glazed over eyes.

I raise my pistol and fire, right in between the eyes. The moment the blaster goes off, I cross to the outlet. But not before I look down at the slumped over man-now corpse.

Erasing whatever emotion the sight makes me feel, I open the door.

There’s no one that I can see from here. Crouching in the doorway, I peek outwards to my left, catching the Resistance soldiers moving in on the pack of stormtroopers and Ren. Now that I’m behind them, I can take them all by complete surprise. But I know there must be more further down this hallway. Soldiers currently not involved in this battle that could easily close in on me. Especially if or when they discover Ren is fighting with us.

I’ll have to be quick, then.

I stand to my feet, exiting the door and making my way down the hallway. Blasts from the stormtroopers fly past me, zipping to the end of the hall.

I have a clear shot on all of the Resistance soldiers. I need to pick as many off after my first gunshot, after they turn around to see me. Until I can get past the first wave of them, I have next to no cover. I flip my arm over, tapping on the button at the armor attached to my forearm. A small gridded shield projects, it’s holographic blue light flickering into something solid. It’s large enough to protect about one and a half square feet of area. That is usually all I need.

Left to right, just like reading. That’s the way I need to fire. Precisely, quickly. I examine their positioning one last time before raising my pistols. I let the first shot loose, accompanying it by the second, alternating guns as I move down the line of soldiers, much like a musician alternates hands while playing a piano. All four crash to the ground simultaneously, limp and motionless.
The line of soldiers in front of them flips around to see me and I fire, picking off two of them before having to use my left arm to shield their blaster's shots. Crouched, hiding more of my body with my shield, I quickly charge forwards, deflecting all of their shots by turning my arm accordingly. I reach the first soldier and push the shield outward, sending him slamming to the ground with a vicious thud.

As he falls backwards, the one next to him yells back at the soldiers facing the stormtroopers and Ren, “There’s another one back-!”

Before he can finish his sentence, I fire a shot through his throat, then through the heart of the one scooting away from me on the ground.

As all the troopers duck behind the cover from Ren to look back at me, I un latch a smoke bomb from my belt, rolling it towards the middle of the Resistance bunch. They manage to get a few shots at me before the smoke surrounds them, but I easily block them all with my shield. I run backwards, still deflecting their blasts and stormtrooper’s blasts, making my way towards the door I entered the hallway through.

I lean against the wall of the door frame, indented in the hallway. I press the button to power off my shield and I slip the pistols back into my thigh holsters. Swinging around my rifle on my back, I drop to the ground, kneeling so that only my gun’s barrel and right shoulder peeks out into the hall.

The Resistance soldiers seem utterly confused on where to go. While some remain in the smoke, trying to use it to their advantage against Ren, the others tumble out, racing to find me. They can’t comprehend where I am before I narrow them down in the scope of my rifle and fire. The dropping bodies cause even more confusion to the ones only now stumbling out of the smoke. Giving me more time to pick them off too.

Suddenly, the smoke’s area becomes tinted red, then absolutely fuming. The sound of a saber’s reverberation echos in the hallway. Without warning, a body flies across the expanse of the corridor, smashing into the ending wall. The man screams the whole way through, the desperate noise halted by the crack of his bones in contact with the solid metal wall. I hear a cry, a wretched scream, as the saber crackles with movement. His dark figure appears from the smoke, his lightsaber now somewhat discernable.

He looks my direction, stomping towards me. Unhappy, maybe. It's impossible to tell. I couldn’t care less. I just made that so easy for him, for those troopers. I swing the rifle behind my back, grabbing my pistols once again. Before he can get too close to me, I step out in front of him, making my way through the hall with the troopers and Commander Ren following behind me.

I look back, the smoke clearing up. A collection of corpses accumulated from the evaporating smoke, some with precise bullet holes in vital areas, and some just completely demolished in burns and cuts.

Facing forward once again, we walk through the hall, making our way to whatever those Resistance troopers were hiding.

Ren asks me, unamused, “Do you even know where we’re going?”

“No,” I shake my head, giving him a sly expression as I look over my shoulder, “Where is the Force telling us to go?”

He grumbles, “Try the last door on the right.”
I notice him try to quicken his steps, nonchalantly trying to pass me, but I just walk even faster. I know he won’t fight it too hard, not with all these impressionable troopers behind us. He wouldn’t want to seem childish.

We reach the door Ren directed me towards and I walk in without hesitation. The first thing I see is the Resistance member holding his gun my direction, firing. I duck and roll away from the blast, before realizing that it’s red beam is stopped in mid air. I shoot him in the chest, taking advantage of the pure terror that consumes him.

Ren lets the blaster shot go, it shooting into the wall of the hallway behind us.

Two men in the usual Resistance jumpsuit stand up immediately on our entrance, raising their trembling hands in surrender. The room is merely just a cubicle desk and a cabinet. The standard office for Empire record keepers.

Two stormtroopers from behind us immediately approach the scrawny men. One wears thick framed goggles, securely strapped around his orange, tall bald head, somewhat resembling a cone. The other has thin wired glasses, white hair and skin that is sagging from age so intensely, it looks as if it’s about to completely depart from his face.

Ren orders, watching the troopers push the men to the ground, their faces smashed into the cool metal floor, “Take them into holding cells and prep them for interrogation.”

“Yessir,” The troopers respond at the same time, their voices nearly identical. They carry the men out of the room, their heads immediately turning away from Kylo Ren’s.

Ren goes behind the desk, scanning the mounted holopad the men were using. It’s a First Order holopad, one that was probably already in this room. They were looking for something on it. Ren grabs the device, unhooking it from it’s charging cables. He exits the room on that note, without a word.

I quickly follow behind him as he walks through the hallway, stepping around the bodies. He orders, back at the troopers, “Has anyone called for a custodian on this floor?”

The troopers all remain silent until one steps up, “I’m on it, Sir.”

Ren grunts, moving forward, slightly annoyed.

I follow him back into the elevator. The other troops don’t follow us, probably due to the fact that they would rather not be in an elevator with Kylo Ren. The elevator shuts and Ren presses a combination of buttons displayed, ones that I recognize send us to the command deck. Ren grabs the holopad from his hand, scanning the information the Resistance men were once looking through. He’s quiet, not saying a word to me as he flips through their recent pages. I peek over to see the searches having to do with old relics that the Empire has recovered from the Jedi.

Kylo Ren immediately turns the device off in frustration, holding it securely at his side.

The doors open and we enter the hallway leading us to the command room. Ren strides, even more full of urgency and anger than once before. I allow him to take the lead as he stomps into the command center, walking directly toward General Hux.

“General Hux,” Ren’s voice booms throughout the room.
Hux, who was once giving orders down at men with their eyes glued to consoles, looks towards Ren. Whatever small chatter surrounded the room before is diminished. I watch the men, working to keep The Finalizer fighting against the Resistance’s forces, struggling not to eavesdrop. Hux walks down the runway of the room, making his way towards us with his arms folded behind his back, head high. How everyone noteworthy within The First Order usually walks (the exception being Ren).

Ren reports, somewhat passively, “I dealt with the complications on the fourth floor. There are currently two people in custody, ready for interrogation on their motives in this attack.”

“I oversaw through the security cameras,” Hux’s gaze turns towards mine. Eyes cold. Void of anything even remotely feeling. Analyzing. I hate it. I hate it because there’s something about him that reminds me so much about how I am. How I should be. His blue eyes are bright, piercing, as they look me up and down.

I tilt my head forward, eyes looking away from Hux back to Ren, waiting for him respond. Hux finally looks towards Ren too.

Ren just says, “Then you saw how ridiculously outnumbered your men were. How they could not defeat a small group of rebels without my intervention. May I ask where the thousands of other troopers on this ship were?”

Hux doesn’t budge at that dig. “I do not plan to waste my resources when you and Agent 2319 could clearly handle the situation with no problem.”

My finger twitches at the mention of my name. Perhaps a few weeks ago, I would be honored for the General to know my name. But now it’s just a reminder of an incident that must remain completely secret, unless I want to be killed by Supreme Leader Snoke himself.

Hux’s gaze turns back to me, "Agent," He tests the title out, on his tongue. "You really should not be wearing your hood in the presence of your superiors out of battle."

I mentally curse myself, pulling my hood down. "I apologize, General." I suppose I have been lacking in First Order procedure lately. Ren doesn't seem to mind, or pay any attention to it.

"Such mindless disrespect is quite unbecoming of a woman your rank,” He hisses, before turning back to Ren.

I just respond, as level as once before, "It will not happen again, General."

Ren stares at me. Probably thinking I'm out of my mind. I suppose it's because if he were to ever say something like that to me, I would be absolutely livid, turning the conversation into a criticism against him. Then the conversation would turn into an blown out of proportion argument.

Hux looks back towards Ren, pointing at the holopad in Ren's arm, "What's that?"

Ren slowly turns his head away from me, back to Hux. He doesn't respond at first. But when he does, his voice sounds absolutely venomous, “I trust that you will be able to manage finding someone to analyze the prisoner's history on our holopads. I briefly overlooked what they were trying to search for in our databanks. It seems they were looking for the locations of old relics we have ownership of.”

Hux questions the logic of it, “This is what their pathetic attack is about? Wanting artifacts for a
museum?"

"Of course not," Ren spits, "They want artifacts for something else. That is what we need to find out."

Hux surprisingly doesn't respond to the insult. He just swallows hard, then returns to his normal gaze. Despite the action being so tiny, it’s an outlier. And seeing an outlier in someone like Hux is extremely telling. He's anxious, nervous even.

"Is that all?" Ren prompts, handing Hux the holopad.

Hux grabs the holopad, sliding it under his arm. He responds, as coolly as someone can when mentioning Kylo Ren’s past to Kylo Ren directly, “This information has not answered why General Organa has accompanied their attack.”

Ren responds quickly, trying almost too hard to prove that her name does not affect him, “Board the ship and ask her yourself.”

General Hux’s eyebrow gives the slightest twitch. “We have tried to board the ship, but the security is something we have never encountered before. Scientists and engineers are already studying the security of the vessel. But as for now, or anytime in the near future, it will be impossible for us board the ship without the ship’s willingness.”

“Then we won’t board the ship, we have all we need here.”

“Why would General Or-”

“We have all we need.” Ren says this loudly. His words only progress in anger as he keeps talking. "Are you finished? Or will I have to be tortured by more of your completely useless, empty propositions."

Shivers scatter up my arms. I try not to resist stepping away from Ren, just from the pure fear that he’s going to take out his lightsaber and start swinging it everywhere in sight.

The General stays still, speaking more calmly this time. Perhaps an attempt to diminish Ren’s temper. “She may be willing to speak with you.”

Ren doesn’t respond.

Hux continues, trying to hide how aware he is of the thin ice he’s treading on, “This is an opportunity for The First Order to capture the Resistance’s main leader. If we have her, the rest of this war may as well be settled. Even if we cannot capture her, and you merely have a conversation, we can get vital information. Information only you can get out of her.”

Ren still remains silent.

“The First Order will finally reign.” He says these words quite differently than the ones proceeding. There’s a sense of desperation in his voice. Pleading. “Supreme Leader Snoke commanded it of you.”

Ren simply says, stopping the conversation before it can move further, “I will go.” Then exits, quickly leaving the room.
The simple response, followed by quick action takes me offguard.

“Agent,” Hux interrupts me before I can go chase after Ren. “you really wish to involve yourself in
this?”

I sigh, avoiding the question as I turn back on my heel to catch up to Ren. Ignoring a General’s
question is not good for my reputation, especially after I wore my hood up in front of him, but I
honestly don’t see that much repercussions for this in the moment. I race down the hallway to see
Ren already in the elevator, closing the door.

“Ren!” I scold, running towards him, “Hold on!”

He doesn’t even look at me. The door closes.

“Goddamnit,” I mumble, clicking the button on the elevator, waiting for it to come back up. At this
point, he’ll be leaving already. Why should I even bother going with him? My droid is on his ship, I
suppose. But there’s something in me, something that is reminded of the person I saw yesterday, that
is telling me that he can’t do this. Has he even seen his mother since leaving the Jedi? Does he hate
her? Does he still love her? I remember the moment he had a clear shot at the command center of the
ship, one that probably would not have done much damage due to their high security. But he
could’ve fired. He could’ve tried. It would have been worth it, but he chose not to.

I have no clue what the bond between a parent and child feels like. All I know is how to manipulate
that bond to my advantage for the sake of the order. But sometimes, when I think to what my life
would be without the Order, I often imagine having a mother. Having a person who has looked out
for me, since birth. Who used to hold me, who never left during rather difficult developmental stages
of childhood. Not because she was raising me to fight, or to learn, or to do anything in particular.
Because she loves me. Ren has a mother. He shouldn’t have to sacrifice that. Not for a political
agenda. Not if he doesn’t want to.

I step into the elevator, sending it back down to the hanger. I don’t even know why I’m bothering.
He’ll be gone by now. All I’ll see is the shuttle, zipping out, headed for god knows what he’s getting
himself into.

The doors swish open and I prepare myself for that sight. But that’s not what I see. The ship is still
sitting there, in the bay. Unmoving. Not even powering up. The quietness of the hanger overwhelms
me. When we arrived, red lights flashed and sirens roared. Now it’s just an empty hanger with Kylo
Ren’s ship, the docking ramp still opened and everything.

My footsteps carry so much volume, so much weight, against the metal flooring. I walk through the
hanger hesitantly. Did he even bother to come down to his ship? Maybe he just went somewhere else
completely. As I move up the ramp, I see R8’s body, slumped against the cabinet, where I left him.
He’s still powered down. The image only adds to the quietness of the scenery. As if quietness could
be amplified.

I enter the cockpit, halfway expecting it to be empty. I’ve been in places I was not supposed to be in
before. I’ve lurked through restricted Resistance areas. But right now, I truly feel the action of
trespassing weighing over me.

Ren sits at the seat, staring blankly at the console. His hand is on the lever, to put the ship into flight.
But he doesn’t move. I’ve never seen anything so still in my life. It’s as if everything is paused.
Slowly, carefully, I sit down in the seat next to him. I fasten the seat belt.

He doesn’t even slightly react to my presence. I lean back, patiently, giving him a moment.

Nothing happens.

We sit like this for awhile. For a long time.

Ren finally says, his voice absolutely broken, “I can’t do this.” The modulator makes the sound even more distorted, cracking even more abruptly than his actual voice would. It’s as if the one thing that he uses to make himself seem stronger, only proves to amplify his weakness.

I wonder what I should tell him. Capturing Organa would be a massive win for The First Order. But we already have information gathered. We’re already doing well in the war. I try to find loopholes and excuses to justify his lack of action. But at the end of it, I know that encouraging him to capture her would be the right thing to do. It should be the only option for him, for me.

I look out into the expanse of space. All the ships fighting so ruthlessly look just like insects from here. I tell him, quietly, “You don’t have to do it.”

“I do.”

I shake my head, watching one particular X-wing zip around the battle. That one in particular leads the rest of the wings. It’s fearless almost. Calculated. A lot like how Ren piloted. “You’re Commander Kylo Ren,” I say gently, “No one can give orders to Kylo Ren.”

“Supreme Leader Snoke can.”

“Supreme Leader Snoke doesn’t have to know.” The words spill out of my mouth.

This causes him to release his grip on the lever to look over at me. "How..." He swallows, "Do you know? About her?" A pause. Then an even more quiet, even more ashamed, "About me?"

I nod slowly, admitting, "I always knew."

He remains still for a moment. Then, out of insecurity, maybe out of shame, he crosses his arms across his body.

I exhale, carefully formulating a plan in my head, “I’ll go. I’ll go meet with her. And I’ll bring back tons of information—”

“What makes you think that you can get past her security?”

I nervously laugh, looking towards the lever to power the ship.

He sinks in his chair, the stress of the proposal pushing his posture physically downward.

I continue, desperately trying to convince him, “I was top of my class in the Academy. That includes in flying ships. I know I’m not as fancy as a pilot as you, but I can do it. All I need to do is make it to her frigate. It’s an easy route and if the X-wings see that I’m not fighting and I’m heading for the her ship, they most likely won’t even fire against me. Even if they did, I could easily take them.”

He leans forward, his head in his hands. “If anyone finds out, if Snoke...”

“What other choices do you have, Ren? I’m trying to protect you. Like you protected me.”
“You do not owe me anything.”

“That’s not why I’m doing this.”

His head turns to me, the blank darkness of the mask so contradictory to the emotion filled words, “Then tell me why.”

I swivel in the chair to face him, but only find myself looking away. “I don’t know why…” It’s honest. I honestly don’t know why. At this point, I’ve lied to Snoke more times than I can keep track of. And I’m still alive. What is one more time? Especially if this time, it’s because I want to help Ren.

He sighs, defeated by the answer, looking away from me. “This will ruin me. This kind of thing can ruin everything I’ve worked for. You don’t understand…”

The words cause me to glance up to him, my voice cracking on the desperate confession, “I do understand.”

He stares back at me.

My fingers twitch on my lap and I lightly bring them up to his helmet, as if I were caressing his face. The action is nothing more than me feeling the need to treat an urge. Nothing more than wanting to comfort him. I tell myself that. My thumb traces the metallic lining that lays under his eyes, then moves up the side of his face. For a moment, when my actions catch up to my logic, I am sure that he’ll push my hand away. But he doesn’t. As my fingers travel across the canvas of the helmet, they catch in the small nicks and dents that stand out against the smooth metal. I imagine the flaws being creases on his skin, indentations of scarring or age. The mask truly is scary. Aniliating. Especially this close. But I think back to the man I saw, wounded, weak, hurt on Korriban. The man who he tries to separate himself from when he puts on this mask. My voice escapes through my parted lips, begging him to believe in me to do this for him, “You’re not as alone as you think you are.”

And when he tilts his head forward, the cool metal of his mask meeting my forehead, I close my eyes in concentration. In realization that maybe I’m not as alone as I think I am either.

Chapter End Notes

lmao new drinking game: take a shot every time agent 2319 directly doesn't do her job and piles on those lies to good ole snokey! im so excited to see what u guys think of this one. there's a little bit of everything; some comedy, some action, some general hux, and then some pure emo moments. thank you all for reading and commenting and all, once again, god BLESS that shit !!!!!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/

UPDATE FROM WINTER 2018: lmao this chapter is iconic for both foreseeing Kylo Ren not shooting mother from his ship and "you're not alone" "neither are you" in TLJ, rian johnson, u out there???
Resistance Frigate

Chapter Summary

“She was very beautiful. Kind, but sad.” - General Leia Organa

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

We stay in that position for a moment. The silence of it is comforting, just our breaths so close. My mind so clear. The moment seems so pure, so full of something I’ve never experienced before. My thumb runs back and forth across a particular dent, where his cheekbone would be. I don’t know why I do it. I know he can’t feel it.

I whisper, eyes slowly opening to the darkness of his mask, “I should leave, then.”

I begin pulling my head away from his, only to feel his gloved hand wrap around my wrist, the one that reached up to his mask. He holds it in his hand, gripping so softly, as if he’s afraid to break it. I shiver, somewhat noticeably as his thumb grazes the exposed skin between my fingerless gloves and sleeve. He starts mumbling, looking down at the bone of my wrist, “When you steer, it’s very sensitive to right turns especially. I’ve been meaning to adjust it, but I haven’t gotten around to it. And there’s some extra modifications I added, but don’t let them confuse you, the basic controls are-”

“Your ship is in safe hands.” I smile, leaning down to try to get his gaze back up to mine.

He looks at me briefly, then looks back down at my wrist still in his hand. “My ship…” He repeats, setting my hand back onto the armchair. “Yeah.”

The moment he does, my whole body feels so different. The absence of his touch is cold. I clear my throat, standing to my feet. He stands up too, allowing me to sit in the piloting chair. Sitting in it gives me a rush alone. I look back at him, standing behind me with his arms crossed.

He stands there for a moment, as if he’s deciding what to say and whether or not to say it. Whatever it is, he decides to keep to himself, walking out of the cockpit. I watch his figure disappear down the ramp.

I take a deep breath. My hand covering the lever Ren’s hand once gripped. I can do this. I pull the lever, pressing a series of red buttons down the line of the consol. Getting this thing out of the hanger is going to be the hardest part, hopefully. The ship’s engines roar to life. Lights blink at me from a million directions. I’ve seen Ren fly this thing. I’ve watched it closely, even. I can do this.

I pull up on the wheel, lifting the ship up off the ground. I push it forward, urging the wobbly vessel out of the hanger before I crash into something. Ren is most definitely shitting himself right now. The ship leans left, so I tilt the wheel to the right, slightly, making it lean right, flying sideways. I adjust it, then throw the ship forwards, shooting me out of the hanger and into battle.

Deep breath.
I take in the scenery, my eyes trying to find a clear path to Organa’s frigate. There’s no clear way, really. But I figure one way that seems pretty peaceful. If I get lucky, they’ll notice that I’m not shooting and they won’t fire. Doubtful. But still, maybe, some chance.

Zooming forwards, I pass the TIE Fighters and X-wings engaged in a chase. Dodging them is the hardest part. The controls are set to such a high sensitivity, each movement with so much power behind it. I push onward, ignoring any of the blasts directed my direction. They definitely want to take down Ren’s ship.

I desperately scan Organa’s frigate, trying to find the location of their hanger amongst the huge grey mass. I veer around it once, noticing the cannons surrounding the ship carefully following me. As I hover next the the frigate, trying to gain a sense of where to enter the thing, a small glimpse of light opens from the lower left. Gates opening. It’s happening; They really are dumb enough to let Kylo Ren on their ship.

I swoop down, accidently too far, needing to jerk the ship back upwards. Two metal plates on the frigate’s outer walls glide open, revealing a metallic hanger. Suddenly, an X-wing flies past me, entering the hangar. I sigh, ungracefully following behind him.

It’s a wonder they don’t know it’s Ren with my unrefined skills on this ship.

I land to the ground with a thud, then a screech as it slides to a halt. I click all the red buttons, once used to start the ship, now used to shut it down. Then pull down the lever, back into resting position. I did it. I piloted Kylo Ren’s ship. I lean back in the chair, letting out an exasperated laugh. I take in the landscape of the hangar. No one’s here. You’d expect all forces to be lined up, ready to take on Kylo Ren.

I give it a moment.

Then the doors across from my ship open, a woman walking out. Alone. She’s short, wearing a grey jumpsuit with a purple vest. Her jumpsuit is cinched with a black, silver-buckled belt. As she moves forward, I see the length of her grey-brown hair tied behind her head, almost like a wreath. Her steps grow quicker and quicker as she nears the ship. Urgent, even.

I undo the seat buckle, standing to my feet, then exiting the cockpit. I just now realized how silly this could be. They could easier just kill me when they see it’s not Kylo Ren. I feel for the pistols in my holsters. Not equipping them, but just touching them to make sure they are there.

I press the button to open the ramp of the ship and it descends, clouding my vision with fog from vents above. The hissing of the vents diminishes as I step down the ramp, making out the form of the woman up close. She looks at me with urgent, desperate eyes, then immediately peers behind me, checking to see if I’m alone.


The sentence disappoints her. Her eyebrows crease and she looks to her right, to something hidden behind the now landed X-wing. She looks back at me, eyeing my body up and down, trying to make sense of me. “Then,” she says sucking in one cheek, then popping it out. “I believe we should chat.” I look at her big brown eyes, taken back to the sight of Ren’s. It’s so alike, it’s almost scary. They hold something so similar, despite the two people being on opposite sides of the war. I barely ever see people who belong to the same family. It’s odd to notice the similarities in their appearances when I do.

I begin to talk, but she holds up her hand, halting me.
“Not here,” She says, glancing towards the door. “If you’re not in a hurry, we can sit down somewhere.”

I suppose I can’t oppose her.

She leads me down the hangar, each step so full of prestige. Of honor.

Suddenly, a figure appears from behind the landed X-wing, meeting my gaze. It’s a man, probably around my age. A Resistance pilot. He wears a bright orange jumpsuit, carrying his helmet of grey, red, and black stripes under his arm. His smile is warm, each step making his groomed dark hair wave past his tawny face. His features are chiseled and masculine. He has a very square jawline and straight, dark eyebrows. With outstretched arms he greets to me, “Ben! Damn, you really have changed, haven’t you?”

General Organa gives him a disapproving look.

I turn my head back forwards, not entertaining him with any acknowledgement.

The elevator ride up to the next level is incredibly awkward. The awkwardness of it seems to not even phase Organa, as she just watches the lights move upward. Meanwhile, the Resistance pilot eyes me up and down, studying my equipment. Trying to get some information from me. I want to tell him that there’s no reason to try to get answers from how The First Order equips me. But I resist, still blankly staring forward and ignoring his gaze.

The doors open with a click, revealing a long hallway. Organa steps out with no hesitation, each step with certainty. I begin to follow her, but feel a hand press against my back, as if it were to guide me.

I whip around to see the pilot’s arm outstretched to me. Grabbing his wrist, I pin it to the doorway to the elevator, snarling in his shocked face, “Do not touch me.”

General Organa moves into my vision, pistol pointed my direction, “Let go of him. We’re here to have a discussion, are we not?”

The pilot says, defensively, charm and innocence threaded into his words, “I was just showing you some good ole Resistance hospitality.”

I squeeze his wrist tighter, pushing it further into the metal wall, “I am not interested in your hospitality or Resistance.”

The pilot defensively squirms, his fingers sticking outwards, “Okay, okay.”

I practically shove his wrist out of my hand, turning back to Organa, who is now putting her gun away. She sighs, turning back down the hall. I follow her, the pilot’s presence very aware in my mind as he walks behind me. The hallway is lit with a warm toned color, complementing the brown walls. It’s a lot different than the cool toned metal The First Order uses.

As we navigate through the corridor, Resistance members passing through stare holes into me. Their eyes are curious, maybe even hateful. But more than anything, confused. I wonder if General Organa is making as much of a sacrifice towards her mission as Kylo Ren is. As I am.

We walk into a conference like room, a large table with a holocron on it’s surface. Chairs line the table, each with a foot of distance in between each other. Organa approaches one, pulling it from under the table, gesturing towards me, “Take a seat.”

I oblige, keeping a careful eye on her and the pilot, who is now leaning in the doorway. Something
about him makes me feel unright. There’s a certain kindness, charm even, about him. And I cannot
tell if it’s genuine or not. Every inch of my body tells me to not trust it. But, as someone who
manipulates others for a living, I usually can tell when people are acting. I lean back in the chair
eying the man as he looks towards Organa for orders.

Organa turns to him, “Go ahead and leave us.” Her orders are authoritative, yet gentle. She’s his
superior, yet she doesn’t talk down on him.

The pilot responds, somewhat hesitantly, “You trust her enough to be alone with her?”

It’s not until he says that, that I honestly consider killing the woman. I should’ve thought about it
earlier. Mentally, I curse myself for not considering it. I could easily do it right now, and kill this pilot
too. The weight of my pistols are heavy against me, hot even. Searing into my skin with pure
pressure of choice. I think about General Hux, how pleased he would be. How pleased Snoke would be.
Whatever lies I’ve told up until now would be completely lost in this victory. I could do it. I also
think about Kylo Ren. Would he be happy that I did it for him? I still can imagine the feeling of his
helmet pressed against my head, in pure gratitude. He wants to protect her. If I killed her, he could
never look at me again. I’m sure of it.

“Can I?” Leia Organa turns to me, an eyebrow raised.

I nod slowly.

“Then I’ll be fine.” Organa says to the pilot, reassuringly. “We need you out there, fighting.”

The pilot looks to me, judgingly, then back to Organa. He approaches her, cutting her off from my
view, as if he is trying to cut me out of the conversation. Despite the effort, I can hear his concerned
words, “If she tries anything, you call me. We can get a lot of information out of her, we can—”

“Poe.” She stops his suggestions, her certainty evident. There’s something in her that I recognize in
all Resistance members. Her child-like, naive hope is contagious. I saw it in that senator Iris Nisedge
too. It didn’t work out for her. But right now, Leia Organa’s hope that I will not kill her gives her the
upper hand with me. It makes me uncomfortable, that something I once saw as so silly is now so
useful. So justified. She seems so calmed by it.

The pilot sighs, giving in, then backs up towards the door. He looks over his shoulder one last time,
brown eyes pleading into mine. Then, he exits. The image of his expression lingers in my thoughts.
He genuinely cares about Organa. Organa is his commanding General and he cares about her
personal well-being. Not just for the sake of the war. But for her own sake. I try to imagine myself
feeling that way about Snoke, about General Hux, but I cannot fathom it.

Organa lets a steady stream of air escape from her lips. I shift in my chair as I watch her walk to the
chair next to me. I assumed she would sit across from me. It would be more like a meeting, more
formal. But she sits right next to me, relaxed in the chair. I sit up as straight as possible, trying to size
her up. Trying to seem proper, intimidating. But the gimmick doesn’t phase her.

She just shakes her head, a slight smile, “I don’t even know where to begin, honestly.”

I swallow hard, keeping my voice as nonreactive to her ease as possible, “Let’s begin at why you are
accompanying this bizarre mission.”

Organa nods, taking in my cold nature. I hope to god she gets the point. I just want to know why
she’s here, then I can leave. No one gets hurt. No one has to know I was here to begin with. She
says simply, “I’ll tell you why I’m here. But first you have to talk to me.”
I blink. “I’m not here to reveal anything about The First.”

She scoffs at the statement, “You honestly think I let his ship into my frigate because I wanted information on The First Order?” She leans back, “I mean, I’ll take it, but I know that’s not why you’re here.”

I look away.

She leans back, taking me in. Trying to figure out who I am, perhaps. She asks, her voice soft, less military than I’ve heard it up to now. “How is he?”

The question takes me by surprise. I don’t know how to answer it, really. I may as well be honest. “He’s a very private man. I have very limited knowledge for these sorts of questions.”

“How is he?” She says the question like a statement this time, cutting right past whatever bullshit explanation I was spewing.

I can’t look her in the eyes. Every time to her longing, her sadness, it feels all too intense. Too real. I wonder what it’s like to feel that much love for someone. I find myself jealous of the woman, so connected to this person, in a way that her eyes could tell such vivid stories. I blink a few times, my vision hazy. I realize that I’m picking at the skin against my fingernails again. I quietly utter, “I think he’s lonely. But he’s not special because of it. We all need to be some degree of lonely, to devote ourselves to the war.” My voice lowers, “Don’t we?”

She nods, trying to repress the answer's effect on her.

“He’s insecure.” I add, somewhat scared to elaborate on that one.

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“How did he choose you to come here then?” She questions immediately, as if it’s been sitting on her tongue this whole time.

Knowledge that Kylo Ren was ordered to come here instead of me is supposed to be kept only between me and Ren. That was the whole point of this. I retort, “I have no clue what you’re talking about.”

She rolls her eyes, something I can so easily reimagine Kylo Ren doing at my attempts to hide whatever it is I’m hiding. “He’s still my son. I know you know that. And I also know he wouldn’t let just anyone touch his ship.”

Dammit. I remain quiet.

“So, if you want to know any information on why we are here, I suggest you tell me how he is.” She taunts, her voice so calm despite the fact I know deep down she’s desperate for an answer.

I begin, “He’s a powerful user of the Force. In battle, he is invincible. He also can manipulate the mind-”

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“He’s insecure.” I add, somewhat scared to elaborate on that one.

I find myself completely awed that I’m sharing such sensitive information. What if she uses this against him? I feel a shudder race up my spine. What would Ren want me to do right now? I honestly have no clue. Maybe I don’t know him as well as I think I did. What if I was creating this false connection with him that just was to ease my own insecurities and loneliness? The thought of
that scares me more than it should. I continue, adding on, “He’s just so private, it’s honestly hard to
tell. Only a few people have even seen his face, let alone have had a conversation with him outside
of things concerning our duty.”

Every time I elaborate, her eyes grow in sadness. Her eyebrows crease as she processes the
information. “I see.”

I swallow resetting any emotion I displayed, unsure of what else to tell her other than, “I think it
would be best if you asked me a more specific question. Then, I’ll be on my way.”

She blurs out, the question that was hanging over her head, “Is he trying to protect me by sending
you?”

I don’t respond at first. He is trying to protect her. I try to lessen the implications of that by adding,
“He’s trying to protect himself.”

“You’re trying to protect him.” Her words have a certain snap to them, one that doesn’t miss a beat.

I look down still unable to shake the feeling of the leather on the tips of his fingers skimming across
the bone of my wrist. Such a powerful man was so gentle. I replay it in my mind on a loop, trying to
replicate the feeling of comfort it brought me. No effort could replicate how it felt in that moment
though. I am trying to protect him. Just like he was trying to protect me. I say too defensively, “It is
my duty as a member of The First Order to protect my Commander, naturally.”

She laughs at that. It’s a knowing laugh, as if she could read inside my mind herself. She is Kylo
Ren’s mother. Perhaps, she has that ability. She leans her cheek against a hand, propping her elbow
on the table. “He’s more like Vader than I thought…”

Despite everything telling me that I shouldn’t care less about this, I encourage the remark and my
curiosity, “Why do you say that?”

“You were informed on our family tree. You’re close enough with him to know that.”

I nod.

“Well, my father loved a woman once before.” Her hands hit her thighs, the sentence said very

“If you are implying that Ren and I are romantically-”

“Alright,” She stops me before I can get too defensive. “I’m just saying, be careful.” Her eyes
wander towards the door. Is she thinking about leaving already? That’s all she wanted to know from
me?

It just occurs to me that I’ve never heard of Vader’s lover before. I have no clue if they were
married, if it was just a fling or what. More curiosity fills me. The question spills out, “What
happened to her?” Her eyes meet mine, pulled away from her small hands folded across her lap
surprised by the query. “Your mother.”

She studies me, for a minute before answering, her voice low, “She was killed. By Vader himself.”

Vader killed his own lover? Why? How could he? It doesn’t seem too far from things I have done,
but if he loved her, like people often talk about love... How? I shake my head at her, my eyes squinting, “Why are you telling me this?”

“I understand we have our political differences, but,” She tilts her head, as if it’s not obvious. “You’re someone’s child too.”

“No,” I clench my fists, “I’m not.”

She looks concerned about that. Her compassion, with no foreseen motive, only makes me feel weak. Her voice goes low, cutting out whatever bullshit “negotiation” undertone this conversation once had. “There’s nothing I want more than for Ben to come back home. Knowing that the one person I love more than anything in this galaxy is causing so much pain on himself and on others, it keeps me awake. I know there’s still the light in him. I know that he still struggles to resist it. I can feel that struggle from across the galaxy. You, his compassion for you, could one day help him reach some sort of clarity. Whether you’re friends, or whatever, him being with you has no use in The First Order. Snoke annihilates him from everyone. It helps him control him.

“The fact that he has someone who he trusts, who cares about him, is more hopeful for me than you know. But I wish to warn you, for your sake about the things he is capable of. History repeats itself more often than you may realize.”

I narrow my eyes. Everything about the two of them; Kylo Ren and Leia Organa is so unorganized. Disfunctional. I understand now why The First Order forbids Agents of family connection. Organa is sacrificing her duty in this war just as much as Ren is. For each other. Even they should hate each other and it makes me so disoriented that they don’t. I scold the woman, “You should crave my demise. Not warn me of it.”

She observes my confusion for a moment before standing to her feet, then crossing towards the door, “That’s all I needed to say. You may leave now.”

“You never told me why you’re here.”

She looks down to my feet, then back up to my eyes. “I wanted to see if something would happen. Something like this.” She takes a deep breath, adding on, “Tell Ben I said that I still love him. And tell him that I still am waiting for him to come back home.”

Before I have a chance to respond to the vague statement, she exits and the pilot reenters the room. He signals me to stand and follow him. I do. We walk down the hallway in silence, Organa out of sight.

It’s not until we’re halfway down the elevator that he talks.

When he does, he looks over at me, his brow furrowed. I notice how thick and dark his eyebrows are. His eyes are so dark, as well. But they’re so full of life. He asks me, “Is Ben happy with himself?”

I nod. "He's the second highest ranking member of The Order. I would say he's ecstatic to be where he is."

Something in the way his face sinks as he looks away tells me that he knows I’m lying.
Getting back to the Hanger is easier than I expected. All the Resistance ships have already begun falling back, into the frigate. I pull into Starkiller base’s interior as the frigate disappears from the horizon behind me, blasting into hyperspace to god knows where. I pull into the empty hanger to find Ren pacing, nervously. Whatever it was about the previous encounter left me completely confused. Everything used to be so simple. But now, everyone’s intentions are complicated. The motives of the two sides of this war that I once saw as definite seem so blurry. And I’m stuck in the haze.

I step out of the ship, trying not to look too frantic when approaching Ren. I can basically see the anxiety radiating off of him, the fear. I feel like it’s begging me to tame it. I enter the path of his pacing and he raises his head from the ground.

“What did she say?” He bluntly asks. “Why is she here?” He says ‘she’ so bitterly. As if he didn’t just protect her.

I swallow, remembering what she told me. “I…” I don’t know how to word it. Suddenly, doubt clouds my mind. Maybe I should have just killed her. Or maybe I could’ve planted a tracker on their ship somewhere or gathered more info on their location. I don’t think I did nearly enough with the opportunity I had. “She wanted to see how you’d react.” I admit it before I can get too caught up in doubt.

He doesn’t respond.

I rephrase it, for a reason I am unsure of. I know he heard me. I think I made myself clear. But I say anyways, “She wanted to know if you would respond at all to her being here.”

Still no words. Just the quiet mask looking down at me, so inhuman, so still. Still enough to when he does move, it startles me. He turns on his heel storming towards the exit. The reaction hits me, like a slap in the face. I don’t know what I expected. And if I did think that I would have another opportunity to comfort him, to sit with him in peaceful silence, it would be completely foolish of me. I run after him, calling out, “Ren, wait!”

He huffs, still moving towards the door.

I catch up, grabbing his wrist to stop him, but he yanks it away as if my touch is disgusting, poisonous. He words are full of spite as he snarls down at me, “What do you expect me to tell General Hux? I went on the frigate and Organa said she just came here to see if I’d react? And then I chose to not kill her?”

“I-”

“I thought agents were supposed to be intelligent. You couldn’t bring me anything else to go on?”

I don’t respond. I study the darkness of where his eyes are supposed to be in complete shock.

He mumbles something I cannot hear before he turns around, storming off again. His fists clench at his side.

In that moment, any compassion and anxiety I felt attached to the man is vanished. Now there’s just anger. Anger in the fact that after all I did for him, totally out of my comfort zone and against The
First Order, he has no appreciation for it. My teeth grind, jaw clenched, but it’s not enough to stop myself from blurting out to his dark figure walking away, “Just because you’re mad that you couldn’t go talk to your mom, doesn’t mean you have to take it out on me.”

He stops. So still, once again. His head turns so I can see half of his mask. A ceiling light reflects from the metal rim surrounding his eye. He looks away, then turns back around towards me, walking forward. His finger extends, pointing, his voice raised with authority, “You were happy to do that for me. You were the one who offered. I gave into your manipulative game, I have every right to be mad.”

I stand my ground, partly from the shock of his accusation, “Manipulative game?”

“You know exactly what I’m talking about.” He’s so close now, the mask is like something from a nightmare. I can’t believe I touched it and felt something, something like comfort a moment ago. I can’t bring myself to remember what his face looks like, especially as he says the words, “That’s all Agents know how to do. At the end of the day, you’re just some girl with no more personality than a droid, who uses other people to get what she wants. You’ve been desperate for my approval since the moment you met me. You hated that I hated you. This is all just your pathetic attempt to get me to like you.”

I want to get more angry. But all I can feel is my chest hurting, my mind fogged. Is it? Am I just trying to win his approval? I have had no clue what my intentions were with him this whole time. I’ve been confused this whole time. I have no clue what I’m doing, what I want. I shake my head, trying to bring sense to myself, “I’m not trying to manipulate you.” I don’t feel like I am. I don’t want to hurt him, I don’t want anything bad or wrong to happen to him. I don’t hate him. Not like I was trying to convince myself I was.

“Then what the hell are you doing?” His words are soft, yet so full of a quiet frustration.

I feel a shiver move down my spine. I bring myself back to how I felt in his ship, so close to him. “I thought that we were supposed to help each other.”

“You’re supposed to help The First Order.”

“I want to help you.”

“Then you have no right to be here.” He barks, the volume making my shoulders hike up. I think that he’ll let those words simmer in me, festering. But he doesn’t stop there. He continues, each word adding onto the pain forming in my chest. “You don’t care about the First Order, or anything. You’re a traitor who only pretends to care about this war to give your pathetic life purpose. Because this is the only thing that you’re good for.”

Quietly, I respond, “You’re right.”

There’s two choices on how I could let myself react to this.

And I choose to let the blood in my body boil over, absolutely fueling me out the door. My fists clench at my sides so roughly. I can feel my fingers being crushed against the pressure. I punch the elevator’s button, opening up the door. I stomp inside, sending the elevator to the fifth floor. I think that’s where I live. My mind is so away from myself, I can barely remember.

I find myself pacing in the elevator, unable to unhear the robotic words of Commander Ren. Words
like traitor, pathetic, and manipulative repeat particularly. I’m no good for anything else. I don’t know how to do anything else other than this. I have no personality. I’m not better than a droid. I’m not a real person.

Anger courses through my body, so violently I don’t even think before I send my fist into the wall of the elevator, pain shooting up from my fist to the length of my arm.

The elevator dings open and I stomp into my room.

The first thing I grab is my holopad and my fingers float against the alphabet as I type. I type everything I should’ve said before. From Kylo Ren saving me, to Kylo Ren protecting Organa. And anything in between. I even mention Ren and Lex, their friendship and whatever that entails. I talk about every moment he’s been kind to me, every moment he has been unprofessional.

And I talk about how crushed he was when he found out he had to kill his mother. How weak. And how crushed his mother was when I told her how Ren wasn’t happy, wasn’t social, and was just a scared insecure boy.

It’s all so easy for me to type, it makes me wonder why I didn’t do it before, it makes me wonder what was stopping me.

My eyes blur, the long paragraphs on the screen becoming unreadable. I blink and tear drops spill down from my cheeks, onto my fingers, still manically typing. I laugh at the feeling. The last time I cried was when I was a child, in the academy. I was so afraid someone would see me, that the action itself was a betrayal of the Order. I was afraid someone would see it and then I’d be discontinued. Killed. I remember, hiding under the sheets of my bed in a room shared with tons of other kids. I stuffed my face into the pillow, trying so hard not to make any noises. And as soon as I stopped, I flipped the pillow over, any wetness concealed. Any sign that I was not cut out for this life hidden.

I finish the long document with the words,

“I have betrayed The First Order. But in these betrayals, I found that Kylo Ren was the root of it all. The one who also betrayed you, Supreme Leader. He has betrayed me and everyone who fights this war with all their heart. I believe that Ren is a danger to the Order. And if this information kills me, please, let it be for the cause of bettering The Order. May The First Order rise.”

I stare at that sentence for a long time, my finger hovering over the “send” button. This is what I was made to do. This is what I’m good for. This is what I need to do, if I have any chance of ever being myself again. I’ll be redeemed, out of this hole Ren stuck me in.

My finger is now trembling. I envision myself pressing the button, sending the report to Snoke, but I don’t physically feel it.

There’s something stopping me. I don’t know what it is. But it’s so powerful. So inexplicable.

Everything comes together in a string of thoughts. The realization of how lost I am. The realization of how utterly unhappy I am here. How no one will love me like a mother loves her son, like a friend loves another friend. How I will never love anyone like that.

It all makes me feel exhausted.
My shoulders begin shaking, somewhat uncontrollably. A whimper escapes my lips, almost like a shriek. I pull my trembling hand away from the holopad to cover my mouth. My other hand slides the holopad onto the desk, still opened on the unsent document. I pull my knees to my chest, turning on my side in the bed.

I cry.

And I wish I could hope that one day my life will be different from this. But I know, deep down, that it can’t.

Chapter End Notes

so that was a downer lmao. welp. a lot of things have happened since last update. things like: me moving out. me moving into college. me going to bandcamp. me starting college. I have been BUSY so i’m sorry for the lack of updating. but I have so many ideas and i’m so excited to share, just as much as usual. regular updating will return, but right now i’m still adjusting. i’m sorry :/ thank you all so much for the kind words and understanding!!!!! <3 I hope you enjoyed!!!
Poor Decisions Pt. 1

Chapter Summary

“I am not going to die sober.” - The Wolf of Wall Street, Martin Scorsese

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Oh, it’s perfect, Agent! I am thankful.” R8 moves his arm, bending inward and outward effortlessly. Studying the ease of his movement, I determine that I’m content with it. I set down the small screwdriver on my nightstand, then swing my legs up onto the bed. Crawling back under the covers, I close my eyes, pulling the blanket up to my chin.

A few seconds pass.

Then, “Master, your sleep schedule indicates you should not be in bed until, at the earliest, 10 o’clock tonight.”

I pry open my heavy eyes, still somewhat sore. “I do not have any assignments today.”

R8 towers over the side of my bed, peering down at me. I notice scuffs in his silvery finish. But I force myself to not linger too long on it, or think about how I should probably shine him up a bit. “May I suggest spending the day training? It’s been awhile since you’ve done a strength building workout. According to my records, you’re due for another session.”

I close my eyes again, sighing deeply. Trying to tune out his voice.

“Perhaps you could go down to the shooting range? Your accuracy in firing is exceptional, in the top percentage of all First Order members. But it wouldn’t hurt to practice, to ensure your position.”

He’s not going to stop. I shove the covers off me, proceeding to roll out of bed. “I’ll go do that.” I say, slipping on my shoes with no intention to go to the goddamned shooting range or training rooms.

R8 begins following me.

I stop him. “You should probably stay here.”

“Why?”

“I do not need assistance.”

“But I measure and keep track of all your statistics.”

“I don’t want you to do that for me.”

R8 blinks. Confused. “But that’s one of my purposes in being assigned to you, Agent.”

I narrow my eyes at the droid, trying to find anything real within the lifeless humanoid. “What do
you want to go do right now? You can do anything in this whole galaxy. Choose. I’ll let you go do it.”

“Why?”

“Tell me what you want to do.”

The droid says without hesitation, “I wish to go with you to add data on your strength and shooting accuracy statistics.”

He’s not lying either. That’s actually what he wants and he knows it. It seems so simple for the droid. I look down, away, feeling somewhat regretful for denying him, “Well I wish to be alone.”

I exit the room, not giving R8 a second look.

It’s odd, not having left that room for so long. I don’t think I’ve ever stayed in there for more than just the night. But I’ve been cooped up in there from last afternoon, that night, then when a Stormtrooper sent R8 to my room this morning, and while I was fixing R8 all this afternoon. It had to have been over twenty-four hours, most consisting of lying in bed. Yet, all I want to do is just turn back around and return to that same spot. Well, that is, until R8 got there. Now, he’s just going to annoy me with all the things I should be doing.

I walk down the hallway, each step seeming so uneven with the next. Out of rhythm for some reason. It just now occurs to me that I really don’t know where I’m going. Or what to do. I suppose I could go down to the social district of the base. There’s a few cantinas and lounging options. I think that Agents have permissions to go there, but I’m not sure. Usually I hear of high ranking officers and people of that sort going there. I think I fit into those categories. Maybe I’m just not happy here because I never have time to do stuff like that. To make friends.

But even the idea of trying to make friends makes my toes curl. It sounds awful.

But where else can I go, right now? R8 isn’t going to let me stay in my room, doing nothing. And I’m not about to do anything to do with fighting, or shooting. I absolutely refuse.

Tonight is going to be completely combat free.

With that reassurance, I make my way down the hall. Tonight will be well deserved fun. I’m going to socialize and make friends. And then, I’ll be right on track to loving it here. It’s my only option to make this work. If I can do half the things that this job requires of me, I can do this.

I go into the closest elevator, sending myself down into the lowest floor. I’ve only even been down here once. It was a long time ago. Often, when missions succeed, this is where whoever high enough involved goes to celebrate. I tried to celebrate once, tempted by the way that everyone else talked about it. How happy their successes made them. But success is so necessary, I feel like partying because of it would be odd. Like celebrating breathing. Or birthdays. I never quite understood birthdays either.

The elevator doors open and the hallway seems just like a normal First Order Finalizer hallway. But there’s something unsettling about the way two men stand outside the door, still in their Officer uniform, but not following procedure by standing up straight. One leans his body against the wall, so casually, a silver bottle in his hand. The steady beat of music pulsates throughout the floor, right into the soles of my feet. His hair brown hair is still combed over, in ship-shape. He turns towards me, square jawline now aligned my direction. I look down as I walk past the men, to the doors of the cantina.
As I pass them, I silently scold myself. Avoiding eye contact is not a good way to make friends.

The room is full, but not crowded upon entering. People are off, in their own sectioned groups, exchanging conversation with one another. Pre-established groups. Probably friends from their positions, or old friends from the Academy. Friends that I never made. I take a deep breath, making my way to the counter to my right.

There’s a Twi’Lek man serving three men a few stools over. I try to convince myself to sit near them, close enough to make conversation. But I can’t. So I decide to sit down, far enough away from anyone else. Waiting, I begin picking at my hangnails, trying to wrap my head around why I’m even doing this. I can’t even think straight, I still feel so angry from prior events. If I concentrate on it too hard, my blood heats, head pounds. It’s a kind of anger that hurts to hold in. As I pick at my skin, I notice that my sore knuckles are now visibly bruised from punching the elevator wall. It’s the kind of anger that makes me want to punch another elevator wall. Or just any wall in general.

“Girl, you awake?”

The voice startles me. I look up to see the Twi’Lek man, raising his brow at me.

Was he talking to me for long? Was I ignoring him?

He continues, “Whaddu want?”

I look up at the menu, illuminated with a neon boarder. I don’t read it at all, but I still process the image of it before saying, a crack piercing my tone, “Shesharillian vodka.”

He turns around, preparing the drink. I watch his arms reach across his work station so quickly, grabbing glasses then filling them and handing them to people around the counter. I focus especially hard the liquids pouring into the cups, trying to hypnotize myself so that I don’t think about Kylo Ren.

Kylo Ren.

My fists clench at my sides. I hate him, but more than anything I hate that he hurt me. I hate that I ever saw his face, I hate that I ever thought that we had anything in common. He’s evil, not just because of his actions in this war. But because he waits until people care about him, until they’re invested; then he hurts them. At least, that’s what happened with me.

The cup of vodka slides into my arm, interrupting my gaze. I grab it, downing it in one gulp, basically. The warmth of the alcohol spreads from my throat all the way down to my stomach, somewhat intertwining with any anger nesting deep inside of me.

I send it back up.

Part of me doesn’t know if I want to get drunk or not. I am not even sure if it’s safe for me to. I’ve never been anything more than tipsy. I suppose before, there never was a reason for me to get drunk. There’s something about how the alcohol complements whatever physically pain my emotions are causing. That should be a sign alone that this is a bad idea. But frankly, I don’t give a single fuck right now.

So I have another drink.

As it slides down my throat, I turn on my stool, watching the rest of the bar. There’s a specific group of people I notice, more drunk than the rest. They’re obnoxious, very touchy on the people around them. They run up to the counter beside me, nearly knocking down chairs along the way, demanding
some sort of beer. They’re so damn loud.

I have another drink.

Maybe it’s the Agent in me, but I can’t help but eavesdrop on their slurred conversation. One’s bragging about how fucked up she got in a Hutt’s palace. The other’s laugh at her exaggeration of the story way too much. It makes me angrier, for some reason. They’re acting like idiots with no common sense. I understand they’re drunk. But something tells me they’re just this obnoxious all the time, using their alcohol as an excuse to kick it up a notch. The woman telling the story talks, her arms flailing around, completely oblivious to her surroundings. With an infliction of words, she whips her hand outward, knocking over a halfway filled glass, as if it were fulfilling a prophecy my anxious mind foresaw.

I lean my head on my hand, trying not to make it obvious how annoyed I am. I just now am coming to the realization that they are my age, probably. If not, they’re not too far away from it. Is this what people my age do normally, on the weekends? Is this what I have to act like to make friends? If so, maybe I should change plans for the night. I could just not talk to any of these idiots, go find a place to crash around the ship, and call it a night.

I’m already forgetting why I wanted to make friends to begin with.

Shit. Because I need to like my job and the people who I work with. My only option. I repeat that mantra in my head for a few seconds, maybe minutes. My mind’s perception of time grows foggy.

I call for another drink.

It’s not too long after until I decide to head out. I feel sick. And definitely not happy, like the other people at the bar. Their laughter just made me irritated and jealous. If anything, tonight was just another reminder of how I really don’t belong here. Or anywhere for that fact. Maybe I could have, if I didn’t fucking waste the past 20-whatever years training. Shit, I really want to know who I would be if my personality wasn’t bleached out of my brain since birth.

Stumbling away from my stool, I push past the bodies in my way towards the door. They’re all rude, taking up so much space. All the people surrounding me is so overwhelming. The layers and layers of bodies, keeping me from the exit. When I came here it seemed so much emptier. Sweat forms from the pores of my face. Each step seems so heavy, my upper body unbalanced, leaning forward. I feel like I’m falling forward. Shit.

I tumble out of the mass of people, grabbing the wall in front of me. Inhale. Exhale. My right side feels so heavy now, I must fight the urge to fall towards that side. And during that fight my vision shifts, back and forth, images of people’s legs floating in and out of focus.

I clench my eyes shut, then open them again.

My eyes feel open, but I only see darkness.

Suddenly, light comes back into focus, the crowd coming back into discernable figures.

I can do this. Just exit. That’s it.

Right foot. Left foot. Right foot. Left. Right. Left. I envision a path drawn on the floor towards the
door. Each step is carefully placed on the line. I’m walking on a tightrope, the ground miles and miles below me. It makes me feel even more sick.

I make it to the door, pushing the button next to it eventually, after a few tries of my finger ending up not quite on the button as I push. It slides open and I exit, too quickly for my mind to keep up with my body. I look right and left in the hallway, my head trying to discern which way to go. Right. I came from the right. Where am I even going? I can’t go back to my room, R8 will kill me.

“Hey,” A booming voice says from behind me.

My head whips around, colors blurred until a face comes into view. Square jaw. Brown, parted hair. Officer uniform. I’ve seen the man before, but I don’t think I know him. I backtrack, trying to remember, but I’m cut off.

“You going home?” He asks, now leaning against the doorway.

I don’t know. But for his sake and for mine, I nod, giving a mumbled, “Uh-huh.”

He steps towards me, away from the wall, so slowly. Each step, his heel rolling to his toe. I keep staring at his shined black shoes. “But the night just started!”

I shake my head, unable to formulate any sentence. All I can utter is the word, “Leave.” I stumble to my right, trying to walk away from the encounter.

His arm extends, reaching in front of me to stop my path. But my momentum is too much for my body to halt, causing my stomach to lean into his arm, my mind screaming at me to not fall over. The pressure of his arm on my stomach makes my throat swell, as if to warn me that I’m about to throw up. My eyes water, looking up at the man, as if to beg him to leave me the fuck alone.

“You okay? If you want, I could take you back to my place?”

I don’t need this shit. My teeth grind, my already pissed off state suddenly multiplied by so much more. I am slightly wasted, I’ll admit, but I manage to muster any sober part of me left to look straight into his eyes and say, “You don’t want to flirt with me right now.”

“I’ve noticed you around the ship and…” His words linger, arm snaking around my body. “I was hoping to do more than flirt.”

This asshole didn’t talk to me the whole night. No one did. Maybe, if he would've made me less miserable an hour ago, I’d consider it. But now? I set my jaw, trying to make my words as less slurred as possible. Trying to sound serious, intimidating, “Fuck. Off.”

He smirks. “Those mean words don’t look right coming out of that pretty mouth.”

And before I can even think about it, my fist flies into his jaw. And it feels so good. His smirk is gone, only to be replaced with pure anger. Anger like whatever I’m feeling. All I want to do is make him angrier. To give him a reason to fight me, so I can just retaliate.

And he does. He stumbles back, holding his jaw, “What the hell, bitch?”

Clumsily, I fall forwards, grabbing onto his shirt’s collar, throwing him into the ground with every bit of strength I have. The momentum I created almost causes me to blackout right then and there. His body crashes with a satisfying thud. I straddle him, planting fists against his face over and over, knuckles cracking at the mere force. The pain feels so real. No role is being played. This is who I am. This is what I feel. Someone who’s not Agent 2319, who has no clue what that even means.
I yell at the man, hoping the words get through to him in-between his calls for security, “I told you to fuck off! I told you!”

His blood intertwines with mine, my vision fading in and out, red and then black. And in a moment of clarity, I realize what I’m doing. And I realize that I could stop at any moment. But I don’t.

“Hey!” I hear a voice from the distance call.

I ignore it, still sending my fists forward.

I don’t stop until I feel my arms lifted up, pulling my heavy body off of the man. I flail against the force, trying to free myself of the white, armored limbs that now restrain me. In slow frames, the man stands to his feet with the help of another officer, blood trickling down his face. His eyes squint, unable to open. Each of his breaths wheeze in pain. But I feel no remorse. If anything, I miss punching him.

I can barely fathom my body being pulled away from the scene, feet dragged against the metal ground. It’s nice, to not have to put any effort into moving. So, I don’t fight it. I feel like I’m floating, opposed to my body weighed down like before, each step burdened with extra weight tied to my ankles. I close my eyes, trying to let my mind sink into the feeling.

When I open them, I’m sitting in a chair, across from the desk. The room is bright, despite the wall across from me being a window showcasing the horizon of the dark galaxy. I wonder where we are, currently. We must have fled after the attack, or whatever happened. Did we? I forget. I can hear men behind me talking. Stormtrooper voices. I don’t feel like dialing into what they’re saying, purely out of laziness. And lack of focus.

But I hear can make out someone say, “he wants to talk with her.”

My skin shivers, assuming “he” is Kylo Ren and “her” is me. And will die before I talk to that man tonight. I stand up to my feet, wobbling forward, needing to use the desk to steady me at first. The blood rushes from my head, down to my feet, making me fall back into the chair just as a tall figure passes me. But the uniform is too fitted, too ironed to be Kylo Ren’s. My eyes travel up the length of the man, finding the red hair, combed at the sides. A lot like the hair of the guy I just beat up.

He sits down in the pleated red chair, behind the desk. I notice how clean his desk is. Organized. Maybe it’s because I drank a little, or maybe it’s because I can’t seem to give a shit about anything right now, but being in what seems to be General Hux’s office doesn’t feel like it should. It doesn’t feel like anything. It’s just a place. A place with me in it, a clean desk, and General Hux, sitting down, putting something in a drawer.

I lean my head on my hand, waiting for him to say something. He doesn’t. He still goes through a drawer, not paying much attention to me.

I start things off, slurring, “Am I in trouble?”

“No,” He responds, still not looking at me.

“Then why am I here?”

He finally looks up, leaning back. Chin tilted, like a pompous asshole. “Did you not hear my
conversation with the officers who restrained you?”

Did I? I don’t recall. Shit.

He takes my confused expression, responding, “You’re here because you’re not in trouble, actually.”

I stare at him blankly.

He continues, sitting up so straight, so formal. Seeing him do that, this late at night, in this chill of a situation exhausts me. He elaborates, hands folded across the edge of the table so carefully, “I am going to allow this issue to vanish. The Officer you attacked will not speak of it. Neither will the troopers who restrained you afterwards.”

Trying so hard to follow his quick words, I slowly respond, my singular word taking forever to come out, “Why?”

His eyes slither up from my feet to my unsteady gaze. I stare at his thin lips as he talks, trying to make something of the fuzzy words he speaks. I feel like as soon as he says one word, I forget it by the time I hear the next. “Ever since our first altercation with each other, I found myself rather intrigued. Specifically, because Kylo Ren saving someone doesn’t seem to be a thing he would do. I went through your previous records and found that you went through the Academy two years under me. I vaguely remember you.”

I try to recall him. But it’s impossible right now.

He continues, “You actually have quite the impressive accomplishment list. Also, no former disobedience or record of even the slightest mistake on previous missions.”

I throw my head back, bored. “That’s not why you’re letting me get off.”

He chuckles, “Even pathetically intoxicated you are aware of the human motive.” I want to roll my eyes. I might have. I forget. He leans forward, “I want to know why you’re acting out now. Getting drunk and beating a man is not like you.”

He thinks that just because he read a few papers concerning me that he knows me. Asshole. I shrug.

“Kylo Ren has something to do with it, I suppose.”

The mention of his name causes every inch of my body to stiffen.

Hux notices, chuckling at the sight. “Ren seemed quite angered by something today too.”

“When is he not angry?” I snap, realizing my tone was too rude too late.

He doesn’t seem bothered though. If anything humored. He continues, his voice so desperate for information, so carefully calculated in hiding it, “If you tell me what is going on, I could do something to help your situation.”

Bullshit. “You want to know what’s going on?” I taunt. “Supreme Leader Snoke assigned me to work at the hip with Kylo Ren for god knows how long. And it’s insufferable. He’s insufferable.”

“Have you not dealt with insufferable men before?”

“I am dealing with one right now.”

He chuckles again, leaning back. It’s so weird to see him amused by this. In any other situation, he
would have killed me. My head hurts. It reminds me so much of how Ren was to me, memories flooding into my mind. How he always entertained my disobedience. How I always entertained his. I thought drinking was supposed to make me forget these things. I feel like I’ve been cheated.

He opens a file in his hand, fingerling through the papers. As he searches, he responds, his voice deeper than before, “I spoke to Supreme Leader Snoke about you and Ren.”

My whole body freezes.

Hux says so absentmindedly, so casually, “The Supreme Leader said that the two of you are close.”

My brain hurts from all the lies I’ve told everyone around me. I feel so muddied by it all, lost in what I should be doing. I don’t respond, mentally begging for this situation to be over.

He analyzes me carefully.

I can’t hold his gaze, let alone sit still. I shift my weight. “Just let me go home, please.”

In that moment, he looks up, behind me. I hear footsteps and I swing my head around, too quickly. A black blur overwhelms my vision. When my eyes finally focus, the first thing I can see is the silver outline of the mask I know all too well. The feeling of illness creeps back up on me, along with a rush of so many other things. The urge to cry. The urge to throw something.

I clench my jaw, narrowing my eyes in Ren’s direction.

“General,” He begins, avoiding my sharp gaze towards him, “What is your business with her?”

Hux stands to his feet, almost out of respect for Ren. It’s what everyone is supposed to do when he enters the room. But the way Hux does it, it seems primitive. A way for Hux to seem larger. He says to Ren, testing, “Your Agent has recently been involved in quite the altercation with an officer.”

Ren’s head snaps towards mine. Embarrassment spreads throughout my body, down my throat. A lot like the feeling of alcohol did. I find myself longing for another shot. Whether he’s concerned, angry, intrigued, I don’t know. Damned mask. Nor do I care.

And I don’t want to be here anymore.

So, I decide to leave.

I stand to my feet, trying with absolutely everything I have to remain steady with the movement. “Bye.” I announce to the men, walking for the door.

Ren’s figure is suddenly in front of my, blocking me. I stumble forward before I can stop myself, falling into him, body crashing nearly limp against his strong frame. He holds me up, gripping my arms with his fingers. I can’t help but lean into the touch, despite every fiber in my being telling me not to.

“I’m done with her for now.” Hux says, waving Ren on, as if I’m not even in the room.

I squirm out of Ren’s grip, which was surprisingly not too overbearing. I make it out of the office and into the wall of the hallway before I hear familiar footsteps.

I flip around to find him catching up to me with ease. And the only thing I can think to say is, “Fuck you.” I wonder if I would have said that sober.

He stands still, but looks as if he’s swaying. Oh shit, I’m the one swaying. The deep-set voice asks,
so obliviously, “Are you upset with me?”

To that, I turn on my heel, somehow even more pissed than before. I want to punch another thing. I stomp forward, down the hall, trying to keep straight, but ultimately needing to lean into the wall. Ren catches up with me, the robot face peering downward, so unsure of what to do.

I lean further into the wall, away from him, trying to make sense of the mask and remember what his stupid face looked like before he put it on. I point forward, hissing, “Your mask is so fucking dumb.”

He scoffs, “Let’s just get you back to your room.”

I lean into my words, spitting at him, “Your lightsaber is dumb too.”

He peers down the hallway, shushing me.

“Don’t fucking shush me, I can talk as loud as I-”

“Agent.” He scolds.

“Fuck you.”

I stomp forward, down the hallway again. Shit. Is this the right way? I might be going back towards the General’s Office. How do I already forget? I am better than this. I turn around again, heading the other direction, ignoring Ren watching me. Suddenly, his hand is placed near my shoulder. Not on it. But barely not touching. As if he’s afraid to touch me.

This just makes me more confused.

He says softly, the modulated voice crackling, “You made yourself clear on your distaste for me. Just let me get you back to your room safely.”

I want to reject it. But the care in his voice leaves me feeling even more lonely, even more scared. He doesn’t care about me. He doesn’t care. He just doesn’t want me to embarrass him.

“Please,” He begs. I never heard him say please. Have I? For a moment, I entertain the idea of Kylo Ren begging to me. Just for a moment.

He just has to get me back to my room. Then it’s over. We don’t even have to talk on the way there. I notice his hands now ghosting over my arms, as if to catch me if I were to fall to one side.

Shit.

The realization hits me. “You idiot, R8 can’t see me like this. He thinks I went to go train or something. Fuck. He’ll be able to tell I’m drunk, I’m sure of it.” I run my hands through my hair, my head pounding at the effort it takes to think a way around this.

“You can sleep in my quarters, it’s alright.” Ren says quietly.

“NO.” I immediately respond, no hesitation.

He shushes me again and looks away, trying to think. “There’s probably an open dormitory you can sleep in. I’ll open one up for you. And I’ll tell R8 that you were with me.”

I stare at my feet on the ground, swaying back and forth. The overwhelming need to lay down overpowers any feelings of hatred toward Kylo Ren. And those feelings are still quite strong. I am reminded that I want to punch something again. My fists clench at my sides, but I manage to utter out
a frustrated, “Fine.”

It’s not long until I can’t walk to such a degree that Ren picks me up. His one arm hooks under my legs and other wraps around my back, holding me securely to his chest.

As I lean my head into the warm crook of his neck through the quiet, almost vacant hallways, I think about how nice this would feel if I didn’t hate him.

Chapter End Notes

AH! UPDATES:
so u know I had to do a drunk chapter. and i feel like drunk agent is angry and pissy and sassy so, there's that. this took me forever just because i literally have been so OVERWHLEMED like i thought i was busy before but i have never felt the struggle.
Imao fun fact about me is that i play the oboe and no one at my college does so the professors were like "hey u should play for all our ensembles" and i was like YEA and now I'm doing 20+ hours of band a week, even though that has nothing to do with my major! cool! :) had to vent a little because yea i don't want to seem like weakling to the people on campus and ive just been silently dying.
but now that I'm more adjusted (and got all the weekend partying out of my system) i am feeling so ready to publish a lot ! maybe not every week like i did in the summer, but hopefully a week and a half to two weeks. none of this three week shit i just pulled :')
GET READY FOR FUCKING FLUFF NEXT CHAPTER HELL YA FIRST FULLY FLUFF DEVOTED CHAPTER

also, more updates on this on the regular:
Spotify playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/

thank u all for putting up with my inconsistencies :)
Poor Decisions Pt. 2

Chapter Summary

“Men in rage strike those that wish them best.” — William Shakespeare, Othello

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Will this be okay?” He asks, carefully setting me to my feet.

I squirm away from his grasp, making for the small bed in the corner of the room. Upon falling out of his arms, I catch myself before stumble into the wall. “Whatever.”

I regain balance stare at the blank wall ahead of me, waiting to hear him leave the room. But there’s no sound. He’s still there, just watching me.

Then, finally, the robotic voice orders, as if this situation weren’t at all informal, “Lay down.”

I stare at him blankly. I want to lay down so badly. My head hurts. My eyes are strained. My ears feel flooded. But him telling me to lay down makes me content with remaining standing, just to spite him. Immature of me. But I know it doesn’t really matter. I can’t convince myself that anything really matters at the moment.

“You know,” He responds to my disobedience, as if he thinks it would reassure me, “I do not wish to see any harm put upon you.”

Maybe I’m embarrassed by whatever pain he’s caused me. And the fact that he knows he caused it. It would be foolish to deny it if his superpowers tell him what I feel. I don’t focus on any of that. I just focus on the hate I have inside for him. The resentment. So that maybe, he can get a better sense of that instead. I turn my head, looking directly towards the man’s mask. Unable to see his true face because he is too afraid to even show it around his coworkers. Why am I embarrassed when he’s the coward? I sneer, “I do not wish for you to see me at all. Ever.”

He doesn’t move. But responds, “I didn’t think that meaningless words would hurt you that much.”

“Stop saying it hurt me.”

“But it did.” He steps forward.

I step back. “What, are you proud of yourself?”

“I’m not,” He quips, significantly quicker than his previous responses. “Your pain is not within my best interest.” His head tilts downward, the artificial lighting reflecting right off the metal lining of his helmet and into my eye. “If I’m being honest, I am slightly relieved, though.”

I squint. “What the fuck?” Something about hearing him say that feels like a spear going straight through my chest. Maybe R8 was wrong, all those weeks ago. He is sadistic.

“I underestimate your humanity, sometimes.” His head tilts back downwards, then away from my
gaze. “It’s refreshing when I do see it. Exciting, even.”

“My humanity…” I hiss, now just as angry as when I punched that guy moments before. How long ago was that? Why did I even punch him? I can’t bring myself to care enough to try to remember. I just spit at Ren, now, the one invading his personal space. “How dare you be refreshed by my humanity when you make yourself out to be a faceless killing machine.” That’s what I try to say, at least. But the slurring of my voice jumbles the words. I can’t tell if I messed up. But I can tell he got the message.

He huffs, throwing his arms back. He reaches up to his mask. While everything at once felt so slow, the movement of him taking off his mask passes by almost too quickly to process. I take in his whole face all at once. I didn’t forget how he looked. It still surprised me though. I tilt my chin up. His pale skin is excessively tired, bags formed around his cold brown eyes. His hair forms around his face like a frame for a painting, from some ancient planet. He slams the helmet on bed, then rips the lightsaber from his belt to throw it beside the mask. “There.” He snaps at me.

I find a sort of steadiness in studying his image. Maybe it’s because it’s still so new to me. So fascinating. His hair looks very soft. Softer than mine. Am I jealous? Maybe. I open my mouth to talk, but hesitate. His eyes take me off guard. The first time I saw them, I found comfort in the cool-toned brown. That same comfort is almost threatening me now. Threatening to trick me, to manipulate me. To hurt me. And some part of me wants to give into whatever temptation they cause me to feel, just to see if it’ll cause as much harm as I think it will. And, to see if it’s worth it. “As you were saying. My humanity…” I say, my voice horse. My eyes travel down his long, regal nose, to his lips. I watch them as he speaks.

“It’s refreshing. To see you not conform.” He pursues his lips, in thought, then releases them, continuing, “To see you go against everything you were once taught. I enjoy watching you grow, develop yourself outside of the Order.”

I pull my eyes away from his pink lips, back up to his intense gaze. His eyebrows are slightly knitted together, as if he’s trying to make sense of this all as well. I swallow hard, my throat growing raw from the alcohol. “Your Order. You called me a traitor. You told me I don’t belong here. Now you’re saying that those things refresh you?”

He blinks. No forgiveness. Not even remorse. “Correct.”

I clench my fists. I don’t have to stand here and deal with this confusing shit. Why doesn’t he take anything I do seriously? Why isn’t he scared of me, but instead entertained by me? Before I can even stop myself, I snatch at the lightsaber placed on the bed beside me. Pressing a button, I ignite the damned thing, causing it to buzz to life. The heat from the two vents on the side is nearly burning my hand. But it doesn’t concern me.

Ren approaches me, eyes wide with shock and jaw clenched with anger. His gentle, unmodulated voice doesn’t sound the least bit intimidating as it threatens, “Give that to me. Now.”

I point the weapon towards him, laughing at the order. “How dare you think my inner turmoil is refreshing.” I look down the red, bright blade, straight into his halfway stunned, halfway angered face. “How dare you find humor in my agitation towards you.” Anger flows through me, right into my fingertips. It just now occurs to me how many things I could absolutely demolish with this thing. Including this room Ren put me in because he wanted to help me. “How dare you say that I don’t belong here and then come find me and pretend you did nothing wrong. Like you didn’t just fucking destroy any sense of purpose I had here to begin with.”

I swing the lightsaber over, right into the dresser. It’s heavier than expected. But it goes through the
object so smoothly. I watch sparks fly from the debris, back to the ground. And I want to hit it again. So, with a grunt, I do.

I continue, at Ren, “I was perfect before I met you,” I thrust the saber to the left, annihilating the end of the bed. “You ruined everything I ever worked for,” Inner stuffing from the mattress flies into the air, some white and unharmed, others on fire as they fly, “How dare you ruin my life!”

He yells above the slashing noises of the lightsaber, “Did you really put much value on the life you led before this?”

My breaths grow faster, arms grow fueled with more adrenaline and rage. Everything feels on fire. The heat of the blade consumes me. “That doesn’t matter!” I drive the blade into the nightstand with a grunt. Nothing has ever made me feel so powerful. The saber is so dangerous, so full of energy. “You-” another slash “-don’t get to-” another slash “-assume that-” another “-I didn’t!”

I look around the small room. Everything is just a bunch of rubble now. I meet Kylo Ren’s stare. He doesn’t look angry anymore. But still intense. He’s watch me, eyes so focused. I look up and down his large figure.

My foggy mind clears. Any alcohol subsides for a moment, allowing me to swallow hard, saying with a low steady voice, “I want to destroy you like you destroyed me.”

His eyes go wide. He resets his jaw.

Suddenly, my whole body is frozen. Trapped by something so unspeakable. My head returns to it’s foggy state, yelling at my arms to move, but they won’t they can’t. I can’t even do as much to adjust my hand on the lightsaber.

Ren’s eyes study my frozen figure carefully before stepping closer to me. His voice, in a tone I have never heard from him before, asks, “Is that how I make you feel…” The words are so carefully constructed, unlike my own. So low, they buzz against the top of my forehead, where his mouth is parallel from. Suddenly, I feel his gloved fingers pry at my bare ones holding the ignited saber. He presses the switch, the blade retreating back into the saber’s hilt, then twists it out of my grasp, clipping it back onto his belt. He doesn’t step back though. He remains close to look down at the ground, then back up at me, eyebrows low. “…Destroyed?”

I feel whatever held my body in this position release me, but I don’t move. He’s so painfully close to me. I can now see the aging of his face, despite his young age. The prominent dark circles that stick out especially because of his pale skin.

His jaw is shaded with the beginnings of facial hair. I ask myself if I’ve ever looked at anyone like this before. With no reigning motive to gather information, to analyze. With just pure fascination. I settle back in on his eyes.

It’s in those eyes that I see true, raw, emotion. And I realize how much emotion he’s made me feel, in such a short amount of times. He’s made me feel things I’ve never experienced, I never thought I could experience. Some of it was sadness. Rage. Hatred. And some things I can’t quite figure in my mind. But I want more of all of it. I want to continue to feel things. I want to continue to live. I nod slowly, my eyes still set like lasers on his own.

He steps back, reaching for his helmet on the ground. I finally let myself breath. He says, “Then I should probably leave.” He glances around the now demolished room. “Would you like me to find you a different room. One more intact?”
I nod again.

I follow him outside into a different room. He doesn’t have the key pad number, so he just opens the door with his special powers. I wish I could do that. I wish I had the Force. I wonder if Ren could give me some of his powers, just for a moment so I could try. I already used his lightsaber. Holy shit. I just used Ren’s lightsaber… And I am looking at the back of his head right now- a head without a helmet. This usually wouldn’t matter at all to me. It shouldn’t now. But I allow myself to indulge in the selfish feeling it give me, the feeling that I’m special.

I lay down in the bed Ren guides me to, the room identical to the one I destroyed. He pulls the blankets overtop my body for me. I’m happy he does, because I didn’t feel like sitting up to grab them. He’s quiet as he moves, though. Not looking at me. Did I hurt him? I forget what I said to him already. Something about wanting to ruin his life or something. That wasn’t nice to say. Shit.

I reach out, grabbing his wrist after he tucks my body into the covers. I want him to look at me. He does, surprised by my action.

I say, my words growing more and more slurred, “Are you okay?” In a hunger-like urge to feel his skin, my thumb slips under his sleeve, rubbing gentle circles into his soft skin. A pit forms in my stomach at the contact. I decide that I like that feeling though. I like touching him.

He’s taken aback by the question. I wonder who asked him that question last. How long ago it must’ve been. His adam’s apple bobs up his throat before he answers, “I’m fine. Are… are you?” His eyebrows narrow.

I know I was angry before. Like a few seconds ago. But I’m not now. I think I’ve come to terms with the situation. More circles into his wrist. “I’m a lot better. I like using your lightsaber when I’m mad.”

He blinks. “Oh,” His eye lashes are so long and curly. “Okay.” Speaking of long and curly, his hair is too. It’s so dark. Especially in the darkness of this room. I turn on my side, admiring the shine to it. It’s so smooth, like spilling oil. He stares down at my fingers clasped around his wrist. “You can borrow it when you’re angry to break more things. I do it a lot myself.”

“I’ve heard.” I laugh at this. There’s so many rumors about his temper. I haven’t really experienced it. But I’m sure they’re partly true. I look back down at his full lips. I almost melt into the pillow, “Can I tell you something?”

He seems hesitant to listen. Probably because I just told him I hated him. But he obliges, kneeling at the edge of the bed, ready to listen. Somewhere in the movement, he removes my hand from my wrist. My fingertips twitch at my sides. I wonder what holding his hand would feel like. I wonder if he would trace circles into my knuckles, if he would draw lines parallel to the frail bones felt when rubbing the back of my hand.

In that thought, I forgot what I was intending to tell him. So, I just go along with the feelings I’m feeling. Whatever comes into my mind, comes out of my mouth, “So, sober ‘me’ would never admit to this, I just am feeling courageous and all. And I know I just was really mean to you, and what I said still stands valid. But I am really glad Snoke put me on this mission with you. I was thinking about this earlier, I’ve never felt anything with intensity before. And you made me feel everything all at once and yea, I said that I hate you and I’m mad at you and all, which I am, because you’re a dick kinda, but you’re getting nicer. Anyways, I really really enjoy working with you. And talking to you. And arguing with you.” I prop my head up on my fist, elbow crooked. “And looking at you.”

Despite the dark room, I can tell that his cheeks go red. He looks away from me, embarrassed by his
reaction. I purse my lips to conceal a grin. Not because I think it’s funny. Although the idea of Kylo Ren being flattered may sound humorous, it’s not. It just makes me want to smile in a warm way. In a nice way. I’m unsure how to describe it. He pushes off the bed, standing to his feet, still unable to find the nerve to look at me. “I should be leaving.”

I nod. I was the one who asked him to leave. It’s kind of him to respect my wishes. He turns his back to me, stepping towards the door.

Before he can leave I imagine how quiet the room will be without him. How empty. I call out, unable to hide any desperation in my voice, “Ren,”

He pauses, looking over his shoulder to me.

I can’t think of any other words to use besides, “I don’t want to be alone right now.” So those are the words I say.

There’s a sad empathy in his eyes when he hears this. “I thought you didn’t want me around you.”

“I thought so too.” I admit.

He tilts his head sideways. I’ve noticed him do that before with his helmet on. But I didn’t imagine his face to look so curious, so gentle, when he did it. He crosses back over, toward the bed. He kneels, resting his head on the mattress, a few inches away from my waist. He stares up at me. I turn on my side, resting my head on my folded arm so that I can stare back. Our breathing patterns begin to synchronize.

There’s so many tricks I’ve learned to read people. But I can’t seem to remember any of them right now. So, instead, I ask, “What are you thinking about?”

The question pulls him away from whatever it was going through his mind. He shakes his head, as if to tell me that I do not have permission to know yet. I understand.

We lay in silence, alternating between resting our eyes and just looking at each other. It sounds awkward. But it’s not. It’s nice. Each moment that passes, I grow more and more aware of my surroundings. My thoughts are more comprehensible, less foggy. But I am also more tired, as well.

There’s slight paranoia that overwhelms me, that I’m bothering him with my questions and requests. I don’t even know if he’s awake. His soft eyelids have been closed for a while. But my curiosity overpowers these anxieties, making me ask, “Why would you say all those mean things to me after I tried to help you?”

His eyes flutter open. Each time they do, I’m just as astounded by how nice they are to look at. How hypnotizing. I wonder if I could ever get used to it. “I didn’t intend to hurt you.” He readjusts his head on the crook of his elbow. “I thought that the only reason that you would be kind to me is if you wanted to manipulate me, if it was part of some game… I was just saying what I thought would make sense. What I thought would protect me.”

It’s nice to know that he didn’t say it with intentions to hurt me, but it still stings to think about. I forgot the specifics for a while, while I was very angry and drunk. All I knew then was that he pissed me off. But now I can remember specific things. Things like him saying I’m not good for anything else other than being an agent. Like how I only trick myself into caring about the war to give my life
I curl my body up into itself. “You were wrong.” I don’t know what my life is like outside of The First Order yet. Or what my purpose is. But I want to try to find it. Maybe I don’t want a purpose at all.

"Terribly wrong," He nods, his head relaxing back down. He says quieter, “I wish I could take it back. You're so much more than an agent. I wish for you to see that, someday.”

I can't recall what he most recently said. I was too busy recalling how he said I tried to manipulate him into liking me. Because I hated him hating me. He said that I needed his approval. I absentmindedly examine the pleats in his black sleeves. “But the part about me wanting you to like me,” His shoulders stiffen at this. I swallow, then, “You were right about that.”

The corner of his lips twitch. “Don’t worry,” The small grin that forms is so childlike. So innocent, so shy, for a man so powerful. I realize that this is the first time I’ve seen him give off such a positive emotion. I don’t want it to be the last. “I like you.”

I lay my head down on the pillow, straight up at the ceiling, to avert his attention from my own smile. I could push the conversation further. But I decide not to. My heavy eyes tempt me to fall asleep.

And falling asleep with this much contentment sounds like a wonderful idea.

Chapter End Notes

im back, kiddos. hope u guys are still around lmao. I apologize x2039004283129. i am SHIT at prioritizing my time right now. also, i hope this is alright. it's been so long, reading this might be confusing because it happens legit right where the last chapter left off.

but yea.

idk.

ALSO the new trailer! first of all, SO GOOD. secondly, the part with Ren about to shoot leias ship (that has some kind of protective shield) but he cant do it because hes a mommas boy.... HM. I WONDER WHERE IVE SEEN THAT.......

heres some more stuff :

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
Interrogations

Chapter Summary

“I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked.” — Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I woke up that morning to feel the most confused I have ever felt. My head thumped into consciousness as I tried to make sense of my surroundings. A room, I don’t think I have ever been in before. A bed I’ve never slept in. But most of all, Kylo Ren, slumped against the wall on a holopad, with his mask off. He taps his long, ungloved fingers against the screen, typing something. His fingers are long and quick. Pale. I swallow hard, noticing how dry my mouth is. It still tastes like liquor.

Shit.

In pieces it all comes back to me. I punched that Officer. Hux talked to me in his office. I destroyed a room with Ren’s lightsaber. There were so many things I said to him. Silly things. The more I recall, the harder I try to block my mind from the memories. I know that if one becomes intoxicated enough, they forget the events of the night. I regret not drinking a little bit more, to get me to that point.

Ren says, not even looking up at me, still focused down at the holopad. “How are you feeling?”

Chills run down my spine. I’m still not used to his bare voice.

When I finally process what he asked, I want to laugh at the question. I’m feeling quite ridiculous. Embarrassed. Awful, in general. But I manage a small and simple, “I’m fine.” I rip the covers off me and sit up, far too quickly. My brain feels liquidized in my head, sloshing around with each movement. I stand to my feet, trying to remain as put together as possible. I’m wearing black pants and a grey, long-sleeved shirt. My combat boots are still on my feet. Belt still synched around my waist. Reaching up, I feel that my once prim and proper bun is now a complete ratty knot. I doubt I have ever craved a shower so badly in my life.

Ren’s voice catches me off guard, once again. He says, nonchalantly “There’s a meeting that Hux wants us to attend today. But you don’t have to go.”

I rub the sleep away from my eyes. “Why? What is it about?”

His eyes remain on the holopad. I don’t think he’s looked at me once since I woke up. Something about that makes me feel even more embarrassed. What if I was so excruciatingly embarrassing he can’t bring himself to look at me? He responds, “The Resistance members we captured.”

We captured. I’m surprised he included me. “When is it?”

He sighs, mumbling with the most unenthusiastic voice, “In thirty minutes.”

Whatever sleepiness I once felt immediately melts away with that statement. Thirty minutes. I’m not
even sure where I’m at, let alone, if I can get back to my room, then shower and then change within an hour. “Why didn’t you tell me this sooner?” I snip, frustrated. Not even that I need an answer. My head is just a mess of frustration and embarrassment. The urge to release it overwhelmed me.

He decides to look up. His brown eyes look at me, skeptically. “You were sleeping.”

I blink.

He goes on, slightly defensive, “Hux only sent out the order for you to attend to be an ass. You don’t have to go.”

“That doesn’t matter, I have to follow his orders no matter what.” He wouldn’t know the feeling of having to respect every instruction specifically and perfectly, so I suppose I can’t blame him. I try to tell myself to just leave, to go get ready. But still, the sight of his face seems like it’s an honor, in a way. Something that I need to take advantage of for as long as I got. I think I told him that I liked looking at his face last night. God, that’s humiliating.

He remains looking up at me, his eyes narrowing. “Are you sober enough to attend a meeting?” The way he said it sounded so condescending. Probably the meanest I’ve ever heard him speak without his mask. Immediately, he looks away, almost regretful of his tone. Maybe it’s because of the way that heat spread to my face upon the mentioning of last night, that he feels so regretful of his statement. His fingers go to the bridge of his nose, obviously mentally cursing himself. “I do not want you to go if you are feeling unwell. That is all.”

“I’m fine,” I manage.

He mumbles, gaze fixated on the place I slept in the bed, curiosity getting the better of him, “How much do you remember?”

I remember all of it, I think. But do I really want him to know that? Do I want him to confront me on me saying his face looked nice? Or do I want to talk about how much of a complete emotional wreck I was around him? I shrug, crossing my arms. “Just bits and pieces…”

He seems disappointed by an indefinite answer, looking back down to the holopad. He turns it off, tosses it to the bed, then stands to his feet. He’s so tall. I knew this, of course, but without his mask on, his height so much more human. Something in my gut twists as I crane my head up to him. He looks so sleepy. His hair messy, lips dry. “Are you still upset with me, then?” He keeps his head to the side, avoiding eye contact.

I search for his eyes, but he remains unwilling to consider mine. “I don’t think so.”

He quietly nods, processing.

I swallow hard, the sound amplified in the dead silence. The awkwardness is unbearable. The unconventional nature of this makes me feel sicker than I already am. I steady my voice, focusing hard to make it as unwavering with emotion as I possibly can, “I apologize for any poor decisions I made last night. It was unprofessional and will not happen again, Commander.”

His eyes finally flicker to me upon the word ‘Commander.’ His stare is so concentrated. Analytical. But not in the way mine can be, in the way R8’s is or Hux’s is. Concerned is a good word. For a moment, I wonder if he’s not going to even respond to me. But he does, saying, “If it does happen again, make sure you have someone you trust with you. Being alone was not wise.”

The advice, resembling something more like an order, causes even more heat to rush up to my face. I want to tell him that I’m perfectly capable of defending myself, obviously. Or that I don’t need him
to give me advice. And I am about to say something back, along those lines. But I stop myself. For a moment, I relish in the moment of someone telling me what to do. Not because it is for the good of a mission, but for my own good. So, I settle on just saying, “Yes, sir.”

He sighs reaching over to check the time on his holopad, now placed on the bed. 12:33. I’m guessing the meeting is at 13:00. He looks towards me once again, back to examining. I find my eyes tracing the outlines of his hair, beginning from the part on the side of his head and moving down it’s dark curls and waves. The black locks frame his complicated range of expressions. He reaches up, a hand going into his hair, causing my trance to break. “It’s been awhile since you’ve called me ‘sir’ unironically.” He says it questionably.

“I apologize.” I respond, without being able to think of anything more suitable for the situation.

He kind of laughs to himself. Not a full laugh, just an amused exhale though his nose. It brings me right back into the moment last night when he laughed before saying he liked me. Holy shit. What does that imply? His head tilts down and he stares at his feet, amused. “That’s unnecessary.”

I nod, catching a held in breath. I don’t know how long I haven’t been breathing. But it feels like enough to be suffocated. “I should go get ready. Where’s the meeting at?”

His small, amused grin relaxes into something subtler. Still pleased, though. He nods towards the door, then, “First floor conference hall.”

I walk towards the door, accessing the whole situation last night provided. It’s just now that I realize that Ren spent the night with me, taking care of me. I don’t really know what I would’ve done without him. Or where I would’ve gone. He didn’t have to do that. Especially after I was so mean towards him. He stayed, despite whatever stupid things I did. He didn’t have to do that. I turn back towards his gaze that was once fixated on me leaving. He seems slightly taken aback by me pausing. I try to make my voice match his gentle nature that he showed me last night. But there’s too much of a soft apprehension in it to sound smooth, “Thank you for helping me.”

His expression visibly melts. “I do not mind helping you.”

I look down, unable to stop a small smile. “Okay.”

Out of my peripheral vison, I see him begin to twist the leather tips of his gloves in-between his fingers. “I’ll see you there?”

“I suppose.” I turn back around, exiting the room.

In the shower, I have the warm water turned all the way up. Steam fills the volume of the room. As the water shoots down, it stings in contact with the scratches from Korriban still fresh on my back. I really should have treated those better than I did. It’s been the least of my concerns, as of late. I face the water, tilting my chin up, letting the heat consume me.

I try my best not to think about Kylo Ren last night. I run a hand through my hair, letting the shampoo applied run through my roots. He said that he liked me. I see it so clearly in my mind still. The blue tint of the room illuminated his pale skin and shined against his dark hair. He was so sleepy. So comfortable with his position kneeling next to the bed, arms crossed with head resting in the crooks of his elbows. Was he just trying to be indulge my drunkenness? Or was he serious? I turn around, putting my back against the water again. It still stings against the wounds, so I arch back,
only allowing the showerhead to be in contact with my scalp. I don’t see Kylo Ren as the type to say he likes someone, even if it is just to mess with them. Especially not to mess with me. If he didn’t care about me, why does he look like he does with his mask off? No one’s looked at me with such carefulness. Such consideration.

I turn back around, absentmindedly reaching for more shampoo. I squirt it into my hand, then begin working it into my hair. So, I think Ren meant what he said when he said he likes me. But what does that even mean. He likes me, as in he sees us as friends? He enjoys my company? Or does he like me beyond that? The thought makes my whole body feel on edge. Scared, even. I know that Kylo Ren would have no reason, nor any desire, to pursue a committed relationship with me. But what if he did? What would I do? The idea in of itself would be complete suicide, on my part. If Snoke were to find out he had any of those feelings, despite even acting on them, I’m sure I’d be dead. Hux asked Snoke about Ren and me. I remember that from last night. Snoke said we were close. Did he say that because Ren’s point of view on our relationship? Or what’s been told in my reports on Ren?

Goddammit, my reports to Snoke. How the hell am I supposed to report to Snoke on Ren if there’s anything even remotely romantic underlying our relationship? Which, there isn’t. But if there was, just in case, it’s wise to analyze the situation. And when I do analyze it, my stomach drops and the anxiety of the circumstance intertwines with the steam of the shower, filling the air of the room. Suffocating me.

I press my hands into my temples, trying to bring myself back down to ground-level. I have no clue how my thoughts even trailed into this path. God, what information do I even have to go on other than that for such an absurd assumption? Why would I assume that? Do I just want to think that he feels that way because it makes me feel good? Am I mistaking having a real, actual friend for something completely different, because I’ve never experienced having a pleasant platonic relationship with someone other than R8? Nothing’s going on between Kylo Ren, Commander of The First Order, and I. I don’t feel anything more than compassion for him. And friendship. We have a connection because we both hate everyone else and we happen to be forced to be together. Nothing more, nothing less. I reach over, turning off the water with a flick of my wrist. But at the same time, I can’t help but hope that whatever it is the extent of my feelings are, feelings of friendship, he feels the same way. And I can’t help but wonder how someone so magnificently special, so important, could see me as anything other than a pawn in this war.

I exit the shower, dry off, then put on a grey tunic, black pants, with a black belt around my waist. I fasten the tall, combat boots, then comb through my wet hair with my fingers only to secure it in the First Order-standard bun. Before heading out the door, I catch a glimpse of myself in the fogged mirror. I smooth out any stray baby-hairs.

Ren is late. Like usual. There’s something about it that’s refreshing, in a sense. It’s a reminder of how simple things seemed, in a way. It’s seems like forever since I’ve been in a conference room. General Hux has been pacing around, tapping his foot, crossing then uncrossing his arms. He keeps glancing up at the clock on wall, as if it’s going to go faster by his persistent staring. As if he isn’t used to Ren being late to meetings.

Hux didn’t acknowledge my presence yet. Part of me expected him to give me a snarky remark about last night. Or how I’m feeling this morning. I lean back in the chair. There’s a few technology officers sitting around me. I don’t quite understand my place in this meeting. With each passing second, I’m more convinced that Ren was correct; Hux only invited me here to be an ass. I have no
purpose here. If this is all just about improving security in The Finalizer’s data bases, there is really for my specialties.

Finally, after nearly fifteen minutes of sitting, doing nothing, the door slides open. Ren walks in, full uniform, just as capable of inducing terror as ever. The cowl around his neck flows behind him with his long, confident strides. His masked gaze is immediately fixated on me as he moves across the length of the table. I adjust myself in the seat, sitting up straighter. I don’t know how quite to feel about him being so fixated on me. But it causes something within me to be on edge. He stands next to my chair, switching his attention towards Hux, silently.

Hux’s throat contracts in quiet frustration. With the most professional, yet passive aggressive tone, I’ve ever heard, he says, “Finally, we can begin.” Hux sits at the large chair at the far end of the table, opening the folder laid out in front of him.

Ren remains standing, arms crossed.

Hux begins, reviewing the paperwork, “There are currently two Resistance technological officials incarcerated in our temporary holding cells. Our goal for this afternoon is to get as much information as we can from them. We know from their history in their searches throughout our database that they were looking through old Empire archives. What they were looking for, we are unsure of. Before they could make it too far into our system, they were interrupted by Kylo Ren and Agent 2319.” Hux pauses to examine his notes.

Ren fills the silence with a simple, “You’re welcome.”

I try to not express any amusement.

Hux’s eyes scan the papers, then go towards me, as if the information is directed towards me alone, “The prisoners have not been fed, given water and have also been stripped of sleep. There has been no direct pain inflicted, but I can supply whatever methods you prefer in interrogation.”

I raise an eyebrow. Am I interrogating these people?

Before I can ask myself, Ren begins, “That won’t be necessary. I will get what we need.”

Hux’s glare snaps to Ren. “I would like to evaluate the Agent’s means of interrogation. It’s come to my attention how little has been documented on a First Order Agent’s interrogation skills. I’m already well aware of yours, Ren.”

Ren is quiet for a moment. Then, before the silence in-between words gets too unbearable, he responds, “I did not realize you were in the business of wasting time.”

“You believe that Agent 2319’s work is a waste of time?”

Ren remains quiet.

Does he think that? Does he really think just because I don’t have the Force, I can’t interrogate efficiently? Just because I can’t get the answers straight from their mind, doesn’t mean I can’t get the answers. And I can do more than get answers. I can get extra information; information Ren won’t even know he wants. I can get information based on their behavior. I’m great at interrogations. I shift in my chair, once again.

Ren places a hand on the table, leaning forward. He threatens without any fear of false accusation, “Do not try to pit me against my Agent.”
The officers sitting around us all stiffen.

“Surely, 2319 would not take such a thing personally.” Hux looks at me, head tilted. It’s almost as if his parodying compassion in his expression. As if he’s pretending to know me, on a personal level. “It’s not within her nature.”

I shouldn’t take it personally. That’s why he’s telling me not to, as a reminder for me and a defense for himself. Both men are being assholes. Hux, a manipulative one, and Ren, an arrogant one. I’m not in the business of letting either affect me or my work. I tilt up my chin, “It is not, General.” I look right into the darkness of Ren’s mask, masking any of my own anger of his lack of faith in my craft, “I can assure you that the interrogations under my control will be successful, even if you have nothing to do with it.” Still some part of me yearns to prove Ren wrong. To show him just how amazing I am at my job.

Ren doesn’t respond. But the officers around us look like they’ve been cut off from all oxygen. Hux’s thin lips stretch into that of a methodical grin. He says, matter-of-factly, “I admire your confidence, Agent.” He turns to the men around the table, explaining, “She has earned her right to boldness. You are all correct to be intimidated by her.”

General Hux just complimented me in front of other Officers. Superiors have done things like that before, but there’s something about the General’s specific prestige that makes this feel important. Despite not liking the man, I still respect his position. And I suppose when he attempted to kill me, he was only doing it for the sake of The Order. Which, is reasonable.

Ren leans away from the table. I almost forgot he was there all together. He orders, trying to gain whatever dominance he once possessed in the situation back, “General, if you’re not going to progress the meeting, I suggest you adjourn it.”

Hux turns his head robotically back to Ren’s fired gaze. Perhaps the most threatening thing about Ren wearing the mask is one can bet that Ren is probably angry, but the mask conceals just how angry he is. “Good leaders make time to respect their subordinates, Ren.”

Ren doesn’t respond, absolutely fuming.

For a reason I have not quite figured yet, this makes Hux pleased.

After discussing more details of information involving the archives of the Empire, Hux dismisses us. The officers file out quickly, as if to avoid whatever is bound to happen once Ren gets an opportunity to speak with Hux. I honestly do not see the big deal of it all.

I file out, behind them, but Hux calls out, from across the room, “Agent.”

I turn back, catching Hux look up, folders in hand. Ren is on the other side of the room, examining the encounter carefully. I want to roll my eyes, but I manage to resist. I walk back to Hux, boots tapping against the cool ground with each step. “Yes sir?” I fold my hands behind my back.

He hands the files over, “This is the information on the prisoners. We don’t have much yet. I figured you would want them to be kept in solitude before interrogation began.”

I accept the files, holding them close to my chest. “Of course, sir.”

He nods, looking me up then down.
I try my best to remain still, waiting for him to dismiss me or continue.

Ren’s voice cuts in from the side, “I wish to speak to my Agent alone, General.”

Hux nods, still staring directly at me. Trying to find something. Answers to questions formulating in his mind. The judgmental stare puts me off, to a point where I question if he knows something about me he shouldn’t. Within this mission, I’ve lied to Snoke more times than I can count. Does he suspect anything? Why would he? Perhaps I am just being paranoid. Hux steps around me, exiting the room.

I exhale, in relief.

Ren approaches me, his scowl evident in his voice, “What the hell was that all about?”

I narrow my eyes. He really has the nerve to interrupt my superior in the middle of praising me, and doubt my skills, saying they’re ‘a waste of time.’ Then tell me I did something wrong? “First of all, stop referring to me as ‘your’ Agent. I’m the First Order’s Agent, not your own personal one.”

He scoffs. “I would have thought that you, of all people, would be able to see Hux’s true intentions.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Okay, so the only thing that warrants me receiving compliments from the General is him having alternative motives?”

Ren nods.

Every single fucking time I grow to enjoy Ren’s presence, he just as quickly pisses me off again. I feel my fingernails dig into my closed fists, even though the thin leather gloves. “And what exactly are the General's intentions?”

Ren shrugs, “He’s flattering you to agitate me.”

“So this is ultimately all about you?”

“Many things are.” He says it as if it’s not the most narcissistic thing in the world to possibly say.

My words physically taste bitter as they spew from my mouth, “Why exactly would flattering me agitate you? I thought we came to the agreement that we do not hate each other?”

“We don’t hate each other.”

“Don't avoid my question.” I urge, unable to hide the frustration.

His lack of response and head now looking away makes everything in my brain click.

An unsteady stream of air escapes through my nose. All I can manage is, “What’s going on Ren?”

“I have not accessed the situation thoroughly enough to tell you yet.” He states.

“Can you just…” I sigh, running a hand through my hair, “Talk me through your thoughts? Tell me what you’re feeling.”

He’s silent again.

I grind my teeth together. “It isn’t fair that you’re withholding information from me.”

No response.
Whatever. I have a real interrogation to worry about. He’s just distracting me, pulling me away from the things I should be concentrated on. The worst part is that I know I could get the information from him. If I really wanted, I could manipulate it out, through more pressing and some indirect questions. I have no doubt in my mind I could do that. But I don’t want to. Not if he wants me to know. It’s hard not to take it personally that he doesn’t care how much stress this is causing. Or how much the confusion consumes me. “Nevermind.” I say, quietly, accepting.

I make for the door, halfway expecting that he stops me and tells me exactly what some part of me anticipates hearing. Wants to hear even. I curse whatever part of me is disappointed that he doesn’t tell me to stop leaving and confess even a fraction of the things I’ve been feeling for him. Maybe last night was just some weird, drunken hallucination. Maybe it’s better for me to pretend it was.

I fill in the silence with one final statement, one that I can’t stop my inner arrogance from spewing. I want him to know that I know why he’s scared. Why I’m scared. “R8 is suspicious of the nature of our relationship as well. He was since Korriban.”

He responds, somewhat taking me off guard. His voice is confused, desperate for some sort of resolution, “We didn’t do anything wrong.”

He’s right. But I still feel like I did something wrong. Being around him in of itself feels wrong, like a betrayal to the Order. And although the Order hasn’t served me quite the way I would have hoped, I realize that I’ll never be able to gain anything aside from them. They are the reason I’m alive. That I have food, shelter, a job. A job that I’m good at, a job that is respected by my peers. There’s a sudden clarity that passes over me. With the recent realization that I want more than what the Order can give, there’s also the realization that I can’t have it. Not by myself. And certainly not with Commander Kylo Ren, whatever the nature of our relationship. I look at the man again, the man I am supposed to be spying on. The man I am spying on. My missions always have been the center of my world, but I never have felt so emotionally connected to one.

“Not yet.” I say quietly. “I intend to keep it that way.”

I exit the room, on my way to the correctional unit of the ship. I hold my head up high as I pass in the hallways.

I am Agent 2319. On my way to Holding Cell 32. Interrogating Prisoner 143. I allow whatever data the files contain to replace anything within my mind that is not for the cause of The First Order. I allow it to swallow me whole, hoping that it works for at least the next few moments. Each step brings me further away from Ren, just like they should.

I walk through the elevators and halls, until my mind cannot even recall anything besides the interrogation.

I walk past Holding Cell 1, 2… 5… 10… 17… 29, 30, 31. My feet plant infront of the door with the number 32 above it. I type in the access code on the panel next to the doorframe. The door opens.

“Prisoner 143.”

The man looks up to me, staying unresponsive. His tired, beaten, scrawny body is like a pile of bones on the floor. The glasses across his long face are crooked, even cracked in the corner. Dried blood drips from his nose. Lips chapped.
I enter the cell, closing the door behind me. I kneel to his level. “I’m going to get you out of here.”

Chapter End Notes

sooooo a new story arc is starting with the end of this chapter and I'm so excited!!!!! I hope you guys liked this chapter, even though it was a lot of recovering from a hangover and attending meetings the next morning lmao. thanks for reading!

heres some extra stuff :

Spotify playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/

ALSO a really talented artist by the username "lalacat2000" made so many cool pieces of art for this fic! I love them so much and spend like 2 hours a day staring at each piece and then proceeding to shed a tear. please go check it out and share some love!
https://sta.sh/2ql6nodkp3d
Chapter Summary

“The wound is the place where the Light enters you.” — Rumi

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The man doesn’t believe me. But I expected that.

I consider his dark eyes, surrounded by even darker shadows. It’s only been a few days, yet he already looks as if he’s been ill for years. From seeing the man when he was first captured, I know he wasn’t quite in shape before. He’s aged and scrawny. There doesn’t appear to be anything between his pale, sagging skin and bones. I can’t wrap my mind around why the Resistance would choose such an ill-suited man to be one of the people boarding The Finalizer. His technological skills must be exceptional, for them to put him on this mission. But if his skill were truly that exceptional, why would they risk putting him in such a dangerous, stupid quest? They surely know that this couldn’t have much chance at succeeding. Sending this man to The Finalizer might as well be putting him directly into his grave.

I don’t show any sign that his vulnerability and the Resistance’s ignorance is where my thoughts are. I continue, allowing my body to settle down on the ground next to him, on his level. I begin, started from the beginning of the lines I conjured up on my way here, “My name is Alis. I’ve been employed as a maintenance supervisor for the Order.”

At the very mention of The First Order, the man retreats, barely able to scoot back as his long, skinny legs struggle to gain traction again the ground. His arms are restricted by handcuffs, but other than that, they didn’t bother to restrain the man too greatly.

I shake my head, voice becoming somewhat offended with the association of my personhood to the Order. “No, no. The Order bribed me. My father…” I imagine a man in my mind. Faceless. But I manage to find love for him. I’ve tried to imagine what my father looks like, based on my features. But the exhaustion those thoughts cause me to prove to make the task merely a waste. “He’s very sick. They said they would provide resources to our family in paying for his treatment, in exchange for my service. We needed that money. I couldn’t refuse.”

He doesn’t look as disgusted by me. But there’s still a large amount of doubt.

I look over my shoulder, glancing back at the door. I urge, “I don’t have much time. They’ll find me in here soon.” I lean forward, pressing, urging, “But working here, seeing the awful things that they do. They’re murderers.” I imagine the bodies after battle. The gore I’ve seen. I gasp at the images of mangled corpses, blood spilling onto fields. Tears prick my eyes. My voice shakes, “God… I helped them. And I’m so sorry. I did this…’ I’ve seen enough people break from what this war makes you do to be able to mimic it perfectly. It’s quite interesting. Seeing the people, completely mentally distraught by their actions in this war completely shifts many outsiders compassion from the victims to the actual murderers. My eyes dart around the form of the man’s defeated body, “Are you alright? Should I go get you food? Water? Jesus, have they not given you water?”
His tired, stone cold expression melts. Not fully. There’s still a small crease in his eyebrow, indicating suspicion. But I can tell this will go smoothly already. He says, carefully, through a hoarse voice, “Do not risk it…”

“Are you sure? I would be very careful, I-”

“Don’t.”

I nod, blinking, getting back some composure. “Ok…” But not enough for him to totally stop feeling compassion for me. “I have a plan. To get you out. But if I do you need to help me.”

Prisoner 143 doesn’t respond. But he’s intrigued. Still damn skeptical.

I allow my voice to go more serious, more authoritative, “Promise me that if I get you out, you’ll help me.” Then, I dial it back to pathetic, to desperate, “…please.”

He takes a breath. Closes his eyes. Ponders it. Then, croaks out, “What are your terms?”

I begin, my tone barely unsteady, barely emotional, “Okay, okay. So, I need you to have the Resistance to protect me from The Order. Just at least until I can get my life situated. And my family too. I’ll need them to protect my family.” Realization sets in. “Oh, god, the Order will try to kill my family, won’t they?”

The man’s face tired, sunken face softens. “It’s okay. The Resistance will have no problem with that.”

My eyes glow, “You have no clue how gracious I am for that. Are you sure? I’m… I’m going to be known as a First Order defector.”

He shakes his head, disagreeing with the title. A trembling hand reaches mine, placed on my lap. He says in a voice, so heartbreakingly kind, “The Resistance does not discriminate. We have room for everyone.”

I allow a smile, full of the corny, bullshit Resistance hope I see so often in their kind. Pure naivety. “I’ve always dreamt, that in another life, I would have been on the other side of this war.”

The man assures, eyes sparkling, once so dead and weak now filled with life, “It’s never too late. Not for even the furthest of us away.”

I place my hand on top of his, squeezing. “We’ll have to go fast. I’ll quickly grab a disguise for you to wear and make sure the ship is ready to go.”

The old man nods, agreeing.

I stand to my feet, exiting the room. Just as my fingers meet the panel of the door, I pause. As if this idea was just now appearing into my mind. “You’re mission…” I turn to the man, once again. “I can help you complete your mission. It’s the least I can do to repay The Resistance. And it may help them trust me.” I quickly find myself back at the man’s side, kneeling again. “I have access to all the archives obtained by The First Order. Whatever it is you need, I can take with us.”

The darkness of the room makes the man hard to read. I don’t think he thinks it was suspicious, but he’s definitly apprehensive. “We need to worry about getting us to a checkpoint, safe.”

Dammit. He just failed a mission and his main concern is getting to a checkpoint? Without any of the information we came here for? Goddammit, think of a way around this... I nod, “I know. And we
will. I promise. I can get us out of here.” An idea formulates in my mind. “I just…” I go quiet.

“What is it?” He carefully enquires, genuinely concerned.

I pause. Look away. Then, “I do not wish for the people you fought alongside to have died in vain.”

He remains quiet.

I turn around. Exiting, slowly, sadly. Giving him time, while also giving him a time limit.

“What is it?” He carefully enquires, genuinely concerned.

I pause. Look away. Then, “I do not wish for the people you fought alongside to have died in vain.”

He remains quiet.

I turn around. Exiting, slowly, sadly. Giving him time, while also giving him a time limit.

“Information on the Emperor’s vault.”

I cannot help but whip around. Skeptical, yet intrigued.

The man repeats, “It was destroyed in Operation: Cinder, years ago. But we believe the Empire has some archives on it. Maybe even replicas of its contents.”

My mouth goes dry, knowing that whatever reason it is that they need this information for is so much bigger than me. Anything that involves ancient relics of the Empire is something that I have grown to fear. The Emperor is dead, and has been for a long time. But I still fear his name. Maybe because the association my mind makes with him and Supreme Leader Snoke. I say evenly, “I will retrieve it all for you. When I return, be ready to abort. No questions asked. We just have to move.”

The man swallows hard, nearly whispering. “Please hurry.”

Once again, I begin to leave, but I am interrupted.

“You were there with him when I was captured… is Kylo Ren going to interrogate me?” There’s so much fear instilled when he says Ren’s name. Pure terror even, as if saying his name in of itself is dangerous.

There is no need for me to lie this time around. “Not if I have anything to do with it.”

Once I arrive at the nearest armory, I stuff a standard stormtrooper uniform into a duffle bag. I think I can make this quick enough to where I return the uniform in time, if the trooper to whom it belongs needs it. If the man didn’t look so damned old and weak, quickly throwing a guard’s uniform on him would be suitable. I can’t parade him around the base, as a prisoner himself. People would surely assume I am up to something. Especially since this is such a high-profile case.

I also grab a set of thigh holsters, but with dagger attachments instead of the normal blasters. I step into the loops, adjusting them securely around my legs. My hands settle on the dagger’s handles, getting myself used to their feel. My fingers curl around the handles, pulling them out, then pushing back in.

I make my way back through the hall, duffel bag thrown over my shoulder. People from the opposite direction stare as I walk through. Sometimes I look back, exchanging a quick awkward glance. I know it’s not new for people to stare at me in the halls. I have noticed this before. Perhaps it’s due to the fact that I am usually walking alone. They usually walk in groups, with their unit or other officers. But it’s never bothered me quite as much as it is now. I feel like they all know how exhausted I feel when they look at me. How confused I am. I feel like whatever image I once had has worn down. I can’t seem to find the refined confidence I once held when I navigated these halls. At one point, I felt as if I owned these halls.
I can’t seem to replicate the feeling as I near upon the prisoner’s cell.

As soon as I enter the code, I look left and right, making sure the coast is clear before I throw the bag inside, towards the man. He scrambles to gain some footing, but before he can even gain a steady balance, I grab a dagger from my holster, approaching him. Just as I do it, I realize that the action probably looked very threatening. However, the man does not think anything of it. He just turns his back to me, extending his arms behind his back to give me full access to the cuffs.

I sigh, somewhat relieved but also saddened by his obliviousness.

Digging the tip of my dagger into the lock of the handcuff, I find myself biting the inside of my cheek with equal pressure. The dagger’s point eventually catches the lock’s latch and I twist gently, the cuffs clicking off. They fall to the metal ground with a bang, making the man nearly jump out of his skin. I wince.

“Get that armor on. We’re running out of time.” I say, voice low.

He obeys, rushing to get the armor over his standard prisoner jumpsuit. He moves quickly, with purpose, despite his frailness. Within a minute he’s putting on the helmet, completing his look. The faceless man looks to me, the action asking for authorization for us to continue.

I start back towards the door, “Don’t say anything until we’re in the ship.”

He nods.

I lead him through the halls, focusing on keeping my stride straight and breath steady. I’m not anxious. I do not think I am. I just feel this impending dread, thinking about driving the knife into his flesh. He doesn’t really have that much flesh for me to drive a knife into. Only bone wrapped in wrinkled skin. The man’s lived a long life, at least. And this mission was a suicide mission to begin with. He couldn’t have believed he wouldn’t had made it out alive. Maybe the Order will decide to keep him around. I doubt it. But who knows.

We enter the elevator, standing in silence with two other officers. They do not suspect a thing. I take the elevator down to the hanger level. With each level the elevator moves down, there’s a quiet beep. A reminder of how further I am away from where I once was. How much longer it will take to get back up. I stare at the floor levels slowly descending, somewhat mesmerized by it.

The opening of the door brings me back.

I make my way towards the nearest shuttle, looking back once to see if the prisoner is keeping up. He is. The hanger isn’t too busy, now. Most departures have happened earlier in the day. But I notice Ren’s ship, across the floor. Its large door is opened with troopers walking out, carrying something, some box. It almost resembles a casket. I swallow hard. Behind them, Ren walks out, cowl flowing behind him. Every step is another advancement down the ramp, bettering the chances of him seeing me getting into a shuttle with a random trooper, while he knows I should be interrogating the prisoner. Which, I am, technically. I just left him out of my means for doing so. I’m used to leaving out my colleagues on the details of how I proceed with my missions. And it only sometimes gets in the way, but never enough to where I can’t quickly diffuse the situation.

From across the hanger, I see Ren’s head snap towards my gaze. He stops walking. I do the most stupid thing I could in that moment and stare back. Something about his stare froze me into place, pulled me into a trance, like some sort of black hole. He begins walking towards me. Quickly. I mumble to the prisoner, “Get on the shuttle. I can handle this.”
He steps up the ramp, unable to conceal a trembling hand.

I cross my arms behind my back, waiting for Ren to arrive in front of me. To question me. To accuse me. I know I could easily tell him what I’m doing, so I’m not worried about it.

But Ren doesn’t ever come close enough to engage. He stops, somewhere around halfway. Staring, still. I wonder if I should advance towards him. If he needs something. But I can’t leave the prisoner on this shuttle alone. Although the prisoner couldn’t get past any of the shuttle’s security to get anywhere, I would rather not see what other ideas he could conjure up in the time it takes for Ren and I to talk to one another. I suppose I will just explain the situation to Ren afterwards.

I turn away, making my way back onto the ship. As I leave, there’s a slight pressure on the back of my scull. I nearly vomit at the feeling. I’ve only felt it twice; once when I first met Ren and once in the cave of Korriban after I killed Erson. Both times Ren was invading my mind. I exhale hard, unsure of how to respond to the intrusion. The feeling grows, then stops all together.

I climb into the cockpit of the shuttle with the man frozen in the passenger seat. I power the ship up, to the extent my access code allows me. I settle in and get ready to type in coordinates. The dagger feels hot against my leg. “Okay…” My fingers settle on the keyboard, “Where is the nearest checkpoint?”

He hesitates. “Should we stop by another planet first, just in case someone follows us? Or they track the ship?”

I blatantly lie, “There are First Order spies on all the planets near The Finalizer. I have already prepared a stealth shield on this ship, we would be safer if we just went straight to the Resistance.”

He sighs. “I don’t know. We cannot risk it.”

I keep my voice calm, patient, “We have to leave before Ren suspects something. And there’s nowhere around here to go. I promise, The First Order will not find us. You have my word. But your corporation is absolutely necessary.”

Still, hesitation.

I urge, “Ren said that he’d be coming to check on this shuttle soon.”

He looks out the window, one last time towards Ren’s shuttle. Despite wearing the stormtrooper’s mask, his fear is apparent as the mere sight of Ren’s ship makes him recoil into his chair. He pauses one last time, gripping the armrests of the co-pilot’s seat. Then whispers, “Our best bet is the planet of Hoth.”

I nod, wondering if I can push this just a little bit further, “Do you have coordinates?”

He motions towards the computer. I cooperate, sliding the keyboard towards him, watching his fingers move across the keyboard. It helps that his fingers are shaking with fear, slowing even someone proficient with technology down. With each button he presses, my memory stacks it on top of the last.

28° 23’ 6.83” North, 81° 33’ 49.94” West.

Got it.

With a swift movement, I swing the dagger out of my holster and plunge it into the unarmored area of behind the man’s knee.
He screams in anguish as I dig the blade between the bones, right into his ACL. I grit my teeth, fingers clenched around the blade of the knife, hand holding his knee down into the blade. His screams grow more gruesome, more violent.

I pull the knife out to wrap my arm around his side, hauling him upwards. He tries to squirm away, but that pain makes it impossible. Just like it was supposed to. His body weight is forced to lean against me, while he attempts to flop away like some sort of dead fish. I pull him forward, his blood dropping from his leg to leave a trail behind us.

Carrying him out of the shuttle, his screams morph into cries. Pure sorrow. Still, something distorted and inhuman with the sounds of the mask. I’m sure he has questions now. Or maybe he doesn’t. Maybe he knows exactly what has happened. No matter what he wants to say, he can’t bring himself to formulate anything but pure noise of anguish. I stare forward, blankly.

Stormtroopers have already accumulated among the end of the ramp of the shuttle, guns drawn and ready to respond to the scene. I use my free hand to reach over, pulling the helmet off the man, unmasking him to the confused soldiers ahead of me. His sobs are louder now that the mask is off. More audibly human.

I shove his body towards the nearest stormtrooper, who instinctively grabs him. Dusting my hands off, I dryly order, “Get Prisoner 143 back into Holding Cell 32. He may need medical attention.”

The troopers obey, dragging the limp, flailing man away. He’s still screaming. But he manages to scream back at me a few curse words. Nothing quite coherent. I avoid looking in his eyes.

When they enter the elevator he shouts towards me, the most comprehensible thing yet, “You people can’t live like this forever! You can’t live without punishment for your atrocities! Your lies!”

Normally, when Resistance members say things like that to me, I blow it off. But it seems too heavy to do that today. My eyes meet his and the elevator closes.

Two days have passed.

I find myself sitting on my bed, silent. R8 has tried to make conversation with me, but I’ve waved him off each time. Talking to R8 is not something I’m in the mood for now. I haven’t heard anything since sending in my report to Hux, giving all the details on my interrogation. I want to be able to think about what it is that the Resistance wants with the Emperor’s vault information. But I can’t bring myself to care. Instead, my thoughts lead me to Kylo Ren. It’s frustrating. But not, at the same time. I would much rather think about that man instead of work. I should be thinking about him in the context of work. Writing another report to Snoke on his current state would be within my best interest. But I don’t. I can do it later.

Ren is probably busy training or doing meditation at the moment. Surely, there’s no excuse for me to see him or request for his presence. So, I reimagine a few nights ago. How kind he was to me. How human he seemed. No one has ever taken care of me before. No one’s ever needed to.

My mind is wrapped in the memory until there’s a knock at my door.

Sighing, I stand to my feet, approaching the noise. My best guess it’s an officer wanting me to report to Hux, to elaborate on the situation. Or maybe interrogate the other prisoner right now. And I really don’t feel like dealing with the other one.
But when I open the door, I freeze. Swallow hard. Goosebumps dot across my bare arms. He doesn’t say anything at first. I don’t either.

I set my face, stone cold. Expressionless. Trying to make it obvious that I wasn’t just thinking about him, part of me wishing for his presence. “Commander.”

He hesitates. Then, a quiet, “May I come in?”

I look across the apartment to R8, his body coming to life with the sound of conversation. Then I step aside, allowing him through.

As soon as he enters, his hand moves upward, towards the droid in the corner. With a wave of his hand, the droid goes back into a slouch, powered off. I feel a lump form in my throat.

“Was that necessary?” I manage.

He doesn’t respond, examining my apartment carefully. Crossing from the bedroom side to the area with the table and shelves, he moves slowly. Scanning. His fingers drag across the shelf against the furthest wall. He asks, curiously, “Where are your belongings?”

“I don’t have any belongings.” I say simply.

He hums, pondering it.

I fold my arms across my chest, hyper aware of the fact that I’m only wearing standard black pants and a grey tank top. My hair is pulled down from the regular bun. Nothing about my appearance is acceptable for an inferior should wear around a superior, for sure. He might have noticed the sudden uncomfortable gesture, prompting him to ask, “Did I come at a bad time?”

I shake my head. He came at the perfect time. That’s the concerning part. It’s as if he was reading my mind. Which he wasn’t. I would have felt it. But he didn’t have to. I rub the skin of my biceps, colder now than before, “Why are you here?”

He absentmindedly drags the tip of his finger along the shelf, examining the dust it collects on the end of his glove. “I wished to inform you about a mission you’ll be accompanying me on. We’ll be headed to an attack on the planet of Hoth.”

I could’ve guessed that. I find myself lost as to why he felt the need to come to my dormitory. I’m not sure what the point of this is.

He remains quiet.

I allow a moment to pass before asking, hesitantly, “Is that all?”

He doesn’t respond. Instead walking across to the table. He stares down at it. “We are going there based on the information you collected.”

I squint my eyes, “Is there no debriefing meeting?”

“There is. You’ll get the notification on it soon.”

“Then why are you telling me about it now?”

He doesn’t answer. Instead walking across to the table. He stares down at it. “We are going there based on the information you collected.”

I allow a moment to pass before asking, hesitantly, “Is that all?”

He doesn’t respond.

The silent air feels so thick, so hard to inhale and even harder to exhale through my squeezing lungs.
He turns away, back to the empty shelf. I stare at his back, covered in the tattered cowl and deny the urge to reach out towards him, towards the concept of him.

He finally fills the silence with, “I thought that you were leaving.”

“Leaving what?”

“The Order.”

I walk around, still across the room, but now at an angle to where I can see him playing with the fabric on the tips of his gloves. My mind goes back to his absent stare as I entered the shuttle with the stormtrooper, while he knew I was supposed to be interrogating someone. I bite the inside of my cheek. “I can assure you, I would never do such a thing.”

He only nods.

Frustration overwhelms me. Maybe it’s that he’s in my apartment, with his mask on, not telling me straight up why he’s here. The sudden irritation gives me the courage to approach him, demanding, “Take your mask off.”

The mask stares at me blankly.

I grind my teeth. “If you’re going to be in here, speaking to me about things that are not directly related to our mission, I don’t want to be talking to a helmet.”

He obliges nearly immediately, reaching up to the mask, pressing the latches with his thumbs. With one swift movement, the mask is set on the table and his face is revealed, just as I imagined it. Long. Thoughtful. His raven hair looks clean today, his face recently shaven smooth. I notice that his lips look less dry than the other morning. “I thought you were leaving.” He repeats. His gentle voice feels physically warm to listen to.

I tilt my head against the shelf, rubbing the back of my neck. “Why didn’t you stop me?”

He stares at the ground, his brown eyes hidden.

A certain paranoia hits me as the anxiety crosses my mind, suddenly, unable to help but ask, “Do you want me gone?”

Almost as if the accusation sent him into a panic, his eyes go wide, meeting mine, “No, I-” The expression morphs into something softer than before. “I am grateful you didn’t leave.”

I’m grateful that he is grateful that I didn’t leave. The thought makes my head feel so much lighter. I ask, pressing the question, “Why did you enter my mind?”

“I apologize.” He says immediately, taking the question as an accusation.

I shake my head, backpedaling, reassuring, “No, I’m not upset, I just don’t know why you did that.”

He begins to speak. Stops. Then starts again, “Just in case it would be the last time I saw you, I wanted to know what was on your mind.”

I barely find the oxygen to reply, “What was I thinking about?”

He shrugs, admitting, “I was only able to find emotion. Any further pushing would have hurt you.”

“What was it? The emotion?”
For a moment, he looks like he doesn’t want to tell me. Like it’s something he wants to keep for himself, or think over for longer before bringing it to light. But he does tell me, in a low, soft voice, “Longing for something.”

For him to talk to me, probably. I can’t help but scoff at myself, an odd sort of laugh. I hide the humored grin behind the back of my hand, shaking my head. Perhaps it’s how absurd this all is, that is the humoring part. This situation that I’ve grown to deny but now seems to be spiraling into something I cannot control. Something that will inevitably blow up in my face if I can’t find a way to diffuse it. Can I diffuse it? Do I even want to?

He seems confused by my laughter, not finding any of this funny. Speaking to me as if it’s a business matter instead of childish feelings that I don’t know how to deal with. I wonder if he’s ever dealt with girls before. Maybe that’s why he seems so serious about it.

Shaking my head, I walk back to the cabinet against the wall, pulling out a bottled water. I look over my shoulder, to offer him something to drink, but instead I see him staring at my back, mouth slightly a gape.

I raise an eyebrow. “What?”

Suddenly he’s walking straight towards me slouching forward to get a better look at my back. He scolds roughly, “These are the same scratches from Korriban. Have you not treated them at all?”

I flip my body around to hide my back, but in the process, I realize how close I made myself in relativity to him. I try to ignore the tension I created, simply mumbling with a shrug, “I haven’t gotten around to it.”

His soft jaw tightens. Eyes harden, ordering at me, “I’m making you go right now.”

“You can’t make me do anything.”

I notice his fist clenching in frustration. He looks a lot less confident in his orders with his mask off. His eyebrow is furrowed. He looks worried, even. Perhaps that I’m not taking him seriously. “You’re going to the clinic.” He repeats, as if doing so makes the order hold more weight now than before.

It doesn’t. I look him right in the eyes and say firmly, “No.”

He opens his mouth to rebuttal, but I interrupt before he can manage any words.

“Going to the clinic means they’re going to ask me questions. Questions about what happened. I could conjure up some absurd story, that doesn’t involve you or Eerson Ren, but contrary to popular belief, I don’t enjoy lying to every goddamn person I meet.”

The mention of Eerson’s name causes him to step back away from me. Whether he meant to, or not, the distance was created. He sighs, running a hand through his hair. “They look deep.”

I stare at the ground. “It really doesn’t bother me unless I’m in the shower or I reach out too far and they split open. But it’s fine. Really.”

He sucks in his cheek, thinking. He says, unsure, “I could try to, you know, fix it.”

“Fix it?”

He shrugs, his words coming out sputtering, uneasy. “Like, use the Force. If you’re okay with that.”
I tilt my head, unaware he could do something like that. “Like Lex can heal people? You can do that too?”

He says somewhat defensively, “Someone had to teach her how to do it.”

I nod. Ren doesn’t really seem like the healing type. “I don’t mind. You can try.” I turn my back towards him, so that he has access to the gashes.

Nothing happens for a moment. Then, he speaks, “You should, um, probably lay down or something.”

I look towards the bed across the room. The lump that I have just gotten used to in my throat grows larger. “I can do that.” I say, my voice slightly wavering towards the last syllable. I silently curse myself, wondering if it sounded obvious how unsmooth I feel.

I make my way to the bed and lower myself down, laying on my stomach. He sits on the bed, beside me. I can feel the fabric of his pants brush against my hip as he bends his leg to adjust himself into a proper position. I turn my head to see him, laying my cheek in my arms. He’s examining the gashes carefully, lost in concentration. I notice the furrow in his brow, his adam’s apple move up over his armor and back down, hidden by the black layers.

His voice is quiet, careful, “It might be painful. I’ll try to be as gentle as I can but-”

“I think I can handle it, Ren.” I reply.

I’ve had to do a lot of pain tolerance exercises in the academy. Ones that were focused on dealing with torture methods, specifically so that if I were to be captured, I would not feel the need to tell any information. The training was extensive and definitely painful. But it did make me stronger. I know that nothing will ever happen to me that will hurt like that again. I don’t think anything physically can.

I can see Ren taking his gloves off out of the corner of my eye. His long, pale fingers move out of my sight and above my back. I can almost feel the energy they give off, despite him not actually touching me. It’s not quite electric. But something like it. It’s hot. Moving. But not painful, like electricity would be. No sporadic popping. It’s focused. More like the energy of a river’s flow. I close my eyes, focusing on the feeling, wondering how such an energy could be possessed in a human. Is Ren even considered a human at this point? I honestly feel like he’s something else entirely.

Then, my skin is on fire. I bite down on the skin of my arm to conceal any noise the pain derives from me. It’s not just my skin. It’s everything underneath. Parts of my body I didn’t even know had sensory receptors suddenly feel some sort of searing stretching heat.

Ren silently shushes me, comfortingly. I try to focus on the noise.

With another thrust of energy, my back feels like it’s being skinned right off my body, then pulled the opposite direction. My eyes water, clouding my vision, until I can no longer bare to keep my eyes open due to the wincing, cringing sensation. I can physically feel the blood of my body moving straight to the gash’s outlines. My mind fogs, suddenly feeling completely distant from me. Am I going to pass out right now? Is it that bad?

Suddenly, it all stops. The energy, the pain, everything. Now it’s just sore. Like something between a pulled muscle and a bruise. Or like I received the most intensive massage ever. I wipe my eyes into the pillow underneath me, saying weakly, “Is that it?”
“It’s done.” He responds, trying to catch his own breath.

A new feeling spreads across my back. Something completely different. It’s his bare hand, just lying there softly on my skin. I feel frozen underneath him. I’ve been touched by many different people, especially when it comes to men. I have never really felt anything from their hands, though. Nothing meaningful, nothing more than a necessary action to complete a mission. But Ren’s hand, laying on my back, so gently, so full of something so genuine, is different than anything I’ve ever felt. The sweat I broke out in from the pain nearly freezes over as goosebumps race across my body.

He’s touching me like I’m fragile. Like he’s fragile and he needs the connection to regain stability. And suddenly, all I can imagine is him touching more of me. The thought consumes me, to the point where I turn my body over and sit up, pulling his weak form into an embrace.

His whole-body tenses at first, unsure. But in nearly a split second, before I can second-guess my action, he melts into my form, embracing me back. His weight leans against mine, body still breathing heavily, head nuzzled into the crook of my neck. I feel his hot breath against the sensitive skin above my collarbone. I can’t help but tightly wrap my arms around his strong frame, unable to feel anything but the thick texture of his uniform until my hands reach up into his scalp, buried in his soft hair. I close my fingers around it tightly, forcing myself to accept that he’s real. He’s close. I’m holding him. He's holding me.

I tilt my head forwards, so that my mouth is near his ear, pressed lightly against his hair. “Thank you.”

He remains silent, wrapping his strong arms around me tighter.

We sit like this for a few moments. Just surrounded in each other’s warmth. In each other’s bodies. He’s shaking. I feel it. Our breath growing steadier, but equally heavier with each passing second.

And it’s now that I realize that I’ve never felt anything like this before. And it doesn’t have to do with the Force. Or anything other than him and I. I breathe out, looking directly into the metal wall ahead of me. On that has looked so familiar, so blank, until now. Now it feels completely new to look at. I massage his scalp, hypnotized by the feeling of his hair in-between my fingers.

He mumbles into my skin, words warm against me, “I wished to see you. That’s why I came here today.”

I nod, despite the fact he cannot see.

Ren adjusts his head upwards, so that his jawline is now on my shoulder and my head is nuzzled into his broad chest. He holds me there. I hear his racing heart. My hands find the cowl around his shoulders, and squeeze the fabric holding on for my life.

Maybe it’s because he’s stopped trembling that I realize that I’m trembling. I pull away from him to enough to consider his face. He studies mine. Taking me in, fully, completely. I notice each beauty mark lining his pale skin, each hair of his eyebrows. The pout in his full lips.

Out of nowhere, a prevailing phrase sticks in my mind. It doesn’t cease, as it’s too razor sharp to allow anything else near it.

_I want him._

I don't know what it means. Sexually? Just generally? Even if I don't know what it means, I do know how it makes me feel. My hands settle on his forearms, holding on against the pleats in his uniform. I shake my head, looking down, “I’m so scared.”
His hand moves up to my face, caressing my cheek. It sends warmth throughout my body. “I know,”
His thumb hesitantly, shyly, glides along my cheekbone, rubbing gently. “I feel your fear. This is the
loudest you’ve ever projected.”

The movement brings my gaze back up to him, pulling me into a confession, something I need to
hear for myself as well as reveal to him, “No one has ever been able to make me feel anything by
touching me. Just you.”

Suddenly, a clank comes from the corner of the room. Ren nearly jumps off the bed, clearly startled.
I whip towards the sound, catching R8’s limbs begin to come to life, his eyes flickering on.

R8 looks towards me, head tilted, “Master! My power was turned off unexpectedly! Luckily, I
rebooted myself into power-saver mode.”

I clear my throat, sitting up. I force a response, “Good thinking, R8.”

Ren is standing all the way on the other side of the room, rubbing the back of his neck, pacing.
Annoyed, embarrassed even. He grabs his mask, slides it on, then turns back to me, quickly saying,
“The debriefing information will be sent promptly.”

With that he leaves.

I stare as he does.

R8 wastes no time explaining what power-saver mode implies.

I find myself staring at the door, wondering what the hell I have gotten myself into and concluding
that the situation with Ren and I will only intensify before it settles into something even remotely
normal. If anything could ever be normal again.

Chapter End Notes

lol so this bad boy took me a longer time because news of battlefront 2 just came out,
shit that's canon, and I had to adjust some of my overall plot to fit it. sooooo yea. oops. I
hope everything still works out the way I've been planning for the past few months
cause DAMN. idk, I've wanted to make a big deal about everything in this fic being
possible in the canon universe. but yea, hopefully the fact that this chapter is LONG AS
HELL will help make up for the fact it took awhile. stayed tuned kids! we all know
from previous star wars stories that shit goes DOWN on Hoth ....

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It Could Be You Pt. 1

Chapter Summary

“Most unfortunately, in the lives of puppets there is always a 'but' that spoils everything.” — Carlo Collodi, Pinocchio

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

We start the debriefing ten minutes after its scheduled time, specifically when Ren arrives.

My blank stare at the surface of the metal table in the debriefing room is broken upon his entrance. The men, including Hux, rise to greet him. I follow, a few seconds after. The mask’s gaze is directly on me the whole time it takes for him to walk through the room to the chair to my left. Hux already is placed at the chair to my right. When Ren sits, the rest of the group sits. I do as well.

I wonder if he can feel the extent to how much I feel like a fuck up for being so unnecessarily intimate. Hugging him was excessive, ridiculous. There wasn’t even a clear reason why I did, other than, I felt like it. I can’t remember ever feeling the urge to hug a person. Why the hell does it have to be Kylo fucking Ren? Perhaps the most absurd thing about the situation is that despite how dumb I acknowledge it as, I wouldn’t mind doing it again. If the situation calls for it.

“Let us begin.” Hux greets the group, formally, “I trust that you all have read the material I sent out. But if you haven’t a quick summary is that we have received word from the prisoner that a Resistance checkpoint is located on the ice planet of Hoth. Hoth housed the location known as Echo Base, belonging to the Republic, until their defeat during the Battle of Hoth. The planet is basically inhabitable, due to its temperatures, which makes it a great hiding location.”

The projector in the middle of the table flickers on, displaying the planet. It looks like a simple, blue orb. There’s a single red dot, indicating where Prisoner 143 gave coordinates.

Hux goes on, “We expect their security to be weak here, only with some measures to ensure unknown droids or machines do not breach their security. We can’t rely on machinery to stay under the radar for this one. Not with such a great advantage we gained from the location of this base.”

One officer is particularly surprised, confused, by the statement, “Are you suggesting that we go in blind to attack this base?”

“Only one of us.” Hux’s eyes flicker towards mine, then steady to hold a stare.

I tense up in my seat.

Hux explains, “Agent 2319 will scout out the area. She will send us detailed descriptions of who we will be up against, what the layout of the base looks like, and what we will need for infiltration. You all have been assigned locations around the planet of Hoth to wait at for this information. These locations will be far enough away that suspicion should not be a problem, but close enough to enter the planet’s atmosphere within a decent timeframe. Once we receive this information, we will go from there.”
There’s multiple people whispering amongst the table. I can’t find myself to say anything at all, or even think straight. All I can do is process what he wants of me. Ren is the next to speak, quite defensively, “You’re proposing that we send our best Agent into a Resistance Base, completely blind?”

Hux snips, “It’s debatable whether or not she is our best.”

My stomach drops.

Ren stands from his chair, absolutely fuming, “Supreme Leader Snoke will be hearing of this proposal of yours. And when he does, he will discontinue the mission immediately until a more intelligible plan is presented.”

Hux smirks, boldly, “Supreme Leader Snoke has already heard from me and approved of the plan. He assisted in working out the details for this to take place tomorrow.”

This could legitimately be a suicide mission. For all I know, they have mines set up around their base. Cameras installed. Even something as small as a trap wire could ruin it all. Not to mention, the large number of Resistance members being housed there. If I were to get caught, I wouldn’t be able to fight off a whole army by myself.

“She’s not going alone.” Ren spits, “I’ll accompany her.”

“Supreme Leader Snoke ordered you to stay with the rest of us, on stand-by.” Hux says, so matter-of-factly. “You will fight alongside your troopers when the time is right.”

I remain still. Out of the corner of my eye I see Ren’s fist clench tighter. Ren snarls at the man beside me, me quite literally in the middle, “And how do you suppose she even lands on Hoth without being spotted?”

Hux says, “She’ll take a non-affiliated shuttle there. Then, land far enough away from the base to not be seen. She will travel on foot to the base itself.”

Ren’s voice raises, my left ear wincing at the sound, “She’d die of hypothermia before she could reach it!”

“Our Agents are in the best of health and her armor will be up to standards for protection of the cold.” Hux’s voice raises as well.

Before Ren can respond, I do, so much quieter, more professional than the men, “Will I be undercover?”

Hux’s jaw contracts as he pulls his glare from Ren’s mask, back down onto me. “No. The idea is for you to not be spotted by anyone whatsoever for you to have to portray an identity. If you are, you’ll use the injection we provide for you to avoid interrogation.”

I nod slowly. The injection.

Ren directs his anger towards me, “You’re not doing this.”

I ignore him, swallowing hard before asking Hux, “How much information do you need before you arrive for the attack?”

Hux responds, “An approximate count of the enemy, types of weapons, ships, and any other machinery they have. Also, an outline of their base. Entries and exits are vital. Hopefully, we can
keep them contained within it to eliminate them.”

Ren scoffs, “You’re orchestrating possibly one of the Order’s greatest failures.”

“Again, with the doubting of our Agent?”

“I’m doubting you, General.” Ren continues, something more ominous, more cautionary in his voice. “Ever since we captured those prisoners, after we discovered their intentions, The Force has been calling to me. Warning me of something. Upon further meditation, I will discover what this means, but-”

“Do you not want to see the Resistance fall, Ren?” The General tests, before saying quietly, low. “Or are your previous loyalties blinding your judgement, hiding behind what you call The Force?”

Ren stands still. Silent. His body relaxes, fist unclenches. “Previous loyalties…” He says, to no one in particular. “Would you like to elaborate on what you were inferring with that statement?”

The General looks around the room, at the stunned, silent officers. Then at me. Then back to Ren. “I believe elaboration is unnecessary. My point has been made.”

Ren nods. So calm. I can’t imagine his face, but I don’t sense anger anymore. I don’t know what I sense. I look back to the General to see him adjusting his collar, uncomfortably. Sweat beads down from his head.

The General’s thin lips part, mouth now agape, trying to gasp for air. I find myself unable to breath as well.

The General tilts his chin up, as if he were submerged and trying to reach the surface of the water with his mouth. His fingers begin to twitch at his sides. This is the first time I’ve seen true, raw emotion in The General’s eyes. I’m just shocked to know that this emotion is fear. I look back to Ren, just as still and focused as before.

Suddenly, the General gasps, nearing falling onto the table. He grips the side of the table, doubled over, trying to regain breath.

Ren towers over the scene. “You are very easily educated in The Force, General. I will remember you learn by demonstration.”

The General doesn’t even bother to look up to him, merely looking towards the officers, stunned into a still silence. He says after catching one last breath, “Meeting adjourned.” The men leave the room and Hux pushes up off of the table after them. Before he leaves, he looks back at me, his brow lowered. Shadows form around his eyes, making him look crazed. Like some sort of monster. He snarls, “The best Agent of The First Order would succeed in a mission of this caliber. Perhaps it could be you.” He exits on that note.

I hate to admit it, but he’s right. It could be me. Sure, the mission would be difficult. Maybe even a hair short of impossible. But I can do it. I could be the best Agent of The First Order. I’ve been given the resources and now the opportunity.

Ren follows the men out, only to slam the door shut with just the two of us in the room. “Tell me you’re not falling for that bullshit.”

The fact that that’s the way he sees this gives me some sort of stabbing sensation in my chest. “It’s not bullshit, I can do it.”
Ren raises his voice, the modulator starting to crackle at the overbearing volume, “Hux is using you!”

“Maybe if you believed in me the way Hux does, you wouldn’t be as worried about this!” I respond, desperate to meet his intensity.

“Hux doesn’t care if you die!” He snaps back.

I fall silent.

Ren sighs, rubbing the back of his neck, under the metal of his helmet. He grumbles, “The Force is chaotic surrounding this mission. Every fiber within my being is telling me to stop you from going.” He stops fidgeting and pacing to narrow in on the sight of me. He steps forward, limiting the gap between us. “I have to trust The Force.”

In trying to understand what he’s talking about, I just feel frustrated. How is he differentiating between what the Force is telling him and what his emotions are? Can he? I grind my teeth, “Why can’t you trust me?”

His anger returns. “Because your arrogance is going to get you killed!”

I scoff, “Then so be it! Live for The Order, die for The Order.”

“Again with this bullshit? Do you not put any value on your own life?” He sneers, demeaning me. Mocking me almost. “Your destiny?”

I nearly laugh at the statement, “Not all of us were fortunate enough to be born with a goddamn destiny to worry about.”

This causes Ren to pause. The mask looks down, then back up towards me. I see his hand twitch at his side. “You’re wrong…” He steps forward, taking that same hand and bringing it upward, towards the side of my face. His palm meets my skin, the leather of his gloved thumb brushing up against my cheekbone. He sighs deeply at whatever sensation this is giving him. I am merely frozen, unresponsive. He continues, voice low, “The Force surrounds you. It’s guiding you. I feel it.”

My voice wavers as I attempt to respond, “I can’t.” I try to search for it. For something, anything. But all I can find is the feeling of Ren’s hand caressing my face. It’s a feeling I’d be okay to surround myself in. But it’s not The Force. “I can’t feel it.”

He tilts his head forward and I imagine a sad, small grimace that forms on his face when he says, “Can’t you trust me?”

Can I?

He must sense my hesitance because he pulls away, gaze now focused on the table. “I don’t know why I expected you to understand.” He begins to exit the room, mumbling something under his breath. Something along the lines of, “Just like him.”

I say, partly annoyed, partly angered by his passive aggressive nature, “Like who?”

He doesn’t respond.

“Hux?” I test.

He scoffs at the guess.
My mind runs through all the other men in Ren’s life. And one stands out. One that couldn’t understand the Force, probably. One that perhaps didn’t trust him. “Han Solo.” I say the name dryly.

He continues to walk out, giving me a clear indication that I was right.

It hurts, to watch him leave. Especially knowing that he’s leaving because what I said was hurtful. What I said upset him. But I frankly don’t feel great myself. I cross my arms, calling out, “Is this how we’re going to part ways? I may not get to say goodbye before I leave tomorrow.”

He stops in his tracks. He tests the word out, it sounds more like a question than a way to part ways, “Goodbye…”

I bite my lip, pressing my luck, “Ren,”

He looks back towards me. The dark, robotic face is so blank. So emotionless.

“Take your mask off.”

He doesn’t. He just looks back to the table’s surface, distant. “Don’t give me commands.”

Perhaps it’s the rejection that makes me defensive, but I respond so child-like, so immaturity, “You’re giving me commands.”

“I am your Commander.”

“I thought you were more than that to me.”

He turns his back towards me. Now, he truly feels far away. “I shouldn’t be.” His voice is weak. “I see how foolish it was to indulge myself in the thought of it now.”

Something in my gut twists, making me want to puke and cry at the same time. It’s a somewhat relieving feeling, though, something I keep coming back to. “I’ve indulged in them as well.”

He turns around, walking back my direction. “What a waste.” Such a small sentence almost buries me alive in a new kind of distress I’ve never experienced. One that aches deeply. He reaches behind his back, pulling something from his belt. He extends his arm to press the object into my hand. His gloved hand lingers against mine. His voice goes as soft as it can manage, soft enough to where I am afraid it will break, "It's so exhausting to care for someone who follows orders so blindly, no matter the consequence."

I begin to compose myself, quietly, “I need to go. I need to prove myself to The Order to make up for everything that’s happened. If anyone finds about the lies I’ve told, the mistakes I’ve-”

He pulls his hand away. The object in my palm is secure around my half-clenched fingers. He says, scolding, “You don’t own the Order anything.”

The statement causes my breath to hitch. It sounds flat out incorrect. But I don’t think it is. I don’t own the Order anything. If anything, they own me my childhood. A chance at a life I can choose for myself. I focus in on the dark eyes of the mask, suggesting, "Your Order."

"This isn't my Order." He grumbles, "This is a means. A means to defeat the evil of the Resistance and then gain the power necessary to control the evil in The Order."

I shake my head at him. I have no clue how to discern what's right and wrong. How to decide if something is evil. Which is why I don't. I just do what I'm told. I'm not made for better than that. I
could never be like him. "I'm going." I sternly respond.

“Live for The Order, die for The Order.” There’s something in his voice that goes dead, void of emotion. Despondent. Back to his regular state of droid, state of ruthless Commander.

I open my hand and look downward to see the object. A comm-link. I rub my thumb against the device. “If I have a destiny at all, it’s to be the best Agent I possibly can. That’s my only option.” I don’t know if I truly believe in what I’m saying. But maybe I can convince him that I do.

He stares down at my hands that are holding the comm-link. “You lie to yourself even better than you lie to others.” He steps back, for the last time. I can tell he’s upset. Angry at me for being so naïve, for being such a blind slave to The Order. He’s sacrificed so much to go against what he’s been raised to do. Maybe he thinks I’m weak, because I can’t do the same. But I’m not ready to be someone else. I’m not sure if I ever could be.

He’s gone before I can explain myself. I try to convince myself that it’s for the best.

I’ve watched my fair share of holo-movies. Mostly for research. But I could never help but to find enjoyment in them. They helped me live the lives that I could never dream of, feel feelings I couldn’t find within myself, empathize with people I could never get to know. I often base my undercover roles off some of my favorite characters. It’s childish. But it’s successful, so far.

In one movie, a romance, a woman knew that she would not see the man she felt strongly for ever again. He was moving away to go out and find his long-lost family and she was stuck with her prior responsibilities on her home planet. So, the last night he was on her planet, she went to him. Basically, she poured her heart out. He reciprocated. They spent that night pretending their circumstances were different and he would not have to leave in the morning. All the pent-up emotion and suppressed passion of the movie was released all at once, nearly two hours in. There was something so desperate about it, so lustful and romantic.

For a moment, I thought about going to Ren’s. Doing that same thing, confessing how much I long for him. Confessing that I don’t understand what’s going on and what I feel, but I do understand that he makes me feel something. And that’s more than I’ve ever gotten from anyone.

All my hidden emotions, kept secret even from myself would be out for him to devour. That night, we could pretend nothing else exists. That our actions don’t have consequences. And that could be enough for me. Especially if I do die shortly after. I do not really know how to explain to him what I feel, but I definitely don’t want to die without exploring these feelings. At least once. It may not even become of anything. I might go back to feeling absolutely nothing, being completely detached. But, what if I don’t? What if I only grow fonder of his presence? Part of me must know. But another part of me is stronger than that. And I think that part of me stems from my concern for him. Asking him to do such a thing, right before my plausible death, would be selfish. Awful, of me. Even if I were to survive, the situation would be damned from that moment forward. Only causing him more pain, more confusion, than he already must deal with. I wonder if even now, my death brings him pain. Or maybe just disappointment. He did call it a waste. Was it?

I think about this as my shuttle approaches Hoth.

I also think about how this shuttle is unaffiliated. How easy it would be to just land on the nearest inhabited planet and start a completely different life. I’m taken back to when Ren left me on the
Moon of Jabiim. How betrayed I felt by the very thing I devoted my life to. That takes me back to when Hux captured me, putting his reputation over my life. And now, I’m here. The one who tests the waters of the base. The guinea pig who gives The Order as much information before I’m killed, basically.

But I remain on route.

I’m bundled up in several layers of isolating armor. The armor is heavy, making my agility weakened greatly. I have the cold air on blast in the ship, to help me get somewhat used to the conditions, although I know this is nothing in comparison to what Hoth’s surface will feel like. The ensemble is completely white, to blend in with the snow. The comm-link is secured in my ear, the rest of my normal gear and weapons under the isolating suit of armor. Before I left, I practiced over and over, taking the armor off quickly, to allow access to my weapons. I tried to get them to go over it, for easy access, but the holsters wouldn’t fit around the bulky materials. Also, their coloration would stick out like a sore thumb against the white snow. Nearly everything will.

Not to mention, there’s probably no cover whatsoever. Nowhere to hide if I need to. How am I even going to approach the damned base without being seen? I sigh, finding myself slouched in my chair. Tired. Stressed. Just wanting to get this done and over with, no matter the outcome.

And although I cannot bear the anxiety of waiting, the dread that overwhelms me when the planet comes in to view is just as torturous. The white orb, marbled with an icy blue tone, nearly omits light as a star. My focus turns to the controls, making sure the coordinates from the base are perfectly aligned on the other side of the planet. If I can get below the atmosphere on the opposite side of the base, I can just fly low to the location where I can drop my ship off, far enough for them to hopefully not see me.

Out of impatience, or maybe out of my irritation from the anticipation, I thrust the ship into the fastest mode it offers. Which is nothing close to lightspeed. But still, faster than one should normally travel this close to planets. I pull up, upon entering the atmosphere, dropping the speed.

The ship veers up at the sight of plain, snowy landscape. It’s completely barren, a frozen wasteland. Getting to their base without them spotting me is going to be nothing short of a challenge. Just like Ren said. I continue forward, zooming across the terrain. With each mile I progress, thoughts of him subside. Thoughts of myself subside. Even thoughts of The Order itself subside. I am not undercover. I am not myself, either. I can’t be for now. I am truly no one. And I am merely a vessel for a mission.

So, I proceed to land my ship in coordinates far enough away from the base to where I can’t see it and they can’t see me. As I land, the snow pillows upward, blocking my view, transforming everything into pure whiteness. I can’t even tell how close I am to landing until the ship jolts from underneath me. I power the ship off and adjust my armor one last time. The plush, heavy material is uncomfortable, so restricting.

I navigate towards the exit of the ship.

I think about how I could still go back.

I think about how this mission is ridiculous and how only someone naïve, completely under The Order’s control would agree to this. How they would only send someone on this sort of suicide mission who is replaceable, expendable.

I open the door to the outside.
Cold air hits my exposed cheeks, piercing into my skin violently. I can’t tell if it’s the brightness of the snow or the bitter chill that makes my eyes water. Nevertheless, it awakens me.

I hear Hux’s words in my mind. “The best Agent of The First Order would succeed in a mission of this caliber. Perhaps it could be you.”

I knew it was a lie, to instigate the very part of my ego The Order crafted to specifically manipulate. But it doesn’t have to stay a lie. I could succeed. I could be the best Agent.

So, I step into the snow, it is engulfing my leg, nearly swallowing it whole. I put my other leg down, ahead of the first. It’s so damn hard to move.

But I do anyways.

Chapter End Notes

OK good news and bad news: 
bad news - this chapter took me forever to publish. I just got back from going on a performance tour thing in California (where I met kylo ren at Disneyland HELL YA) and now it's the week before finals so eep. sos.
good news- this chapter was intended to stop on a certain point, but it was just getting wayyy too long, so I had to split it up into two parts. this means, technically, the second part is almost done. so it should be ready to go pretty soon. i'll probably wait until after finals to publish it, I'm shooting for the day before The Last Jedi (Wednesday), because TRUST ME, it's gonna be a good place to stop before all that TLJ shit goes down. hopefully you guys have stuck with the angst for this long because u wanted pay off because boi... pay off is coming ;) ....

more content:

spotify inspired playlist: https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board: https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
I move all the way to the Resistance base, carefully following the coordinates I memorized in my mind. With each stride I take, the last is erased by the snow blowing over, covering my tracks. Between the wind almost tugging me back towards my ship, and the snow covering my vision, I can barely navigate forward. All there is for the longest time is me and a white, cold ocean. The armor keeps the cold away enough for me to move. But it’s still so freezing. My body fights the urge to recoil into itself, shivering, scared. But I don’t let it. I continue, as quickly as I can, disassociating myself from any feelings or thoughts of the conditions.

I reach up into my hood, to my ear to press the button on the comm-link. After pulling down the fabric of my coat covering my mouth, I say, trying to hide any sign of shivering, “I have landed successfully. I should be approaching the location of the base shortly.”

General Hux’s voice responds, nearly immediately, “Continue forward. Give us as much information as you can as you go.”

I oblige. “Copy that.”

I don’t know how much time has passed. But it feels like an eternity of walking. For a moment, I don’t even think that I was going in the right direction. To come all this way and die just because I got lost doesn’t seem like a very grand way to go. I’m moving slowly. Too slowly. It hurts me how much land I should be covering, but am not. My face is ducked into the coat, only peeking up every now and then to scan my surroundings. Each time I look up, it takes even longer to gain the heat I lost back.

The wind is a large reason why I am not covering much ground. I try to tell myself that this is a good thing, that it will be great for cover. But I’m beginning to doubt if I even am going to make it to the base to need cover. What if I’ve been going the wrong way? I’ve been following the coordinates perfectly, to my ability. But what if I got turned around somewhere. It should have been a straight shot. But I can’t see any difference between the landscape around me. Am I even in the right direction?

I reach up to my comm-link, pressing down hard on the button. I take a deep breath, saying above the monstrous wind, “Do you have any tracking system on me right now? Can you give me an update on my position?”

After a few moments, Hux responds, “Are you lost?”
“No,” I say, almost too defensively. “I would like to know how much longer I have until I reach the base.”

“I’m afraid there is no way for me to supply you with that information. I am sure you are almost there, Agent. Keep moving forward.”

The connection clicks off.

I duck my face back into my coat jacket and do exactly that; move forward. The best Agent of The First Order wouldn’t get lost. The best Agent of The First Order would be able to withstand these conditions. I’m not lost. I’m not freezing.

I suppose I wasn’t.

After more walking continuing forward, for what felt like hours, relief washes over me. As the outline of a mountain appears through the snowy wind, I notice a grey structure, much resembling a docking door, in the opening. I squint my eyes, examining. From here, there’s only that one entrance visible.

I reach to my comm-link, “I have reached the coordinate’s location. There is a docking bay entrance on the north side of the mountain.”

Hux’s voice pops into my eardrum, “This is the only entrance to the whole base?”

I open my mouth to answer, but then hesitate. If I say yes, this means they have all they need. They could literally just trap the Resistance in the base and raid it, from the outside in. I would get backup, then deal with the consequences of a potential second (or third, or fourth) exit later. But I wouldn’t be going into this alone. I scorn myself for thinking of such a thing. I respond, “I have yet to check around the rest of the mountain.”

“Get on that.” He says, coldly.

I sigh, stepping forward. My feet are beginning to feel the cold. The boots I’m wearing prevented this up to this point. I wonder if they were meant to last this long out here. If all my armor was meant to withstand these conditions.

It takes awhile to travel the perimeter of the mountain. As I do, I report to Hux about small, door entrances on the west and east sides. Then, another docking bay entrance on the south side. It’s a pretty standard layout, security wise.

That’s the first part completed. Now, to get in. To find a way to get in, at least. I find myself patting the place where my guns lie, in the holsters on my thighs. But to grab them would mean unzipping this coat. And unzipping this coat means giving up all the heat I have left.

Before I advance, I slightly unzip my coat, down far enough to grab the knife from my belt. With each second that passes, more and more cold pierces through my uniform, going straight through my basic, grey uniform, to my chest. I quickly grab a knife with my shivering fingers, then scramble to zip the coat back up. It’s a struggle to even grab the zipper, as I can’t close my fingers around the metal. I try at least three times before I finally grip it and jerk it up, engulfed in the fabric once again.
I exhale into the coat’s fabric near my mouth, using the warm air to keep the rest of my face warm. It works for a moment, but then the moisture just makes everything colder.

The piercing, freezing sensation causes me to audibly cry out.

I walk quicker towards the door. I don’t have a plan. Or any idea of what to expect. I just grip the knife firmly, moving forwards, nearly running. Once I’m inside, the cold won’t be an element. There won’t be wind. Sure, there’s going to be a shitton of Resistance members. But I’ll deal with that at the right time.

As I approach the grey metal door, noticing a keypad on the side. “Fuck.” I say, under my breath. It’s not surprising, that they would have some sort of security, even those this base is nearly as remote as you can get. I nearly stumble into the wall as I reach it. My body urges to me to just sit against the wall, to allow my wobbling legs a break. I ignore it.

I tap the keypad with my gloved finger, nothing happening.

“Fuck…” I repeat, looking down at my hand. Why the hell would they install a touch based system on the outside of a freezing planet?

I use my teeth to rip the glove off my hand not holding the knife. As soon as my fingers encounter the chill, I feel my whole hand tingle. I tap on the screen, noticing that I can’t even feel it under my fingers. The screen lights up, displaying a number pad.

Using my shoulder, I press the button on my comm-link. My voice breaks a few times in saying, “There’s a keypad that locks the door. It requires a four-digit code.”

General Hux merely responds with, “Four digits should not be that hard to crack.”

I exhale, in annoyance. I don’t have any technology with me to break the code. I stare at the keypad mindlessly, my hand now completely numb. Ducking my head down, I examine the way the lock is built into the mountain. I shimmy my glove back on, then clench and unclench my fingers.

I slide the knife in between the metal box of the keypad and the mountain. There’s so many security hazards I’m going against right now, but I really don’t know what other choice I have. When I notice my knife hit a groove in the metal, I tilt upwards and pull back. The front, metal casing flies open, much like the cover of a book.

Upon examining the wiring, a newfound confidence consumes me. This is a pretty standard keypad model, one that I learned about in the Academy. Any doubts in my mind vanish with the reminders of my training. I was top of my class. I am the best Agent. I can do this. There’s three different kinds of wires; a blue, black and red. Red is the alarm system, black is the mechanics of open the door and blue is the transmission of the code to the lock.

I cut at the connection of the blue wire, it is falling limply out of the box.

Quickly, I unzip my jacket to grab a pistol, then go through a similar struggle as last time to zip it back up. The cold wind smacks against the back of my head as I work. I hold the knife in one hand, pistol in the other. With a deep breath, I point the knife as far away from me as I can manage, aiming the blaster towards the tip, just enough to heat the end of it.

My fingers are barely able to feel the pull of the trigger. I don’t know I even do until a red blast is sent into the snow. The sound is startling, but I trust no one from inside the base could hear it. I press the red, heated tip of the blade into the place where the blue wire once connected. There’s a click.

The door opens.
I exhale in relief, quickly entering. There’s no way to close the door now, which may lead to some issues. But I’ll get this information quickly. It shouldn’t be a problem.

Inside the base is still freezing. But there’s at least protection from any wind. Metal flooring covers the frozen rock. A dome-like hallway is created with this same metal reaching the ceiling and spreading down the sides of the wall, much like a cylinder.

Yellow lights are built into the walls, illuminating the icy hall. With each step, the base grows warmer, more secure. But there’s also a tension that accompanies it. I shove the pistol back into my holster and replace it with my second knife. I know I can’t do anything that makes too much noise. But being in a corridor with only close-ranged weapons and no place to cover is ridiculously dangerous and stupid situation to put myself in. Especially with the lack of agility this coat gives me.

I pause, looking down at the heavy coat.

Decisively, I strip it off my body, throwing it to the side. I readjust the knives in my hand and activate my shield on my forearm with my pinky. The holographic blue grid flickers to life, projecting into a one-and-a-half-foot square off my arm.

I continue down the hall, head up, shoulders back. I can be the best Agent. They have no clue that I’m here. Once I get enough information, I’ll have back-up. This isn’t a suicide mission. This is rebirth. Me proving that I am good enough for all of them. Me proving Ren wrong.

This is my destiny.

I walk faster, down the corridor. I notice an opening to another hallway, to my right. Then the preexisting hallway continues forward. I peek down the right hall, noticing two Resistance members immediately, walking down its length, away from me. Their conversation indecipherable, but by the tone I could tell it was leisurely. The two men suddenly turn, entering a room.

Instinctively, I bend my legs and quickly move forward, after them. I know Hux said that I wasn’t supposed to go undercover. But I’m going to make the decision to go against that. As I reach the room the men entered, I hear chatter from down the hall.

Suddenly, three silhouettes turn down the hallway, towards me.

Left with no other choice, I slide into the room the two other men entered, nearly seamlessly. To my right and left, there’s nowhere to hide. The two men continue talking, walking down an isle of desks. I must act immediately.

I reach to the panel next to the doorway, pressing a button that closes the door.

Without giving them a chance to turn around, I lunge forward at the man closest to me, sending the left knife into his neck. As the other man swings around, I flip my right knife around in my hand. I throw the blade, aiming for his eye. His wide, terrified eye is now replaced with the image of the knife’s handle sticking straight out of his eye socket.

I twist the left knife from the first man’s neck, his blood spurting out from the wound. His nearly-limp body falls to the ground. He gurgles a violent, terrified sound, bleeding-out.

The other man screams as he attempts to rip the knife from his eye, but it’s fairly stuck from the force of my throw. As I approach him, he stumbles back, into the wall. I shove my knife in between his ribs, right into his heart. I look away, but still can’t help but imagine the life escaping his face. The sight of that, filling my mind, mixed with the dying sounds of the man bleeding out behind me makes me feel physical sick. I hurriedly twist the blade that impaled the soldier’s heart, then rip it out of his flesh. I use his jacket to wipe the blood off the blade, then return it to my holster. I look behind me, at
the other man, now dead in a pool of blood.

I sigh. His eyes are still opened. He almost looks like he’s still surprised. My mind tracks backward, trying to remember what he last said to his colleague. What his last words were. And how it’s my fault that he didn’t live to speak more. Who am I to decide that? Someone who has no legacy? No idea what’s right and wrong for this war? I wonder if someone cared for this man, the way I care for Kylo Ren. Or if he cares for anyone in that sense. Maybe multiple people do.

Suddenly, the door swishes open. I throw the knife out, hitting the man right in-between the eyes. He falls with a thud, dead.

Hurriedly, I grab his ankles, pulling him into the room. I wipe my brow with my sleeve as I move, dropping him as soon as his body passes the doorway. I press the panel next to the door to close it again.

I stripped the man I killed last of his uniform. It had the least amount of blood on it. And because the uniforms are white, it would not be easy to cover up. The white jumper is a lot more comfortable than the armor The First Order gave me. But, it’s a lot colder too. It fits decently, as well, which was lucky. I’m beginning to wonder if all my luck has been used up for this mission or if there’s still more left, somewhere. And if it’ll be enough. I shake my head, adjusting the beige vest. I attached my shield on my arm, just in case I need to turn it on for an emergency. Hopefully, it won’t be necessary. But the add-on is relatively small. And there’s already some sort of device installed on the forearm of the uniform. Maybe some communication device of some sort. Whatever it is, I don’t touch it.

I also had to use the smallest man’s boots, which still are slightly large on me. And the smallest set of white gloves. I tuck one pistol and one knife into the white belt around my waist, towards my back and covered by the off-white vest. I got a better sense for the room when I was hiding the bodies under the desks. It’s some sort of control-tech room. Which would make sense as to why the Prisoner wanted to come here. I could collect some great information, digitally, on my way out. I make a mental note of that.

Upon walking out of the dim room, only lit with the light coming off computer screen, I take one last glance at the three bodies, along with my extra weapons and uniform, I piled into the further corner away. I don’t know where else to hide them. There’s nowhere else to put them, nowhere less noticeable. Three people seems like so many today.

I exit.

As I walk through the quiet halls, I begin to wonder if I was too loud. If others heard the gurgling screams of the man I stabbed in the throat. Or the thud of the man who fell to the ground after I sent a knife in-between his eyes. But it doesn’t seem like they heard anything at all.

Four people appear down the hallway. Two women, two men. The women are younger, my age. I stare straight ahead, unable to breath at any rhythm. One of the men, out of the corner of my eyes, is looking at me. I can’t see him enough to analyze the stare. Whether it’s skeptical or just an absentminded action. I don’t dare make eye contact. As we pass, nothing happens. I exhale.

I make my way further into the mountain. Each time I pass someone, I find their stares growing more intense. More suspicious. Is this base too small for them to not have people they do not know, or at least do not recognize? Each time they pass, I wait a few moments, then look back to see if they enter the computer room, when the bodies are stashed. They never do. I walk faster.
So fast, that when I turn at the end of the hallway, I run straight into a man. I gasp, way too dramatically for the situation.

His old, greyed face smiles warmly, hands lightly touching my forearms. Every inch of my body feels on edge, muscles tensed. He says, kindly, “Oh my, I’m sorry. I was off in my own world.”

I give him and nod and step around him. “You’re fine. I suppose I was too.”

There’s more men walking behind him, walking around us. The man continues talking, despite my urgency to continue forward, “It’s windy out today, huh?”

I swallow hard. “Yeah, it is.”

“Are you leaving base today?”

I find myself answering truthfully, “Yeah, I am.”

He nods, giving me a small wave, “Well stay safe.”

“You too.”

I continue forward.

There’s an elevator that I notice. Usually security rooms would be the top floor. I suppose I’ll head there. I press my finger against the metal button, waiting patiently. Two more men walk out, wearing different clothing. Clothing that of Officers. I notice one looking down at me, glancing at the sewn in red and blue metal squares above my breast. I don’t know what they mean, whether it’s an indication of rank or position. But whatever it is, he seems skeptical.

I do my best to not think anything of it, entering the metal doorway to the elevator.

As the elevator moves up, more people walk in and out. Each quieter than the next. Some say hi. Some don’t. I find myself longing for pure solitude. Just for a chance to breath normally. There’s something about being in the middle of a mountain. In an elevator. Completely alone on a planet where no one would protect you, no one is on your side, that sends a shudder down my spine.

Only the best Agent could do this. I keep telling myself that. I’ve been through worse battles. Greater hardships.

Then, the small, round lights on top of the elevator run out. The door opens. I walk out. There’s a window, to my left that oversees the hanger. Two rows, each with five men, sit at control booths, working behind screens, talking to each other so calmly. When the door behind me whooshes closed, all look right at me. Confused.

Ten sets of eyes stare at me, wondering what I’m doing here, who I am. I wonder that too.

Upon deciding, I rip the blaster from my belt. It’s all so fluid; my motions.

I fire at them all, perfectly, right in the skull, moving from the ones furthest to the ones closest. I can kill four before they all begin to scatter. Two run right towards me. So, I fire, right in front of me, hitting a man in his chest. He stumbles back to reveal another man, ducking under my blast, then lunging towards my knees. I side-step out of the way and shoot downwards, the shot going right into the nape of his neck.

One man runs to the back of the room, crouching under a desk and reaching up to a panel. As he
feels for a certain button, I shoot his hand. His loud, piercing scream fills the room and he retreats under the desks.

I move down the aisle, shooting them one-by-one. Almost like some sort of fire-squad execution. They aren’t armed. They’re in shock. This was too easy. Unfair.

Then, the room is silent.

My finger feels sore from pulling the trigger, eyes tired from so much focused aiming. They begin to water. I sit at the main control desk, looking down at the hanger bay. People walk along, so mindlessly. So comfortable. Some laugh with each other. Others just sit on benches, merely lounging. Some do maintenance on the ships. I blink and feel tears spilling down my cheek.

Angry at myself for such a silly, unwarranted action, I sniff and wipe it away with the back of my hand. The glove soaks the substance effortlessly. I reach up, pressing the button on the comm-link.

“General Hux,” It takes a moment for me to make my voice as steady as possible. But I manage. “I have entered the base successfully. I am currently in the hanger’s overseeing control center. From what I can see, there are approximately twenty X-Wings. Some are not fully assembled. A lot are in maintenance. I’m suspecting that this base is very technology-based, so I could-”

“We are right on it, Agent. Thank you for your work.” He says briskly, cutting out.

I narrow my eyes, confused at his vague nature. Ambiguity is not like him, or any decent General. “What reinforcements will be supplied? I killed fourteen targets so far. But the rest of them will find the bodies or disabled door I used to enter the base any moment now. There are at least forty personal, just down in the hanger. I know there’s more in rooms surrounding the halls. I need assistance immediately. There could be a whole army here.”

Something dark takes over his voice. So mechanically menacing, “Agent, the base is in a mountain. One that is most likely comprised of solid ice rock. If we can take down the mountain, trapping everyone in the base, our mission will be so much less messy. No troops deployed. No extra expenses. They’ll have no clue that the missile is even on their way, thus we don’t have to worry about anyone discovering The Order had any involvement. It will be a mystery, at least for a while. The Order’s involvement will merely be conspiracy theory.”

“A missile is on its way?” I croak out, my voice weak. “To the mountain?”

“Yes. I sent it directly after you mentioned the nature of the base’s structure. It will enter through the entry point you exposed. Thirty minutes until it reaches destination.”

Panic sets in. “I don’t think I can escape in that short of time. I was relying on reinforcements and-”

“Congratulations, Agent. Fourteen men killed, all on your own without your cover being blow, is quite impressive. I didn’t think you’d make it this far to be completely honest with you. After a while of no reporting, I assumed you already have died.” He pauses. “It’s the willingness of an Agent that makes them the best. An Agent’s submission. You have earned your title. I hope to see many more like you.”

Logic clouds my mind. Confusion. Darkness. More tears stream down my eyes, without me even feeling anything decipherable. The bodies around me make me feel claustrophobic. I shake my head, my voice more like a beg. The noise is foreign, something that I’ve never produced genuinely. “If you can just send out a ship, to pick me up. I no longer have my insolation armor, and my shuttle is miles away.”
“Pity.”

Snarling, bitter anger seething through my teeth, I respond, “They’ll see your missile coming. They’ll evacuate. They’ll inform other bases. They’ll tell the other territories of the Republic.”

The most blatant thing the General has ever said is then spoken, “That is why your final mission is that of diversion, Agent. I have no doubt in my mind that you’ll give them an amazing show.”

The connection is clicked off. I press the button, but no sound is producing. Frantically, I change the channel. There’s absolutely no static, no sign of other connections. It’s as if the thing just died on me.

I fall into a chair from underneath me. I lean back. Close my eyes. It’s never been this quiet. I check the comm-link again. Nothing. It’s never been this goddamn quiet.

Suddenly, I jump at the projection buzzing into a picture from my forearm, the device on the uniform coming to life with a beep. All the bodies around me have the same image on them. A red light from above begins to blink. The sirens begin.

My stomach drops. The picture is mine. My ID photo from The Academy.

I stare at the girl, who seems so dead. So void of anything other than coding, duty. There’s nothing in her eyes. No sign of life. Even the soldiers I killed, considering their eyes after they died, they held more emotion. More purpose.

The text next to the image reads:

“Intergalactic terrorist has infiltrated base. Location is unknown. Name: Willow Kai. Kill on sight.”

Everything sets in. My adrenaline sparks. I run towards the elevator.

With a slam of my fist on the panel, the door whooshes open. But there’s no elevator cell. Just the empty, dark shaft. Through the darkness, I notice the elevator at the very bottom. They’ve already shut it down. My stomach flips. It’s a long drop. There’s cables going down the middle of the dark abyss. I scan the walls for any type of means to climb down. There is none. I exhale. Behind me there’s noise coming from a door across the room. Scattered footsteps.

I step back, to get a head start. I keep my feet light with each stride forward. Concentrated. Then, I leap.

My body slams violently into the cables. I feel myself falling, then snagging at the sensation of catching myself. My hands cramp, feet shuffling upward to grip onto the cable securely. When I do, I allow myself to breath. The breath is shaky, shattered even. More tears spill down my cheek. I remember the sight of Ren’s ship, flying away from that moon all so clearly now. It didn’t hurt me then, not personally. But for some reason the rejection sets in, at this moment.

I begin lowering myself down the cables. My hands tremble, upper-arms ache from the physical exertion the action causes. They shouldn’t. I’m built for this. But now, my body feels so unstable. So defective.

I remember how I couldn’t move against the restraints on Hux’s ship. How he would rather kill me than have his record even be slightly defective. I remember that feeling of knowing that I will die soon. I believed it, truly. Deeply. Just like I believe it in this moment.

With the thought, my hands lose the rhythm of descending down the wires steadily. My grip is suddenly weakened, and I feel myself sliding down, too quickly. I grab back onto the cables, as
tightly as I can, my body halting. To wipe the tears from my cheek on my shoulder, I catch a glimpse of how much further down I must go. I look back up, at how far I’ve gone so far.

My gaze is interrupted with the sound of a swooshing door. The elevator door, a floor below my location, opens. Light from the hall pours into the elevator shaft. Hurriedly, I wrap my left arm around the cable and squeeze it hard in-between my forearm and bicep. My legs wrap around the cables, desperately. As I use my free hand to grab the blaster from my belt, I see three Resistance soldiers in the doorway, looking down.

Before they get the chance to look up, I fire down, straight into the first’s skull. The blast’s noise echoes throughout the shaft, crushing my eardrums. I can’t contain an audible shriek. The others stumble back, the man I shot plunging downward, his body limp. The ringing of my ears stop at the sound of his body hitting the elevator, bones crunching.

Another Resistance member peaks out, his gun pointing upward. I fire. He falls, this time backward, into the hall. The one next to him fires at me, the blast going towards my right side. I swing away, my body rotating around the cable. I use the momentum to get a good shot at him as my body swings around, towards him. I fire. The ringing in my ears grow. The blast from his gun remains bouncing around in the elevator, zipping up and down the walls. The man I shot falls to the ground. I don’t hear his bones crunching, like I did the last man’s, but my mind imagines it anyway, despite how awfully I hate the sound.

My hand trembles as I return the gun to my belt. I replace it back on the chord, descending downwards, once again. When I pass the open elevator door, I catch a group of men, running forward. Before I can count how many, I allow myself to slide down the cables. I feel as though I’m falling. I may be. My hands clutch onto the cables, but not too hard. My hair flies upwards from the momentum and as I stare down, the elevator’s surface grows closer, rapidly. The bodies of the two men who fell out of the hall, along with it.

Upon impact, I attempt to brace myself. But when my feet hit the ground, my ankle gives out. I stumble forward, the pain flowing upwards from my feet. My ankle cries in pain, desperately. Everything, physically, mentally, emotionally begs me to stop. My feet, the soles now coated in the blood spilling from the men’s bodies, stumble to gain balance. I reach down to an emergency hatch the elevator’s ceiling has, then pull up. Just as I do, a blaster shot descends downward. I dodge to my right as it hits the elevator, then bounces back upwards to the top floors. I slide myself down the exit hatch, dropping to the floor of the elevator.

The impact only emphasizes the shattering feeling of my ankle. I cry out in pain, hurriedly turning on the shield and grabbing my blaster. I reach for the button on the elevator's panel, the doors opening to the mass of Resistance members, all scrambling. I limp outward, my sight set on the door of the hanger bay. I look to my left, noticing the opposite door closed off as well. I sneak to the side wall, desperately looking for something, some way to divert attention. Someone’s going to see me. I have no cover. They’re going to catch me. There’s too many to fight off, when they do catch me.

I scan, desperately, my focus settling on a fuel tank across the length of the room. Before I can question it, I reach my blaster up. Aim.

“Hey!” A voice in the distance projects.

I fire.

The blast fills a portion of the room, but not enough of it. Men are thrown across the floor. One crawls, desperately, both of his legs blown off. I sprint for the door. My shield, drawn, deflecting a
blast that aimed towards my legs. With each step, I feel my ankle become more and more shattered under my weight. After the first blast, there’s a second, coming for my upper body. Then a third. A fourth. I run faster.

I shoot at the panel next to the door, praying to something that it opens.

It does.

I run out into the blizzardy storm, backwards, deflecting the shots coming my way. I fight the urge to fall backward. My body is screaming at me, more than ever to give up. I desperately fire back at the Resistance members, now doubling in numbers. The cold air is significantly crueler. I have no insulating armor on. My tears feel like they’re freezing against my skin. I won’t survive this. Even if I kill every member of the Resistance here, I won’t physically be able to survive the cold, not in time to return to my shuttle. A sob escapes from my throat. I attempt to shoot at the Resistance members, while still gaining distance, but my shivering arm throws off my aim. There’s too many of them.

My vision blurs from tears, face distorted from the pain and the cold. I deflect more of their fire, but my feet slowing down. The arm holding my blaster slowly lowers to my side. There’s a wall of them now, all running towards me. Flames from the small explosion I caused grow behind them. I yearn for the heat of it.

And then, it happens. There’s two blasts that come towards me. One towards my chest, the other, towards my head. I didn’t see the second one quickly enough. I block the first one. The second is so bright. I can watch it coming towards me, right between the eyes. But I can’t move. Not fast enough. It’s so close, it engulfs my vision. The red light is at the greatest at first, but then there’s just a blinding white light. My strained eyes clamp shut. And I come to terms that this is how I’m going to die.

I’m going to die being the "best" Agent of The First Order. And nothing more.

I don’t necessarily accept it. But I can’t change it. Not now.

I don’t feel the blast enter my head. All I feel is its heat. It radiates violently off the icy skin of my face. The ringing in my ears fade into the buzzing of the blast. It’s suspended. Prolonged. This shouldn’t take this long.

My eyes, squeeze shut, relax. Then open. The blast is still there, suspended in thin air. If I were to even move the slightest bit forward, it would penetrate my skull. I step back, slowly, my feet struggling to fight the weight of the snowy ground. It’s impossible to breathe. Confusion clouds my mind. And then, the blast moves.

But not towards me.

It zips backward, right back down the line of fire. Right into the chest of the man who fired it. He falls to the ground. I stare at the line of Resistance members, all frozen. I can’t make out any facial expressions. But I can almost feel their fear. Their confusion. The windy snow clouds most things. I squint my eyes, trying to make sense of the situation.

Then, the sound of a lightsaber ignites.

I look straight forward, the red light appearing from a dark, shadowed figure.

And I continue to fight.

A newfound hope thrives through me. I sprint forward, forgetting the pain of my ankle, the cold,
frozen nature of my body. I just fire at the Resistance members, perfectly. Accurately. Beautifully. When they fire back, I deflect it with my shield, replacing their gunshots with my own. As I grow closer to the soldiers, I see the swinging of the lightsaber. It’s so violent. He’s so ravenous. It cuts through, furiously slicing the men in half, slashing at their flesh. I’ve never seen anyone fight with such dominance.

All the men are focused on him now, desperately trying to land a shot on him. I don’t allow it. As they draw their weapons, I take advantage of their new center of attention. I shoot so many, I lose count. My blaster is burning my hand, while the rest of my body frozen. A numb sensation overwhelms my index finger responsible for pulling the trigger.

Suddenly, a man to my right, unfocused on Ren, is aiming at me. Just before I can fire, his body is ripped back, chest impaled right down the length of the saber. With a flick of Ren’s wrist, the man’s body slides down the lightsaber, into a crumbled mess on the floor. I meet Ren’s gaze. His mask is off, face set with pure rage. Pure power. He looks me dead in the eyes as he ruthlessly lunges at a fleeing soldier, slashing up the length of his back.

I fire at four more men. But now, most of them are retreating. They’ll die at the hands of the missile. So, I don’t go after them. Ren doesn’t either.

Scattered footsteps of running men begin to dim. Then, there’s only the sound of the wind. My breathing. He stands, legs spread into a stance specifically reserved for fighting. One, slightly bent at the knee. The wind from the outside meets his face, pushing his hair back. It pushes mine forward.

The adrenaline fades and the pain of my ankle sets back in. Along with the hypothermic condition of my body. The fact that tears are still running down my face. But I can’t move. The sight of him, skin radiating from the glow of the lightsaber consumes me. And there’s something about me that consumes him too. His eyes hold true, untamable fire.

I wonder what he’s going to do now. If we’re just going to continue staring at each other like this. I can’t move. It feels impossible. The reality of the situation, of my circumstance grows on me. He saved me from The Resistance. From The Order. From everything.

He turns off the saber and returns it to his belt. He walks towards me.

Each step so purposeful. Quickly, yet, heavy. Stalking across the length of the base we transformed into a battlefield. I sniff, taking in a breath. I begin to speak as he grows closer, my head needing to crane upwards to meet his gaze.

But it’s cut off.

His lips crash against mine, restlessly. My stiff, surprised body is cradled desperately by his clinging arms. He grasps my body in the same way I held at the cables down the elevator shaft; as if life itself depended on it. As he wraps his arms around my body tighter, his kiss grows messier. I can’t reciprocate. The weight of him against me is too much. All I can do is stand there, completely consumed by him. His arms reach up, allowing his large hands to hold my head steady as his tongue dives into my mouth, devouring. The chaotic action pulls out a moan from inside of me, one I can’t even think to contain.

This sound provokes him to shove himself even more against me. Every inch of me is pressed into his large frame. Our teeth clank together. It’s so disorganized. He’s doing things that I’ve leaned to never do when kissing. The Order taught seduction to me, for missions that required me to offer myself in that regard. His kisses are awful. Intruding. Nothing that anyone would want imposed upon them. But I still can’t help but be destroyed by it. The passion, the anger. Everything that is
within the context of it overwhelms my body, sending pleasure that I never knew I could experience throughout my veins.

My arms shimmy out of his grasp to allow my shaking hands into his hair. Within this movement, he doesn’t stop kissing me. I latch onto the locks, pushing back against him with all I can. I match his rage, his energy, with my own. And it feels like it goes on forever. Like there was nothing to ever happen before this moment and nothing will ever happen after. There’s only this. Right now.

He’s the one to pull away. We both gasp for breaths, as if we both are emerging from a pool of water. His hands cover the sides of my face, overwhelming the shape of me with their size. He looks me in the eyes, so deeply. So intently. The brown is darker than I remember. Yet so alive. I look down at his flushed, pink lips, in astonishment that they were once against mine. Upon this, he immediately tilts my head upwards once again, as if to tell me to just remain looking in his eyes. I do.

He stares at me with an intensity I’ve never seen from anyone, ever. It’s as if he’s affirming himself that I’m alive. As if he’s affirming everything we’ve ever been through with each other, everything he feels for me. I do the same, for him.

His hands draw away from my face. He steps back, sighing, looking across the hanger. Then, he quietly informs, “My ship is at the left entrance.”

I swallow hard, wiping away at the remnants of my tears. “We should hurry.”

We do.

Chapter End Notes

lmao so remember when I was like 'yea ill upload wednesday' then I waited until 4:30 am on Tuesday the next week... yea that was a good meme...
anyways enjoy this chapter! this is the longest one yet, I believe.
also the last jedi ruined me. I've never felt so many emotions within the span of the first days it was out. I watched it the first time and I didn't like it at all and I was upset because I was really wanted to like it but I just didn't but then I watched it again and I fell in love with it. it's honestly my favorite, right after empire. and adam driver is legitimately the such an amazing actor. damn. I'm blessed.

ANYWAYS
thanks for reading, as always! your comments, fanart, kudos and everything make me so infinitely happy. honestly, I would have no confidence in my writing/sharing my work if it weren't for all the kindness you all send my way. life has been throwing me some FRESH ones lately, so whenever I'm down I just go through some of the comments and it makes me feel so much better. writing this fic is such a nice way to escape. and I cant thank you all enough for the support given.

MORE THINGS:

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
I stumble into his command shuttle, collapsing to the co-pilot’s chair. In the pilot’s seat is R8, looking back to Ren, “Ready for takeoff, Commander Ren.” The sight of the droid is comforting. Familiar.

As he enters the ship, Ren slides his hand across his hair, pushing it away from his face. “Do it.” He orders, not even slightly slowing his pace as he crosses into quarters. I look out the window at the mountain as the shuttle rises. Soldiers exit out of the side exit to shoot at the shuttle. Their blasts, while some do land, can’t do any damage. I look across the landscape of the Hoth, the bright sun blazing aggressively against the white of the snow. In the distance, a black object appears, fuming yellow sparks radiating from behind it.

“We have to go, now,” I say, the pain causing my teeth to grind. My shivering hand reaches up towards the lever to send us forward. I lean off the chair to reach it. The action causes my head to suddenly feel heavy, dizzy.

Unexpectedly, Ren’s gloved hand is on top of mine, pulling me away from the control panel. Once my hand is out of the way, he returns his own to the lever, slowly pushing forward. The ship gradually soars away from the scene. I look over at his gloved hand, settled gently on the control. Whatever rage he had, just a few minutes ago, has now either completed subsided or substantially decreased. I don’t know how, or why. He seemed so angry just moments ago. The sound of the explosion below us causes me to jump. I wrap my arms around my knees, hugging them tightly to my chest to gain more warmth.

R8’s golden bug-like eyes blink in satisfaction of our successful escape. His mechanical, silvery limbs stretch as he stands from the pilot’s chair, allowing Ren to sit. Ren glances at the empty chair, then looks down to me. His hardened, concentrated expression softens, almost instantly. Nodding to his quarters, he orders, “Go lay down.”

My words tremble as they escape my dry throat, “I’m fine.”

Ren slides a glove off, then brings the back of his hand to my forehead. I can’t feel it at all. Though the touch was nothing of flirtation, with his touch brings the taste of him, still present on my lips. The feeling of him so desperately grabbing me, holding me. I look up to his face, taking in the inimitable sight. Each time I see him without the mask, I feel this need to memorize his features, his facial mannerisms. He’s sweating, a fair amount. The dark hair that usually feathers lightly around his face is now clinging onto the skin of his defined cheekbones. When he pulls his hand away, my head leans forward, as if I were trying to keep his skin against mine for as long as possible. He says blankly, “You’re freezing. Your core body temperature has probably dropped. What’s wrong with your ankle?”

I look down at it, not even realizing I’ve been gripping it, squeezing. “I dropped down an elevator
shaft.”

He stares at me, dumbfounded, then looks to R8. “Tell your master to lay down.” He settles into the pilot’s chair, beginning to flip various switches, steering with ease. He doesn’t seem rushed. This is the first time he’s flown anything gently. I absentmindedly stare as his light fingers dance across the controls.

“Master, if you could please go lay down, it seems that you’re showing signs of mild hypothermia. Not to mention, your ankle. Using the data I have collected on the nature of the injury, I have predicted the injury to be classified as a pilon fracture. To get your mind off the pain, I could make you any variety of food from the emergency medical—”

“I wish to remain in the presence of Commander Ren.” I respond, my voice quieter than intended.

Ren freezes at the mention of his name for a brief moment, then continues what he was doing. He orders R8, “Bring her some food and a blanket.” Then, he pulls his gaze away from the controls to me, eyes warmed, tone warmed as well, “Put the safety belt on.”

I do as I’m told, allowing myself to settle into the seat.

We exit the atmosphere of Hoth and with the darkness that comes with the galaxy’s horizon, darkness seems to cloud my mind. Where are we going? Is he just going to drop me off at the nearest planet, give me some credits, and send me on my way? The Order obviously doesn’t want me anymore.

I’ve heard stories of Agents “expiring,” but I never thought they were true. And, I thought, even if they were, I could make myself good enough at this to make myself immune to it. With Agents, as they grow to learn too many secrets, or they develop too many identities with too many loose ends, the logical thing would be to send them on a suicide mission. But, I’ve kept my ends clean, I’ve tied up all my cases neatly. I thought I did, at least.

Did Snoke find out that I told Ren about Eerson, that I covered up Ren saving General Organa, that I covered up Ren saving me from General Hux? Ren saved my life two times now… Hux will know about this. He probably already does. Along with the squadron working on this mission. If that was even a thing. I’m assuming it is. If the base wasn’t inside a mountain, would Hux have actually dispatched troops for my aid?

If Snoke doesn’t know about those things, he surely knows about me explicitly leaving out information on Kylo Ren in reports. I didn’t realize how much I was bending the truth to protect him. If I were anything like the Agent I should be, those reports would be completely different. I haven’t even written one in days, purely out of not having anything I’m willing to share with Snoke about the nature of our relationship.

R8 returns from Kylo Ren’s quarters with a folded black, wool blanket. The droid hands it to me and I wrap it around my frame, still shivering. God, I can’t stop shivering. I pull the material around me tighter, leaning my head back into the seat. I look to Ren, still quiet. I want him to say something. Something about what’s going to happen with me. Something about why he saved me. Something about why he kissed me. Anything, at this point.

He sighs, as if he senses my urgency. He doesn’t respond to it immediately. I can tell he’s trying to piece together words in his head, carefully. Cautiously. His lips part and he finally speaks, “You’re alive. That’s a…” He swallows hard, trying to phrase it correctly, “nice thing.”

I exhale. He’s complete shit at comforting. The Order is going to kill me. I know it. I stare straight
ahead, into the galaxy’s vastness.

He seems confused as to why I’m worried. As if him coming here, saving me, fixed everything. If anything, him saving me put me at even more danger than I’ve ever been in. Especially with Snoke or Hux. I mutter, testing if he knows of the term, but also ashamed to use it when referring to myself, “I’m expired.”

His jaw contracts. He can’t argue against it.

I continue, “They’ll kill me when we return.”

“I won’t let them.” He contradicts, sharply, tone slightly raised.

I can’t help but scoff at the implication. Ren may be attracted to me, humored by me, or maybe even care for me. But his promise of my safety is so naïve. I ask, my once weak voice gaining more strength with the duration of the conversation, “You won’t let Supreme Leader Snoke?”

He scowls, unable to look at me. His eyes are still focused on the controls despite the ship flying steadily, without need of piloting.

“He’ll be the one to want me dead most.” With every right. I decide not to tell Kylo Ren now about how I’ve been (or was supposed to be) spying on him the whole duration of our time together. He’d question the nature of our whole relationship. But with this decision not to tell him, comes an understanding that he won’t be able to comprehend my anxiety with the situation. I take it.

Ren reassures, “The Supreme Leader is wise. He would not want you dead. You’re a valuable asset in this war. You’re not expired, nor in the process of expiring.”

“The Supreme Leader is the one who approved of this mission.”

“I don’t believe that.” His voice is harsh. Almost warning me to not question it, to not tread into that territory.

Doubtful, but for his sake, I go with it. “Okay.”

Ren continues, the soft voice more calculated than usual, “I have full confidence that The Supreme Leader will abolish the true issue with General Hux. Hux sees you as a threat to his position. He’s conspired things like this before with others who have intimidated him.”

I just nod.

He doesn’t say anything else.

I feel like squirming in my seat. Something tells me that we’re not going mention the whole kissing portion of the day’s events. I pick at the hangnails outlining my fingers from under the warm blanket. I decide to keep conversation moving, at the least, “How did you know? About Hux’s plan?”

“Well,” He sucks in his cheek. “The Force warned me something was going to happen before you left. And I warned you. But you didn’t listen.”

I roll my eyes. If I knew he was going to be condemnatory towards me, I would’ve laid down in the goddamned bed.

He goes on to add, “I had the comm-link channel between the two of you open. My ship was on stand-by for assistance.”
I can’t help but feel embarrassed that he had to save my life again. Part of me wishes I didn’t need the help. That I could prove to him, to Hux, that I could save myself. I slouch forward, blankly looking at the ground.

“Are you planning to attempt to escape The First Order?” Ren bluntly asks.

The question yanks me right out of whatever trance I was in. “What?” It takes my mind a moment to make sense of the question. “There’s nowhere I could run.”

“You’re not dumb. You could find a location off the grid. Create a new alias. Your profession taught you how to be exceptionally deceiving.”

“Do you want me to do that?”

He finally pulls himself away from the controls, to swivel his chair towards mine, now attention fully on me. “I don’t know.” He harshly says. “You seem pretty dead-set on the idea that everyone’s going to try to kill you when you get back, despite me telling you that I’ll protect you from-”

“I was just on ice hell being sold out to the Resistance as a galactic terrorist with a fucking missile headed straight for me. Sorry if I’m on edge about people wanting to kill me.” I snap, ripping the blanket off me and undoing my seatbelt. I probably should just go lie down. I don’t feel wanted up here at all now. Maybe I overestimated the meaning of him kissing me, of him saving me. Maybe that was him just toying with me. Trying to gain even more control over my life that he already has. What if this is all one-sided? I can’t mentally deal with this being one-sided. Not today.

“I know that,” He leans forward, ready to follow me if I stand up. I notice the intensity in his dark eyes. How his eyebrows lower to frame it. “And I saved you. And now you’re alright.”

“Yeah, I’m really alright.” Him saving my life isn’t him saving me from The First Order. To allow myself to believe such a thing would be naive. I stand to my feet, forgetting about my ankle. I stumble to the side and he reaches out to help, but I avoid his grasp. “I don’t expect you to understand. No one would dare betray you.”

He freezes. His eyes go down and he sits back his chair, turning it towards the controls. All I’m given is the profile of him looking down blankly at his panels, as if a wall was suddenly built between us. A cold energy comes from him, my body beginning to shiver all over again.

“Ren, I-”

“The soup is prepared, Master!” R8’s voice chirps from the background. “The temperature is substantially heated, so I would advise caution when consuming.” R8 studies me as I’m standing, confused on whether to hand me a bowl now or when I sit back down.

“I’m going to go lay down.” I tell R8, subliminally telling Ren as well. The droid returns to Ren’s quarters. Ren’s jaw is clenched and he’s staring downward. My fingers twitch at my side, slightly scared to engage with him, but I gain the strength to lay a hand on his shoulder. His muscles tense under my touch. I say, as softly as I can manage, “I’m sorry.”

I assume he won’t respond, but he slightly turns his head to look at my hand. His voice is low, haunting, “Tell me if you need anything.” He turns his head, moving his shoulder away from my grasp.

The action makes my gut twist. I am supposed to be exceptional at human behavior analysis. I usually am. But right now, I genuinely don’t understand. Sure, I made a generalization, suggesting his elitism, which made him annoyed. But he also just kissed me. And saved my life. Yet, he’s still
closing himself off from me so suddenly. I turn around and exit the room, finding my way into the quarters.

As I curl into the comfort of the bed, I allow my weight to relax into the dark silk blankets. Taking small sips of the soup, I attempt to keep my mind stay at peace. I’m exhausted. I can’t think that much about the possibility of dying now. I’ve already spent too much time doing that in the past 24 hours. I just finish my soup and lay down on the soft, plush pillow. When I close my eyes, I find it hard to escape retellings of the violence that recently occurred. How I slaughtered them for a group of people that could just as easily slaughter me.

I don’t like thinking about that, so I opt for replaying Kylo Ren kissing me over and over in my brain. But even that has its own sober nature to it. It’s as the memory itself is teasing me with a reality that could never be. I hug the blanket around my body tighter.

I feel the ship land in The Finalizer when the bed starts to lightly shake from turbulence. I stay still, eyes closed. I’m by no means close to being asleep. But my body still feels unmovable. The pain of my ankle has dimmed from no recent movement. I know standing up will be excruciating.

After a few moments of hearing shuffling feet outside the room, the door opens. I open my eyes and force my body weight to shift forward, until my elbows can support me. A man and a woman push a stretcher into the room. I know it’s standard procedure, but my pride gets the best of me. I swing my legs off from the bed, trying to ignore the sharp pain that shears at my ankle, and wave the medics off, “I can walk there.” I don’t tell them that I plan to do that after I go speak with General Hux.

Suddenly, Ren, now masked, stands in the doorway. After getting somewhat used to the sight of him without the mask, this seems odd. I forgot how intimidating he is. The dark, expressionless face stares piercingly at me. “Get on the stretcher.”

I stare back, trying to match the intensity. I walk past him, hiding my limp as much as possible. I’m not about to be rolled out of his ship, immobile, completely vulnerable to whoever wants to walk up and kill me. Nor, am I about to completely trust Ren enough to protect me from that. The medics rush to my sides once they recover from the initial shock of someone defying Kylo Ren. This is why I said what I said, about no one being brave enough to betray him. When people even slightly go against him, they’re stunned into a frozen state. If he can’t acknowledge the influence and privilege he has over them, he’s not only blind but delusional. I can’t believe I apologized for pointing that out.

I walk down the ship’s ramps to see a line of stormtroopers, at attention. I stare at all of them as I pass, my eyes unable to leave their blasters across their chest. My mind makes my blaster’s location, towards the back of my belt, apparent. Just in case. Officers in the distance stare at me, then look to the men next to them to make a comment. I look down at myself as I continue forward. Blood has spattered messily over the white jumpsuit. My hair is out of my bun, knotted and tangled against my shoulders. My face is probably the worst part of it all. I can’t even begin to imagine the bags under my bloodshot eyes, all covered in dried tears.

The medics behind me catch up to my side and the woman says, her concern probably stemming from Ren, “Your ankle needs medical attention, Agent. Your droid informed us that it’s likely a pilon fracture.” I look towards the male medic, struggling to keep up as he rolls the stretcher.

I ignore the woman, continuing forward. General Hux is likely in his office. Or maybe on the command deck. I’ll check both. I make my way to the elevator across the bay, but am interrupted by a booming voice.
“Agent 2319.”

It’s so loud, I physically jump. I turn to look behind me, Ren standing at the bottom of the shuttle’s ramp. I feel the terror radiating off everyone else in the room. But there’s none in myself.

Ren barks, “Report to the medical wing. That is an order.”

I grind my teeth, glaring. The tall figure doesn’t budge. Another surge of anger runs through my bones, one for Hux, for The Order, and for Kylo Ren for inexplicably kissing me and then having the nerve to order me around. Everyone’s watching me, praying for their own sakes that I obey. Fuck that.

I project the words back to him, seething, “I’m going to discuss business with The General.”

I notice his fists clench at his sides. “That was not your instruction.”

“I know.” I turn back around, walking towards the elevator.

Instantly, my whole body is immobile. I feel stuck, claustrophobic to the air around me. I desperately try to jerk my body away from whatever energy is trapping me, but it’s impossible. There’s a tunnel like noise surrounding my ears. Despite the overwhelming sound, I hear footsteps, Ren’s footsteps, approaching me from behind.

A darkness drowns my mind. Consciousness and unconsciousness blur together in a moment, until there’s nothing at all.

My body wakes with a jolt. I gasp for air, head whipping around to examine my surroundings. I’m in a medical room, R8 standing by a chair in the corner. The room is completely empty, other than cabinets on the right wall, then metal a rolling table holding gauze, syringe, a scalpel and bottles of medicine. The sterile, artificial lights are obnoxious, my head cramping from their brightness. I immediately notice that the feeling of the blaster in my belt gone. Looking down, I realize that I’m just wearing a light grey hospital gown. It’s uncomfortable, itchy. An IV is in my left arm, connecting to a machine rapidly beeping. I take a deep breath. On my right foot, up to my ankle, is a slick black metal boot. I attempt to roll my ankle, but it’s useless. All movement is constricted. Now, if they wanted to kill me, they probably could with very minimal fight.

R8 is the first to begin speaking, “Agent, I am very pleased to see that you have woken up, I see you have taken note of-”

“How long?” I interrupt. “How long have I been out?”

The droid pauses. He knows whatever he’s about to say will piss me off. I brace myself. “After Ren… immobilized you, the anesthesiologist put you under for the duration of surgery on your ankle. The injury started as just a small Pilon fracture, the bone cracked, but due to the additional stress you put on it afterward, it grew slightly more severe.”

“How long?”

“Two days. You were suffering from severe hypothermia.”

I exhale, falling back down into the bed. Snoke will certainly kill me now, if not because I’m a
traitor, because I haven’t given him a report since forever. “Do you have my holopad?” I ask.

As if the droid could read my mind, he says, “The Supreme Leader requested that your next report be made in person on board of The Supremacy. He has been made aware of your injured state encouraged you go through recovery with patience.”

I nearly shit myself right there. Meeting Snoke in-person. So that he can personally kill me. Holy fuck. I run my hands through my hair, which someone must’ve shampooed and brushed cause it’s not the mess that it was before I was knocked out. While part of me is dreading my execution, another part of me is pleased to prove Ren wrong that Snoke is wanting to kill me. I focus on me being right, rather than the subject matter.

I lay back, staring at the ceiling, then down at the IV. I should probably go talk to Hux, like I intended before I was rudely knocked unconscious. I reach over towards the rolling cart with the medical supply, then sit with my legs crossed. I lay the arm with the IV out in front of me. “Go grab me some clothes from the uniform room.” I order R8 as I rip the tape from the IV. R8 exits and I grab gauze from the cart and place it over the IV. I bring it up to hold it in place against my chin and pull the needle from under my skin. My teeth grind at the pinching pain. Tearing off a piece of tape from the cart, I press the gauze down with the pressure of my chin, then tape it in place with my free hand.

My body relaxes back into the stiff cot, my mind attempting to wrap itself around the situation at hand. Perhaps it’s good that I was knocked out for two days. I’m not as angry as before. I think that before I would’ve murdered Hux, out of sheer spite. I’m not sure what I’ll do now.

And I’m still not sure when I arrive outside the door of his office. I wonder if I should knock or just walk in. I look unprofessional, needing to lean on a crutch that I found in the medical bay. If I needed to, I could always use it as a weapon. When getting me a uniform, R8 said that my rights to weapons were “temporarily revoked.” Although my uniform is in check, the black overcoat and pants, pleated nicely, I didn’t bother putting my hair up. I don’t have any means of doing it, and I don’t feel like going back to my quarters before meeting with Hux. I mentally make a note that if he makes any comment on it, I’ll just kill him.

I decide to knock at the door.

There’s no immediate answer so I wait.

When the door finally swooshes open, I’m face to face with The General. The first thing I notice is a bandage covering the bridge of his nose. My mind formulates countless scenarios for the moment the injury occurred. He looks down at my ankle, seeming to do the same, then steps aside.

“Come in, Agent.” He says, blankly.

I do. He ushers to the seat across from his desk. The same one I sat in when I was drunk, after I punched a man. That probably doesn’t help my reputation either. I settle into the chair, propping the crutch up next to me.

The General begins shuffling through files, pretending like I’m not present. I look down at the slick black ground, then back up to him. His red hair is precisely combed over, so bold against his lifeless, pale skin.

I speak, my words harsh, “Who is Willow Kai, actually?”
He sighs, placing his files down. He looks disappointed that I spoke. Tired. His ice blue eyes pierce sharply into me. His voice in lower than usual, strained, “Willow Kai was a galactic terrorist located and executed on the planet of Bespin. We found her last week and killed her. It’s not public information, nor has The Republic or Resistance received word, so I figure the alias would do.” He leans forward. Darkness surrounds his tone, overtaking any hint of his exhaustion. “My apologies for misinforming you about not being undercover during the operation.”

“I can forgive that.” I narrow my glare at him. Whatever intimidation game he thinks he’s playing with me, I can play right back. I lean forward lessening our distance.

He snarks back, “It is a shame we could not supply them with a real name. Even galactic terrorist scum has something they’re called other than their profession’s title. Yet you’re far too insignificant, too inhumane, to have the right.” He pushes off of his desk, then slowly walks around to stand in front of me. I look up to him, unafraid, unmoved at how close he now is, how he’s towering above me. He analyzes my appearance deeply. I remained locked on him as well. “You know this though…” A smirk forms on his thin, blood-red lips. “When you are intimate with Ren, which is treason, might I add, what does he opt to refer to you as?” His hand reaches out and I hold back every urge to swat it away. His fingertips brush against my loose hair, barely even making contact. His touch is that of a ghost, lingering, haunting. I remain steady. “What does he call you in his mind when he imagines you? I wonder, because all you’ll ever be is an Agent. A tool for The Order to use then dispose of. A filthy whore.” He rips his hand away from my hair, as if he’s now disgusted.

I lean back, getting comfortable. The tactic was sad. I’d rather not have a name at all, then have one as ridiculous as Armitage.

He continues scoffing down at me, “It’s quite funny actually. Ren revealed to me that you believed you were expired. Which, I suppose you are now, after the outcome of the mission. But the real reason why The Supreme Leader agreed to have you killed was out of curiosity to see Ren would save you. Even your death has nothing to do with you at all. Pathetic.”

My mind clicks into a different gear. That was my mission. To get close enough to Kylo Ren to obtain information on his psyche and loyalties. And I now am closer to him than ever. And I can convince them all that I’m worth keeping for that exact purpose. I can survive, I can stay with Ren, then just continue lying, continue withholding whatever I want. They taught me how to deceive, The Order trained me in existing within lies. I never considered the possibility of using my own lies to get what I want. To protect the people, the person, I want to. This is how I can make my life here livable. How I can be happy. I smile in realization. “Did The Supreme Leader tell you the whole story, though?”

Hux stares, slightly taken a back. Maybe even offended by the possibility that The Supreme Leader wouldn’t tell him everything.

I stand up, matching Hux’s height. I notice him lean back into the desk slightly. “Do you know why I was assigned to Kylo Ren in the first place? Or have you overlooked that detail all together?”

He swallows hard.

I continue, allowing myself to revel in the feeling of having the upper hand. “Kylo Ren is an unstable force in this war. Someone needs to ensure that he remains fighting, full-heartedly, for The First Order. Supreme Leader Snoke assigned me to get close to him, to watch him. To get that information for The Supreme Leader, I ensure that I’m as close to the Commander as possible.”

Hux doesn’t respond, processing the information.
I lower my voice, the words sliding off my tongue with pure bitterness, “Kylo Ren saving my life was only confirmation to my success. Thank you for providing the situation necessary for me to see it.” I consider Hux’s broken nose and can’t help but let out a small laugh. “I have everything under control, General.”

For the first time in forever, I feel like I do.

Hours have passed since my encounter with Hux. Back in the dormitory I work, typing out exactly what my story is to say to The Supreme Leader. My fingers type restlessly, eyes strained by the bright screen. I’m tired, but this newfound plan has fueled me. This whole time, I’ve been trying to hide the progressions of Ren and I’s relationship, but in reality, it’s the perfect cover for my true feelings towards him.

There’s suddenly a knock at the door.

“Come in!” I yell, assuming it’s R8, who left to get some mandatory updates by the technicians.

But it’s Ren who walks through the doorway. Hurriedly, I save the document I was working on and close it, turning off the holopad. I set it to the side and raise an eyebrow at him. Even though I’m in a fairly good mood right now, I’m still a little pissed that he kissed me, didn’t talk about it at all, then knocked me unconscious. He walks towards the kitchen area, holding a bottle of medicine.

He says passively, “You forgot these when you checked yourself out of the med bay.” He places the silver bottle it on the table’s counter, then reaches up to remove his mask. I can’t help but be surprised by the action. He keeps it in his hand, carefully inspecting it.

I wonder why he didn’t wear it to save me. It would’ve kept him warmer, definitely. For a moment, I catch myself thinking that maybe he didn’t wear it because he planned on kissing me. I stare at him. I decide, right then and there, that we’re going to talk about it. I hate the weird taboo nature around the incident and the fact that it’s the only thing keeping us from having this conversation. I swallow hard, then force the words to come out of my throat, “So you kissed me the other day. Are we not going to talk about that?”

He freezes. Blood rushes up to his face, and he looks further downward. His low, gentle voice returns, “Should we?”

I feel myself tense as well. Maybe this wasn’t a good idea. I revert back to a professional state of speaking, “I would just like to know the reason behind it- the implications of the action and how to apply myself towards you in future situations.”

“Implications and future applications…” He mumbles, turning his back to me. His fingers pick mindlessly at the ridges in his mask.

I sit up on the bed, swinging my legs off the side closet towards him. “Yes.” I say, simply.

“Well,” He begins, lowing the hand grasping his mask to his side. He takes a deep breath, perhaps one of courage, and then turns towards me. His bright eyes take mine off-guard, like usual. “You’re supposed to be an expert on human analysis. You tell me the why I did it. You tell me the implications.”

I should be an expert. But not when I’m analyzing something that is so… personal. God, it’s never
been personal before. I set my jaw. It shouldn’t be any different than analyzing any other social behavior. I begin speaking, as if I’m conducting some kind of obscure meeting. “Well, The First Order requires that my physical form remains in a prime condition in the case of seduction. I’m designed and trained to be appealing.” My voice cracks at the end of the sentence. The corner of his lip twitches as he remains staring at me. The stare nearly breaks me in of itself. Whatever I thought I could accomplish, consequence of the overconfidence gained by my encounter with General Hux, is immediately broken with Kylo Ren. I mentally curse myself and subconsciously make my hands into fists at the bedsheet underneath me. “You admitted to being humored by my resilience once before. Additionally, we have spent a large amount of isolated time together recently and our relationship grew from distaste to kinship. The combination of these circumstances, along with your tendency to do rash things, ultimately resulted in a lust kindled by a large amount of adrenaline released during combat against those Resistance soldiers.” I lift my head up. I think that all sounded logical.

His eyes finally move away from mine, but they just move to scan my body down the length of my figure, then back up. Not allowing me to catch my breath, he repeats back to me, “A prime condition…?”

Suddenly, I can’t recall how the hell I was nearly freezing to death two days ago. Heat races through my body at an excruciating rate. I’ve grown to realize how often he repeats certain words or phrases I say, so damn passively. I squeeze my fists around the blankets tighter, trying to remain professional. “That is correct.”

“Undeniably,” He says briskly, low. I nearly choke at the oxygen caught in my throat. He doesn’t dread the topic, but I can still tell he relishes my disorder by one simple word. “Well, you seem to have the whole situation mapped out. I particularly appreciated your acknowledgement for my aptness for spontaneous bursts.” He’s making fun of me now. “It’s reassuring to know that you’ve equated the moment to a rash, spontaneous action.” The sarcasm in his tone has never been so thick.

I stare daggers into him and it feels like we’re back to the first week of our acquaintance. Pure bickering, toying and testing each other’s wit. I tell myself it’s not any different. I tilt my chin up, my hands by my side relaxing. I explain, fearlessly, “Spontaneous action is exactly what the dynamic of our relationship begged for.”

“Our dynamic?” He quips back, immediately. “Or you?”

It all clicks. Why would I deny it? There’s now virtually no reason to hide that I want to make sensual, passionate love to this man. I hope to god I’m projecting all of this right to his Force powers right now. Plus, he’s in my territory. I may have fucked up a lot of things recently, but I’ll be damned if I fuck up flirting. My voice is low when I respond, a smirk forming with my eyes more so than my mouth, “That’s the future application.”

When he breaths in harshly, chest rising, eyes growing darker, I know I won.

Before he can gather himself and respond, I say, “Thank you for bringing me that medicine. I should probably get back to my work.” I grab my holopad from behind me and place it on my lap.

He returns the helmet to his head, then says on his way out, "We board The Supremacy once your ankle is healed."

"I know." I respond. I'm ready.

Chapter End Notes
happy holidays kiddos thx for reading and also the support on the last chapter made me so happy. I hope you all enjoy this one too? also catch me crying in the club about how agent doesn't know how to do things or make connections with people unless it's in the context of a mission eep I think about that a lot ok bye
...

more officious things:

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO

pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
I stare down at the black boot, gleaming against the ceiling lights. As I turn my leg, the light’s reflections move around the oil, slick metal. My eyes revert to the holopad on my bed. I’ve spent hours going through my plan of what to say to Snoke. And I’m confident in it all. Any further revisions would just be overkill. My hand once again reaches up to feel the comm-link secured in my ear.

I sigh, bringing my hand back to my side.

Recovery has been excruciatingly boring. I’ve begged some of the Officers I know stationed here for some busy work, but they haven’t gotten back to me with anything. A break from intense action should be something I don’t take for granted. But all I want to do is be on The Supremacy, getting my meeting with Snoke over with. I don’t know why I need my ankle to be healed beforehand. If I just would’ve been more careful coming down those cables, I wouldn’t be so stuck here. The presence of the comm-link in my ear grows more apparent.

I turn on my side, curling up into the comfortable lounge wear. The fabric of the dark grey trousers is light and thin, while the black tank top is tight and clinging. There’s a comforting feeling the clothes bring with the mixture of their fit and their fabric. It’s a sensation that definitely can’t be supplied with the stiff grey uniform I wear around The Finalizer. Or the black armored jumpsuit I wear on missions.

In a moment of running out of fucks to give, I sit up, abruptly, turning on the comm-link. When I hear a beep, I stammer, “Connect to Commander Kylo Ren.”

The device chirps and I bite down hard on the side of my cheek, instantly regretting everything. Anxieties of being too clingy, too annoying, flood my mind. If he wanted to talk to me, he would. And he hasn’t. Not for a whole day. He probably won’t even answer my call. And if he does, it’ll be purely out of pity. But Kylo Ren doesn’t seem like one to pity others. Why would he feel that way towards me? Who am I kidding, he probably actually has stuff to do, he’s not even going to answer-

“Agent.” The voice takes me off guard. I can tell he’s not wearing a mask. I’ve never heard his bare voice through the comm-link before. “Are you alright?”

I swallow hard. “Yeah,” Shit. I didn’t think I’d make it this far. What was I even going to say? I manage, completely pulling a reason for me to call him out of thin air, “I was just wondering if you had anything for me to do during the duration of my recovery.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. I am currently not assigned to any projects and I can’t engage in anything along the
lines of training or working out. But I could be of aid if you need something.” I cringe at myself falling back down into the bed. R8 is across the room, staring at me, judging.

Ren responds, sounding painfully awkward towards the scenario, “There’s really nothing I can think of.”

My words come out too quickly, all jumbled into one breath, “Yeah, that’s fine, I’ll ask someone else.” I reach up to the comm-link to cut off the communications.

“Wait,” My hand freezes and there’s a pause. “You’re not doing anything at the moment?”

I take a deep breath. “Correct.”

Silence fills the connection for the most unbearable of moments.

Then, “If you want, you could come, um, recover in my quarters. I have some files and holocrons to overview, but other than that, I’m just as unoccupied.”

“Okay,” I respond too quickly. Too enthusiastically. I mentally curse at myself, then add on, “I suppose I could stop by for a moment.” I pick at the hangnails surrounding my fingers. “Where are your quarters located?”

“Top floor of the dormitories. You should have access, probably. If not, I’ll come let you in. It’s the third door on the right.”

“Alright,” I roll off the bed, struggling to gain balance. I grab the crutch next to my nightstand to support my weight. “I’ll be there once I finish this thing.” I twist the dial on the comm-link until I hear a beep, then walk forward to my wardrobe.

R8 chirps from the corner of the room, “Finish what thing?”

I slide open door of the structure, shuffling through the hanging stiff uniforms in search for a cardigan. “I don’t know. I didn’t want my circumstance to sound too horribly uneventful.” A tan, soft fabric comes into my view and I reach forward to pull it from the hanger.

R8 responds, his usual empirical nature evident, “You are not planning to wear your uniform?”

I look down at myself. If I’m only going there to keep him company, I don’t see the purpose of wearing something professional. Especially when I’m still feeling like shit due to the side-effects of the medicine for my ankle. But maybe my uniform would look better. I ask the droid, “Does this look alright? Like, presentable to him, at the least?”

“You look fine, Agent.” R8’s words are slower. More suspicious, “My questioning regards the context of the meeting. Is it an unprofessional setting?”

Exhaling, I make my way into the bathroom. I set the crutch against the sink and look at myself in the mirror. I slide the cardigan on then adjust the black tank top underneath, smoothing out the fabric. “If I’m going to get that information for The Supreme Leader, Ren is going to have to trust me enough to say something he wouldn’t normally say to everyone else. Which means we have to engage with each other in unprofessional settings.” I comb through my hair with my fingers, clean up it’s part, then fluff it out a bit. Maybe parting it further to the right would look better. I try that. But then just move the part back over.

“Am I accompanying you?”
Whatever I look like, it’ll have to do. I secure the crutch back under my arm and make my way out of the bathroom, towards the door back into the hallway. I open it, then turn to R8, “Nope. Just me this time.” I exit, closing the door behind me.

I knock at the metal door ahead of me; the third one on the right, at the top floor of the dormitories. I step back, waiting patiently. I look up and down the hallways, for troopers, anyone. I wonder if it would be suspicious if someone were to see me. I wonder how many people have been inside Commander Kylo Ren’s quarters.

Before I can think too in-depth about it, the door opens.

I was expecting Kylo Ren to be standing in the doorway, but he’s not. No one is. I hesitantly step into the room. The first thing I notice is a holocron on the floor projecting the image of a planet with wispy clouds, marbled with red land and blue oceans. Ren sits on the ground beside it, surrounded by opened files and a holopad. He looks up to the door behind me, then waves his fingers fluently. The door shuts.

“Hey,” He greets, his eyes meeting mine. His eyes flicker to my body, then back up in nearly an instant. He swallows. “You can sit down if you want.” He nods towards the small, twin sized bed, but my eyes don’t follow his. He’s wearing a black tee shirt, with his standard black pants. His feet are covered by thin black socks. Besides when I was in his quarters on Korriban, helping his injuries, I haven’t seen him in such normal clothing. Even then, I was too busy trying to make sure he didn’t bleed to death to think too hard about it. And too distracted by seeing his face for the first time. His hair looks clean, voluminous even. Healthy. Same with his skin. Every time I’ve seen him without the mask, he’s looked so tired. There’s been an element of extreme stress in his expression. Urgency. But right now, he’s calm. He doesn’t look like he’s a Commander. Just a young man. A friend. I’ve never looked at someone that way before. I’ve never had a real friend.

Blinking, I pull my eyes away from him to look around the room. His quarters aren’t anything of extravagance. They’re actually the standard layout, similar to my own quarters. The biggest difference is that his shelving system is filled with books and holocrons. I make my way towards the bed and sit down on the edge of it. The sheets are nicely made and tucked around the edges of the mattress. I sit in a way that doesn’t disturb their neatness.

“You look comfy.” He says this, despite not looking at me. He flips a paper laying in front of him over.

I’m not quite sure what that’s supposed to mean. “You do too, I guess.”

A small smile forms on his lips. The brown eyes flicker up to mine, then back down to the paper. “It’s nice.”

I feel my cheeks grow warm at the comment. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him smile. I examine the planet ahead of me, projecting from the holocron. I can tell it’s mainly an aquatic planet, but I don’t recognize it. I try to read the files sitting in front of Ren, but I can’t quite see from this far away. My gaze returns to Ren as he reads. He sits, legs crossed, head tilted in curiosity. His pale skin illuminates brightly from the blue holocron across from him.

He sighs deeply, placing the file back on the ground. When his head inclines, his attention locks onto me. “What do you know about Operation Cinder?”
The question brings me back to my courses in history of the Empire in the Academy. I answer him, as if I was in class answering an instructor, “I know that it was part of The Contingency; An insurance that the Palpatine’s Empire and enemies did not outlive him when he passed. Operation Cinder was focused on the destruction of planet life.” My mind naturally processes his question as an invitation. I lower myself off the bed, onto the floor across from him so that I can see the files. My fingers run across the lettering of one labeled, “Satellite Construction.” I tilt my head to the other various labels and visible headings. “I’m guessing this relates to what the prisoner mentioned about the Emperor’s vault destroyed in Cinder?”

Ren leans to his right to grab a file, outstretching his arm. His slender fingers flip through the papers, double checking their presence, before handing it to me. He says, deep into a strain of his own thoughts, “I found this in the archives of the Empire. According to these files, there was only one of the Emperor’s vaults that was destroyed during Operation Cinder.”

I raise an eyebrow at him. “There’s more than one vault?”

“There’s several.” Ren points at the planet projected on the holocron. “The one that was destroyed during Cinder was located on the planet of Pillio. Whatever the Resistance wanted with the Emperor’s artifacts was located inside of this specific observatory.”

I narrow my eyes onto the planet, then look downward at the files. I flip the cover open to reveal the mission statement. Coordinates on how to get to the location, what detonators to use inside of the observatory, and standard procedural notes. “They can’t want something they don’t know exists. And if the vault is destroyed, they would’ve had to have known about its contents beforehand.”

“Exactly.” Ren runs a hand through his hair. “It doesn’t make any sense. And whatever it is that they’re looking for, they have to be desperate.” He looks up to me, eyes finally settled instead of scanning and skimming over the information before him. “They sent a whole fleet to try to retrieve that information. They can’t afford doing something like that.”

“Well,” I try to piece together the information, formulating a solution from what little parts I’m given, all while remaining engaged in the intense gaze he’s subjecting me to. “Who was assigned to destroy the vault? Maybe they know something, if they’re still around.”

“That’s the thing.” He grabs the file from my lap, opening it, then flipping to a specific page. He hands it back to me. “All information on the people involved has been covered up.”

Every few words on the page has black rectangles over the words. I ask, “Have you checked the digital copies?”

He nods.

“Hm,” It is odd. I’ve never seen information concealed like that. I don’t know how else to figure out the information, other than going to someone directly involved in this specific mission. I reroute my mind towards another option. “What about the other observatories? Is there a trend with the contents of all of them? Because if there is, you could probably get an idea of what the Resistance wants to find. Which is better than nothing, I guess.”

He leans back, supporting his body with his palms. I notice the muscles in his arms flex with the action. The wounds wrapping around his skin from Korriban are healing quickly. They probably won’t even scar. He must be treating them with care. He responds, “That’s probably the closest thing to a lead we’ve got.” He lets air escape from his lips, visually taking in all the files. “I’m just going to think on it. Reading over these for the millionth time won’t help.”
He clicks the button on the holocron and the image of the planet flickers off. The once blue-tinted room returns to its darker state. He then begins replacing any stray papers back into their designated file. I assist, stacking them one-by-one, leaning across the floor to reach them. One file specifically catches my eye. I read the side of it, labeled “Project Resurrection: Origins.” For a moment I keep it closed, just in my hands. Then I set it back into the pile. I know enough about it. Digging for more information would only lead to a dead end and disappointment.

Project Resurrection is the means of which The First Order take children, primarily presiding in the Outer Rim (where no one would care to monitor too closely) and raise them into stormtroopers. Or, if they show promise in the first stages of the Academy, make them into something else entirely. A lot of time, parents would sell their children into this program for temporary financial confiscation.

Ren must sense my mental pause towards the file. He leans over to read the label. When he does, he purses his lips. I can see him in my peripheral trying to analyze my expression as I continue stacking the rest of the files. I keep my face blank; dead. He gathers the stack into his arms, then stands to his feet to place it onto his kitchen table. He does the same with the holocron. I find myself retreating to sitting on the bed. My body feels stiff against the mattress.

Ren pulls up a chair from the kitchen table across from my position to sit on. I make note of the action. He sits with his right leg over his left. His hands rest within each other on his lap. I try to stop analyzing him, but find myself reverting to it, almost because it feels comfortable for me to. The position he is sitting in is that of insecurity. I study his facial expression. He sucks in his right cheek, trying to think of the right way to ask me something.

Before I can tell him to just spit it out, he does.

“Do you remember anything about your parents?”

I remain still, despite discomfort the question causes within me. I focus my voice, steadying it, “No. I was in possession of The First Order since infancy.”

He looks like he’s waiting for me to give him more information. There really is nothing else to say.

Yet, I find myself saying, “I’ve never developed a bond with anyone either, that mirrors that of a parent and child. Because my status has always been constantly changing, progressing, I could never really develop a close relationship with any one of my superiors. Unless you consider listening to countless hours of The Supreme Leader speaking through holograms a relationship.” After I say it, I reflect that I’m saying this inside the quarters of my superior to my superior. There’s a fucked up aspect of the situation I recognize, but choose not to think too hard about, to spare myself for just this once.

He continues, genuinely curious, “Is it relieving? To not have those ties to anyone?”

I stare at him carefully. I feel bad that I already know why he’s asking me this. Because he wants to be reassured. The bonds he has with his family are stressful. He wants to know if he'd be better off, just ridding himself of them. I feel my head grow heavier in realization that friendship isn’t always something rid of ulterior motive. I respond, “I don’t know what I’m missing out on. So, I suppose it’s not relieving. I’m just indifferent.”

The answer doesn’t satisfy him.

I wonder if I should change it so that it does.

I then wonder if normal people think like this. If they consider ulterior motives in casual
conversation. If they analyze body language. If they construct answers to solely please someone else. Doubt clouds my mind that I wasn’t meant to have conversations like this. That I can’t be genuine with anyone.

But I can’t help my own curiosity from bleeding into the equation. I ask, “Is that kind of relationship, is it really…” Finding the words to ask him what I want to ask is difficult. “Can you actually love someone like that?”

His eyes revert downward. I want to urge him not to think about the answer, to just blurt out whatever thoughts come into his head. But I realize my question was pushing it enough. Requesting him to answer it in a certain fashion would ridiculous of me. When he looks back up with eyes glossed in memories, he responds, his smooth voice quieter than usual, “Yeah.” He hesitates. Then, “I think that was the part that made it hurt the most, when they left me. The fact that I did love them that deeply. And I thought they loved me in the same way. I was wrong.”

My words come out coarse. “They left you?”

His eyes are now to his lap. He leans back, readjusting his crossed legs, but I find myself leaning forwards, making up for the distance he created. “That sounds harsh, I guess. They sent me off to train to become a Jedi with Luke Skywalker.” I notice a certain pain, a hateful pain in the way he says the name. It’s something I’ve never heard in his bare voice. It sends shivers down my spine, reminding me who he is. What he’s capable of. “I was able to write to my parents while I was away. My mother would respond at first, but as time went on, the responses became few and far between. But I feel like I lost them, I really lost them, before they sent me to that godforsaken planet.”

It just occurs to me that he’s not been able to speak about this to anyone since he’s been here, probably. Maybe Snoke. But Snoke is still… Snoke. The words he’s saying have been pushed into some corner of his mind, collecting cobwebs, unmoving. But still present. He stopped talking, in a way that one would stop talking when they’re ready to change the subject. But I know there’s so much he wants to say. I can tell, by the way he’s tearing at his fingernails, body so closed in on itself. I lean forward, urging, “What was it like, before you left for training?”

He sits up, slightly. “My mother and I were somewhat close. She was easy to get along with. Kind. Intelligent. And my father was someone who I wanted to be like. I thought he was the most interesting person in the galaxy at one point. He was usually gone, so when he was around I tried to cherish every moment.” There’s a dullness that returns to his voice, replacing whatever hopefulness the memories once brought. “But it wasn’t enough. Not for them. Whatever lifestyle they thought they created eventually eroded and reality hit them. They argued constantly. About the most trivial of things. Han Solo made every excuse he could to not be around. Leia eventually found herself back into politics, more than she ever had been previously. I grew up, mostly in that environment. And when things at home were at their lowest, I was sent to train, despite me telling them I had no desire for it.”

I still feel like there’s something missing. Something he’s not telling me something big. I ask, “Why did you leave The Rebellion? The Jedi?” I feel selfish asking, as if what he’s told me isn’t enough. But it isn’t. I can’t imagine myself leaving The First Order for just those reasons. There must be more.

He brings his eyes, which the whole time have been fixated on his lap or the ground, to me. There’s something so painful, so dark, about him when he says, “Don’t say I left them. They didn’t give me a choice.”

I open my mouth to ask for elaboration.
But he stands up. “I think that’s enough.” He pushes the chair he was once sitting in back under the small table in the kitchen section of the room.

I stand, limping to follow him. I reach out towards his arm, instinctively. Goosebumps spread across my body when the pads of my fingers encounter the warm skin of his forearm. He turns to face me, merely looking at my hand’s grip on his arm. I let out a shaky breath, sliding my hand downwards, the warmth of his skin only growing with the friction. I can’t help but make note of how the skin is smooth, yet also tough. My touch against him is light, brushing against the fine hair of his arm, then moving to his palm. I card my fingers in-between his to hold his hand. He remains stiff at first. Unresponsive.

It’s his unresponsiveness that makes me consider his diverted eyes. My frail voice is practically begging, “It’s okay. I won’t push it further.”

There’s a twitch in his fingers before they finally bend into the frame of my hand. His voice is low, aimed towards my hairline with the angle of his tilted head, “Don’t be sorry. I wish I could tell you everything. I wish…” There’s a tremble of the once melodic tone. I meet his blinking eyes. “I wish I were strong enough to face it.”

I squeeze his hand tightly, narrowing the distance between us. “You don’t have to be.” His bottom lip trembles. I feel his hand grasp onto mine tighter. I’m barely able to make the words audible, “Not with me.”

As if something inside of him cracks, he clenches and unclenches his jaw. I notice the arm with his hand holding onto mine flex. His words are weak, desperate, shifting into different territory, “I don’t want to hurt you.”

I feel the corners of my mouth pulled into a small smile. “I think I’ll be able to handle you.”

“This is bigger than us,” His brow furrows, voice gaining more stability. “I’m supposed to be fully devoted to my training. To the dark side of The Force. If Snoke were to find out about any of this, he will kill you. He won’t hesitate. He’ll make you suffer.” His grip on my hand grows nearly painful. “The Supreme Leader finds out everything. There’s no hiding from him.”

I want to tell him my plan. But I know that telling him could compromise it. And not only that, it would mean that if it were to fail, Kylo Ren would be held responsible as well for my treason. I won’t fail. But I won’t take any chances that compromise Ren’s placement in the Order. I plead, “I can hide it from him, I swear it. I’ll be safe.” My free hand reaches up to the frame of his face and he flinches at my touch. I caress his head against my palm gently, testing the nature of it. He’s trembling again. I drag my thumb against the outline of his cheekbone. “This is the most real thing I’ve ever felt.” As my thumb moves down his face, the smooth skin becomes rough with the texture of growing facial hair. I slide my hand into the silk-like hair, carding fingers though the locks. “Please, if you want this like I do, let me feel it.”

Ren’s free hand latches onto my outstretched arm, lightly keeping it in place. “I’m too scared,” he admits. Despite the rejection in the words, he still holds onto my arm, he still holds onto my hand. “I cannot have you hurt. Not because of me.”

“Kylo-”

“I don’t want to hurt either.” His voice raises.

My body stills.
“I could not bear going through something like that again.” Now, he’s the ones pleading to me. Whatever desperation I once had, he’s reconstructing with himself.

I say with every ounce of strength and conviction I have, “I’m not them. I won’t hurt you.” Hurting him is the absolute last thing I would ever want to do. I don’t know much about caring for people, but I do know that you aren’t supposed to hurt the people you care for. I don’t know how you could. My thumb traces downwards, towards the outline of his cheek, then to the skin around the corner of his lips. “I won’t allow it.”

He sighs, as if a wave of relief washed over him. But there’s something within his eyes that still show me he’s unsure. Questioning.

And maybe because it’s so close, he’s so close, that I feel the panic of this all crumbling around me set it. I know I can make him happy. I know he can make me happy. Not being able to, because he doesn’t trust me, terrifies me. More doubt clouds my mind. I find myself spilling it all out, “I don’t want to trick myself into believing this is possible when it isn’t. I’m not in the business of unreciprocated feelings.”

He swallows hard.

I urge, my caressing grip growing tighter. “You need tell me what you want.”

I notice his eyes flicker downwards, to my own lips, then back up at me, as if he were asking for permission. Or maybe for help.

With my own sigh of relief, I stretch myself upwards, my eyes closing when my nose brushes into the skin besides his nose. He leans downward, pressing his forehead into mine. He releases my hand and my arm, and I feel the trembling hands cupping my face lightly. His breaths escape parted lips, meeting my own. It’s uneven, quivering. He’s nervous. This setting is nothing like the one of Hoth, where everything was loud, cold and violent. This is peaceful. Quiet. Nothing to hide behind.

My hand moves from his face, through his hair, then to the nape of his neck, pulling him even closer to me. My other hand finds it’s place laying against his chest. When I tilt my chin upward, our lips brush against each other so painfully lightly. His fingers twitch with the contact. I pull away, to readjust the angle of my head, and he bends down more, relieving me from needing to stand on my toes.

Our lips meet again, this time pressing into each other to form a kiss. The skin of his lips cling onto mine as we pull away slowly. There’s something about the nature of it that makes my chest physically hurt. But the pain isn’t negative. It’s almost like a hunger, a craving, a signal. There’s something about it that makes me feel like this is my first kiss- what was supposed to be my first kiss. His nose nuzzles into my cheek and his lips press back into mine again, this time my bottom lip in-between his. I now find myself unable to breath in a defined rhythm. The kisses are so slow, so innocent. It’s magical, something I never knew a kiss could accomplish. My ears buzz. My toes curl.

I whisper, my lips meeting his with the inflection of certain words, “I won’t ever hurt you, Kylo,” I press my lips into his deliberately once again, then pull away to ask, “Please, believe me.”

He nods against me, roughly saying, “I trust you.”

He breaks our kiss to pull me into an embrace. I press my face into his shoulder as he strokes my hair.

I can faintly hear him repeat it to himself, “I trust you.”
I’ve been aboard The Supremacy before. A few times, actually. But back then, it was a lot more secretive. Due to The First Order’s intention to remain under the radar from the Rebellion and Resistance, the Supremacy is hidden in the Unknown Regions. Looming and patient. Despite the secrecy surrounding the vessel, The Rebellion and The Resistance must know about it by now. Even if its existence is just downgraded to just a rumor. I’ve learned that most rumors can be simplified down into a truth. Or, at least, a point of view of the truth.

After being assigned to The Finalizer for so long, walking through the halls of The Supremacy is nostalgic. It’s also a shift in world view. Compared to The Finalizer, The Supremacy is gigantic. Compared to anything The Supremacy is gigantic, I suppose. It’s like a planet in of itself. The floors are still the same slick black, oil-like. They still reflect the lights from the walls crisply, almost duplicating the light all together. The halls are still significantly wider, with larger packs of troopers passing more frequently. Mouse droids buzz around sporadically. A blood-red trim outlines the floors and walls, giving off a slightly more sinister atmosphere than that of The Finalizer. I remember it everything so clearly now that I’m back.

But one thing is very different.

As I walk beside Kylo Ren, people turn their attention to him, in awe and respect. Then they look at me. Probably wondering how or why someone is walking beside him, rather than slightly behind. He used to always walk faster, as if he had something to prove. But now we walk at a comfortable pace, side-by-side. I keep my shoulders back, hands folded behind me, in the standard way an Agent should walk. Everything feels as it should. My uniform is finely pressed, hair is tightly pulled back into a bun. I don’t need a crutch to walk. And I’ve gone over what to say to the Supreme Leader at least a hundred times within the past two weeks. I rehearsed it. Memorized it. Meditated to it. I can do this.

Kylo nods to a hall to the right and I turn on my heel, marching forwards towards the elevator.

He says, observantly, “I sense your resolve. You’re confident.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice the mask remaining pointed forward. I reply, mirroring the focused action, “Should I be anxious?”

“Most are before speaking to The Supreme Leader in person.”

I wonder if he is.

We approach the door to the elevator and I step inside. Three panels of long, rounded lights cover the walls, divided by dark controls and panels. It’s nearly blinding. Ren stays on the other side of the door, facing me. Maybe he planned on wishing me luck, or reassuring me. But he knows I don’t need the words of encouragement. He senses my self-assurance. So he remains silent as I press the button to the Supreme Leader’s level. The mask is the last thing I see before the doors close.

As the elevator moves upwards, it’s quiet. The saliva in my mouth feels dry, suddenly. The bright lights surrounding me have an in nauseating sensation about them. I swallow hard and reposition myself in the center of the elevator, feet should width apart. I can’t afford to doubt anything now. I close my eyes, exhale slowly. My hands fold into each other, behind my back.

I am Agent 2319. On my way to meet with The Supreme Leader, aboard The Supremacy. Informing
him of my status with the mission assigned to surveil Kylo Ren. I am the Best Agent of The First
Order. I know I am.

When I open my eyes, I stare straight ahead into the darkness of the doors head of me.

They slide apart.

Immediately my vision is flooded pure red. The same red that once trimmed the halls of The
Supremacy now is the entire backdrop of the gigantic room. I advance forward, down the long
runway, taking it all in as I go. But not for a second do I disconnect my eyes from him.

He’s tall and lean. His skin is a purple-like pale. With the natural shadows of the concaves within his
face, he looks even more deranged than what the holograms depict. But somehow, he looks more
human than I would’ve imagined in real life. He’s never been more alive to me. It’s easy to envision
him as just an idea, a character. Those thoughts in my mind have been destroyed, as he stares at me
as I advance. He sits on the throne, in a long golden robe. Praetorian guards scatter the room, in a
cult-like formation. Their armor matches the backdrop, while having the same reflective nature of the
ground. His long arms outstretch across it’s armrests, casually. Relaxed. Everything is reflected into
the slick ground, like in the halls. But in here, it feels more otherworldly. Almost like the ground is
fluid. I feel as if I’m walking on water.

When my feet arrive before the throne, I kneel.

His voice, baritone and so palpable, booms, “Agent 2319.”

I stare at my reflection in the ground. My eyes are cold, dead. Unafraid.

“My understanding is that you had quite the eventful day on Hoth,”

I remain listening, staring down at myself.

He continues, “It has been brought to my attention that General Hux attempted to take matters into
his own hands, acting outside the requirements of the mission. I apologize that you were at his
expense for such…” He pauses. I hear the scowl on his face, “despicable actions.” The passiveness
in his voice carries as he continues, “I advised him to send you with a squadron, but I suppose he
thought that he knew best. I can assure you that your safety here will not be taken lightly.”

None of that is true; But okay. Snoke is quiet. He’s allowing me to speak.

I do, “There is more to what happened Hoth, my Lord.” I stare myself right in the eye as I say,
“Concerning Commander Kylo Ren.”

Snoke chuckles deeply. “He saved your life.” The voice grows quieter, introspective, “Kylo Ren has
been trained to take lives. Not save them.”

“I believe the action is a side-effect bond that I have constructed with him.” I see myself blink for the
first time in the encounter. “If given your permission to pursue, I believe I can give you the
information you seek.”

Suddenly, my head is forced upwards. As if someone pressed their fingers against my chin then
pushed up. But no one did. The Force continues throughout the rest of my body, down to my feet, to
make me stand. I stare at Snoke. His eyes are a bright, cold blue. I remain steady.

Snoke smirks, his face growing even more contorted by the action. “What bond?”
I respond, as evenly as humanly possible, “I believe that Kylo Ren views me as a romantic outlet.”

The Force releases me. I remain standing in front of Snoke, right at the edge of the throne. If he wanted to, he could reach out and touch me. I could reach out and touch him. The Supreme Leader chuckles, leaning back. He pats the armrest in amusement, drawing my attention to his long fingers, his skin barely clinging onto bone. His nails are yellowed, sharp. They resemble claws more than anything. “Well,” Snoke’s eyes go to my forehead, focused on something. “Do you mind if I have a look?”

“Do what you wish, Supreme Leader.” Intention. It’s all about intentions. My intentions were to manipulate Kylo Ren into trusting me. It’s not reciprocated. He is a subject in my mission. Nothing more.

The long arms reach out, his palm resting on my head. I remain staring at him, steady. He closes his eyes. Suddenly, a piercing pain erupts from inside me. I want to scream at it. It’s as if each section of my brain is being torn from each other individually, yet all at once. His nails dig into my scalp. My vision is taken over by clouds of darkness, legs begging to give out. I don’t allow it. There is no pain. There is nothing outside of my intention. I remain standing straight, staring at Snoke as he crushes my mind with his own.

Intentions. It’s all about intentions.

The pain almost grows into something numb. Something clear. It’s dark, powerful. I find a kinship with the energy. I feed into it, allowing it to become part of me, rather than be used against me. I show him exactly what I want him to see. I make it crystal clear.

It all stops. Whatever energy just engulfed me disappears in as quick as an instant.

Snoke opens his eyes, to consider mine. My are still cold. Still dead.

He is even more amused than before, urging, “The boy is infatuated with you....” His hand doesn’t leave my head.

I ask, my voice unaffected by the mind breach, “Was what you saw to your satisfaction, Supreme Leader?”

Snoke leans forward, the smirk transforming into something far more sinister. “Yes...” A pause. Then, “This presents itself with so many more opportunities.” He smooths out my hair before returning his hand to his side.

“How should I proceed?”

“Ah,” He rests his hand against his chin, pondering deeply, “Proceed how you are. I think what you’re doing will provide me with the resources I need. If you remain out of the way concerning his duties, I foresee this to be very beneficial for our cause.”

I bow my head. “Thank you, Supreme Leader.”

“You’re a clever child- a fine example of the successes of our Agent program.” He smiles.

I nod again, “It is The Order to thank for my success.”

“Tell me, how did you get him to so easily trust you? What was your process?”

I begin, explaining from the top, “I initially noticed Kylo Ren’s need for validation. Once I could tap
into that, making him feel more comfortable with his insecurities, I could get him to find comfort in my presence, resulting in his trust for me.” I continue, head tilting up, “I believe that in future interactions with Commander Ren, this trust will reveal any threats to The First Order he may harbor.”

Whatever is there of Snoke’s white eyebrows raise. “Oh, it’s so much more than that now. You don’t just have access to his secrets. You have power.”

I confirm, “I’ll be awaiting further instruction, Supreme Leader.”

“You shall…” He smirks once again, hand raising. “You are dismissed, Agent.”


“Agent,” His voice booms.

I let a shaky breath out while I’m still facing away, then I turn my head back. “Yes, Supreme Leader?”

“Tell Kylo Ren to come speak to me.”

“Of course, Supreme Leader.” I turn back around and step into the bright elevator.

I face the wall, rather than turn around before the doors close. When they do, I nearly collapse. I reach up to my throbbing head, still sore from the encounter. That did not go how I planned. Not at all. Holy fuck. I had this whole report planned out to recite to him. I mediated to that report, and he just opted to read my mind. I begin pacing in the elevator. It had to have worked. He trusts me. He was pleased with what he saw. I know he was. I just wish that I knew what it was that he saw. He knew that Kylo trusted me. So did he see our conversation from two weeks ago? When I first went to Kylo’s quarters? Or did he see any of the ones after that, of just leisurely activities together? Holy shit, the Supreme Leader Snoke probably saw me kissing his apprentice. That’s really weird. Is it? I crane my neck up. This is all just not normal at all for a relationship, but is that still okay?

Holy fuck, Kylo needs to go talk to Snoke now. If Snoke tells Kylo that he knows about us, Kylo will automatically assume that I told him. Then this whole thing will be over between us. Will Kylo be in trouble with the Supreme Leader? Holy fuck, what did I just get myself into? What did I get Kylo into?

Suddenly, the elevator doors swoosh open. Ren is standing to the wall besides the door. He steps out, immediately to walk down the hallway by my side.

I say, quietly, “The Supreme Leader wishes to speak with you.”

“Very well,” He sounds tired. Not up for the encounter. He makes his way into the elevator. Before he sends it up, he asks me, “Are you alright?”

I nod.

He hesitates before pressing the button. The doors close. He’s gone.
And he’s been gone for at twenty minutes. I know because I’ve checked the time at least thirty times. They’re probably doing some master-apprentice things. I shouldn’t worry. It won’t help anything. Goddammit, I’ve spent so long training myself how to not develop anxieties and now that I have, I no idea how to deal with them, let alone make them go away. Part of me is tempted to just go up to Snoke’s throne room myself and ask to be clued in.

Pain pricks at my finger.

I look down to see blood dripping from the skin around the nail I was pulling at. “Fuck,” I mummer, pressing it to my mouth to suck away the blood.

Why the fuck does the one person I test my limits with have to be Supreme Leader Snoke? Literally give me any other person in the galaxy to lie to, and I’ll be fine. I wipe my hand against my trousers, giving up at the task of getting my finger to stop bleeding. At this point I’m wondering if Snoke is purposely just keeping him up there to torture me. Because for all I know, he could’ve looked in my mind and saw that I think Kylo Ren is a really amazing person, who I wish to protect, and who I just so happen to be sexually attracted to. All that meditating on my “duty” could’ve been for nothing.

Suddenly, the doors to the elevator whoosh open.

Kylo steps out, and I immediately return to his side.

I study for something, for any hint of what Snoke said. I beam up to him, “What did he want?”

Kylo sighs, then pauses before continuing forward. As he steps off, he answers, “Don’t concern yourself with it.”

I blink. “I am concerned with it.”

He looks down, shaking his head, “Well, you shouldn’t be.”

Before I can respond, he briefly places his hand on my lower back to usher me forward. The small gesture is reassuring. But I can’t help but wonder if there’s something else entirely I should be worried about.

When we’re back in his shuttle, he removes his mask almost immediately, throwing it in his quarters before sitting in the cockpit. I join him, in the co-pilot’s seat.

Before he starts the ship, he turns to me, only to give me a pleading look. He seems exhausted. Scared, even. His hair is messy, skin red and drenched in sweat. His brown eyes are fuller than usual, his brow hanging lower. I reach out to pull him into an embrace. His face is warm in the crook of my shoulder. I know I shouldn’t ask. Or even try to. So, we remain like this for a moment. I gently rub his back, my hands sliding under the tattered cowl. I feel his muscles contract to hold onto me tighter.

I hold onto him for as long as I can, before he pulls away.

He sets the ship back on track for The Finalizer.

Chapter End Notes
sooo this is another super long chapter. damn it is really fluff-y and dialogue-heavy. there's more action and sass to come! I hope you all like it nonetheless <3

Spotify playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
pinterest inspired board:
https://www.pinterest.com/ludaalli/2319/
“Reset,” I command.

I close my eyes. In the distance I can hear the previous targets sinking back into slots in the ground and being replaced with new ones arising. The gears underneath the floor turn, causing the targets to slide, rise, fall, across the expanse of the range. My hands to go the blasters attached to holsters on each thigh, palms forming into the shape of the smooth handle. I exhale steadily through my mouth, a direct stream of air escaping the ring of my lips.

A beep emits from R8.

My eyes open, snapping a picture of the eight targets in front of me as hands whip out the blasters. I fire, outside to inside, ingraining the image of the targets locations so deep within me, my arms know how move to aim to each one. The blasters produce a sporadic noise that can’t keep up with the rate of my fingers pulling the triggers.

Lowering the blasters, I look to see each target now pierced with a hole. I was aiming for heads, but the very last one I shot at was pierced more towards the chest. I sigh, returning the weapons back to my holsters. My fingers scrunch up, then stretch out, then relax. I look towards R8, “Time?”

“2.75 seconds.” The droid reports.

I nod. My head is still pounding from whatever Snoke did yesterday. Shooting blasters doesn’t necessarily ease that pain. The memories of the encounter makes me feel more and more sick with time as I reflect. I think I got him to see what I wanted him to see. I felt like I did. I felt like I was strong enough to project it. I’ve been mediating on the lie of it for the duration of my recovery. But it’s the fact that I can’t know for sure that is driving me crazy. I’ve banked this whole plan on being able to keep information from Snoke. If I can’t, is it still wrong for me to stay with Kylo? Is he going to tell me something that Snoke would consider a betrayal to The First Order? Or has what he’s already done for me been enough? He couldn’t kill General Organa. That seems like a red flag to me. If Snoke were to find out about that alone… My mind travels to the look on Kylo’s face after he finished speaking to Snoke. It was pure anxiety, pure defeat. Pain, even. Was it my fault?

“Reset.” I mumble to R8.
I close my eyes. The gears under the floor turn, once again. My hands return to the handles of the blasters. Exhale.

A beep.

Open eyes, remove guns, mental image of targets. Apply the image to my aim, moving outside to inside, firing consistently.

My head only pounds more, the blaster’s sounds consuming my mind. I swallow hard, returning the blasters to the holsters. I notice two of the targets shot towards the chest, rather than the head, this time. I stare into the cavities the blaster created, their outlines producing a small amount of smoke. The smoke travels towards the ceiling, eventually vanishing into nothing. Eight targets. As a chill enters the room, from the door behind me whooshing open, I find myself back on Hoth. I wonder how many targets I killed there. I couldn’t keep track. That was the first time I’ve had to kill that many people all at once. Half of them didn’t even get the chance to fight back. Does that make it worse? The word “massacre” enters my mind and I feel sick to my stomach.

“2.8 seconds.” R8 reports.

“Do you normally use two blasters at once?” A separate voice enters the equation.

I remember it. I turn around slowly to see him. General Hux stands in the doorway, the light from the hallway blocked form his silhouette. He strides in, tilting his head around me to examine the targets.

“Reset.” I coldly order R8. The gears under the floor turn. I don’t break gaze with General Hux, but find my hands returning to the blaster’s holsters. It was initially by habit. But I keep them there, feeling better about the situation.

The General notices, glancing down to my hands.

I speak, a certain hardness in my tone, “Your nose is intact now.”

“Yes,” His gaze returns to my own. “That’s a fair observation from the last time we spoke.”

I blink.

“I actually wanted to speak to you about our last encounter.” He takes another step towards me. The door closes behind him. The room’s darkness returns, only the lights from the end of the shooting range illuminating the expanse of the space. “I said some things that may have been taken as offensive.”

I keep my stare on him steady. “You called me a filthy whore.”

A beep.

I whip around to the targets, removing the blasters. Mental image. Outside to inside. Eight shots, back-to-back. No delay. The noise almost sounds in unison.

Exhale. I slide the blasters back into their holsters at my thighs. All the shots landed in the head that time. I turn around and lean against the wall closest to me, waiting for a response from the General.

The General stares behind me, at the targets. His usual scowl softens into something more amused. He states, “Wrongfully, so, might I add.”

“You may.”
His attention shifts towards R8. “What was her time on that?”

R8’s eyes brighten in delight, “Agent 2319’s time on last round was 2.6 seconds. I am 5D-R8, the Agent’s assigned droid specialized human psychology and interaction analysis. My job has been assisting Agent 2319 in maintaining undercover positions and organizing missions. It is truly an honor to meet such a notably distinguished official of The First Order.”

Hux smirks at this, relishing it all in. I can almost see his ego overflowing from inside of him. He gives the droid a smug expression, “Thank you, R8. Would you mind if I spoke to your Master in private?”

“Stay.” I order the droid before he can respond.

“But-” R8 counters.

I keep my eyes on Hux, but tone towards R8, “Whatever information General Hux has to share with me can also be shared with you.”

General Hux obliges, nodding, “Very well.” The General progresses even closer towards me, stepping with his heel and rolling into his toe. I look down at his leather gloved hands folded into each other. His chest is puffed out, chin upwards.

After speaking to Snoke, General Hux can’t scare me in the slightest. The black of his uniform shines from the light behind me. I notice how finely pressed it is. How in shape. I wonder how long he spends, or makes other people spend, on creating such a proper uniformity to his appearance.

The General begins, formally, “I know you despise Ren. You hate this assignment. It’s obvious. You intoxicated yourself and assaulted an officer just because you despised the task.”

Shit. I probably should’ve told R8 to go. I ignore the droid’s gaze and raise an eyebrow at The General. “Go on.”

“Upon receiving the information of your true intentions with him, I have grown the pity you. And I’m here to offer you an opportunity to benefit us both.”

I allow him to elaborate.

He does, cold blue eyes keeping track of each one of my miniscule movements, “We both know that Commander Ren does not deserve the position he holds in this war. He’s a weapon, and a powerful one at that. But increasingly unstable. Nor, is he nearly as committed as you and I to this cause. He uses The First Order for his personal motives. He doesn't believe in it. He could make mistakes vital to us winning or losing the war. That is why you were given this assignment in the first place. You’re practically his babysitter.”

I try not to cringe at the word.

The General leans down, now uncomfortably close. I feel his icy, mint breath against my skin, “What I’m implying is that you have two golden options. You could sabotage the trust between The Supreme Leader and Kylo Ren. Manipulating information on one to the other could be enough to break Ren. With Ren already so fragile as it is, it would not be difficult. Ren yearns for The Supreme Leader’s approval and validation, more than anything else in this world. I know that for a fact.”

I hide whatever rage the proposition causes me with a blank, bored expression and a critical voice, “And the other option?”
General Hux smirks, “I’ve read your files. You’re quite skilled in assassinations.”

My mouth feels dry. I don’t know what to say or how to respond. What am I supposed to respond to that with?

He continues, “And if you decide to take that route, I promise you that when I receive the Commander’s power, you will not only be pardoned, but granted whatever life you wish to live fully compensated by The First Order.” His head tilts downward and to the side, his whisper sounding more like a hiss than anything, “Whether that’s remaining with us or being granted with civilian status.”

The words make my body feel numb. I manage to force the words from my throat, “I’ll assess the situation and proceed with the best option, General.”

He leans back, stepping away from me. His lips spread into a smile of pure evil. “Delightful.” He turns on his heel, exiting the room. I carefully watch him. He glances over his shoulder to reveal the profile of his face. “Excellent shooting, Agent. Truly some of the finest I have encountered.”

“Thank you, General.” My voice is stone-cold.

The door opens, then whooshes shut behind him.

My feet slowly turn back towards the shooting range. Civilian life has never been possible for me. Freedom was never a thought I could even hope to entertain. I place my hands on the blasters in my holsters, palms forming to their smooth handles. My head throbs even harder, Snoke’s anxiety-inducing presence still lingering. I slowly close my eyes, images appearing behind my eyelids. Memories. My mind reverts to the word “massacre.” It makes me shudder.

I wonder if the freedom of choice is always this painful for people who do not have orders to follow.

I know what I would’ve chosen to do a month ago. Perhaps that’s the scariest part of it.

My hoarse voice manages to project, “Reset.”

The parts of my blaster are laid out neatly in front of me, on the floor. Gas chamber, cooling module, xCiter, cooling vent and barrel, all dismantled from the blaster to expose the intricate static pulse adaptors and inner crystal. As I tilt the skeleton-like version of the blaster to the side, the white crystal catches the lights from Kylo’s ceiling. I admire it’s sparkle for a moment before I break my concentration to say, “Planet you’d choose to spend a weekend on.”

Ren sits with his back against the end of his bed, on the ground with me. His holopad rests against his lap, his knees bent upward to form a makeshift desk. I glance up at him to find that his brow is furrowed. He scrolls upwards on the device. Then, as if to reassure he’s pondering it, he lets out a thoughtful, “Hm,”

I begin to think of how I would answer the prompt as grab the metal rod at my side, securing the raggedy old cloth on its end.

“If in this hypothetical circumstance, I could just find a place off in isolation from the city life, Naboo.” He answers, thoughtfully.

“God, I have no clue how Naboo exists.” I say, reveling back on my time on the planet. I didn’t get to see or do much there. I just went to accompany a represented of The First Order in political
discussions and dig up as much dirt as I possibly could on the other representative’s present. But what I did was like something from a fairytale. The architecture all had this royal feeling to it. The cities often had market places selling everything from crops to art in the day time, then with the night came the party scene. But it wasn’t a trashy party scene. It was like they were constantly celebrating life. And outside the city are forests, lakes, oceans, waterfalls. “It seems too good for the rest of the galaxy.”

“Yeah, it’s been forever since I’ve been there. It doesn’t seem real in my mind anymore, as if it were just a dream.”

I find the corner of my lips raises at the sight of his head leaned back against the end of his bed. One strand of hair lays across the side of his nose, towards the inner corner of his eye. I look back down to supplies laid in front of me and dip the rod into the cleaning solution. I push the rod through the barrel, twisting it throughout the tube-like structure.

He asks, “What about you?”

I shrug, pulling the rod back out. “I don’t know. Something like Takodana, where it’s that forest lakeside vibe. But not as full of traders and smugglers. Maybe if I could ensure that in this hypothetical circumstance I too could find somewhere isolated to just camp out.” I set the rod down to replace with the bore brush, sliding it through. “But I’d be fine with Naboo as my answer too.” Naboo is probably a better answer than mine. Part of me just felt the need to be original.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice him shift, readjusting his weight on the ground. He secures the holopad under his forearm to bring it closer to him. “Is it my turn now?”

“Yes.”

He thinks, dragging his long, slender fingers drag across the screen. “Favorite color.”

The question’s simplicity amuses me. “I don’t know… I like red.”

He nods, “Mine is probably blue.”

I wouldn’t have guessed that. I don’t think I’ve seen him around anything blue, ever. Not that there’s much color around here to begin with. And not that favorite colors have a huge bearing on one’s surroundings, when there’s more important things to worry about. I hold the barrel up to the light above me, looking through, simultaneously trying to think of another question. “What’s your favorite word?”

He laughs, unsure of the question. “My favorite word?”

Ishrug, grabbing the blaster to screw the barrel back on. “What’s a word that you just think is really nice to say? Or hear.”

He thinks about this one for a bit longer than the other ones before answering. When he does, he says, “Denouement.”

I try to recall the word, but I can’t. Which I hope is not embarrassing of me. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard that one.”

“It technically means ‘unknot.’ But it’s used when referring to the end of a play, where things all come together to resolve, detangling all the elements of the narrative to create a clear image.” He sets the holopad down next to him, then proceeds to slide himself across the floor, to sit on the other side of the towel that displays the parts of my blaster.
I’ve never seen a play before. Or read one either. The closest thing to that culture I’ve gotten has been the holomovies I get the chance to download when I go to missions outside of First Order Starships or Starkiller. “Say it again?” I ask, reaching for the blaster’s dismantled gas chamber.

“Denouement.”

It’s hard to tell if I like the word, or just his voice in general when he says it. I rub my thumb against the small, metal box-like contraption.

“And yours?” He asks.

I release the tab on the gas chamber, letting any old air release. “Dissonance.”

Ren grabs the blaster laying in front of me and begins reassembling it’s the enhancements. “Favorite type of weather?”

“Rainy,” I decide.

“Likewise.” He holds out an open palm to me. I place the gas chamber in his hand, and bend my knee upwards to rest my cheek against it. He fits the device back into the blaster, then doublechecks the other components to make sure everything’s tightly in place.

I ask, “When was your first kiss?”

His eyes flicker up to mine, eyebrow raised. He sets the blaster down and laughs to himself. He leans to the side to support his weight with his one hand. “When was yours?”

I grab the blaster, securing it back into the equipment bag, along with the other cleaning supplies. Narrowing the distance between him and I, I scoot forward. “I was thirteen.”

His lips purse and he slowly nods.

He doesn’t want to tell me when his was. I give him an amused grin. “Was it that bad?” My eyes trace his soft jawline.

With a deep sigh, he begins, “When I trained as a Jedi, those actions and even urges were to be repressed. When I began training here, I became so focused with my training, I never really encouraged the thought of being romantic with anyone. It seemed like a distraction. Nor could I find anyone who seemed human enough around here to develop any type of connection with.” He begins picking at the ends of his fingers, pulling at his nails. “I was offered servants before, but the idea made me too uncomfortable.”

“Oh,” I blink. My mind goes back to Hoth. How uncoordinated the kiss was. How messy and frantic. “So was I-?”

“Yes.” He seems uncomfortable with the subject matter. Desperate to get it done and over with. Maybe it’s that it’s hard for me to imagine going my whole life without kissing anyone, because I’ve kissed so many people. Or it’s shock that I’m the only person he’s ever entertained the thought of kissing. But something about the scenario makes me feel on edge. I see it now; the power Snoke tells me I have with Ren, the power that Hux says I have. People here long for power over others. That’s how I’m supposed to be. But now, it’s unsettling. Maybe I’m unworthy. Maybe I’m unqualified. What if what I feel is right isn’t? I don’t think I should be the one to be given choices, let alone choices that hold so much weight. Whether people live or die, or command armies, or fall from power. I tell him, an attempt to make him feel better about the situation, “I wish you were my first
kiss. Kissing has never really meant anything to me before you.” The words come with an unwelcomed timidity.

“What was yours like? When you were thirteen?” He asks, genuinely interested.

I revert back to the nature of speaking logically, void of any emotional implications, “When I was in the Academy, I started moving towards the route of an Agent rather than the other positions when I was thirteen. They recruit Agents younger than other professions, due to children having the advantage of being less suspicious out in the real world. One of the younger mentors told me of the things I’d have to do as an Agent, concerning sexuality. He advised that it would be better to just get them done and over with, to get the first-time mentality out of the way. I agreed and we…” I look down at my lap, trying to find the right word, “proceeded.” I nearly wince at choice of words and keep myself unable to see his reaction.

His words are soft, but have a slightly angry undertone, “How old was he?”

“Eighteen.” I say. “So older, but not like… old.”

He doesn’t respond.

“I agreed to it.” I try to justify. I’ve really never thought much about the situation, in a moral point of view. Or in any point of view. I don’t think about it ever, to be honest. “And I would’ve had to eventually, with someone.”

He just says, “You were thirteen.”

I don’t know around age would’ve been okay for me to make that decision, but something in his tone tells me thirteen is young. I try to think back to when I was thirteen, what my mentality was like. There was never any innocence, no childhood. Being thirteen wasn’t all that different from being nine, which wasn’t that different from being twenty. God, maybe I shouldn’t be given the chance to make any choices. I zip up the bag beside me with more aggression than intended. “It doesn’t matter.”

He presses, asking, “How many times have you had to do that for The Order?”

I finally have the courage to look him dead in the eye, coldly asking, “Have sex?”

My directness takes him by surprise. He gulps, then weakly responds, “You don’t have to answer that.”

As if my fight or flight mode was initiated, I have the sudden urge to leave. But at the same time, I don’t want to leave at all. I don’t want to think about what Hux told me, or what Supreme Leader Snoke told me. I just want to be with him and only be thinking about what that’s like. I answer anyways, my voice harsh, “I wouldn’t be able to. I don’t keep track.”

He looks at me apologetically for asking. But he doesn’t respond verbally, due to unsureness.

And it’s this uncomfortable nature in him that I use to my advantage. He asked me a question that was personal, now I want to ask him one. And he’ll answer this time, because he’ll feel like he needs to. I don’t feel proud of myself. But it’s been eating at me alive. “What did Snoke say to you yesterday?” After I ask, I immediately feel my gut twist inside of me.

He hesitates.

I press, ignoring everything telling me that doing this is wrong and I should stop, “Does he know
about the nature of our relationship?” I know that he knows. But I just need to know if Snoke told Kylo anything about it.

Kylo looks legitimately intimidated by me. He leans more of his weight on his hand. In confession, he exhales, “The Supreme Leader has known how I felt about you for a long time now.”

I narrow my eyes at him. “Since when?”

“I can’t hide anything from him. I don’t think you understand that he sees everything inside of my mind.”

Snoke obviously can’t if he wants me to spy on him. I remain silent, waiting for a direct answer.

“Korriban.”

The information feels like a betrayal almost. The new information floods my mind. He’s felt something for me since nearly two months ago. Snoke has known for nearly two months. I don’t understand. My temples feel pressure growing from the inside, in the confusion. “One week ago, you told me you were worried about Snoke finding out about us, when we were having a moment of establishing trust with each other.” My voice raises, demanding answers. I have no fucking clue why Kylo hasn’t told me this very important factor yet. Paranoia strikes, all throughout my body. Is he trying to hide something from me?

He sets his jaw. “I was trying to keep you from worrying about it. And it wasn’t completely a lie. I am worried about Snoke finding out more and then using it against you or me.”

“Why would he do that?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well?” I feel my fist clench and face grow hot. “What did he say about us?”

His voice just gets quieter, “He told me that you’re at my disposal for use, if I please.”

I feel my stomach drop, “Holy shit,”

He looks up, confused.

I grab the bag at my side and stand to my feet. Throwing that bag over my shoulder, I sneer down at him, “Is that why you’re doing this?” The words are bitter as the come out, sounding sharp.

“Don’t insult me.” He says evenly.

This only makes me more frustrated. I pause to attempt to organize my thoughts. Supreme Leader Snoke knew the whole time. And I came to him with the information, and he asked to read it from my mind, despite already knowing full well what was happening. Maybe this was his plan all along. To get Kylo Ren romantically attached to someone who can supply information to Snoke, without Kylo Ren knowing, so Snoke has even more control than he already does. That manipulative bastard.

Kylo takes my hesitation as an opportunity to add on, more boldly than before, “You already attributed the reason that I kissed you to me being impulsive, an adrenaline rush, and you being attractive. I think you’ve insulted me plenty then.”

I drop the bag to my side again, ready to invest myself into whatever argument this is. “You asked
me for my logical input, so I gave you it.”

He pushes himself upward to stand in front of me. Now that he is standing, I suddenly feel so much smaller. The fact that he must crane his neck downward to even meet my gaze is nearly humiliating. “Did you ever entertain the idea that I kissed you because I care about you and was relieved to see you alive?”

I freeze. I didn’t entertain that idea.

His expression drops, letting any anger ensued by the conversation exhale with a focused breath. “I don’t like arguing with you.”

“I don’t like arguing with you either.” I cross my arms in front of me. I hate arguing with him, now especially. Before we became whatever this is, I enjoyed it. Just because the arguments never had any merit. It all was somewhat playful, with no purpose. It was the only way we spoke to each other. Now, everything seems to hold so much weight. “Just please don’t withhold stuff like that from me.” It’s not until after I say it, I realize how hypocritical the words are.

He frowns. “My intentions were to keep you from worrying about Snoke.”

“Would it be wise for me to worry?” I meet his eyes.

His right eye twitches slightly. His hand reaches outwards, carefully drawing back any strands of thin hair released from my bun back behind my ear. I melt into the feeling of his hand cupping my cheek, pressing my face into him. He reassures, narrowing distance between us. “I have everything under control.” His thumb slowly rubs my cheekbone as he stares down at the skin it grazes. “I didn’t want you to have any doubts about my intentions with you, knowing the excuse I give The Supreme Leader.”

I assure him, leaning forwards, “I’m sorry for being...” I don’t even know what to specifically apologize for. I don’t know what the word to describe my accusations, my hypocrisy, my confusion, my everything, is.

He gently shushes me, sliding his hand back into my hair, then proceeding to pull my head forwards. He leans down and presses his lips to my forehead. I lean into him, wrapping my arms around his torso, allowing myself to be consumed by the warmth his body radiates. His lips press into my skin, until the pull away to lightly linger. I feel him talk against me, “You have no reason to apologize.”

I stare into the black material the thin, tee shirt. I don’t respond.

He pulls away, bringing my gaze back up to his. He returns his hand to softly caressing my cheek. “The Supreme Leader and I also discussed the Resistance’s desire for whatever was in the Emperor’s Observatory. I told him about your suggestion of visiting one still intact to get an idea of what they’re looking for. He gave me the approval needed. Would you like to accompany me?”

I nod. It’s almost as if he prefaced it like a date. “Of course.”

He smiles back, pulling his hand away. He steps out of my grasp to reach down at his holopad. His fingers eagerly tap against the screen. Explaining as he searches, he says, “After doing some more digging, I found that there was another operation, outside of Operation Cinder, in the Contingency to destroy an Observatory on Jakku. The operation also called for the planet to be destroyed through disrupting a borehole inside the Observatory that leads to Jakku’s mantle.”

I frown. “We’re going to Jakku, then?”
Kylo gives me a sympathetic expression. “Unfortunately.”

I attempt to formulate the information he has given to me in my mind, concluding, “Since Jakku still exists, the plan didn’t succeed. The Observatory is still intact?”

“Exactly,” He zooms into something on the holopad, giving it an analytical stare before proceeding. “Commandant Brendol Hux and Grand Admiral Rae Slone were on the mission and reported all that happened into historical logs. But they didn’t log the contents of the Observatory. I have a feeling Snoke knows what’s inside, but won’t tell me.”

The mention of Hux’s name nearly makes my body go into a paralytic state. I regain my composure to ask, “Why would Snoke allow you to go to it, but not tell you what’s there?”

“He probably thinks it’ll be good for my training to discover for myself.” He mumbles to himself, “It’s best to refrain from questioning anything he says.”

I don’t respond to that.

“I think I want the Knights to join us, as well.” Kylo sets his holopad back down and crosses back over to me. He says with the purest smile of childlike excitement, “I really feel that there’s something to importance with all of this. The Force is calling me to this information. I know it’s crucial.” His hands reach out to mine and squeeze them together, pressing them to his chest, “We’re onto something really big here.”

And it’s in that moment where I see it. Not Kylo Ren, or even Ben Solo. I see him. I see his snarky remarks that shield his caring demeanor. His shyness when it comes to feelings, his insecurities. His efforts to hide his secrets from the rest of the world, but desperation to let go of them all. I also see the power I hold over him. It’s so clear to me now how I want to use that power. It doesn’t have to be a burden. I can protect him. I can do this. That’s my choice.

Because I not only can see him. I can see us.

In the moment of clarity, I lean forward, pressing my lips into his. He feels so warm against me. I feel his smile under my lips. I draw away, smiling too. His eyes are so full of light.

I say, before pulling him into another kiss, "We are."

Chapter End Notes

WOW I think it's truly hilarious that I called the last chapter "dialogue-heavy" cause this one is .... Oh boy. I promise, things actually start moving again next chapter. More bang-bang and pew-pews and adventuring! plus Knights of Ren are making a comeback (except Eerson god rest his soul rip /:) The Knights of Ren arc was probably my favorite thus far, so I'm really excited to reinstall them into the story. again, sorry if this seems kinda filler-y. I don't think i've rewritten a chapter and edited a chapter this intensely yet, so eeeep I hope it still flows and doesn't halt the story by any means. the main thing about this fic that has been challenging for me is flowing all the resolutions into the new set ups. I feel like once each question is answered, a new one is asked, and I've been trying to make it happen nearly simultaneously (while keeping it seamless) so everything always is founded on sense of tension and urgency.
but yea, again, thank you all for the love and support. each comment, piece of fanart, kudos, bookmark, everything, I am truly grateful for and really encourages me to write more! its so hard to type out my gratitude because it never seems like i can express how thankful i am in words. I seriously am so excited about showing you where this fic goes. I feel like we're about 55-65% through it. and after this Jakku plotline, things really take off in a direction that I think a lot of people will like as we draw closer to the beginning of The Force Awakens!

updated on the regular:

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
Entering the Observatory

Chapter Summary

"A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it." — Jean de La Fontaine, Fables

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seven cards fan out before me, held between my thumb and index finger. Each differentiate itself from each other by number and color. I peer above the cards to see Maes Ren sitting across from me, two fingers already pinching at a card to choose. Her black hair is sleek, pulled back so tightly it accentuates her already sharp, angular features. Even participating in such a trivial task, she looks ferociously determined. She’s sitting in a manner that must be uncomfortable for her, given her height and athletic build; knees bent and back hunched forward. But there’s not really a way to sit in Kylo Ren’s command shuttle that isn’t comfy or spacious. Her cat-like eyes meet mine and she smirks.

I ask, defeated, “I don’t get it. What’s the point?”

Solaw Ren sits next to me, one leg folded against the ground and his elbow resting against his knee pointed upward. The Knights already have on their full armor, besides their helmets. All their uniforms have a consistent aesthetic. Black robes, fully armored underneath. Tiru Ren, the Kel Dor Knight I beat the shit out of last time, is the most heavily armored. He’s nearly wearing a metal suit, the only part of his body covered by just robe is his abdomen. He stands near the back of the ship, in a trance. Lex Ren is the least armored Knight. She’s wearing dark baggy leggings, simple boots, and just wraps around her arms and a tunic with elbow-length sleeves. She sits next to Maes, across from me, but her attention is elsewhere. Solaw wears heavy robes with a hefty overcoat. I have no clue how he moves in it, but I guess it’ll only be a matter of time before I find out.

Solaw gives me an odd look. I notice his skin tanned more so than before, peeling and damaged with sun exposure. His blond hair is messy, unkept. “What do you mean?” He asks, amused.

I motion towards the empty space in the ground between Maes and I. “We’re not betting on anything.”

“Yeah…” Solaw prompts for elaboration.

“So, what’s at stake?”

He lets out a surprised laugh, eyebrows raised at me. “It’s like when we played Dejarik. You just try to win.”

“In Dejarik, the point was to kill the other player’s monsters. This, this is just dependent on the luck of who has the best card hand.” I explain.

Maes playfully kicks Solaw in the shin. She hisses, eyes wide, showcasing the dark brown of her eyes that could pass as completely black, “Remember, The First Order doesn’t expose them to fun.
We have to ease her into the idea, or she’ll, like, implode.”

I defensively counter, “But if we’re not betting and there’s no skill to challenge, the game itself entirely it doesn’t matter.”

Solaw doesn’t miss a beat, “That’s the best part! It doesn’t matter! It’s just for,” he leans into the circle whispering with a sarcastic sense of realization, “…fun.”

I roll my eyes at him, and they land on Lex Ren. She’s absentmindedly dragging her fingers against the ground, tracing images of something. I find myself remembering the look on her face when she told me Eerson Ren disappearing was her fault. The true conviction in the idea. Her regret. Her self-loathing. I wonder how much she still thinks about him now. Then I wonder how much Solaw and Maes think about their friend’s disappearance. I wonder if Kylo Ren still thinks about it.

Almost as if it were on cue, the comm-link in my ear buzzes, and I hear Kylo’s voice, obviously agitated, “Can you come in here?”

I press the button on the device. “Yeah,” I say, casually. Maes, Solaw, and Lex all look over at me. I add on, for a more formality, “On my way, Sir.”

I release my finger from the comm-link’s button and hand the cards to Solaw. I push up from the ground, my legs feeling numb. I carefully navigate down the aisle, making sure I don’t step on anyone.

When I open the door to the pilot’s cabin to find Kylo sitting at the console, mask on. He glances back towards me. I walk in, shutting it behind me.

“Sir?” Kylo questions.

I look on the ground to see R8, limp and dead. “What the hell?” I say with accusation evident in my voice.

Kylo turns back towards the controls. He passive-aggressively pushes a button, then says, “Everything I do, your droid feels a need to suggest a ‘more intelligent alternative’ to. I can’t operate my own damn ship without being patronized by a piece of metal.”

I bend down to heave droid up and into the co-pilot’s chair. Reaching at my belt for a knife, I mumble, “That’s what he’s programmed to do.” I carefully steady the knife into the screw on the droid’s circular chest piece and begin turning my wrist.

“He’s programmed to be an irritation?”

I snap back at him, “He’s programmed to ensure perfection.” One screw falls out and I catch it in my palm. “If you aren’t piloting up to First Order standards, he’ll correct you.” I move on to unscrewing the second one.

“Are you questioning my ability to pilot?” He whips his head over to me.

“I wouldn’t dare.” I say, unable to prevent myself from gritting my teeth. The second screw falls out and I progress to the last.

In my peripheral vision, I can see him leaning back in the chair in frustration. He stares at me, but I ignore it, unscrewing the final screw so that the panel securing his chest cavity falls open. I reach into the wires for the reset button, but Kylo interrupts before I press my finger into it, “Does it do that with you? Correct you every time you’re not meeting First Order standards?”
I look over my shoulder, back at him. “I always am meeting First Order standards.” I turn back to the
droid.

“Hm,” His glove hand reaches out. I feel the leather of his fingertips against the exposed area
between my hairline and the collar of my shirt. I shudder at the sensation, still hesitating to press the
button. His fingers go downward, running against my spine gently, then back up with slightly more
pressure.

I turn to him, wanting his hand to travel with my movement, but he returns it back to his lap.

He says, as if it’s an insightful observation, “You’re always so self-assured.”

At first, I feel unsure how to respond. I ask, looking up to him, “Is that a bad thing to be?”

His head tilts, thinking about it, “I don’t mind it.”

I retreat my hand from the chest cavity of the droid and stand to my feet. Looking down at the
control panel, I try to get a sense of how close we are to Jakku. Suddenly, I feel the leather glove
close around my hand. His fingers enclose around mine, thumb rubbing against the skin of my
knuckles. The leather feels rougher against my skin than the warm skin of his hands. He then pulls
my hand to his shoulder, as if it were him asking me to show him some sort of affection. I oblige,
pressing down into the curve of his shoulder and running my hands against the texture of his tunic. I
rub my hand across his back, to his other shoulder, then back again. He silently leans into my touch,
his fingers on the control panel limp.

I quietly ask, “What are you thinking about?”

He doesn’t answer at first. He just considers the question. If he should lie for the answer, or if he
should even answer at all. He opts to shake his head.

I don’t respond, my hand suddenly feeling cold against him. I let out as quiet of a sigh that I can
manage, and continue rubbing across the length of his back, trying to make the movements
comforting. He doesn’t often specify his feelings to me. He says he trusts me. But it’s times like this
that I’m reminded that there’s things he doesn’t want to talk to me about. Things he thinks I might
not understand. Or even want to understand. I don’t know how to explain to him that I would try, or
at least listen, to whatever issues he is facing. I’ve already reassured him in a million circumstances
by now. This time, I don’t waste my time with it.

Suddenly, the ship returns to a stabilized speed. A terribly bland, beige planet appears in the main
window of the ship. Hurriedly, I pull myself away from Kylo, pressing the button in R8’s chest and
then fumbling the screws and chest plate back into place. I mumble to Kylo, before R8 can finish
rebooting, “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” He says, sounding even more confused than I am.

What am I sorry for? I look over at his mask, the expression as blank as usual. I stare into the
darkness of the space where his eyes are. “Whatever I need to be sorry for.”

Kylo doesn’t respond.

R8’s speaker, where a human’s mouth would be, emits a beeping sound. His eyes light up, blinking
back to life. I attempt to bring back a lighter, more humored, tone to the room, but end up only
making it colder when I say, “Can you please make an effort to be more kind to my droid?”

I pull my hood up over my head and exit the cockpit.
Light creeps through the opening door of Kylo Ren’s shuttle. He stands in front of me, as I stand in front of the other Knights. They all wear masks somewhat like Kylo’s. But his is the only one to have metal lining. And the Knight’s masks are wider, not as regal as his. I can’t help but feel like the odd one out of the bunch with my face still visible. I adjust my hood and pull the attachable flap over my mouth and nose, to protect myself from the sand.

As the door opens completely, I immediately feel the heat radiating off of the planet’s orange surface. The drifting sand makes the ground have the illusion of completely moving. It’s disorienting to look at. Ren steps off the ramp and begins moving forward. I follow, looking back behind me, through the Knights, at R8 remaining on the shuttle. I tap the comm-link on my ear, as if to reassure him that if he needs me, I’m just a call away.

As I step into the sand, I feel it conform to the shape of my foot, then moving against me to go with the flow of the wind. In the distance, all that is visible are layers upon layers of sand dunes. It’s a complete wasteland. Ren looks down, pulling a coordinate position device, a piece of technology that appears to be just a small square of metal, but with a tap of the button projects a map from it’s surface. A blue holographic map appears, acting as a compass to bring to the coordinates of the Observatory.

I don’t really see how it could be anywhere around here. Or why, out of all the places in the galaxy, The Emperor chose Jakku to place the facility. I suppose if he didn’t want people going to it, putting on Jakku would be the best deterrence.

We continue forward, trudging through the sand, moving against the rising and falling sand dunes. As time passes, I feel the sun radiating nearly violently against my dark uniform. I stare down at my feet, continuing forward. Sweat rolls from my forehead into my brow. I know I should be alert and looking upward. But there’s some sensation, some instinct, I give into to look down. It’s pulling me. It’s as if the sensation is coming from something under the sand itself. I find myself mesmerized by the way each grain of sand moves against my boot. I drag my feet more, allowing my steps to make more of an indentation to the smooth, blanket-like terrain.

Suddenly, I hear a click.

I grab my blaster from the holster and whip my head upward. Turrets arise from the sand, all around us, rumbling against the ground. Before the weapons can even pivot to fire off any blasts, I begin shooting at the one to my left, Ren extends his hand, causing the machine to the right to recoil in on itself. Maes and Tiru shoot at the remaining two with their blasters and Solaw rushes forward to the final torrent, swinging back with his electricity-charged blade and slicing it clean in half.

Smoke pillows up from the remnants of the weapons. I scan the area for any sign of more.

Kylo turns back to the Knights and I, “I suppose we are close.”

We continue up the hill of the dune. I tighten my grip around the blaster in my hand, then relax it. I swallow hard, my mouth becoming dry.

At the edge of the dune is a slope downwards. And then something else, tucked into the sand. A
metal surface, buried by the sand I currently stand atop of. It’s a door. I tilt my head, my attention
going back down to my feet. The Knights move forward, beginning to move down the slope, but I
remain still, staring downward. It’s not until Lex Ren stops, looking back towards me, that I bring
myself to follow.

As we walk, she leans over, quietly saying to me, “What is it?” Her gentle feminine voice sounds so
odd against the modulator of her mask.

I shake my head, moving forward, and reassure, “Nothing of importance.”

We arrive at the bottom of the slope. Kylo examines the door carefully, pacing across it’s length. I
notice two panels, each place on each side of the door. Scan plates, perhaps.

“Master?” Trant Ren calls out. He’s hunched over something, digging through the sand with his
fingers. I peer over his shoulder to see something poking from out of the sand. I step closer, the
profile of a Teedo’s corpse coming into my view.

Swiftly, sand from the side of the dune parts to reveal several metal doors, sliding open. Red sentinel
droids run out, through the doors, armed with blasters. Above the doors, more torrents emerge from
the ground.

I lunge to the side, just as the first droid fires at me. Kylo ignites his lightsaber, slicing the droid’s
head clean off.

The Knights spring into action, all circled in a formation, then advancing on the droids. I run to the
right, towards the droids the Knights and Kylo aren’t attacking. As I run, I fire at the torrents above,
taking them out, one after the next. My hood flies off my head. I bring my forearm to my chin,
clicking the shield on.

I charge at the droids, avoiding their fires on me with a combination of dodging and using the shield.
More and more run out of the metal doors, out of the corner of my eye. I focus on taking down the
one closest to me, swinging my arm back and up against its skull, the shield’s force causing the
droid’s neck to snap, it’s head dangling with wires.

It stumbles into the droid to my right and I use the opportunity to shoot at it’s chest while it’s
disoriented. The other droids fire at me, and I mirror their shooting with the placement of my shield.
One charges at me, but before it can reach me, I shoot at it’s chest plate, and it falls to the ground.

These droids don’t move very fast. But I know I do. I observe their positions, carefully committing it
to my mind as I block their shots.

I take a deep breath. Exhale.

I dive to an open position to the side, dismantling the shield as I roll against the sandy ground. When
I return to a kneeling position, I fire at the targets, still not readjusted from their prior placements. I
fire continually, left blaster at the droids on my left side, right blaster at the droids on my right side,
moving inwards the middle, last droid. It all happens so fast, they nearly fall in unison. Their metal
bodies clank as they hit the ground.

I turn around to see the Knights and Kylo Ren, still not breaking formation. But they’ve killed their
share of the droids. And now they’re just staring at me. All of them, in their ambiguous masks and
heavy armor, staring at me. It’s an odd sight.

Suddenly, another torrent emerges from the sand, above the doorway. I shoot at it, but just as the shot
lands, the device implodes on itself, crushed by sheer force and power. I glance over so see Kylo
with his hand extended towards it. He stares back at me and slowly lowers it. I still feel the Knights
staring. Not just at me now, but at Kylo and I together.

He crosses towards the door, motioning towards the panels on either side. “They look like scan
plates.”

I join him, standing beside him. “That’s what I was thinking.” My eyes go from one to the other.
“Should we try it?”

Ren finds his place in front of the one on the right. “I don’t see why not.” He returns his saber to his
belt and removes his glove. I notice the Knights observing his hand, most likely making assumptions
about the rest of his appearance under his armor. He presses his palm against the plate and waits. The
outline of the plate is illuminate with a red light, but nothing else happens.

I look towards the plate on the other side of the door, also now outlined with a red light. I propose,
“Maybe they need to be activated simultaneously.”

Kylo nods towards the device, encouraging the idea, “Try it.” He removes his hand from the plate
and watches me as I remove my own glove.

I wipe my hand on my thigh, attempting to remove any sweat, then look to Kylo. Kylo raises his
hand back up, I mirror the movement. I press my hand against the plate as he does. There’s
something about the action, even if it’s just opening a door, that feels so intimate. I stare at him, him
at me. He told me that there’s something about this mission, something about it that calls out to him
through The Force. Something of importance. I wonder if he can feel that now.

When the outlines of the plate flash a white light and the door slides open, I don’t doubt it one bit.

I pull my eyes away from Kylo and towards the now exposed hallway. It’s as if my whole body
shifts into a different mode. The Knights and Kylo speak behind me, but I can’t hear them. I don’t
really care what they’re saying. The only thing I can hear is a tunneling energy in my eardrums.
Much like the noise of being underwater, the water flowing, moving, surrounding me. All I care
about is this Observatory now. There’s something pulling me towards it. It’s aching within me. I’ve
never cared about what’s happening during a mission, as long as I end the mission succeeding. But
this is different. I don’t know why, but a certain curiosity about what’s at the end of this hallway
gnaws at me. A certain longing.

I quickly enter, surrendering myself to the prodding urge.

The hallway comes to life as I enter, lights from the floor flickering with my advancement. The
hallway is composed of a burnished metal and black glass, sloping downward slightly. My hearing
becomes even more washed out, but some sort of buzzing. I can barely hear Kylo call out, “Agent?”
behind me. I ignore him, walking forwards. There’s someone here. Whispering. Speaking. I can’t
understand them, though. I look around me, side to side, but never stop moving forward. I’m alone.
But they are here. Just not present. Like there are voices in my head. The idea of it causes my body
to tense. I return the blasters to my holsters and rip the cloth covering my mouth and nose away, in
an attempt to make breathing easier.

I try to focus on the voices. What sounds once were scattered and varying now slowly morphs into
something more singular. It’s a man’s voice, an older man. But I don’t recognize it from anywhere.

“Who do you seek?”

I jump at the sound of the first intelligible sentence. I hurry my steps. It’s coming from deeper within
the observatory. The hallway just goes on and on, only gaining light as I descend further into the facility. I resist the urge to break into a run. With each stride, the voice becomes clearer, more real. Mumbling about “the Empire,” “temple,” and “the boy.”

It’s as if I’m outside my own body, watching myself move towards the door that is in front of me. Whatever I’m looking for, it’s in there. Whatever is calling to me.

“Explorer.”

I reach towards it, pressing my bare finger into the button to the side. It slides open.

I’m outside again. But not on Jakku. Somewhere completely different. The air is muggy, humid. It smells like fresh rain. A man sits on a stool, the small hut. He’s elderly, but has a leather holster across his chest, containing a knife. He seems capable. His wool coat is a worn down, brown, material, with think horizontal stripes, barely visible due to it’s fade. I notice odd pieces of jewelry snaking around his neck. It’s a peculiar shape, something undeniably ancient about the nature of it. There’s chains of wooded beads and a necklace with stones and crystals wrapped around its wire. His white hair is short, beard barely visible against his skin. His pale blue eyes look up to me, then down to the empty space beside him.

He says, simply, calmly, “You’re welcome to join me.”

I open my dry mouth, questions buzzing through my head. I begin with, “Who-”

It all disappears. There’s silence. Darkness. Emptiness.

I flip around to look behind me and see Kylo Ren’s mask looking down at me, back in the hallway of the observatory. A dizzy sensation overwhelms me. As if he senses it, his hands reach out to steady me. I find myself at a lost for words. I look back, towards the door and see The Knights entering the room, examining it carefully. It’s not the same room I saw though. It’s not even close. I look back towards Kylo, trembling. I can’t manage to produce any words. I stare at his mask, almost pleading for help. For answers of what the hell that was.

He grips my arms tighter, “What is it?”

I double check, looking back through the doorway, once again. It’s still just a room. This time I meet the gaze of Lex’s mask, the only one who isn’t examining the area.

I turn back to Kylo. “I don’t know.” It’s all I can manage to say. Am I going insane? Did someone poison me? I’ve never experienced hallucinations before. I didn’t know they could possibly be so real. I felt the air of that planet. I could smell the rain. The man was sitting in front of me, so distinct, so present. His voice plays out again in my ear, but so much differently now as it’s from my memories. I don’t know how to make anything of it. Why would my subconscious choose to show me those images, that man?

Kylo keeps his voice quiet and he leans in forward, closer. “You’re shaking…” His hands rub up my arms. “What happened?”

I feel Lex’s gaze even more, now than before. If I were her, I would stare and wonder too. I compose myself enough to say, “I’ll tell you back on the ship.”

Kylo looks up, then quickly lets go of me, understanding my hesitance towards speaking of it now. He asks, trying to downplay his concern, “Do you need to sit down?”

I ask myself the same question, but decide that I shouldn’t. There must be a logical answer to what I
just experienced. Maybe it’s within the room. The pulling sensation returns to me, nagging me to go deeper into the facility. This time, I question if I should obey it.

But ultimately, I shake my head at Kylo, turn around and once again succumb to whatever is begging me to move forward.

Chapter End Notes

hey guys! so im back at school now :p expect me to update not as frequently as the last few chapters. i'll try to keep it under two weeks but who knows this semester might be chill, or, it might kick my ass! we shall find out :) also writing the last half of this chapter was really fun wow! id love to hear some theorizing on all this shit going down!

i can't wait to update again and share more! thank you all so much for the support!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
Chapter Summary

“You’re waiting for a train. A train that will take you far away. You know where you hope this train will take you, but you don’t know for sure. Yet it doesn’t matter, because we’ll all be together.” -Inception, Christopher Nolan

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The room I walk into is an interesting shape. There are eight-sides to the walls and the room looks relatively empty. The Knights and Kylo all continue onto another hallway, which is lined with crates and compartments. I notice Kylo’s quickening steps as he goes to lead them. He’s excited. Curious to venture forward. But I find myself staring at the only object in the room. Artifacts and history lessons have never interested me. I understand why it would Kylo. But none of this involves me, my training, my life. This is so different than anything I’ve ever experienced. I approach the contraption, an octagonal shaped structure risen from the ground. It’s almost spotlighted in the darkness of the room from the light above, my vision beginning to tunnel around it.

My fingers graze the cool metal, so lightly against the smooth texture. Engravings on the side of the device lights up, responding to my touch. I feel something within myself respond as well. I exhale slowly, trying to regain whatever sanity I previously lost. It looks like some kind of database. Maybe a computing system.

“Commander,” I call out, down the hallway. Kylo Ren’s figure turns and he begins making his way through the Knights around him. To spare him from walking all the way back down the hall to me, I yell, “What’s this?”

He shrugs, seeming more interested in whatever is behind him.

I nod, then bring my attention back down to the object. Ren returns to the Knights and they disappear down the hall, their voices becoming lost in the distance.

I drag my finger across the surface of the cool metal. Then, I lift it, to bring it gently back down, tapping. I hear a buzz from inside the object, as if it’s parts are turning, energy flowing through it. I wonder how long this has gone untouched.

The room is suddenly illuminated.

A blue hologram projects from the object. A map.

My eyes dance from star to star, planet to planet. It fills up the room, consuming the space around me. I reach my finger up to the planet beside me, my touch distorting the image before it bounces back to life. Geographically, none of it makes sense. The orbits don’t fit within each other. Nothing is familiar. There’s several perfect circles of darkness scattered across the map. Not planets. The opposite. I bring my finger to it, poking straight through the nothingness. The hologram remains undisturbed. Black holes.
Wherever this is in the galaxy, it would be near impossible to navigate to or through with the amount of them. But the map is here. Someone or something needed to cartograph it. I walk around the room, taking in the sight of it all while looking for something that looks familiar. I’ve memorized so many navigational charts, I could recreate them perfectly if need be. How have I never seen this one?

I need to force my attention away from the stars and back down to the console. I tilt my head, reading the text on the surface. It’s a list. DRK-49583, DRK-49582, DRK-49581, DRK-49580. DRK… an old, nearly ancient model of probe droids. I scroll through and the list continues, the model numbers steadily decreasing. I press DRK-43019.

The map disappears and is replaced by different one. No. Not different. It’s the same. I turn around, noticing a chunk of the map now gone. I return to the console, scrolling down further and further. I settle for DRK-35401.

The map resets, the section of the map missing before now larger.

I scroll back up on the console, selecting the most recent option. The most completed map reappears. I walk around the console, allowing myself to absorb the images of stars, moons, and planets.

I reach up to the comm-link on my ear and say, “I found something.” I trace a line of orbit with my finger, waiting for a response.

R8 doesn’t waste any time to respond. “What is it, Agent?”

I lower myself on the ground, sitting down to look upwards. I close my eyes, then open them again, to get a fresh view of the sight. The room is nearly completely illuminated by the blue lights. It’s more than bright. It’s like enlightenment. I raise my hand up and in front of my face, noticing my skin’s cobalt hue, the map’s color reflecting off me. “A map.”

“Of what?”

“I have no idea.” I slouch further into the ground, trying to put as much of it in my view as possible. I describe what I see, pointing at things as I mention them, as if R8 were here to experience them with me,

“There’s so many blackholes… asteroid belts, gravity wells. Traveling in this part of the galaxy would be a suicide mission.”

“What do you believe it’s significance is?”

My finger lands on a planet. One where there could be no Republic. No First Order. No Empire, no Rebellion, no Resistance. I say, almost too quiet for the comm-link to pick up. “There are planets too. They’re so far away from here. They’d have to be.”

“The Unknown Regions?”

I pause. The Unknown Regions are supposed to be unknown. Which, I suppose they are to everyone who isn’t the Emperor. Or Snoke. This is how he’s hiding The Supremacy, he’s using this information, or something like it at least. I stand back up to my feet, returning to the console.

I click away from the list of DRK models. There’s a menu that is displayed on the screen giving me a few options.

Mappings
Navigational Charts

Archives

I click the “Archives” option. Another menu appears, listing dates. Perhaps when the device was last accessed. The most recent date was around 5ABY, around the beginning of the Cold War. I click on it and the model DRK-31742 appears. The map updates, now significantly less complete. The room is so much darker than before. The projection that once covered the whole ceiling now only spreads a few feet across. I stare at the small section of the map, trying to make sense of it. Now, looking at it like this, it seems familiar. I return to the menu.

This time, I click on the “Navigational Charts” button. It gives me a list of the DRK units again. I search “DRK-31742” in the text box above and confirm it. The same map appears, but this time containing red navigational lines. This must be how to navigate around the black holes and other various hazards. I step back, taking in the map. There’s one red line, zipping through the middle, carefully charting when to shortly jump to hyperspace and where to pilot against orbital pull. Everything clicks, my memory finally placing where I’ve seen this before.

This is the map Kylo used to get to The Supremacy, in The Unknown Regions.

Hurriedly, I return to the console, clicking away from this DRK unit and scrolling to the top of the list to click on the most recent one. DRK-49583. The map disappears, then reappears, creating one of the brightest, most beautiful things I’ve ever seen.

I sit back down, looking upwards. I laugh, almost in relief. It’s all logged. My eyes dart across the countless red lines, nearly hundreds of paths, options. The whole Unknown Regions are charted, and I could very well be the only one to know this. If this console is the only one of its kind, the last person who accessed it only saw the small section that leads to The Supremacy. There’s so much more.

Places I could go where The First Order could never possibly find me.

I turn my head around the console to look down the hallway, checking for Kylo Ren. I don’t see him. He must have gone further, into another room. I wonder if he would join me. If we could go to some planet, a planet where this war doesn’t exist. A planet where we could both build an actual life together. I lean further into the console. This could be our chance. He doesn’t deserve to be used as a tool for this war. He hates it here. I know he does. I know I do too. I’ve just never been able to entertain separate fate.

I click the comm-link, saying to R8, still in shock, “I had no idea there was so much more than what I already knew.”

R8 remains quiet.

I trace the lines with my finger, trying to figure which would be the best route to take. I want to go somewhere far away. Further than I could imagine. But I would also have to think about fuel efficiency. Kylo’s ship probably can take us a fair distance. And, we could add some enhancements, to ensure it could last without fuel refills for a while. We have all The Order’s technology at our hands. We could do it.

R8’s voice returns to my ear, “Do you want more than what you already possess, Agent?”

I pause. I do. I long for it. I feel desperate to attain it, now that it’s possible. I make the excuse, “Everyone wants better for themselves, R8. It’s the inevitability of human nature.”
“I assumed you were better than human nature.”

I did too. But I realize now, I don’t want to be. Kylo Ren makes me happy. And if we could be together, outside of all of this, safe, there’s nothing else in the galaxy I’d ever want again. R8 asks, probing, “I noticed something in your reaction with the General the other day.”

I remain absentmindedly playing out hypothetical scenarios to where each red line would take us. What kind of planets we’d find. I wonder if there is one like Naboo. He said that’s his favorite. What if there’s one even better? The most beautiful place in the galaxy could be out there, waiting for us.

R8 continues, despite my lack of response, “He mentioned granting you freedom I discovered on a new type of emotional depth I have never recorded from you.”

I can’t help but be slightly intrigued, but my mind still stays staring at the thousand of stars above me. “What was it?”

“Hopefulness.”

I bring my hands back to my side and I think back to that moment. I try to keep my voice steady when I respond, “General Hux’s proposal included me assassinating The Commander. I don’t think that is an option.”

R8 says, his voice so simple, so calculated, “It is.”

Hearing him say that makes my stomach sink inside of itself.

Continuing, he says, “I am programmed to suggest and analyze what would be best for both The First Order and you. Commander Ren has only proven to be more and more unstable. He is a danger to the balance of this order. He continues to show diluted motivations. Trusting the General’s judgement is the wisest option.”

“You’re just pissed because the Commander keeps turning you off.” I respond, unable to hide my childish, defensive tone.

“Agent,” The voice’s inflections grow harsher, something I’ve rarely heard from R8, “You know this. You used to agree with me. It is not only within my programming to aid The First Order but to also aid you, Agent. I want what is best for you.”

I allow him to elaborate, my eyes drawing away from the stars and back down to the black, metal ground.

“I believe that you no longer possess any desire to serve The Order.”

I say, my voice soft, “Why else would I be here?” I stare absentmindedly at my blasters in the holsters at my thighs. I bring my finger up and trace the grips on the handle. “This is what I was made to be.” I say this, avoiding the hologram above me. Knowing that if I do look upwards again, I would question it all again. I’d much rather live with the comfort in absolutes.

R8 says, carefully, concentrated, “I have concluded that your motivations for serving have drastically changed.”

“To what?”

“Maintaining a companionship with Kylo Ren.”
I notice a slight tremble in my fingers. I remember wanting to speak in this manner with R8 in my childhood, but always being too afraid he would report me for treachery. As a child, the droid used techniques to try to develop a kinship with me, but I normally was able to diffuse the situation to a point where nothing too meaningful could develop. I thought it was a test. I’m beginning to wonder now if it wasn’t. If I’ve always have had someone beside me, this whole time. But I’ve been too blind to recognize it. Too terrified to trust it. I say, quietly, “I never desired this life. I wasn’t given a choice.”

“You never wanted a choice.”

I say, “If my motivations include enjoying Kylo Ren’s company, I do not see any problem. I must find a way to keep some motivation alive to serve The Order.”

“Then, perhaps it is best for you and The Order to be unaffiliated, by following the General’s advice.”

General Hux’s offer has always been ridiculous in my mind. Conniving and impossible. But if there’s one thing I know for sure, R8’s judgement is better than any humans. R8’s disposition and detachment are what I should have. I press my finger harder against the guns handle, letting the bumps of the texture imprint into my skin. “What if there’s a way that doesn’t involve me killing Kylo Ren?”

Saying this was a mistake. I cringe at myself for doing it.

R8 doesn’t respond the way I expect though. He calmly says, “If it does not benefit The Order, it should not be. It’s selfish of you to think that way.”

I know it is. But is it selfish for me to not kill Kylo Ren? I’ve killed hundreds of people, probably. And responsible for even more people’s deaths. If I were to kill Kylo Ren, I would never have to kill a single person again. Ultimately, I’d be saving lives. Is it selfish to refuse the opportunity, just because I care about him? Just because he means something to me? The people I’ve killed in the past all have meant something to someone. That didn’t stop me then.

Maybe I shouldn’t kill anyone. Is that an option?

I open my mouth to speak, but I find myself unable to find the words of what to say. I know I can’t kill him. I look over, the floor reflecting the hologram’s stars. I have a way out of this situation. There’s nothing stopping me now. I want to believe that. I want to have hope in the idea. Or at least trick myself into thinking I do. All I need to do is get by until there’s a good opportunity for Kylo and I to leave. That’s it. I can do this. It’s going undercover for one last time, going undercover as myself from three months ago. It should be easy, the easiest thing I’ve done yet. “You’re right.” I say, quietly. I look back up, staring through the portion of the map marked with a black hole. “When the time comes, I will do what I must.”

“I believe you, Agent.” R8’s signal clicks off.

I believe he believes me.

I stand up, a new sense of determination coming over me. I feel the console up and down, searching for some sort of port. There has to be a memory drive, a data compartment, something. On the bottom right of the device, my fingers catch on an outline in the metal. I crouch down to it, examining the cut-out box shape. I try to pry it open by shoving my fingernails under the crack and pulling, but it doesn’t budge. I attempt to push on it.
It clicks, then pops open.

I feel my breath shaking unsteadily. Air trembles against the back of my throat. I pull out the metal shelf, to reveal a wooden box built into the device. Slowly, I open the lid.

Inside is what looks like a piece to a puzzle. It’s a small data storage unit, about the size of my pinky in length. It looks ancient, comprised of mainly wood, but some windows for a red crystal-like structure. The structure of the device is odd, some of the wood raised, others lowered, like towers of varying heights all stuck together. I grip it in my hand, just feeling it's presence for a moment. It feels so right, to have it. Now that I do have it, a certain relaxation takes over my body. A relief. Whatever energy was pushing me forwards now has settled. I can’t describe the feeling any other way.

Slowly, I stand to my feet. I carefully place the data storage unit in my pocket and make my way down the hall.

The first Knight I see happens to be Solaw. The others, including Kylo, crowd around, examining some sort of black holocron. Solaw notices me approaching, then backs up to stand at my side. He asks, “You doing alright? You seemed pretty tripped out a second ago.”

I should be doing amazingly. I found a perfect way to get out of all of this. But I can’t help to think about what R8’s analysis of the situation, and the part of me that is still ingrained to want to obey him. I say,

“Yeah, I just saw something odd.”

“Like what?”

I don’t even know how to describe it. Or it’s significance. I saw essentially just saw some elderly man in a hut and he asked me to sit with him. Maybe there are weird psychological defenses put up around this place that made me hallucinate. I don’t really see any other logical explanation to the question. Besides, I’m far too preoccupied thinking about the data storage unit in my pocket to worry about some odd vision.

There’s so many more important things to worry about. I shrug at him.

He says, changing the subject, “I’m ready to get the hell off Jakku, to be frank.” Hearing him speak with his mask on is so different than hearing Kylo do it. With Kylo, it’s like a separate persona than Kylo unmasked. Solaw remains steady, more like himself. The mask doesn’t change him.

My eyes scan up and down the expanse of the hallway. All these things just look like junk. Whatever curiosity I once had for this place has diminished now. I feel like whatever purpose I came here for is finalized. I’m good to go. “You’re not into field trips?”

He looks downward, staring at his boots, then looking away. I can tell that he attempts to seem relaxed, but his body language tells me that he’s rather quite on edge. “I used to be. History has always been more of Eerson’s thing.”

Hearing his name makes my spine twist from inside me, particularly the placement of where I stabbed him in the back. I cross my arms across my chest. I say, quietly, “I’m so sorry.”

He shakes his head, his voice regaining whatever optimism it once lost, “Nah, don’t worry about it.” He ponders it for a minute. Then, reverts to the somber nature of his previous tone, “I guess when you care about someone, you want to protect them. And when you can’t…” The sentence sounds a lot like Lex’s, when she discovered Eerson was missing. She blamed herself for it all. She felt the guilt I should’ve. Kylo felt it.
Solaw shrugs, beginning to step away, “I guess wish I could’ve done something differently.”

I say, unsure if he even hears me, “I wish I would’ve too.”

As I stand down at the end of the shuttle’s ramp, I look out into the Jakku skyline. The orange of the sand and blue of the sky has a certain intensity to it. There’s a cool wind that sweeps across the terrain that wasn’t here before. It pierces the skin of my face in a calming way. I find my mind always looping back to the image of the man in the hut. I want to desperately find a logical explanation to what I saw and why I saw it. But I don’t think there is one. I feel for the outline of the data storage unit in my pocket. It feels so heavy, so heated. I am constantly taking it out, staring at it to make sure it’s still there and it’s still real. I tuck it further into my pocket as I hear steps approaching me from behind. Familiar ones. Probably the most familiar ones I know.

R8 approaches me. He’s always been taller than me. I think back to a time when I thought that I would catch up to him, eventually. As he joins me at my side, I realize I never did.

I keep my eyes steady on the horizon.

“We are about to take off, Agent.”

I nod.

R8 turns his head towards mine. “Whatever it is you fear, you are strong enough to overcome.”

Am I? There was a time when I did not fear anything. I don't know if I long for that now or not. But I do not deny the troubles that mindset has saved me from. “What will become of you, if I decide to leave?” I ask him, looking over.

R8’s gaze turns to the horizon, studying it. “Reassignment.”

I nod slowly, biting down on the inside of my cheek.

He adds, “Notice I did not say replacement.”

I feel the corner of my lips tug up into a smile. “I doubt you’ll ever have to deal with as much shit with your new assignment.”

“Every conflict has been saved onto my memory drive,” R8 says, “When my new assignment fails to be as exciting, I’ll replay it and attempt to hypothesize where you are in the galaxy and if you are satisfied with your choice.”

Warmth fills my body with the sentence. I lean my head against the cool metal of his shoulder, my eyes suddenly feeling heavy. My smile grows. “I hope I will be.”

Suddenly, the ship from below my feet begins to rumble. I suppose that’s my cue. I remove my head from R8’s shoulder, then start towards the top of the ramp, into the Command Shuttle. The Knights all crowd the body of the ship, most with their masks removed. They crowd around something I can’t get a good look of, but I’m assuming is some kind of artifact from the Observatory.

I squeeze past them, making my way to the pilot’s cabin. When begin to pick up two voices from inside, I pause. I stare at the closed door, separating me from the conversation. Despite something
inside telling me that listening in would be wrong, I lean against the door, nonchalantly, but enough to where I can zero in on the voices. I scan the crowding Knights for Lex, but I don’t see her.

Kylo says, his mask removed, “It’s so much stronger here. I wasn’t even asleep. She just materialized, out of nowhere, for no reason.”

“Could you see her at all this time?” It’s Lex’s voice who says this.

Kylo responds, “No. But I could feel her. It was like she was some sort of ghost. Her presence was so bright. So blinding, so full of light.”

“Do you think she’s close? Could she be around here?”

“We don’t even know if she’s real.”

“I don’t see any other explanation. If this, if she, is powerful enough to come to you, even outside your dreams, I think there’s a significance.”

Suddenly, the door behind me opens and I feel myself stumbling back, into the pilot’s cabin. The door closes again, this time in front of me. I turn around to see an unmasked Kylo sitting in the pilot’s chair with an unmasked Lex standing next to him. She holds the helmet under her arm, at her side. I feel my face heating up, wondering if he knew I was there the whole time.

Kylo doesn’t waste any time to ask me, “What did you see today?”

My eyes go back and forth between them. Kylo’s expression brings me back when he was going through the files on the Contingency, sitting on his dormitory’s floor. He looks as if he’s confused, trying to put pieces of a puzzle together. Lex looks more calmed, more collected. I answer, trying to formulate it in a way that doesn’t make me sound crazy, but as the words come from my mouth I realize just how impossible that would be, “Everything just kind of tunneled in on itself. I started hearing different voices, mumbling. When I tried to follow them, it was like I was transported into a different room, a whole different planet. I could smell the rain, I could feel it’s humidity. And there was this old man on a bench, he asked me to sit by him. Then it all disappeared.”

Lex and Kylo look at each other, then back at me. Lex in realization, Kylo in pure perplexity.

Lex whispers, to herself more than to anyone else, “She had a Force vision.”

Kylo nods, pursing his lips.

I don’t know how to respond to it, or how to know what that means.

Kylo says to Lex, “I checked already to see if she was Force sensitive. She can’t use it, but it’s around her. It’s guiding her towards something. It’s like The Force is using her.”

I scoff at the statement. I don’t quite understand how The Force works, but I’m pretty sure that’s not it. Some people have it, others don’t. I fall into the latter category, so The Force can’t affect me. But that doesn’t describe what I saw or why I saw it. I refuse to deny there’s a very logical explanation to it though.

“What did you see?” I ask Kylo, mumbling.

“I didn’t see anything.” Kylo corrects me. “There’s been this presence that’s been with me for years. Usually coming to me in dreams, but today it was here when we first landed. This girl… I can’t see her, but I can feel her.”
I blink, my voice blank, “A girl comes to you in your dreams and you feel her?”

“Goddammit, Agent,” He mumbles, turning to his control panel.

I look up to Lex, frozen, furiously blushing.

I didn’t mean for the comment to be anything more than an attempt to get him to speak with less mysticism, to summarize what he’s trying to say in a way I could understand.

He sneers at me, “I don’t know why I expect you to be anything less than completely ignorant to the ways of The Force.”

I roll my eyes, feeling my fists clench at my sides, “I don’t know why either, considering you never talk about it with me.”

“It’s obviously something you wouldn’t comprehend well.”

I look at Lex, her mouth slightly a gape, still standing awkwardly next to him. She can talk about that stuff with him, she helps him understand it. Maybe I should just leave them to their spiritual discussions.

Kylo says, before I get the chance to leave, “Lex, please give me a moment with Agent 2319.”

Lex stammers, quickly shuffling out, “Yes, yes, of course, Master.”

I cross my arms, waiting for him to continue.

He does, sighing, “Sit.”

I oblige, passive-aggressively snapping the seat belt across my chest.

He says, voice now more leveled, “If you wish, I could look at your vision when we return to Korriban. I can’t promise you answers, but I’ll try to decipher what you saw to the best of my ability.”

“Take a look at it?”

“Through your memories.”

I then take a moment to realize all the things within my mind that I wish to conceal from him. Everything from Snoke’s orders, the map, Hux’s orders… But there’s a part of me that is convinced that if I can keep it from him, while entering my mind, he’ll be more willing to open up to me. And he’ll be more inclined to follow the map with me. “I would appreciate that.” I watch the ship arise from the Jakku ground, Kylo’s hand shifting a lever upward with the movement. I slouch further into the chair. “I wish you would understand the things I can’t. I want you to trust me. You say that you do, but I don’t think that’s the case.”

His eyes flicker towards mine for a moment. “Really?” His attention returns to piloting.

I nod.

He takes a moment to ponder my words. He doesn’t respond until we’re out of the atmosphere of Jakku, about to be on course for hyperspace, “I like what we have now. It’s… it’s outside of everything else. I do not wish for the things we face in our individual lives to bleed into our relationship.”
“Kylo…” I attempt to wrap my mind around whatever idea that is, whatever it means. “We can help each other with all of that. I can help you. That’s the point.”

“You can’t.” He says, squarely. “And you’ll get frustrated if you try, then begin to see me as a burden - a lost cause.” He flips a few switches and presses some buttons. The ship launches into hyperspace.

I set my jaw, my teeth grinding. “You’re wrong.” I cross my arms, his words sparking a certain anger within me. “You doubt me and how much I care for you.”

He looks over to me, brown eyes filled with a certain sadness. I notice a twitch in the corner of his lip. His gloved hand reaches up, going into my hairline. The leather brushes through the strands of hair softly, combing it back, behind my ear. His touch lingers as his hand returns to his lap.

I can't bring myself to ask him why he doesn't deny my statement. I know exactly why. My hand rests against the pocket with the data storage unit. I turn my head away from his.

Chapter End Notes

lol never sleeping on the angst! again, i always love to hear your guys' feedback. it's always so helpful and encouraging! thx for reading!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
"Either you deal with what is the reality, or you can be sure that the reality is going to deal with you." — Alex Haley

I look at Kylo blankly. I’ve gotten used to his caution around me, but I still can’t help but always be insulted by him thinking I can’t deal with pain. “Just get it done and over with. Quick and easy.”

Kylo furrows his brow at me. “It doesn’t work like that. To avoid causing you pain, I have to ease into it.”

I protest, “What I’m saying is if you just push yourself inside, all at once, the pain will just last for a second. Then it will be done.”

Kylo shifts on the bed, awkwardly trying to find the best position to do this in. It’s hard to imagine that this is the same place I saw his face for the first time, that it was not even that long ago. “I’d rather just take it slowly.”

“Whatever.” I pull my hair back, tying it in a messy bun. I lean back against the pillow on the bed, laying flat on my back. I look over at him, sitting on his knees on the other side of me. He scoots closer. I encourage, “Go at it, when you’re ready.”

I find myself unsure if I should keep my eyes open or closed. I settle on closed, to avoid making him feel pressured, like I’m watching or judging his methods. In the darkness behind my eyelids, his hand coming up to caress my cheek feels even more prominent. The warmth of his hand radiates against my face. His fingers go into my hair, latching onto a grip on my head. Gentle, but firm.

Suddenly, there’s a probing that reaches my temples.

I try my best to project and focus my energy in what I saw on Jakku. I think of the man, his voice, the image of the hut I’ve played in my mind over and over. An energy begins to flow, swimming around my head. It’s like it’s bumping into the sides of my skull. My brain is being bruised from the inside, searing in heat.

I grit my teeth at the pain. It’s not as bad as when Snoke looked inside my mind. But it still is uncomfortable, unnatural. I push back into his hand trying to feel more of it, allowing it to comfort me. The pain grows sharper, then completely disappears.

When I open my eyes, I see Kylo staring down at me, in pure astonishment, out of breath. He stares at me, stunned, eyes widen, full of a fear I never seen from him. He doubles back, creating distance from me.

A million thoughts come into my head. All the things he could’ve seen. He saw Snoke’s orders. He saw Hux’s orders. He saw the awful, irredeemable things I’ve done for this job. I notice him
trembling with pure shock, unable to formulate words. I sit up, reaching towards him, ignoring the sore pain spreading across my temples. I place my hand on his knee, desperately, about to spew all the apologies and excuses I can manage.

But he says, before I get the chance, “That man. Why did you see him?” His words come in between heavy breaths.

I freeze, hand still against his knee. I shake my head, trying to bring myself back down from whatever beginnings of a panic attack I just experienced. “Do you know who he is?”

He seems frozen, mentally in a different dimension. “Don’t talk to him. If you see him, kill him.”

“Why?” I narrow my eyes. “Who is he?”

“An enemy of The First Order.” He says, bluntly. “That’s all you need to know.”

I shake my head, confusion rushing over me. I rub my hand up his leg, then back down to his knee, attempting to bring him back to a reasonable state-of-mind. He shudders under my touch. I lean forward, urging him to give me some sort of clarification, “Who is he, though? What’s his name?”

Ren looks me dead in the eyes, “Look at me,”

I obey.

His hands latch around my biceps, squeezing hard. A seriousness possesses his tone, as if life or death depended on me taking his orders earnestly, “You can’t know. You can’t ever find him. Whatever that vision was, whatever it implied, it shouldn’t be.”

I shake my head at him, demanding, “I want some answers, at least.”

He remains staring at me silent. I come back down to earth, calming down. I realize the position we’re in right now. Sitting across each other on a bed, my hand on his knee, his hands wrapped around my arms. Despite Kylo and I being in each other’s bedrooms often, we’re never both on the bed. And when we are, we’re never touching each other (unless we’re trying to treat each other’s gross, bleeding wounds.) His body language always had read uncomfortable towards that situation and I’ve respected his restrictions. Kylo swallows hard, eyes flickering down my frame for the quickest of seconds.

I try to ignore the unrelated thoughts, pressing forward, “Tell me what it means.”

He sets his jaw, it’s shape slender and long, “It doesn’t mean anything. There’s a man, an enemy of The First Order, who you saw in a vision. There’s no significance. The Observatory probably caused you to see it. The Force was very strong there. Chaotic. You were the first one to enter it, it probably had the greatest effect on you.” His grip around my arms tighten, “Forget it happened.”

I open my mouth to protest. But I realize, I don’t really mind forgetting it happened. I don’t really care about what I saw. The vision doesn’t mean anything to me, and it may just get in the way of my overall goal of getting out of here with Kylo, to the Unknown Regions. So, I close my mouth again, allowing my mind to push any questions of who that man was back, inside a part of my mind that doesn’t need to be present right now. I allow myself to trust Kylo’s judgment. Or at least trick myself into thinking I do. I push forward any thoughts of lust I repressed a moment ago, deciding I’d much rather think about that. I glance down at his full, flushed lips and can’t help but imagine how they feel against me, as I do often. I look back up to his eyes, staring into mine, trying to read me. He still looks scared of whatever he saw, but I see that part of him slowly being drained away.
I grip his knee tighter, trying to feel the way it’s structured under the thin black, leather-like material. His brown eyes look downwards, towards the placement of my hand. He looks back up to me, swallowing hard.

“Kylo,” I whisper, my voice catching against the air, causing a crack to form in the sound of it. I can see the lust filling in his eyes, the pure hypnotism.

He leans forward, “I do not wish for you to stress over such circumstances.”

I shiver at the quiet tone of his low voice, concerned, yet focused. My words are fragile, and I inch closer to him by putting more weight against his knee, “I don’t.”

I see insecurity pass in his face at the situation. His face reddens and he looks away, breaking the gaze. The action reminds me of how inexperienced he is. How immature. I wonder what kind of life he lives to remain unflinching when it comes to killing but hesitate towards showing intimacy with a female. The thought makes me pause before I advance further. I have to push it back, to the same place where I pushed back my curiosity about the vision. My grip on his knee is looser than before.

The thought breaks whatever lust I once felt with a question, one that has been bothering me. Not bothering. More like persisting. I ask him, “I want to hear more about what you experienced on Jakku. About the girl.”

He looks downward, his dark hair shielding his expression. “What about it?”

I don’t really know what I’m trying to ask. “When you said that you can feel her… What does it feel like?”

He struggles to put his thoughts to words. By the way he shifts against the bed, I can tell he doesn’t care to speak about it. “I don’t know. It just feels like energy, like it’s pulling at me.”

“How do you know it’s a girl?”

“The presence, it’s feminine. There’s a youthfulness about it.” He peeks up to me, head still ducked down. “If you’re trying to ask me if I can physically feel her, I can assure you that’s not the case.”

I nod, pursing my lips. I don’t know if that’s what I was trying to ask, but it’s information at least.

He mumbles, his eyes darting away, “At the moment, I’m too preoccupied with the thoughts of physically feeling you.”

I melt, my body so heavy against the bed. It’s so rare that he says things so bold, so when he does, there’s always an element about it that paralyzes me, taking me off guard. His eyes light up at my reaction. It’s like he didn’t mean it as flirtatious as it sounded, he just meant it as a statement. Something about how it affected me must give him confidence, because the next thing he does is lean into me, nose brushing against the curve of my cheek, then back into my hairline. I am completely constricted, still, my breath caught inside my throat at his sudden closeness. His lips brush against my ear, as if to say something. I can’t breathe, preparing to become completely undone at whatever he’s about to tell me.

“I don’t know how to do this.” He says, words shaky, apprehension evident.

I pause, needing to collect myself from the feeling his voice, so direct in my ear, gave me. I manage, tilting my mouth towards him, “You don’t have to know.” My freehand reaches up, around his back, lightly placing my hand around the curve of his neck, an attempt to steady him. To steady myself.
“Do you ever fantasize about us, in these situations?”

He nods against my neck, “Often.” He weakly asks, “Do you?”

I slowly nod back. I say, the words being squeezed from my throat, “Show me what you imagine doing to me.”

He lets out a shaky exhale before his lips drag downward from my ear, to my jawline. His lips press against the skin, linger, then pull away with the movement of his hands releasing my biceps. They move to either side of my body, holding his body steady as he leans further into my neck, nuzzling into the hallow of my collarbone. The skin is slightly exposed, as I’m wearing spare training robes he found for me to borrow while we stay on Korriban. The heat of the skin on the back of his neck is so apparent against my palm. I form my fingers tightly around its shape, some of his hair tangled in my fingers. He uses his nose to nudge the fabric to the side, exposing more of my shoulder. As he begins leaving soft kissing around the newly exposed skin, I find my other hand going upwards, from his knee to his thigh, laying softly against the foreign location. As my hand moves upwards, his kisses change from light, feather-like, to something with more intensity, more pressure.

I settle my hand around the curve of his upper thigh, my hand so small against his leg. I press down, hard, squeezing all the skin my hand can manage to grab. With this, his kiss, now positioned in the middle of my neck, opens, his teeth meeting my skin. He bits down lightly, testing the way my skin feels under his teeth. A soft whimper escapes from my mouth, completely out of my control. He freezes at the noise, his tongue pressed into the spot his teeth once touched. The room is so quiet. I can only hear my own shaky breath and see his shoulders, rising and falling, trying to contain his own unsteady breathing.

And perhaps it’s my training, or just who I am, that makes me click shift into a separate gear. One where we’re not shy, we’re not acting like mere teenagers who are self-conscious, apprehensive. Which, has been refreshing, considering my history. But as I think more and more on the situation, I realize how much pure lust I actually have for him. How none of it is forced, how none of it is faked. How real all of this is.

I remove my hand from his leg and his neck to place my palms on his chest, shoving him off me and down, into the bed. He obliges, but I can’t help but feel how heavy he is, how he’s so much bigger than me. I hold his body down against the mattress as I swing a leg over him, straddling him. He’s completely in shock. Something almost like panic runs through his head, questions of where to place his hands, what to do next, or if he should just let me take control of the situation.

I encourage him, running my hands up and down the length of his broad chest, “Where?”

He stares at my position on top of him, eyes tracing the image with something combining shock and exhilaration. I can feel him twitch underneath me. His voice is weak, cracking as he repeats back, “Where?”

I raise an eyebrow, my hands pushing against his chest even more as I run them up and down the fabric of his thin tee shirt. I can feel how solid he is, how defined. “You said you have thoughts of feeling me.” I focus my eyes directly onto his, my voice low, repeating, “Where?”

I tilt my chin up, allowing him to have access to whichever skin
he desires to touch. Certain spots on my neck are still wet, from his kisses. I watch him, as he’s completely entranced by the sight of his fingers brushing against me. I notice the way his hair falls around his head on the pillow, the locks in their own soft sections laying against the fabric so delicately. The dying sunlight of the day shining through the window gives his skin a warmth I’m not used to seeing. The light catches his brown eyes, turning them to pure gold. He nearly looks angelic like this.

I imagine that we’re off, on the planet that we’ll go to using that map I found. When we won’t worry about the war or whether our relationship will get us killed. Where we will provide for only ourselves and always be able to make each other happy, no complications coming between us. Just like normal people do.

His fingers move upwards, across my jaw, then to the hallow of my cheek, his thumb now brushing against my chin. His fingers settle below my cheekbone and thumb brushes up against my lips. I think he notices my breath slightly lose rhythm, because he pauses. But it doesn’t take long for him to resume the movement, tracing the curve of my bottom lip, so slowly, so gently. My lips part.

He shifts underneath me, setting his weight on his elbow. The position keeps him sitting upward, to get a better look at me. His eye level is still slightly underneath mine, but it’s close enough now to where I can see just how bright his eyes look. How full of lust. His thumb presses into the fullness of my bottom lip. Slowly, I lean forward, taking it into my mouth, maintaining eye contact with him. His eyes are now darker, hypnotized. I close my mouth around his thumb, sucking gently. He presses the pad of his thumb down against my tongue. The action, despite seeming small, sends a rush throughout my whole body. I graze my teeth against his skin as he pulls his thumb out of my mouth, only to replace it with his index finger. I pull away from it, before he can get it too far, just to lightly press a kiss against his knuckle, before slowly taking it back in, lowering my head onto his hand. His long finger hooks against the curve of my tongue, pushing back. I suck inwards, then back out to circle my tongue around his finger, just to suck back inwards again. He bites down on his own lip at the sight, then he pushes up against me with his hips, his other fingers around my face tightening. Another quick moan escapes from me, muffled by his finger.

He’s completely entranced by this all, his gaze so intense. I always need to gain control of the people around me. But this is completely on another level. I have complete power over him. And I didn’t even ask for it. The moan I get out of him is nearly a whimper, as if he’s begging me for me to do something, to do more.

I grab the wrists from both of his hands and pin them on either side of his head, shoving my head downward to meet his lips to mine. The same intensity that was on Hoth is there. The kisses heavy, quick, desperate. But this time, we know each other’s mouths a bit more, able to fit into each other’s shape with less awkwardness, with more cohesion. His head rocks forward as mine rocks back, our kisses played out like some sort of dance. His lips are so hot, so full, against mine. His wrists begin to twist underneath my grip, which only makes me hold them down against the bed with more force.

He rips his wrists out of my grip with so much strength, yet it seems effortless. Immediately, he brings one hand up to rip the hair tie from my bun. We remain kissing, but I open my eyes enough to see him toss it across the room. My hair falls around my face, down to frame his. He ignores whatever inconvenience it caused, his hands now grabbing at my hips. He pushes me down, against him, thumbs pressing into the hallow angle above my hip bones, fingers, squeezing against my lower back. He rolls his wrists to rock me against him. His shape becomes more and more distinct underneath me.

Blood rushes throughout my body. I pull my lips away and to the side, gasping for air. He only responds to this by focusing his kisses back on my neck, sucking and biting the delicate, slightly
sore, skin.

I shift my hands into his hair, holding his head against a partially sensitive spot below my jawline. I make a fist around his hair, pushing him more into me, lost in the motion of my hips against him. "Kylo…" I breath out his name, finding pleasure in the mere act of saying it.

He hums against my skin, as if to encourage me to elaborate.

I don’t know what to say, or how to say it. Should I just straight out ask him if he wants to go further than this? This is way further, way more intense than we’ve ever been with each other. My mind is so heavy, everything happening so quickly around me. I push my body down into his, moving faster. This time, he moans against me. The low, rumbling noise is enough to make my whole-body shudder. He moves his arms to my back, wrapping them around me to hold me as close as he possibly can. All I can think of is how I want to give him more of me. I want to give him all that I possibly can. He already has so much of me, completely at his disposal. It’s so intimate, it’s so terrifying. But it’s still not enough. I pull away to sit back up on him, bringing my shaky hands to the ribbon holding my robe together.

Kylo pulls away, leaning back, to watch me. He exhales slowly, collecting himself, palms rubbing up and down my thighs tenderly. As his palms move up, I feel my body tense with anticipation. But each time, his hands move back down, allowing me to breathe again. My hands are clumsy, trying to untie the ribbon holding my clothing together. He releases my thighs to move my shaking hands down to my sides to replace them with his own. He pulls on the loop of the bow, nearly effortlessly undoing the knot. I sit on top of him, the robes still covering most of me. A small sliver of skin, where the robes are separated is revealed. Underneath, I have on a small, beige wrap to cover my chest, my mind constantly reminding me how revealing the undergarment is. Also, how informal. I had no idea we would be doing this. I could’ve picked out something more attractive, more feminine. But at this point, that really isn’t priority.

He slowly, carefully lifts the fabric of the robe away from my shoulders, letting it fall off my arms and behind my back. Cold air pierces my shoulders, my bare back, my stomach. Kylo stares at the newly revealed skin so intently. His hands run across my stomach, my skin regaining warmth with his touch. His hands settle of the curve of my hips and he lightly lifts me up, guiding me to lay down beside him. He climbs over top of me, knee in-between my leg, holding himself upwards with his hand. His eyes flicker down the length of my body, taking it all in. Thoughts race through my mind, fear that my body structure will be disappointing, that after years of never experiencing this, he expects more than what I can offer. I’ve never been nervous in this situation before. I’ve never not been calculating everything as it happens. Without that crutch, insecurity strikes me.

As his eyes move across the length of my body, he brings the back of his hand up to follow his gaze, knuckles lightly ghosting down my skin. "How are you even real?" He murmurs, before leaning forward kissing my cheek, back to the gentle nature we begun with. It’s so calming. So reassuring. I don’t know how he’s able to convey that he cares about me with merely the way he touches me. His finger grazes down across the skin just above my breasts, my limbs unable to stop from faintly quivering. His finger skips over the wrap, moving down to trace lines into my ribs.

Kylo lowers his head, softly grazing his lips against mine before he looks me in the eyes to say, quietly, politely, “May I remove this?” His finger taps against the edge of the wrap, at my side.

I nod, arching my back upwards. His hand reaches back, fumbling to find the pin. As he feels around for it, he lowers his head back downwards, kissing down my collarbone, then the exposed part of my breasts. I try to keep my back up, but there’s an element to his touch that makes me just want to sink into the sheets. His fingers pinch the metal the pin, then squeeze, unlatching it.
Suddenly, the comm-link laying on the nightstand lights up. I whip my head over to it.

Kylo notices it, but only lowers his head down to my chest, kissing further down, bottom lip meeting the top of the wrap. I roll my head back in anticipation, but my eyes are unable to be torn from the comm-link. He mumbles into my skin, words warm, “Ignore it.”

I want to so badly. I reach an unsteady hand up, into his hair, smoothing it back so I can watch his face press into my skin as he moves downward. He unlatches the pin from the wrap. The comm-link buzzes again. I can’t help but wonder who is trying to reach me, if it’s important. If Snoke found out I’m a pathological liar (in a way that doesn’t benefit The First Order.) If he’s calling to inform me that my execution date has been scheduled and Hux plans to throw an after party in the cantina. I stare at the blinking blue light. My vision tunnels around the device. The sound of heavy breaths around drowned out by the faint beeping.

It takes me a moment to realize that Kylo has stopped moving. I wait for him to unravel the wrap from my chest, but he doesn’t. He’s not doing anything. I pull my gaze away from the comm-link, back down to him, only to find him looking back up at me. He’s staring up at me, his head now parallel to my ribs. His tousled hair frames his face messily, certain strands sticking to his skin with sweat. With a sigh, he replaces the pin back into the wrap, keeping it from coming undone. He pulls himself up, weight placed on his forearm. Now that he’s back to my eye level, I try to read his expression. He doesn’t make eye contact with me, eyes drifted away. He seems disappointed. Maybe even slightly upset.

He grabs the comm-link from the bedside and reaches into my hair, gently securing it into my ear, then pressing the button on the side.

“Agent 2319.” General Hux’s disembodied voice says, so blankly.

I look down to see Kylo readjusting himself to his previous position. Instead of kissing me, he just lays his head right above my stomach, facing the window. He is so warm against me.

I swallow hard, then respond, concentrating my voice, “I currently am not on base.”

“Oh,” He says, unaware. “You’re still on Jakku?”

I exhale, bringing my hand up into Kylo’s hair. I comb it away from his face, appreciating it’s softness in the process. “We left Jakku yesterday. I’ll briefly be on Korriban before returning to The Finalizer.”

“Pity,” He says, bluntly, “So you’re with Ren I’m assuming? I certainly hope I did not interrupt anything too intimate.”

I set my jaw, looking straight up at the ceiling, hand pausing in Kylo’s hair. The sentence was meant to be sarcastic, dry humored. But I hate it. I hate that he said that. “We are currently unloading recovered artifacts from The Commander’s shuttle.”

Kylo reaches out, interlacing his fingers with the hand that remains at my side. I slowly continue the rhythm of massaging his scalp with my other hand, alternating between combing his hair and dragging my nails lightly across the roots.

Hux says, “Riveting.”

I say, coldly, “What is your purpose for contacting me?”

“Did you find any leads on what the Resistance could be searching for in our archives?”
I find it odd that Hux is asking me about this. Kylo technically led the mission. Kylo and I haven’t yet talked about the artifacts we recovered. But he seemed underwhelmed by it. If we did find something noteworthy, I would think that he would have told me by now. “We just found an assortment of artifacts. I’m not really the expert in the matter, so I would not know if we found anything valuable to our goals. But I can assure you the Knights and Commander Ren are investigating the matter further.”

Kylo absentmindedly rubs the bone of my wrist against his thumb, still staring out of the window. He rests more of his weight on top of me, relaxing into the shape of my body.

Hux continues, “As disappointing as that is, I have an alternative to receive the information, going back to the basics of your training. A nice refreshment to your current mission, one might say.”

I respond, unattached from the conversation, “Go on.”

“We used intelligence found by another Agent to discover a Gala organized by many Republic elites to attempt to negotiate a deal with the Resistance. The event will be heavily guarded, but I believe you have the ability to breach their security. Chances are, some of the best of The Resistance will be attending. Some may know about Organa’s mission to The Finalizer, probably in detail.”

“Very well,” I respond, growing bored of talking to him, still staring down at Kylo. I study the two freckles that lay about an inch above his eyebrow.

Suddenly, Hux says, taking me off-guard, “Korriban will probably not be the best place to assassinate Ren.”

My body freezes. I set my jaw. I don’t know if he spoke to R8, confirming I would do it, or is just assuming at this point. “Probably not.”

“For a split second, I assumed that you wouldn’t take my offer. When I first proposed the idea, you looked infuriated at me. I could tell. You had a twitch in your eyebrow, the same one that you had when you were in my office, drunk, when Ren arrived.” His voice gets lower. “For the briefest moment, the thought passed my mind that you reciprocated the naïve, childish, feelings Ren displays for whatever persona you crafted for him.”

I remain quiet, looking down at Kylo. He brings my hand up to his lips, pressing a soft kiss on the inside of my wrist. It only emphasizes a feeling that’s been growing in my chest. It’s painful. I realize how fucked all of this is. Supreme Leader Snoke believes my intentions are to manipulate. General Hux believes my intentions are to kill. R8 believes my intentions are freedom. And Kylo doesn’t have any clue about any of those elements. What even are my intentions? Can they be defined by one thing? I want to protect Kylo, because I care for him. But am I just putting him in more danger by pursuing this? Am I here because I’m selfish? I respond, voice sore, “That’s quite absurd, General.”

Kylo tenses at the word “General,” but as I stroke his hair, he quickly returns to his relaxed state.

Hux responds, “I sincerely apologize for doubting you.” His voice changes to a different tone, a normal one. It makes me notice how dark, how threatening his voice was previously. “I would advise holding off on the assassination until after the Gala, upon your scheduled arrival at Starkiller Base. I wish to speak with you about terms of our deal at that time.”

“Very well.”

“That’s all I needed, Agent. Please, enjoy your continuation of unloading artifacts from the
Commander’s Shuttle.”

The connection clicks off.

Kylo remains still, laying on top of my abdomen.

I reach up with the hand that was once in his hair, to my ear, removing the comm-link, replacing it back onto the bedside table. I then return my hand to his head. This time, instead of playing with his hair, I find myself just resting my hand against it, caressing the shape.

I remove my other hand from his reach under my back to the pin on the wrap, struggling to find it and unlatch it, resuming where we left off.

Kylo interrupts, pulling my hand away, then back down at my side. “Don’t.” He says, nearly whispering.

The word isn’t at all sharp, nor brutal. It’s so soft. So sad.

He rolls off me to lay beside me on his back, staring upwards.

Suddenly, the chill of the room returns to my bare skin, reminding me what lack of heat feels like. I turn my head towards his. His profile is such a contradiction to itself. The curves of his nose, his chin, his jawline is so soft. Yet so striking. His eyes are blank, so void of anything I saw just a moment ago. I want to reach out to him, but I am too paralyzed. “He’s not going to call back.” I reassure, hushed, trying to keep whatever shame and confusion the rejection stirred within me at bay.

“Yeah.” He says, simply.

I look back out the window, observing the sky, now dark tones of blue, void of the sunset that I swore existed just a moment ago. The landscape of Korriban is vast. The navy sky doesn’t have any moons nor stars to observe. It’s so horribly blank. The only light there is, is that of the dying sun at the horizon, which too will be gone within moments. My eyes shift to the comm-link on the night stand. It’s so still. So quiet. When I regain movement back into my limbs, separating my body from the numb feeling the atmosphere created, I reach down to the robe I once wore, now in a crumpled into a pile between Kylo and I. I don’t feel like sitting up to put it back on, so I merely drape it over me, covering myself. I cross my arms from underneath the robes, still feeling too exposed.

I begin to question why I’m even here to begin with. How Kylo’s managed to make me give up so much of myself to him but keep so much of him to himself. Maybe these feelings are naïve.

Suddenly, I feel his knuckles brush against mine. His hand scoops up from under my fingers, slowly rubbing his thumb across the back of my hand. Perhaps an attempt to get me to relax into his touch, but I remain stiff. He remains mute as his fingers interlock with mine.

Every time Kylo needs consolation, he touches me. Not sexually. But with care, with consideration. Whether it’s in the form of an embrace, after I ask him what’s wrong. Or it’s simply tucking a strand of my hair behind my ear when I encourage him to open up to me. Now, it’s holding my hand after being pulled out of whatever fantasy he puts himself in to be with me. A fantasy where I’m not who I actually am. It wasn’t about Hux interrupting us. It was about Kylo being reminded of reality. Because whatever we’re doing, whatever this is, can’t exist within it.

And something about the tenderness of his hand reminds me how I don’t deserve any of it. He has no reason to trust me. I lie to him constantly. He has no reason to open up to me. There’s a whole part of myself that I keep closed off from him. And I have no reason to call him out for disregarding reality when he’s with me. This whole time, the reality, the hopelessness of our situation has been
pushed to the shadows by the pipe dream life I wish I could have with him.

Does that even make it any less real?

If I’m happy, does it matter if we overlook reality?

I just want to be happy.

So, I roll to my side and wrap my limbs around his body in an embrace. He reciprocates. With my head buried into his shoulder, I reach up to brush a strand of hair behind his ear. And as I reach down, grabbing his hand, I imagine the map, our new home, and our future lives together.

Chapter End Notes

so this chapter was very WEIRD to write. I'm used to chapters having certain structures, hitting certain beats, characters reaching certain "checkpoints", and i always try to keep the characters constantly moving. but this chapter was decently long, the whole time spent all within one bed, within like an hour-max time range. although it feels, right now, as if it's kinda separate from the main plot, like a bonus chapter, the emotional tones in this chapter are so vital. and i cant wait to reveal how this will all play out.

idk we'll see how i feel about this later i really hope it doesn't completely disrupt the flow of the story too badly. and i hope i dont reread this a few weeks from now and think "why did i have to do it like that eeeee, i should've done *insert different, more action-y, exciting way to portray this idea*" welp we shall see, thank u all again for reading!

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
Promises

Chapter Summary

“No dream is ever just a dream.” - Eyes Wide Shut, Stanley Kubrick

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rain impinges on the soil, the sound violent.

Light floods my vision, at first as blurs. But with time comes unity of the colors to form an image.

I am returned to the outside the hut. This time, I take a moment to examine the doorway. The arched entrance is covered by a beige burlap sheet. I don’t remember how I got here or where I came from. I look above. Rain pours downward, slapping against my face. The wind is unforgiving, aggressive. Consumed by grey clouds, the sky seems to be swirling. A teal atmosphere barely shines through the bleak whether. I look behind me, but the muddy terrain disappears into darkness, nothingness. All that exists is what's ahead.

I reach out, fingers touching the rough burlap opening. I make sure I can physically feel the fabric. I can. It’s scratchy, yet soggy, against my fingers. I push the fabric to the side, take a deep breath and step in.

The sound of the rain is different in here. It’s thudding against the roof of the hut. It’s not as aggressive, not as cold. A small fire pit sits in the middle of the floor.

The man is there too.

He’s just as I remembered. The same navy tunic, brown overcoat. Same animal-hide belt, same knife at his hip. The ancient jewelry is still around his neck. His hair is still short, snow white, eyes still a bright cerulean shade. The way his skin lies on his face is a testament to his age. But something else. Wisdom.

He stares at me, calmly. He doesn’t question my intrusion. His eyes drift towards the spot on the wooden bench next to him.

Quickly, I stammer before he can speak, “What is this?”

He freezes, mouth halfway open, words caught in his throat.

I stand up straighter, bolder. I look down at him, focusing my words with an authoritative tone, “Why am I seeing this?”

His face regains movement. “You’re welcome to join me.” The voice, the inflections is the exact same from last time. His face is the same. Everything is the same.

But “the same” doesn’t give me answers. I step forward, demanding, “Tell me what is going on.”

Then, as if I blinked, it’s gone.
I find myself jolted awake, in a dark room, unsure of my surroundings. My eyes dart around, trying to find something to recognize. The large, open window across the room is what I first notice. The blue night sky is showcased over the dusty Korriban landscape. It takes a moment for my body to register the arm draped over my waist, body pressed to mine from behind.

He stirs, nestling more of himself against me. His cheek moves downwards, settling into my hair. I allow myself to be consumed by the warmth of his body, releasing whatever tensed muscles I once had. His breath, so steady, so regulated, moves into my hair. I look downward at the limb around my waist. The thin, grey tee shirt reveals his arm, roped with muscles. I slowly bend my arm upwards, bringing my fingers to gently trace down the length of his bicep, elbow, forearm, then fingers. I move back upwards again. He’s so calm. Before this week, I have never seen him sleep.

And even after I started staying in his room at night, I think this is the first time. I usually fall asleep before he does and he wakes up before me. I slowly shift to lay on my back, trying my best to not disturb him. When I settle my weight into the mattress, I turn my head towards his. He’s completely deep in slumber. His lips are slightly parted, the night making their usual pink tone seem purple. His dark hair is messily covering most of the left side of his face, laying against the bridge of his nose. I reach up, carefully brushing the hair back. My hand lingers, caressing his jaw. His face is somewhat rough with the beginnings of facial hair. His eyelids look so soft, eyelashes dark and long. My thumb lightly traces his cheekbone.

I find it hard to believe that this is the same man who possesses the power to control matter, to control people, with the sheer complexity of his mind. He seems so young. Too young to be a Commander, too young to have seen even a fraction of the things he has. It isn’t fair.

A week has passed since we’ve arrived on Korriban. I don’t know how long he wants to stay. I haven’t bothered with asking. I can tell he likes it here, a lot. He enjoys training the Knights. He seems so much less stressed, less angry.

I can’t deny I’ve been bored, though. Not with parts like this. The nights are amazing, once he’s done with training and we’re free to spend time together. But during the day, I find myself either just watching their training from the sideline, trying to force myself to read some of the ancient books here, or looking at the map with a console I found on the first floor. I need to figure out which route we’ll take, still. I really don’t know anything about the planets, based on the map’s information.

I return my hand from Kylo’s face to the shape of his bicep. I close my eyes, trying to force myself back to sleep.

The replaying image of the man, the hut, the rain… It’s unavoidable.

My eyes open again, settling into the grey of his shirt.

I want to tell myself the dream, the “vision,” doesn’t matter. But Kylo knows him. Kylo’s reaction to what I saw only justified whatever fear that it does hold significance. I don’t understand. I don’t care to understand. But I feel like I need to. It’s eating at me alive. It shouldn’t be me that is getting these images. I don’t work with The Force, I know nothing about it. Anyone else in the galaxy could’ve gotten those visions forced into their mind. Why did it have to be me?

I lay there for a few more moments.

As each second passes, my mind only spirals into more questions, more uncertainty. My body begins to feel restless, aching to move before I am driven insane by my thoughts.
Carefully, I lift Kylo’s arm up by the wrist. I roll away from underneath of him, gently setting his dead-weight limb back onto the covers. He stirs, bending his knees, rolling to the side. I freeze. When his body stills, I move again, carefully swinging my legs off the side of the bed and trying not to create too much disruption with my weight leaving the mattresses. My shaky legs are covered by the thin material of baggy trousers. It’s not quite enough to keep the warmth the blankets and Kylo once provided. I shiver, crossing my arms over my chest, keeping my footing light as I walk across the bedroom. I make my way to my armor, neatly folded on top of a dresser. I find the right pocket, zipping it open, then pulling the data storage unit of the map out.

Re-crossing my arms, I hold it in my fist, squeezing its shape.

Maybe I can figure out some sort of way to determine which planets are inhabitable. There must be some way, some logic to it all. Maybe a function I didn’t notice.

I tip toe out of the bedroom, through the area outside with the spiral staircase, bookshelves, and sofas. I open the door leading into the hallway, then quietly closing it behind me. It’s dark. No lights are on, as I assume they automatically are turned off at this time at night. All I can hear is the emptiness of the halls overlooking the levels of floors below me. I quietly make my way towards the staircase, leading to the downstairs area. Each step seems so loud, so intrusive on the soundlessness of the open area.

As I continue down the stairwell, I open my fist to look down at the data storage unit. My thumb runs across the grooves, showcasing its crystal-like red interior.

“Kylo?”

I close my fist, immediately, shoving my hand behind my back. I hustle down the remainder of the steps to put the voice to the familiar feminine face.

Lex sits on the ground, legs swinging off the side of the balcony that opens the hall up to the rest of the vast building. She’s sitting under the railing, looking at me with bright, brown eyes, only wearing a long, flowing sleeping pants and a form fitting tank top. She looks back up to the stairwell that I came from, then back down at me, putting together the pieces in her mind.

Immediately my face grows red. Her face does as well.

I blink, quickly asking before she can respond, “What are you doing up?”

She swallows hard before responding, “I just like sitting out here.” She stares back upwards, disassociating from the words, “It’s spacious.”

I look towards the edge of the floor where her legs hang down. My attention travels to the several stories below us. I can see the monument in the middle of the first floor from up here, stretching upward. There’s bronze engravings on its side of shapes somewhat resembling faces, all swirling into a single image under the presence of a singular hooded man. Something about the monument has always given me an uneasy feeling. But I guess the area is spacious. I didn’t realize how claustrophobic I’ve felt mainly staying in alone in Kylo’s quarters for the past week. “I apologize for disturbing you,” I say, trying to keep evidence of my recent sleep as distanced from my tone.

She reassures, “You’re not a disturbance.” She turns her head, gaze returning to what’s before her. “Why are you awake?” She scoots over, inviting me to sit.

I sigh, stepping forward. I find myself lowering my body to settle a few inches from her, crossing my legs and leaning back on my palms. I respond, “I saw that vision again.”
This intrigues her. Her head whips back towards me, asking, genuinely interested, “Was anything different?”

I shake my head, biting my lip. “Not really.”

“Kylo hasn’t spoken about what he saw when he looked in your mind. I asked him about it and he said it was nothing to make note of. He seemed like he’d rather not talk about it” She explains, so openly, honestly. I admire her for that.

I find my eyes tracing the outlines of her hair, now in several tight braids. The long strands hang from her head with weight, swinging with even the slightest of movements against her bare shoulders exposed from her tank top. I ask her, voice cracking, vocal chords attempting to regain function after hours of no use, “Do you believe him when he says it’s insignificant?”

This causes her to huff in amusement. She merely raises her eyebrow at me, “Do you?”

I shrug shifting my weight from palm to palm. “I’d like to think that he’s being truthful. That what I see doesn’t mean anything.”

She explains, something telling me that she understands what parts of information Kylo would leave out, “It’s a vision sent to you from the Force. It’s most likely a prophesy. Something you’ll see in the future.”

I squint my eyes in confusion, “Yeah, but why can’t The Force just let it happen when it happens. Why does it show me? How does The Force even know it’s going to occur?”

She shrugs, “The Force relating to the concept of past, present and future is a discussion for religious philosophers. I’m sure Kylo has countless books on it, if it really interests you.”

I roll my eyes at the idea, “I honestly don’t care enough to even know. Having these visions is just distracting. I want it to stop. I don’t want to care about what it means.”

“Well, a general rule is to figure out what that person’s priorities are.”

She scoffs, “Easy.” She brings her hand up, counting on her fingers as she lists things, “Kylo prioritizes The First Order.” Her index finger extends, “The Supreme Leader.” Her next finger joins it, then “and you.” A certain sadness interrupts her relaxed expression at the previous statement. I can
tell she tries to mask it. It doesn’t work well. She bends the three fingers with emphasis. “Perhaps he’s protecting one of those. Or more than one. I don’t know.”

I don’t respond to Lex, guilt suddenly taking over. I remember how her face lit up talking about Kylo months ago. How happy he makes her. How much she adores him. How she probably deserves his company a whole hell of a lot more than I do.

She wouldn’t lie to him. She wouldn’t bear to pretend that she’s manipulating or trying to kill him.

She asks, feather-like voice floating into the silence, “What made you stop hating him?” She’s looking down at her hands, picking underneath the nail of her thumb. “If you don’t mind me asking.”

I try to pinpoint the exact moment. Everything happened so slowly, yet so fast. It all blends together in my mind. I can’t find myself able to relate with the mindset I had when I first met him anymore, yet I can’t figure out exactly when I strayed from it. So, I settle for a simpler answer to the complicated question, “I guess, I really stopped hating him after what happened with Eerson.”

Saying his name feels prohibited. I don’t have the right to say it. “I saw that he cared about something, and…” It made me feel like I could care about something too. Like I wasn’t too far gone yet. When I removed his mask, when I saw his face that day, it made me feel like maybe I was also a real person, behind whatever The Order created me to be. I don’t tell her that though. I just end the sentence with a safer, still technically true answer, “I realized that I didn’t want to see him hurt.”

Then, I started hating him again after the attack on The Finalizer, because he was an ass and I hated that I was challenging everything I’m supposed to be for such a dick. Then I stopped hating him again after I got drunk and he took care of me. But I won’t mention that part.

She nods slowly, taking it in. “What I told you last time you were here…” She looks at me with sincerely, wide eyes, practically begging, “Please don’t think that I harbor any ill feelings towards you because of these circumstances.”

“Likewise,” I say, almost agreeing too quickly with her. “I’m glad he has someone so close to him who can understand The Force.” I can’t ever be that for him. Or anything close to the manifestation of it. I’d rather him be able to speak about it to someone, rather than feel frustrated trying to explain it to me. Even if it hurts, I acknowledge that it’s the way things are.

Her expression melts in relief. She explains, “I’m glad he has someone who doesn’t.” She says, voice growing quieter, more disconnected from her thoughts, “I think he sometimes forgets who he is without The Force. You remind him. You are refreshing.”

I suppose I never thought about it that way.

Lex Ren and I spent an additional hour talking, about her life before The Knights and mine during the time I spent in the Academy. We talk about our favorite and least favorite parts of childhood. We talk about when she first discovered she had The Force and when I was taken out of the stormtrooper program to be transferred to the Agent program. Eventually, as late night became early morning, I found myself walking back to Kylo’s quarters. The map stays in my hand firmly, the whole time.

When I open the door, I tiptoe back through the sitting area with the sofa, staircase to bookshelves, overhead window, and into his room. I enter his bedroom and he immediately sits up, indicating he awoke awhile ago. I cross to the dresser, securing the map segment back into the pocket of my uniform.
He mummers, pulling the covers from him to climb out of bed, “Where were you?”

I quickly fill the empty space in the mattress beside him, trying to encourage him to lay back down. “I just needed fresh air. Why are you awake?”

He doesn’t question my answer. He reaches out to me, pulling me against his body. His frame alone consumes me, my shape not nearly meeting the size of his. He pulls the blanket over my shoulders, tucking the material around me. I find my head against the crook of his neck, one arm wrapping behind his back, the other with my palm to his chest. His leg moves over mine, then hooks into the bend of my knee. He squeezes me tightly, into a warm embrace.

He presses his lips to the top of my head and says, “You never wake up in the middle of sleeping.”

“You don’t know that.”

Pulling away to look at me, he says, “Am I incorrect?” His voice is questioning, eyebrows raised, lips parted.

My eyes can’t help but be drawn to their shape. I shake my head, giving into the question. I say as nonchalantly as possible, “I had a dream, one identical to what I saw on Jakku. I couldn’t fall back to sleep.”

His gaze turns sympathetic. He unwraps an arm from around me to caress his hand into the shape of my face. His thumb runs across my cheekbone, then up to my brow bone, softly grazing my skin. He gently says, “You should’ve woke me up.”

I insist, “That would have been awfully selfish of me.”

“Perhaps you should think of yourself more often.” He mumbles, hands moving behind my head to bring me back into comfort of his chest, “I would much prefer consciousness with you to sleep anyways.” His nose nudges my hair and his lips press into my scalp.

We lay like this for a moment.

His chest moves against my face with each breath. He’s steady, but still not to the point of falling asleep. It’s the hour of the night where sleep would almost be counter-intuitive, considering it’s so close to the morning.

As if he can sense my hesitance towards the idea of sleep, his hand moves downward to my hip. Unsure of his intentions, I relax my body to make his movements as easy as possible, my body as accessible as possible.

His hand rubs against the hem of my shirt, slowly running horizontally across my back, then back over to my hip. He repeats this a few times. The shirt slightly rises, barely exposing a strip of skin. I reach back to his hand, grabbing it, then placing it under the shirt at the small of my back. His palm is so warm, so large. I can feel the span of his fingers covering my back, rubbing up and down. Then in patterns. In shapes. No layers in-between him and I. Just skin.

He says into the top of my head, voice so sleepy, so damn deep it’s barely audible, “I realized something tonight.” Speaking causes his hand to pause in-between my shoulder blades.

“Hm?” I encourage him to elaborate.

He pulls away to look at me once again. The beginning of daylight from the window shines behind him, his body shielding me from any of the light’s harshness. His hair is draped around his face, curling softly against the pillow. The order of his hair is so tousled, so much more scruffy than usual.
His hand settles against my bare ribs, thumb rubbing the ridges the bones create in my shape. “When I woke up, the last thing I remembered was falling asleep next to you. I assumed you would be here still. I was expecting it to be like waking up any other time this week, to how warm you are,” His hand runs back to my shoulder blade, then returns to my rib cage, “How precisely your shape fits against mine, the rise and fall your breath creates in your chest…” He furrows his brow, seriousness taking over his expression; commitment to whatever he will say. “Then, when I reached out, you weren’t there. That feeling of realization… it nearly was agonizing.”

The statement makes me feel like my heart is beating far too quickly to be healthy. “No matter where I go,” I look him in the eyes, the intensity of my gaze matching his. “I’ll always come back to you.”

“I-” He starts under his breath, a smile breaking his seriousness. A smile of pure contentment. I’ve never seen such an expression from him before. “You cannot possibly know how much you mean to me.”

I smile, something resembling a laugh coming from me at the situation. Not because anything is funny. Because everything is so nice, just like this. I didn’t think it was possible to feel so content. Just looking at him alone, at how beautiful he is, it’s powerful. The feeling inside growing inside of me is so sweet, but so strong. It consumes me.

I realize that no matter what I’ve been though, what I’ve missed out on, I could put that all behind me. One day, the past will die. I’ll do whatever it takes to kill it. Just laying here like this with him is enough to make any of the anxiety, the fear, melt away. There will be a day when it’s just be this. Us.

It’s freedom. It’s all I have ever wanted.

I lift my head upwards, pressing his lips against mine, trying to maintain the kiss despite the million emotions bleeding into my expression. I bury my head back into his chest.

“No,” I say into him, never having been so certain of anything. "I know."

I watch the Knights in the training room, sparring each other with staffs. As I lean against the wall, I find myself growing more bored, more restless. I stare at Kylo Ren across the room. He’s standing with Trant, the Twi-Lek man, and Tiru. He takes Trant’s staff, slowly demonstrating an uppercut movement. The sequence shoves the staff towards the chin of an opponent, then turns the staff, spinning it make contact with the ribs.

His voice is only a muffle from this distance. But even still, he seems so nurturing to the Knights. It’s a more mature side to him. My eyes shift to the other Knights, catching up on how each match is progressing. I shift my weight. Lunch should be soon. I’m so goddamned hungry. And bored.

I roll my neck. My fingers move to my right thigh to the outline of the pocket, feeling for the map. Suddenly, the comm-link attached to my ear beeps.

I sigh, bracing myself. Kylo looks over at me, alerted by the device’s noise. I give an expression of reassurance into the darkness of the mask before I step out of the room, into the hallway. I press the button.

“Good morning, Agent 2319.”
I try not make any verbal noise of annoyance at General Hux’s voice.

He goes on, an artificial chipper nature to his tone, “I’m unsure what the day-to-night cycles are like on Korriban, but it’s currently morning in my sleep-schedule.”

I compose myself to say, seemingly unbothered, “In that case, good morning, General.”

“I’m calling to receive the coordinates of your location on Korriban.” He says, bluntly.

Oxygen catches in my throat. I don’t respond at first, replaying what he said to make sure I heard him correctly. I manage, “What use of this information do you have?”

“Oh,” He responds, “I am currently traveling to Bonadan to investigate a certain circumstance with some of our weapons manufacturers. The planet just so happens to be in the path of Korriban, thus I figured I’d do you the favor of picking you up. We need to negotiate the terms of our deal anyways.”

I focus downwards at the floor, trying to figure out how to respond. I can’t tell him no. There’s only one option I have. The fact that he’s doing this is unsettling. He doesn’t need to bring me along. There must be some reason why he wants me to accompany him. And I’ve often found that what Hux wants is usually dangerous for those who get in his way. At that moment, Kylo walks through the door to the hallway, stopping in his tracks when he sees me. My hand that rests against the comm-link freezes. I stare at him, and he stares back. There’s silence for a moment. I say calmly, “Very well. Contact R8 and he will send the coordinates your way.”

“I will be arriving soon, Agent. I look forward to seeing you.”

The connection breaks. It’s almost as if that last sentence was a mocking statement. It didn’t sound like it. But it felt like it. I wonder if he did that on purpose. Just to further my second guessing on his intentions. There’s no evidence he was speaking to me in a demeaning way. But my anxiety tells me he was. My stomach twists. I lower my hand back to my side.

“Coordinates?” Kylo says, carefully.

I swallow. “To my location.”

Kylo’s so still, processing. I almost believe he’s turned completely stationary until he says, “Was that Hux?”

I nod.

I notice his fingers twitch at his side. “Why does he keep contacting you?”

I lie, so effortlessly. So effortlessly, it makes me feel even more guilty. “He needs my assistance on a weapons manufacturing issue on Bonadan. He’s going to pick me up, so I can accompany him.”

“When?” The word is still so calm, so steady. Just like his others. He talks like this when he’s trying to analyze a situation, when he’s trying to gather himself, so he can figure what emotions to release.

I try to match his calm nature, but I know he senses all the stress I’m projecting. It’s impossible to mask at this point. “He’s on his way now.”

This is what break’s his demeanor. He clenches and unclenches his fists, walking towards me. He says, as if I am one of his students and he’s scolding my techniques, “And you’re going? After he tried to kill you.”
I can’t help but scoff at the statement. “There was a time when you left me on a moon to die, so—”

“That was one time!” His voice raises, modulator only emphasizing it. “Whatever it is that Hux is doing, he has an ulterior motive. And that motive will end up getting you hurt or killed or—”

“I won’t be.” I say simply, sure of myself for his sake. “I’ll be fine. I can take care of the situation. And I truly believe that Hux needs me for this mission, so he can’t risk hurting me.” I step forwards, narrowing the distance between us. I reach down to the leather gloved hand, squeezing it against my own. I look up to the mask, urging him softly, “I’ll be fine.”

His opposite hand moves upwards, bringing his knuckles to gently run against my cheek. I shudder at the sensation. He leans forward, saying as the modulator crackles, “Last time you left…”

I squeeze his hand tighter, “It won’t be like last time. Hux wouldn’t make the same mistake twice.”

The comm-link beeps again, the noise startling me out of the moment.

I pull my hand away from his to reach up to it, pressing the button.

Hux states, “I’m closing in on your location now. I will meet you outside.”

“How did—”

The connection is cut off. He must’ve already been orbiting Korriban when he first contacted me. How else could he have managed to make it here so quickly? I sigh looking back up to Kylo with a sympathetic expression. “He’s here.”

Kylo reaches up to his mask, removing it swiftly. His hair falls around his face in a graceful manner, lips pursed, and he clenches his jaw. I see just how worried he is. I don’t want to make him worry about me. He says, unable to hide the emotion in his authoritative tone, “If anything is even remotely suspicious, you contact me.”

I nod, reaching up to him, hands settling around his neck. “I know. I will.”

His brow lowers. “Promise me.”

“I promise.” As I tilt my head upwards, my eyes flutter shut, and I press my lips into his. It’s softer than a regular kiss. More concentrated. Our lips linger against each other’s, unmoving for few moments.

“If anything happens to you, I’ll never forgive myself. Please,” His voice shakes, lips pressing back into mine for a brief moment before pulling away, “Please be safe.”

I repeat back to him, opening my eyes to say, “I promise.”

Suddenly, I hear footsteps approaching the hallway from the training room. Kylo remains still, as if he doesn’t care the inevitable intrusion. He kisses me again, pressing deeper into me. The footsteps grow closer and I rip myself away from him, giving him a cautionary stare. His eyes are full of so much fear.

The footsteps meet the floor of the hallway and I turn around to see who it is. Kylo stays completely still, staring at me.

“Master, do you—” Solaw stops in his tracks, jaw dropped. He stares at Kylo’s face.

Kylo stares back, his expression now turned into that of flatness.
Solaw looks to me, then back at Kylo, blurting out, “Holy fuck!” His palm flies upwards, covering his eyes, “I’m sorry, Master!” He runs back into the training room.

I grin at the situation, attempting to offer Kylo ease. He still seems so on edge. I grab his hand one last time, squeezing. I whisper, standing on my toes to press a kiss into his cheek, “I promise.”

He keeps his hand in mine for as long as possible as I back away. Eventually, after I’ve taken a few steps back, he lets go. I turn around, immediately wishing I didn't have to leave. I still feel his stare, hypnotized on the sight of me leaving. It's almost as if he's in a trance. I quicken my steps moving down the hallway. For some reason, I think about all the people he's had to watch leave in his life, unsure if they'll come back alive. I want to be able to reassure him more. But I don't think I can.

R8 meets me at the bottom of the staircase. He's carrying a bag, full of my weapons. I take it from him, swinging it over my shoulder. We walk together down the hallway, exiting the temple. As we grow closer to it's entrance, I hear the General's shuttle still running.

Upon walking out the large entrance, I see it. It's not quite as big as Kylo's shuttle. The wings extend less, the color is more grey than black. General Hux stands on the ramp, nearly gawking at me. No. Not at me. At the idea that I'm going to kill Kylo Ren. I approach him. He extends the gloved hand out to me, thin lips stretched into a leering smile.

He says, accent thick and voice full of malicious optimism, "Allow me, Agent."

I resist the urge to look back to the temple. I merely take his hand, allowing him to lead me inside.

Chapter End Notes

hey guys! im so excited for this next chapter, i've honestly been working on it for a really long time. when i got the idea i was like "FUCKCKK i gotta write ahead" just like idk i dont wanna hype it but it was SO much fun to write! eeee! thank you all for reading, for the millionth time, damn i so blessed you all are so kind to me and make me so excited to update! :)

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
Chapter Summary

“I’m aware what tremendous feats human beings are capable of once they abandon dignity.” - Inglourious Basterds, Quentin Tarantino

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

General Hux’s ship is nearly identical to Kylo’s. Several stormtroopers line the hallway, saluting Hux as he travels back to the pilot’s cabin. I follow him, staring blankly at the back of his neck with each step. The men are all so silent, so uniform. It’s easy to forget they are actual men under that armor. As I move through the ship I look for an empty space to stand, joining them.

There’s an open spot closest to the entrance of the pilot’s cabin. I step into the small, but manageable, space. I reach up, grabbing the handle hanging over my head. R8 sets the bag of my weapons in the cabinet above and stands behind me. I look forward, settling into the sight of the back of the stormtrooper’s helmet in front of me. I can see my own face, in a distorted reflection of the glossy white material. I look away.

“Agent,” The General says, causing my attention to be brought to him standing in the doorway of the cockpit. “Join me in pilot’s cabin. You are far too high of a rank to be back here.”

My grip on the handle above tightens, then I slowly release it to bring my arm back to my side. I nod, “Very well, Sir.”

I follow him into the cockpit.

Upon entering, I stare at the co-pilot’s seat. The layout seems so much like Kylo’s. The controls on Kylo’s ship are darker and some of the buttons are out of place, due to modifications Kylo made. There’s something about it being so similar, yet different, that’s off-putting. It’s not different. Just distorted. I scrunch my eyes shut then open them again. I lower myself into the co-pilot’s chair then reach back to secure the safety belt around my chest. The General sits in the chair beside me, movements so poised, so proper. It’s something between a droid and a human.

He says as he clicks the buttons to prepare the ship for takeoff, “I do my best to accommodate those who join my missions. If you need any food or rest, my quarters are open for your use.”

The sentence makes my throat feel as if it’s swelling. “Thank you, Sir.” I respond, focused straight ahead at the Korriban landscape.

Hux looks back, towards R8, “It’s lovely to be in your presence as well, 5D-R8.”

R8 beams, starstruck, “The same to you, General Hux! Both Agent and I are always honored to be associated with you.”

I remain staring forward, silent.

The General sits in silence as well.
I wonder if he knows I hate him. If he does, he’ll know I’m irrational. He did try to kill me. But for the sake of The Order. So, I should be fine with it. If he knows I’m irrational, he might go back to believing I harbor any sort of feelings for Kylo Ren. I shift in the chair. I used to hate Kylo Ren, like he does now. I try to find any particle of that mindset and let myself become possessed by it.

Kylo Ren is a man-child who doesn’t deserve his position.

Without the Force, without his legacy, he’s nothing.

He’ll burn this Order down with his immaturity.

I clench my teeth, trying to force myself to believe the statements. But I am reminded of how he said he trusted me, whispering the words in-between kisses. How he touches me with the care and consideration that was completely absent in the fingertips of all the men who have touched me before. How for the first time, I feel like there’s something actually worth fighting for. He’s a skilled fighter, calculated, intelligent. And if that makes him even more dangerous, I don’t give a shit if Kylo Ren burns The Order down.

As long as I am the one to be at his side as it’s burning.

As if I’m afraid of the General hearing my thoughts, I fill the silence with a question, “Am I too tardy to receive a debriefing?”

The General pilots his ship so much differently than Kylo does. He moves slowly, calmly. There’s no passion in his movements. A lot how I pilot my ships. So uniform, so procedural. He answers, veering up, pulling us from Korriban’s atmosphere, “This trip is nothing more than the routine checkups on some of our weapon manufacturers. I wanted to speak to the Lau residence. They are responsible for managing a large sector of Bonadan’s factories.”

The sky blurs around me, transitioning into that of stars, then stars flying past me. The General’s transition into hyperspace was so smooth, I didn’t even feel it.

Routine checkups.

He needed me to accompany him for routine checkups.

I suddenly feel the presence of the ten stormtroopers just in the room behind me. General Hux’s presence is multiplied as well. One of the highest-ranking members of The Order is a foot away from me. He was first in his class. Just like I was in mine. It would be an equal match. I don’t like equal matches. I’ve spent my life making sure no one could be an equal match for me.

I feel just as trapped, just as imprisoned as when I was pretending to be Iris Nisedge, strapped to an interrogation table. I remember how quick he was to watch me die. Despite my identity. My eyes glance downwards to the gun in his belt.

I smooth any stray hairs back into my scalp. These anxieties are silly. He needs me. He needs me to kill Kylo, he wants to keep me alive.

Yet I can’t help but wonder if he won’t hurt me, what use does he have for me in this mission?

The General looks over, nodding with an artificial reassurance, “Just follow my lead, Agent.”
I do.

Upon landing, I can’t help but notice how much pollution is in this planet’s atmosphere. I’ve never been before, just due to never having a background in factory work with The Order. The planet itself looks like a yellow-sphere, red-rust strips running around it’s shape. It’s now completely barren, completely void of any plant life. There’s most likely no animal inhabitants. I don’t think the planet could physically support anything that doesn’t depend on the food and water supply The First Order provides, now that the pollution has stripped all resources from the land. If I remember correctly from history lessons, Bonadanians live off-world, reimbursed by The Order for their property. But that’s something I’ve always been choosing to believe, rather than trusting whole-heartedly. The Order has never been one to ask politely.

The ship lands and the stormtroopers file out. I walk beside The General, following them all. I find myself feeling for the pistols at my side. It’s always been a habit before facing anything potentially dangerous. But I find that anything out there is far less a threat than the man standing beside me.

As we walk out, I immediately cough when inhaling the world’s air. It smells unclean. It feels thick in my lungs.

General Hux chuckles lightly at my reaction, saying with a synthetic playfulness, “The air quality here is despicable. I formally apologize.”

I clear my throat, trying to get used to the thick feeling of the oxygen. My head feels light with the mixture of my anxieties and the effort it takes to breath steady. As my feet contact the dry ground, I take note of how the dirt feels more like stone.

“Surround the perimeter.” General Hux orders at the troopers. He adds on, specifically for me to hear, “For precautions.”

Ahead of us, is a small rusty-metal building. The structure almost resembles a box more than a facility. Is this even a facility? It’s far too tiny to be a factory chain. I look around, noticing the much larger buildings that surround us. Smoke pillows out of the tall chimneys, merging with the dark, grimy sky above us, blocking out whatever light would usually shine through from the neighboring suns.

Hux approaches the doorway, a piece of metal a slightly more copper-tone than the rest of the building. He stands square in front of the door, forms his hand into a fist, and knocks with a gentle, quick flick of his wrist. The pattern sounded too upbeat for a man like him. As if he a friendly man knocking on the door of a good friend. Neither of those things apply here.

I fold my hands behind my back, standing up straighter. I glance back over my shoulder to see the Stormtroopers guarding the doors of the shuttle. They look relaxed, but still hold their guns with a certain stiffness.

Hux knocks again.

The door opens, nearly immediately, but I have no visual on the person who answered the door with Hux’s frame in the way. When I peek around him my attention goes downwards, to a small child, in a pink nightgown. Her hair is dark, pulled back into two symmetrical buns atop her head, opening her face up, displaying her large brown eyes. Her skin glows warmly, so bright, so alive compared to the atmosphere of this planet. She blinks up at General Hux. I feel a lump in my throat form. It’s rare that I see or run into children. Especially children that aren’t in the stormtrooper program. Children don’t exist in the realm where most of my missions take place. So the few times I do interact with them, I feel somewhat uncomfortable, unsure how to act. Maybe because I can’t relate to them. Or
their frail, innocent nature is off-putting to me. Or because I know if I’m around a child, that child is around a much bigger problem, now added into the equation of my work.

The General crouches down, meeting her eye level, “Hello,” He says, politely, his voice a higher pitch than usual. “Is your father home, darling?”

The girl turns to the side, yelling, “Papa!” She runs, her steps light, somewhat clumsy, out of view. I take the moment to look inside of the home. It’s completely different than I would’ve expected the interior to be, of such a rackety looking building. The hues are all so warm, tan walls, brown wooden floors. The furniture is all a different shade of sepia, everything looking somewhat orange from the candle-lit lamp. The home is comfortable. It’s almost like the perfect home for a family, excluding the conditions on the outside. Just like the sets in the holomovies I’ve seen. I like it. I like the idea that despite whatever their conditions are, they’ve managed to make their own space habitable. Hux stands to his feet, brushing out his long black coat, readjusting it on his shoulders.

A tall man steps into frame. He’s in loungewear, baggy cloth pants and a button-down tunic. Googles hang from his neck. His dark skin seems young, fresh, but not complete unworn. He’s maybe in his early thirties. I notice his throat contract when his eyes fall onto Hux, then to me standing behind him.

Hux says, getting the first word in, “I apologize for coming unannounced at such an inconvenient time. My schedule has been horribly unforgiving as of late.”

The man smiles with charisma, “No, no, General. You’re always welcome.” He steps to the side, opening his arm outward. “Please do come in.”

Hux walks in slowly, walking heel to toe, rolling with each step. Methodically. I follow behind him. When I enter, I notice the floorboards creaking under my step, whining at the pressure of my foot. To my right is the doorway to the kitchen. A woman, hair tied up with a red cloth, sits at the round table, looking up at Hux. Her eyes are the same as the little girls; bright, wide, innocent. Her cheekbones are pronounced, lips are full. Her hair is thick, long, parted down the middle and curling outwards. On her lap is an even younger girl, wearing an identical pink nightgown as her sister. A boy, probably in his early teens sits at the table as well, food place on his fork, but suspending in front of him. He doesn’t move.

The man says to Hux, “We were just having dinner. We made plenty, if you would like to join.”

The General paces to the table, examining the food from over the woman’s shoulder. Hux can’t see it, but I see her letting out a smooth exhale, through her nose, her eyelids lowering with the action. The General makes a complete rotation around the table before stopping at the seat across from the woman, next to the teenage boy. Hux smiles up to the father, “The casserole looks exquisite.” Hux nods, “I’ll have a portion of that.”

The wife lowers the child from her lap on the ground. The child walks with a wobbling action, as if it’s just now getting used to the nature of the movements. The child wobbles over to her sister’s side and grabs onto her hand, as if to balance herself. The wife hurriedly goes to the cupboard and pulls out a plate. I notice the plate is nicer than the other dishes. There is golden embroidery along the edges, it’s shine is more glossed than that of the simple wooden plates the family has been eating from. She then moves to the stove a scoop out a portion of the food as the man motions to an empty seat, next to the teenage son, for the General.

General Hux ignores this and sits where the man once sat. He slides the man’s plate out of his way to make room for his own. The man opts to sit in the chair he offered for the General, averting his eyes away.
The wife looks to me, asking, “Would you like anything as well?”

I politely say, trying to ease her tensions, “No thank you, mam.” I make eye contact with the teenage boy across from me. When our eyes meet, he immediately looks back down to his food. His fork is still suspended in the air, still.

General Hux leans over from the chair to the sinks edge, where a clean white rag hangs. The General tucks it unto his collar and grabs a hold of his fork. He points the fork at me, “This is my colleague by the way. Very great at what she does.” He digs the fork into the food and takes a bite, giving out a pleased moan at the taste. He swallows, then looks to teenage boy, “She worked with the FN corps when she was younger, before she was promoted to her current position. Truly, an impressive division.” He takes another bite. “If you have any questions about how our stormtrooper program works, she has answers. We’re always looking for new recruits.” He gives the boy a brief wink.

The boy says, evenly, concentrated, “Yessir.”

Hux continues eating, moaning with a bite, staring at the woman across from the table as he does. I shift my weight. He says, pleased, “I’m assuming you made this?”

She nods, “Correct, sir.”

He takes another bite. A smile of amusement. “It’s delightful.”

“Thank you, sir.” She shudders after saying the sentence, as if her muscles are forcing her to relax. But her tension returns.

“Agent,” The General, looks up at me. “You must try it.”

I stare at the woman, who stares back at me, wondering what my response will be. For a moment, I think about saying no. I’m not hungry at all. But something about the situation implies that I can’t. I say, complying to his request, “I suppose I’ll have a portion.” I turn to the woman, reassuring, “If it does not impose on you.”

She shakes her head, standing from her chair once again. “It is no trouble, m’lady.” She walks to the cabinet, grabbing a plate similar to the one she gave Hux. I walk around the table, meeting her at the stove top, reviving her from walking to me. She’s trembling. Her unstable, frail hands reach for the spoon in the pot, shakily scooping out another portion of the food.

The General says with an eerie smoothness, interrupting her, “Your wife is truly a sight, Mr. Lau. I am quite envious.”

At that moment, the food falls from the spoon, onto the plate supported by her quivering palm. The food unevenly goes onto the right side of the plate, toppling the plate to the side, crashing to the floor. The plate shatters, food intertwined with the broken pieces of glassware.

I bend down immediately, along with her to clean it up, clenching my teeth. What the hell is he doing? I push back the urge to give Hux a look of judgement, of ridicule. One that I’d feel comfortable enough giving to Kylo, but too paralyzed to offer to the General. My eyes shift to the husband. He seems so calm, so composed.

“Thank you, General.” He says, calmly.

But from under the table, I can see his hands clenching against the arms of the chair.

The woman stammers, words stuttering at first, then flowing out all at once, “I-I’m, I apologize,
General, we’re very happy to have you come to our home, it’s an honor to have such high-ranking members of The Order see us, please excuse my nerves, I truly.”

“Ah,” The General waves her off. I begin picking up the small pieces of glass, placing them into my hands. He says, voice booming with confidence, “The flattery. You are too kind. Please, do not think The Order minds your apprehensiveness. I understand.” He leans back. I look over at his feet from under the table. His legs extend and feet cross. The black boots are shined to perfection. “Most people respond to The Order’s presence with fear. But with that fear comes a great amount of respect. I’m delighted to see that you possess such sensations in my company.”

A sharp pain shoots through my finger. I wasn’t even paying attention to the placement of my hands, picking up the shards of glass. One of the shattered edges sliced horizontally across the side of my ring finger, on my left hand.

Immediately, the wife puts the broken pieces of the plate to the side. She reaches out to me, “Oh my, I apologize, let me help you.”

I bring the cut up to my lips and suck the blood, an attempt to lessen the bleeding. I pull it away from my mouth, then press against it with my thumb. “It’s fine, I insist.”

Hux interjects, looking down at me with a pout, “2319. Denying help when offered is rude of you.”

There’s a silence that enters the room with the sentence. Maybe the confusion surrounding my name. Many call me Agent, or Agent 2319. But only one person has ever called me just by the numbers, aside from Hux, just now. There’s something about it that’s demeaning. He’s mocking me. I look up to him, analyzing his stare down at me. On my knees the wooden floor, below him, there’s a humiliation that I can’t shake. It’s not my nature to be so subject to such feelings, but he manages to do strip away any mental strength I have to make me feel like nothing more than a pure disgrace in this moment.

His eyebrows are slightly raised, face pretending to care about my pain. He nods towards the woman, his ordering nature seeping through his words, “Please, do clean her up. We require ranks of her kind to remain in the best of condition.”

For her sake, I follow her hurried steps out of the kitchen.

As we walk through the living room, I look down at the two little girls who have found their place sitting on the living room floor. They have dolls made from vegetable husks, grasping their small fingers around it. I tilt my head at the sight. They giggle, mimicking song lyrics, motioning the dolls to dance around. It’s so simple, yet they receive so much enjoyment out of it. I didn’t notice how much I slowed down until I look upwards, already seeing the woman standing in the doorway of the washroom. She notices my observation, swallowing hard. I look down, joining her, clutching my bleeding finger.

She stands over the sink, letting the water run. I put my hand under it, washing the blood away. She’s still trembling as she reaches into the cabinet mirror, grabbing a bandage. Now, in such a close space, I study the rings on her fingers. A wedding band, presumably on one. Then, something else. I’ve seen the jewelry item before. It’s golden, with a circular, plain plate, outlined with different separations of lines. I try to recall where I’ve seen it.

She grabs my hand, patting it dry with a rag. I hear the giggling of the girls in the other room. I stare at the ring.

“Why is he here?” She whispers. “We didn’t do anything wrong, please, understand my concern,
we-"

Able to empathize with her apprehensive nature, I quietly shush her. I find myself mimicking the shushing noises that Kylo has used to calm me down. “Routine check-ups. He just would like to oversee your work.” Her bottom lip trembles. It’s dry, chapped. I look up into her brown, pleading eyes. She closes them, exhaling slowly. Her hand stills on mine. I reach out to place my other hand atop of hers. An offering of more comfort. As I rub my thumb against the back of her hand, it encounters the golden ring. I reassure quietly, “We’ll be gone shortly.”

She nods, swallowing hard, blinking her eyes open. She collects herself, her emotions settling.

I try to continue running my thumb against her hand, further comforting her, but I notice something when moving against the ring once more. Suddenly, my memory reminds me of where I’ve seen it before. When I’ve seen it. My stomach sinks.

I feel for a switch against the gold’s edge.

I find it, she freezes.

Slowly, I slide the small switch to the left, hearing the faintest click. I watch a tear stream down her face, eyes full of a new, paralyzed brand of fear.

When I look downward, I see it. A red Alliance Crest.

I’ve seen the jewelry before, when I was undercover. The piece was often used in the Galactic Civil War, but it’s not nearly common enough to be known by The First Order. It’s used to show alliance with the Rebels, often when in positions that deem you untrustworthy. Like working undercover for a weapons manufacturer. The presence of my gun burns against my thigh. Like a code in my mind, I think of the questions such as if to kill her now, if to bring it up to Hux first, or if to just knock her out until I can alert Hux through the comm-link. I can’t stop myself from assessing the situation with only violent intentions.

The sounds of the girls singing in the background intensify, their laughter, their comfort in life. It’s as if youth itself is enough to bring them happiness.

I stare at the woman vacantly, tears now rapidly running down her face. “Please...” She says, inhaling sharply, holding back sobs, “Please, just please. We’ll end all connections with them, I swear it. I swear.” Her hands clutch onto me tighter. “I promise.”

I’m completely rigid.

My finger spasms at my side, begging for me to give into the urge to turn on the comm-link to the General.

“The Republic is important to me,” She begs, quivering words, “But there are things more important. I’ll give it all up for those. I will. I’ll do whatever it takes to keep my husband, my children, safe, I promise, you have to believe me.”

I have the same hesitation I had before killing Eerson Ren, the knowledge of consequences. Of people she loves suffering. Of me single-handedly deciding to ruin their life, just to fight for a cause I don’t even know if I believe in. There’s always been consequences for people because of my actions. This isn’t any different. I’ve ruined too many lives, taken too many lives, to ever make up for it. What does it matter if it’s one more?

The feeling of the map intensifies in my pocket. It reminds me that this could be one of the last times
I ever need to kill for them. It also reminds me how much I care about Kylo Ren, about securing a future with him. One that this woman and her husband were trying to live.

I don’t want to take that away from her.

I don’t want anyone to take that away from me.

I clutch onto her hands tighter. She squeezes her eyes shut in fear, holding back a sob. This is different than when I killed Eerson. Snoke didn’t order me to kill this woman. No one did. That doesn’t mean it’s not my duty to. But it means there’s a chance I could hide it.

Just like I’ve been hiding everything else.

I rip the ring off her finger. She inhales sharply, startled by my sudden movement. I shove it into my pocket, the item now resting next to the map. “Is there anything else like that around here?”

She stubbornly doesn’t answer.

I grit my teeth, sizing the woman up. She backs up, further into the bathroom, horror-stricken at my advance. I only step forward again. “If he searches the house will he find anything suspicious?”

She shakes her head, the movement rapid and frantic.

I whisper harshly, “When we leave, shake my hand. I’ll give the ring back to you then.”

She’s confused now. Blinking away tears.

I point at her, eyebrows lowered, trying to scare her into following every word I say, “We’re going to walk back in there, and you’ll act exactly like you were a moment ago. Not more confident, not more paranoid.” My voice lowers, seriousness becoming even more apparent, “Exactly how you were.”

She nods, bringing the back of her hand up to wipe under her eyes.

“If you speak of me doing this to anyone, I will not hesitate to kill you.” The threat comes from the back of my throat, quiet yet low.

She whispers back, glancing to the pocket the ring is now in. “Are you with them- the Alliance?”

I scoff, unable to not be offended by the accusation, “No,” “Then where are you,” She sniffs. “In this?”

“I don’t answer that at first. The question prompts me to ask myself that, instead of conjuring up an answer to satisfy the situation. Where am I in this? I mumble, “I don’t know.” I reach up to her face, wiping away any evidence of the tears. Her skin is smooth under my fingers, delicate. I shiver at the sensation, of how her cheek is like silk. As I look into the heavy emotion of her eyes, I wonder how many other eyes I looked into with even the slightest consideration of what my other options were, outside of what to do to serve The Order. I see Eerson Ren, the tons of people I slaughtered on Hoth, the hundreds of people I must’ve killed or helped kill before all this. Most are faceless. I don’t remember. I don’t deserve to remember. The question changes from where I’m at in this, to who I am. What kind of person am I to so easily have blocked out compassion. I don’t know what’s right or wrong. But I do know the disgust for myself manifesting within me.

She sees my expression fluctuate. Another tear falls down her face.
Before she can respond, I straighten my jaw. I say to myself, more so than I say to her, “Get your shit together. It’ll be fine.”

“Promise me.” She squeezes my hand one last time.

For a moment, I see Kylo Ren in her eyes.

I steadily respond, low, hardened, “I promise.”

She nods, taking a deep breath.

I grab the bandage she pulled out from the cabinet over the sink, ripping off the packaging, then slapping the adhesive cloth around my finger. I blow a stray piece of hair out of my face, then look in the mirror before turning to exit. I push the hair into the rest of my bun, relaxing my face. I exit, the woman following behind me. I hope to the stars that this woman is capable of doing this. I hope that whatever importance her family does hold over her life is enough to keep her determined to do exactly as I instructed.

We walk through the living room. Past the two girls on the floor. General Hux’s voice comes into earshot. As I walk into the kitchen, the muffled sounds become intelligible.

“How about the numbers for the metal needed for the ports?” Hux is sitting with his plate pushed to the side, typing the pads of his fingers into a holopad in front of him.

The woman hurriedly sits, returning to her seat, an empty seat now separating each person at the table. I notice the teenage boy has exited the room. Hux probably dismissed him, sparing the boy of data talk.

The man says with a professional tone, “We are right on schedule with the requests Officer Nolrey forwarded two months ago.” The man leans forward, indicating some of the previous tension that once surrounded the table is gone. He points downward, towards Hux’s holopad. “The specific numbers are listed under the ‘materials’ tab. We should be around fifty tons of material per hour.”

Hux says, pleased with the information as he double checks it on the screen, “Very well. And for the construction aspect?”

“The ports are nearly complete. We are expecting them to be ready to ship in a month’s time.”

I glance at the woman, watching her holding her hands at her lap, trying to steady their shaking. My attention turns to the General’s holopad, showcasing the blueprints of rocket-like structures. He zooms in on the image, examining different aspects with a careful eye. He zooms back out.

The General smiles, only a sinister sight because of my knowledge of the man. “Everything is looking lovely. At this rate, the infrastructure will be fully operational in no time.”

The man nods, calculating. He asks, “May I ask what these ports will be used for, General?”

The General freezes.

I do too.

So does the woman.

The man remains relaxed, sitting back in his chair. He takes another bite of his food. “We’ve been working on them for quite some time. I would love to know how they’re contributing to The Order.”
Everyone’s staring at Hux now.

Hux shifts in his seat, his face relaxing at the inquiry, “I suppose that’s fair. This is your life’s work.”

“Indeed,” The man takes a swig of water.

General Hux explains, “Starkiller Base. We’re planning on moving it. We need the ports to give it mobility.”

“Starkiller Base,” The man nods. I can see him questioning whether or not to push it further. He doesn’t make it obvious though. I’m unsure if I would be able to tell if I didn’t know what information I just discovered. But mostly, I’m unsure if Hux can tell.

Hux continues on, casually talking with an eased motion of his hand following his inflections, “Forgive me, it’s hard to imagine that there are people unaware of the base’s construction. It’s currently a main priority of The First Order, considering how influential the base will be in securing our power over the galaxy. We have people like you to thank for it, so it’s only fair that I do inform you on its use. We started construction within an ice planet located in the Unknown Regions. It runs solely on Kyber Crystals and Dark Energy. Amazing scientists assisted in that aspect. We’re preparing to move it to a location with a better scope on the Republic.”

This takes me slightly off-guard. I know about the base’s construction. I’ve even been located there several times. But I did not know the base would be moving. Let alone, moving closer to the Republic. That approach seems somewhat silly. Why would we be moving our headquarters closer to the enemy?

As if he anticipated my question, the General goes on to explain, “If I’ve learned anything in this war, I’ve learned the importance of taking the offensive line. Everyone speaks of how vital it is to maintain a balance between defending your army and attacking the other side, but I do not see it as a fifty-fifty situation. Not when you’re as powerful as The Order.” He pauses, tilting his head in thought. Then, “Are you familiar with the game of Dejarik?”

The man nods, “I have played it.”

Hux goes on, “So you understand that the game has much to do with statistics. Each monster has a certain strength, so you must position them to properly attack the opposing monster’s weakness. It’s a game of strategy.”

“Indeed.”

“Well, imagine if we were playing the game and all of your monsters were decent. They could manage in a fight but were not particularly well-trained. Your players weren’t completely incompetent but did not possess a notable level of intelligence. They had shields, and knew how to use them, but the shields would eventually deteriorate in quality.” The General slightly leans forward, hands moving to rest on his lap. “But my players, they are all overpowered. It’s to the point that it’s unfair. The monsters are all designed to do nothing but destroy. They could kill any of yours with a single strike. You could attempt to retaliate, but even if you do land an attack, it doesn’t affect my players at all. If anything, it only motivates them to kill yours faster.”

Hux tilts his chin upwards, a sly expression overtaking his previous relaxed one. “Why would I even waste my time to carefully place my players around the board, pairing each with yours? If I could just eliminate them all, swiftly, instead of dragging them whole thing out, why would I bother? Why don’t I just get the deed done and over with?”
The man is unsure whether or not to answer. He swallows hard, his wife beside him as still as a human could possibly be.

Hux continues, pressing into the tension even further, “Now, imagine if I have a weapon, a weapon that could single-handedly destroy all of your players with the push of a button, simultaneously. Why would I keep it hidden, merely to act as a defensive counter? Why don’t I just end the game and claim the victory?” He chuckles to himself, reveling in the thought of it all. “That’s what these ports will be used for. Ending the game. Eliminating the enemy once and for all. All that must be done is to move my player into the battlefield.”

Suddenly, I feel as though I’m intruding instead of observing. Is he inferring that the weapon, Starkiller Base, is going be used on Republic planets? Without any negotiations, without any instigation? I don’t really know what I assumed the weapon would be used for. I guess I was naïve enough to think it would be reserved for opposing starcrafts or military bases. Not whole planets, planets with citizens. I don’t know why I assumed that after the Death Stars’ failure, doing something to that extreme would be out of the question.

Hux looks up, towards me. I process the information as subtly as I can as I return his stare. He says, gesturing to the seat across from him, “Why don’t you have a seat and join us, Agent? It’s pointless for you to be on your feet when there’s room for you right there.” I notice that he doesn’t gesture towards either of the seats next to him. It’s the one right in-between the woman and man. He stares at me, patiently waiting. His nods, encouraging me.

Slowly, I walk around to the side of the table the man and woman sit. I pull out the chair from underneath, cautiously settling into the chair. It squeaks as my weight sinks into the wood. I ignore the pulsing feeling of both the map and now the Alliance ring in my pocket. I stare straight ahead at Hux, his frame now completely parallel to mine.

Hux continues, with the same tone used once before, now speaking to all of us, “Going back to the game of Dejarik, I believe I asked you a question. It was not rhetorical. Why would I not use the weapon to just get the game done and over with? If I knew I could destroy the enemy in a split second, why would I draw it out for such a dramatic duration of time?”

I don’t dare to answer, still unsure of his angle, still unsure of what mine should be. I ask myself what he could possibly know and to what extent could he know it. Does he know about the map? About what I truly feel for Kylo Ren?

The man answers, finally, after a deafening three-second silence, “I don’t know.”

Hux leans even more forward. His hands still under the table. He says, a darkness settling in his tone, “Would you like me to tell you?”

The man nods, as well as the woman. Hux’s gaze falls on me, waiting for an answer. I attempt to meet his level of confidence with my posture, but it seems impossible as he’s before me, beaming of a smug conviction of his own self. The pieces of what exactly he’s inferring to begin to blend together in my mind, horrifyingly connecting. I blink, then give a small nod.

He smiles at my participation. He leans back once again, relaxing, as if to ease the tension his pressing presence once created. Now, more eased, more casual, he shrugs, “When I do have the free time, I enjoy the act of playing such trivial games.”

I physically feel my stomach drop. From under the table, I slowly bring my hand to the blaster’s position on my thigh, making the movement seem as disconnected from my upper body as possible.
The General directs the words at the man, expression dropping, voice low, “You’re giving information on our factory productions to the Republic.” He knows. He always knew. That’s the whole reason why he came here to begin with.

The woman brings her hand up to her mouth, stopping any noise from coming out. I don’t dare to look away from Hux’s face. But out of the corner of my eye, I see the man trembling. He blinks, a tear streaming down his face. My hand rests against the gun at my side, palm forming to the shape of the handle.

The man utters, “Yes, sir.”

“You know I cannot allow that, don’t you?” Hux says, almost in a sweet, sing-song voice.

“Yes, sir.” The man repeats, even weaker than before.

The woman next to me shakes violently, concealing the sob with her palm. She looks to me. I can’t help but break my gaze with Hux to look back at her. I keep my expression cold, dead. Her eyes are begging me to do something, anything. She’s begging me to think of her family, of her life. I try my best to not think of those things.

Hux says to the woman, voice now reverting to the relaxed, friendly tone it once possessed, “Do you have wine?”

She glances back at him, confused, terrified. She nods then wipes her eyes.

“Get two glasses for 2319 and I.”

She hurriedly stands, approaching the refrigerator, opening it’s door. She grabs the bottle from the shelf and proceeds to pour the blood red liquid into two glasses on the counter. As the liquid pours into the glasses, the stream is unsteady, wavering. She sets the bottle next to the sink and does her best to serve the glasses without spilling them, due to her trembling hands.

I stare at the glass in front of me.

The woman sits back down.

Hux raises his with his left hand, giving me a charming expression. He says, voice projecting, “Agent,”

I remove my dominate hand from the blaster at my side. I cautiously grab the glass and raise it, steadily mirroring him.

“To eliminating our enemies.” He toasts, proudly.

He takes a drink. I do too.

Suddenly, a blast goes off, then another. The man falls forward, head into his plate of food. The woman falls back, body sprawled against the chair. Both are dead, blaster wounds in between their eyes. I stare at Hux, gun in his right hand, wine in his left. The blaster is pointed at me.

But only for a moment. He lowers the blaster, returning it back to his belt. I do nothing whatsoever. My gaze shifts towards the doorway to see the two small children, staring at the sight of their parents with big eyes, horrified. The younger one lets out a squealing cry. The older remains paralyzed.

Hux brings his hand up to his ear, ordering the troopers, “Advance. Get the three children detained
As the building is raided by stormtroopers, I find myself still unable to move by it all. Unable to assess what exactly is happening. As the silent small child that once opened the door to allow us into her home is pulled away by the troopers, she stares at me in-between the bodies of her mother and father. I slowly reach up to my face, whipping away blood that splattered on my cheek. My fingertips now are stained with dark burgundy.

The General takes another sip of the wine. “Anyways, how have you and Ren been?”

I hate the sound of him saying his name, how he speaks with such malice towards Kylo. I absolutely hate it. I manage with a coarse voice, “That’s a loaded question.”

Hux accepts the answer, continuing, “As for negotiating the terms of our deal, do you mind residing in an apartment on Coruscant? Due to the planet’s population, it will be easy for you to integrate quickly. There’s several opportunities for employment.”

“That’s fine.” I look through the doorway once again to watch the teenage boy being pulled out of the living room. When he looks inside to the sight of the kitchen, he screams. He flails against the stormtroopers, trying to break free. It's useless, as their grip detains him and they are easily able to drag the boy out.

Hux ignores the sound. “Kill him after the Gala. I believe that would be the best option.”

I nod slowly, pretending to agree.

He tilts the glass upwards, allowing the rest to slide down his throat. He takes another bite of food. Then, he stands, crossing over to me. Steps still leisurely, as if he's strolling. He exits my view and I feel his presence behind me. He leans downwards, reaching over my shoulder to the smeared blood on my face. I desperately refrain from shuddering underneath him. “A shame.” He says, voice so calculated and quiet. His gloved touch is so cold, so dead. I don’t know whether the touch will remain a caress or transition into a choke-hold. I remain sitting straight forward, unable to look away from the blood pooling onto the table from the man's head. Hux's hand travels from my cheek, returning down to my shoulder. He massages the area, but I find the feeling of his hand muffled by the presence of the two dead bodies next to me. My eyes flicker to the soulless eyes of the man’s, his head lying at the table. The General squeezes my shoulder, nearly painfully groping it. His grip feels like it's bruising me, breaking my bones. He encourages, “Do you not like the wine? I thought it was decent.”

“It’s fine.” I say, unable to remember what the wine tastes like.

“Finish it. Do not be wasteful.” He threatens more than suggests.

I snatch the glass, swallowing the rest of it in one gulp. I fight back the nausea forming in my stomach, slamming the glass back onto the table.

“How pitiful

He travels towards my neck, fingers stroking the shape. I stiffen. His fingers against the exposed skin are selfish, inconsiderate. After what seems like so long of being with Kylo, I've forgotten what that's felt like. But now, it's all I can remember. He continues dragging his fingers along the contours of my neck, digging them aggressively into my skin, down to the collar of my shirt. I don't react, wondering if he'll push it further. I brace myself. But the leather fingers retreat to move up the length of neck once again, to my chin. He grabs it in his hand, holding my head upwards so that I'm forced to meet his gaze. As he looks down on me, he stills, only staring for a moment. Then, with a disturbing amusement in the situation present in his tone, he says, “How pitiful
of them to think that they could maintain such relations without consequence.”

That’s the last thing he says before he removes his hand from my body and exits the room.

I find myself frozen by the uncertainty of if he was referring to the bodies on either side of me, to Kylo Ren, or to myself.

Chapter End Notes

SO this is super random and on a whole separate tone, but do u all remember when Hux and Agent first met and he thought she was that senator and agent was like “Nooooo u got the wrong woman I am an agent for the first order!” and hux was like “… I don’t care either way, im still gonna kill u soo,” and then kylo saves the day ???

OKAY so I was watching the cinematic MASTERPIECE “Muppets Most Wanted” and there’s a scene where Kermit is arrested by the Russian government or whatever because they thought he was some Constantine asshole and Kermit is like as he being incarcerated, “I’m telling you, you got the wrong frog!” and Tina Fey Russian Prison Warden says, “As far as authorities are concerned, you are Constantine, glue or no glue,” (referring to the glue that is used to glue a mole to his face which makes him look like constantine but that’s irrelevant to my point.) And then kermit’s like "My friends will save me, just you wait and see!" and then his friends save him.

yea if that's not a cinematic parallel idk what is

BUT ANYWAYS sorry for this chapter being way too long!!!!!!! eee! i just felt like if I did split it up, the tension would die immediately and the whole point of this chapter is kinda suspense and tension and me being a hoe for Alfred Hitchcock and wanting to write a chapter inspired by his "Bomb Under Table Method." If you haven't seen him talk about it, i highly recommend watching it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPFsuc_M_3E idk but yea. thank you all so much for reading! sorry there's no kylo in this one. but usually that implies there will be a large amount of kylo content next time around :) i'd love to hear what you all thought about it either way! i hope it could hold up despite no kylo eee

spotify playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The metal doors of the elevator close in front of me, separating me from the battling Rebellion members and Stormtroopers. They didn’t expect us to be coming, but they were prepared.

I sigh, cracking my neck as the elevator moves upward. I spin my blasters against my fingers. Then, left arm bent under right arm, I point my right pistol forwards, aiming down my sights. The elevator steadily slows down, ticking to a halt. I brace myself, unsure of what to expect. Hux sent me here blind, merely ordering to clear out the upper level. Which, I don’t expect any less of him to do. But it’s not reassuring to know he’s not going out of his way to ensure my safety. Nothing he’s been doing has been reassuring. Maybe it’s not that complicated and he merely has faith in my skill. Nevertheless, I can still feel his fingers gripping my chin, his sinister voice saying the sentence I’ve been repeating in my mind over and over and over.

“How pitiful of them to think that they could maintain such relations without consequence.”

Fuck.

I push those thoughts away, knowing now is not the time to give into my paranoia.

My finger runs against the outline of the trigger.

The doors open.

Without thinking, I fire at the figure of the man before me. He jumps out of view, to the side, sending red blaster shots my direction as he leans against the perpendicular wall.

Placing my back against the elevator’s wall to my left, I assess what I can see of the room. It’s a small control base, only two computers set up, a few charts placed around the room. The room rustic and small, not seemingly up to date on technology. I’m assuming whatever is left of their crew downstairs has already been dealt with by the Stormtroopers.

“Alert the headquarters!” The man yells to another, who I’m guessing is also against the wall on that side.

I crouch as low as I can, slowly nearing the corner of the wall. In a fluid movement, I turn my blaster around the angle, firing at an estimate of the men’s location.

Suddenly, there’s a beep in my right eardrum.

I pull my blaster back to my chest before their returning fire can land. Pressing the button on my comm-link, I am nearly sure to hear the General’s officious tone.

Instead, I get a kinder voice. One I haven’t heard in a few days. One I found myself opting to imagine when in my loneliest moments. “Hey,” Kylo says, voice stripped from his mask. “How are you?”

Silence overtakes the area. I listen intently for footsteps.

I hear the faintest evidence of the fabric of clothes shifting, then the roll of a foot to the ground.
Another beep from my comm-link, a reminder to respond. I close my eyes, focusing on the noise of the man creeping forward. My mind gauges in the man’s proximity.

He’s painfully close, close enough to lunge forward to fire at me.

I don’t let him.

I push off the wall, slide my left pistol back into my holster. I run out of the elevator and grab the wrist of the extended man’s arm as he aims at me. Just when he fires, I twist his wrist upwards, forcing the blast to hit the ceiling.

“I’m alright.” I respond to Kylo, dust from the ceiling rains down on me as I use my free hand to fire into the man’s abdomen. He doubles forward from the pain and I grab the fabric covering his shoulder, positioning him in front of me as the other man in the corner fires. The blast lands into the man’s lower back. I fire at his chest with my right hand, still wielding the pistol. I shoot three times, right through the heart. I drop the man opted as a body shield to the ground.

The thud of his body reverberates throughout the room. “How are you?”

He’s too preoccupied with the background noise of my surroundings to answer my question, opting to say with much more urgency than I wish upon him, “Stars, where are you?”

It takes me a moment to even remember, considering these past few days have been me just mindlessly doing whatever Hux tells me to do, going wherever he tells me to go. “Ryloth. Some Rebellion members own a housing unit here, using it as a secret checkpoint.”

“Why? How’d you find them?”

I cross the room to the computers system in the very middle. “There were Alliance members working undercover in factories on Bonadon. We traced the information they were sending out to this location.” I pop the hard drive out of the computer and secure it onto my belt's loop. “Boring stuff,” I attempt to change the topic, “What are you up to?”

“I’m currently on my way back to Starkiller. I considered surprising you, but I couldn’t figure out the logistics of where you’d be on base. I assumed you’d be back before me. Do you know when you’ll be here?”

The idea of him wanting to surprise me makes me visibly blush, despite no one being around to see. Kylo and I haven’t gotten much of a chance to talk since Korriban’s time difference is right in the place of inconvenience of either of us being asleep when the other is awake. And in the circumstances we do speak, it’s not for long. There was just once we spoke for quite some time. The night after visiting Bonodan. I couldn’t sleep anyways. I was laying in the General’s bed, on his shuttle, while he was in the cockpit. Hux insisted I’d sleep there. It reminded me of how Kylo Ren made me sleep on the floor when I was first assigned to him. It reminded me of how much more comfortable the hard ground was than the Hux’s bed. Not only that it belonged to him, but it was a bed a room away from the captured children. I’ve avoided them at all costs. I could hear the youngest one crying for most of the night. I imagined that the middle child was still in shock. The older boy, from the quick glance I got, was enraged. Seething.

As I laid against the cool sheets, too uncomfortable with the idea to get under the covers, I found myself needing Kylo as the distraction. I needed him to tell me about random occurrences in his day. I just needed him to keep talking, filling the silence that would otherwise be filled with guilt, with paranoia.
I didn’t tell him about anything that happened on Bonodan. About what Hux said, about what I did. About what I didn’t do. About what I wish I would’ve done. I don’t know what he’d think about it. I don’t even know what I think about it.

I blink. I find myself absentmindedly staring at the man shot through the heart. I wonder if he was close to the Lau family. I wonder if he had a family himself. He’s a Twi’lek with dark green skin. Probably upper-thirties or lower-forties. I focus my vision on the golden band on his left hand, forth finger, my stomach twisting within me.

“Agent?” Kylo’s voice comes back into my eardrum, nearly startling me out of my trance.

My eyes dart away, looking back to the solid, empty ground away from the body. My mind pulls itself away from such pointless thoughts.

Whatever I don’t like about The Order, I won’t endure it much longer. I know this.

In the time I’ve spent with General Hux, I’ve formulated a plan on how to tie up any loose ends with the General and I. The plan isn’t long term but will at least to buy me enough time to convince Kylo to get out of here and leave with me.

I have no idea what Hux knows or what he doesn’t. I have no idea if I’m just being paranoid because I finally care so much, too much. But Hux would be the type to report me to Supreme Leader Snoke. And Supreme Leader Snoke, if anyone, is the one person that could compromise every single part of my escape with Kylo Ren. So, if I could go to Supreme Leader Snoke first, after the Gala when Hux expects me to kill Kylo and report General Hux for attempted assassination, I could possibly get him demoted. Not only demoted. Maybe even killed for treason.

I’ve never had a particular urge to kill. Every time I do kill, it’s military. Robotic, disassociated, emotionless. But when it comes to General Hux, I can’t deny that every time I see him part of me wonders if I could pull my pistol out fast enough to send a blast into his skull. Right between the eyes. Just like he did with the Lau man and woman.

I cannot deny that the thought of killing him satisfies me.

My plan has some flaws, I’m not ignorant of that. Flaws such as Hux most likely being given the chance retaliate with whatever he may know, whatever evidence of what he knows. Which, I don’t see how he has any. I don’t think they is footage of us anywhere. And if there were, I could use manipulating Kylo as my scapegoat with Snoke. Hux can’t prove that I feel anything for Kylo Ren. Can he?

Additionally, once I tell Kylo about all of this, he’ll be on my side too. He can vouch that I am telling the truth. And Kylo may just be mad enough at Hux, that he’ll kill him himself. It’s just a thought. But it’s possible.

“Agent?” Kylo repeats. “Is our connection deficient?”

I shake my head, forgetting that he cannot see me. “No, sorry. What did you ask me?”

“When are you coming back?” He asks again, not quite sounding irritated, but unable to hide that he’s somewhat frustrated by my lack of response. I don’t think it’s personal. I am not blind to his impatience.

I fiddle at the hard drive I recovered from the data system, hanging from my belt loop. “Hopefully by tonight.”
“Will I see you?” He asks, voice perking up.

As I stare into the ground, I can’t help but smile. “If I can do anything to ensure that possibility, I will.”

I hear him sigh on the other end of the call. The sound brings back memories of laying against him, feeling his chest moving with each breath. “I...” He pauses, attempting to formulate his words into the right order. He mutters the timid words, “I’ve missed you.”

My smile grows even wider at the sound of him saying it, stomach feeling twisted into warm wonderful knots. “The absence of you has been quite terrible.” It’s hard to hide the happiness in my voice, so I don’t. I begin to wonder what our plans will be tonight. What the first thing he’ll say to me will be when he sees me. I just want to skip to that moment, forsaking anything in-between. “I’ll be there soon.”

Suddenly, my eyes unwilfully revert to the body of the Twi’Lek man. The smile that just a moment ago seemed so eternal is quickly erased. My body feels cold all over.

“Thank you.” He says, quietly. I find it odd that he finds the need to thank me for returning his affection.

The connection breaks off, leaving me by myself with the two bodies and the hard drive attached to my waist. I feel for the outline of the map in my pocket. It’s still there.

When we land on Starkiller Base, I make sure that I’m the first one to get out of Hux’s ship. I tell myself that it’s because of my anticipation to see Kylo and has nothing to do with me not wanting to encounter any of the children captured.

My steps are quick and light as I squeeze my way to the front of the stormtroopers. I must force myself to remain still until the ramp is all the way on the ground before I exit. As the ramp lowers, the line of troopers waiting to greet us is revealed. But my attention immediately goes to Kylo Ren standing with military stature at the end of the line. His hands are folded behind his back, shoulders back and head tall. I do my best to not look visibly relieved at the sight of him. Even if he is still in the mask. He’s so tall compared to the troopers, his presence holding so much more weight than anyone I’ve ever been in the company of.

I stare at him, knowing he’s staring back. I ask myself how long it’ll take to get to his dormitory, or mine if it’s closer. My feet already have started down the ramp, quickly moving towards him as if a magnetic pull has overwhelmed my body. With each step, I fight the feeling to move even faster, just to eliminate more time between finally being able to speak with him, to be with him.

“2319,”

My feet come to a halt. I take a deep breath, then turn around.

General Hux stands at the end of his ramp, slowly strolling forward. Despite the background noise of nearby machines preparing ships and units walking about, the only sound I can focus on is his boots tapping against the floor, bringing himself closer to me. I stand up straighter, attempting to predict what he will say, what he will do, but only find myself lost in my annoyance. In how pissed off his aura makes me feel.

I hear a scream from inside the shuttle. The one of the smallest girl. I clench my teeth, keeping my
eyes on Hux, wary not to look over his shoulder at the sight of the troopers pulling them out.

Hux gestures me to walk beside him, continuing onward.

I turn around, my gaze settling back onto Kylo’s unreadable figure, Hux’s hand settling on my lower back to usher me forward. As I tense, I can’t hide the immediate panic that flashes across my expression. I look down at the ground again.

Hux leans over, hissing in my ear, so close his nose brushes into my hair, “So eager to leave. Did you not enjoy our time together?” The heat of his breath against my ear is nearly searing. “I know that I did.”

It takes everything I have to seem unaffected by the riling, demeaning statement. I manage, gathering a certain stability, “It’s always an honor, General.”

Kylo Ren walks swiftly towards us, his steps so much heavier, so much more rushed. I noticed clenched fists at his side. He orders, the modulator’s effect popping much like embers of an enraged fire, “General, you are to report to the bridge, immediately. And Agent,” His head settles, turning to mine. “I believe we previously reviewed what business you must attend to.”

I blink at him, knowing that he didn’t mean to make the sentence sexually charged, but unable to separate how my mind from the implication.

Hux presses his hand further into my back, causing me to stand up even straighter, posture pushed forward. “I have received the orders, Ren.” His hand rubs up my spine a few inches, then back down. I stare downward, unable to look at Kylo. However, out of the corner of my eye, I can see Hux staring at me, ice blue eyes flickering up and down my frame, “I can see why you prefer to have her accompany your missions. She certainly serves The Order well.” He removes his hand from me slowly and I attempt to not visibly relax into the absence of his touch. He now directs his words at me, “Please allow yourself to take pride into all that you’ve accomplished this past week.”

There’s another scream from inside the shuttle.

I contain a shudder.

Kylo doesn’t even flinch from the noise, just opting to order Hux once again, seething, "General, I believe that Agent 2319, given her status and skill, does not need your validation for her accomplishments."

"Well, it's certainly nice to offer it to her. It's the least I could do." Hux ends the conversation, musing at me, “I look forward to any future endeavors by your side, 2319.”

The elevator is quiet. R8 stands to my left side while Kylo Ren stands at my right. The uncomfortable nature of the situation has made the two of us just as rigid as R8 with skeletons of metal. It’s almost unbearable, all the anticipation just to see Kylo without his mask, to hear his voice in real life, to touch him.

I tense my hands and relax them, growing restless with each second the elevator moves upward.

There’s a beep, cutting through the silence as the elevator lands on the floor to where I’m stationed. R8 steps outward, exiting. After taking three strides he pauses to look back to me, unmoving.
“Your dormitory is on this level, Agent.” R8 states coolly.

I nod, “Please settle in. I’ll be there shortly.”

R8 just stares at me. Then to Kylo Ren. I swallow hard, shifting my weight onto my left knee. “Very well.” R8 snips, his frame whipping around to exit down the hall.

I never noticed how slowly these elevator doors close until now.

I stare at R8’s back as the doors slide shut, almost teasing me. I don’t know quite what I’ll do when they close, but I know whatever it is, it’ll have to be suffice for releasing the tension has been building within me for the past week.

With the sound of the metal shutting against itself, Kylo and I turn our heads towards each other.

I sigh, relaxing my shoulders, breathily to confess to the blank mask zeroed in on me, “I-”

Suddenly, another beep emits from the elevator. I roll my eyes, turning my head back forward to watch the elevator doors slide back open once again. The familiar face of Officer Marven appears, relaxed to see me, but immediately scared shitless when noticing Kylo Ren.

I haven’t seen the man since I was on The Finalizer, receiving my first order from Snoke. His aged face still looks as ancient as the last time we spoke, skin sagging and thin grey hair sticking out of his cap. He smiles kindly at me, standing to my left where R8 once stood.

“Agent,” He nods. “Commander.” The later greeting sounded tighter in his throat, barely able to make a full projection of sound.

I attempt to relax him by making conversation, “It certainly has been a long time, Marven. How have you been?”

He says, as friendly as he can manage with his increasing anxiety, “It seems like just yesterday to me, Agent. I’ve been the same since the last time we spoke. Focusing most of my efforts on Starkiller’s progress. Lots of paperwork. Yourself?”

I shrug. “Nothing much has changed for me either, I suppose.”

A beep. The elevator doors swoosh open once again and Kylo strides out, impatiently. I follow behind him, trying to keep up while also looking back towards Marven, “Nice to see you again, Sir.”

“You as well, Agent!” He calls back, the doors closing behind him.

Kylo walks fast, long legs stepping with such urgency as he moves forward. It’s hard to resist breaking into a jog in an effort to keep up. Luckily there’s no people walking around this particular corridor to see Kylo Ren and I impatiently rushing to his room together, alone. I cross my arms across my chest, looking up towards surveillance cameras in the hallway. I slow my steps, letting myself trail behind him.

He comes to the door at the very end of the hall. Without even bothering to touch the keypad, he waves his hand over the entrance, it opens with his command. He doesn’t even enter all the way before reaching up to take off his mask.

I grin at his impatience, feeling better about my own. His hair cascades downwards as he lifts the helmet up, then crosses to the counter to our right to carelessly slam it downward. I stand still, inside the doorway of the dormitory, staring at him. He turns around, advancing toward me. I can’t even
process his face, his movements, anything. I just sense how desperate he is and relate it to how
desperate I feel. He reaches out as he makes his way towards me, not to touch me but to close the
door behind me with the Force. I can’t help but look back at it, a natural reaction to the inexplicable
power he possesses. And the convenience it provides him in such unrelated situations.

As my head turns back towards him, his lips crash into mine, nearly with violence. I stumble
backward, my back pressing against the door from the pressure of him against me. I gasp at the
sensation of vertigo he gives me, reaching up to the fabric covering his chest for stability. I’ve
forgotten the warmth his body provides, how soft his lips really are, how he tastes so fresh. He’s
nearly hunched forward to meet my level as I stretch myself up to his.

It takes us no time to get into each other’s rhythm of movement, no time to immediately begin
exploring the depth of each other’s mouths. His hands go to my hips, pushing me further into the
wall. All his movements now seem so needy, so starved of affection. And all I can think about is
how much I want to give that affection to him. For the briefest moment, I allow the relief of me not
remembering anything that happened before I walked into this room.

I bite down on his bottom lip, feeling it’s thickness in between my teeth as he pulls away with the
faintest moan. The sound transfixes me.

He says roughly, hands sliding up my hips to my waist, then back down to my hips, “This moment is
the only thing I’ve thought about for the past week.”

The sentence causes me to reflect on my own week. I find myself needing to kiss him again when
my mind moves too far into the events. It all comes in flashes; images of bodies, of screaming
children, of a smirking General Hux at it all. We are so close that when I speak, it’s directly
murmuring into his mouth, “Can I stay here tonight?” The loneliness, the emptiness, the guilt. It all
floods over me, intertwining with the emotions Kylo brings of care, passion and purpose. “I don’t
want to be alone again.” I mumble, unable to tell if the tremble in my words are from the lust or the
memories of the sound of the gunshots, the thump of the Lau man’s head falling dead against the

I nod absentmindedly, reaching down to my thighs to hurriedly loosen the blaster holsters. The
feeling of them in my hands makes me remember their placement when Hux was sitting across from
me. How easily it would’ve been for me to kill him. How easily I could’ve prevented the death of
those people. The taste of wine enters back into my mouth. I throw the blasters to the side, tugging
Kylo back into me, wrapping my arms around his neck. I kiss him, pulling us back into the
passionate moment. I sweep my tongue into his mouth, trying to absolutely consume myself with
him. With my back against the wall, I find that it’s easy to push myself upwards. I guide his large
hands down to my thighs, then replace my hands around my shoulders, hoisting myself up and
wrapping my legs around him. He shifts me up against the wall, bringing me to his eyelevel and
relieving himself from having to bend down so far to kiss me.

Pleased by the sensation of our placement, he squeezes the skin of my thighs, pushing his body
further against mine. He moves against me with the kisses I remove my mouth from his and plant
kisses across the landscape of the underside of his jaw and whatever is exposed of his neck. I feel his
hand rub against the pocket with the map.

With the Alliance ring.
I shudder, pausing. Then resume to kissing his mouth.

I notice him still for a moment, removing his hand from my thigh to caress my face during the kiss. His kisses decrease in desperation. I urge him to continue it, quickening mine, but all he does is return the advances with soft brushes of his lips.

He pulls away all together to look into my eyes, thumb running against the bags under my eyes. The brown eyes sparkle, so full of a light that I feel I have been deprived of. He says, a serious, concerned tone, “You’re distressed.” He closes his eyes, concentrating on the sensation. “I feel it.”

I shake my head, pressing my forehead into his, “I don’t want to think about anything else besides us right now.”

The answer doesn’t satisfy him and he pulls away once again. His eyebrows knot as he bites down on his cheek. “What happened?” His voice, so close to mine, so low, is painful to hear. The kindness I don’t deserve, the sensual nature I should never be granted.

I blink at him, trying to put my emotions into a compartment into the back of my mind, with everything else I find myself storing away to deal with later. But whenever I try, I find it bubbling back over. Not just the Lau family. Memories of other families from before, families I was too inhuman to care about before now for some reason. With Kylo’s gloved hand settling against my cheek, I find myself reminded of General Hux’s hand against me. He nearly smeared his fingers into my skin with the movements, him touching me feeling like he was mocking me for having skin to be touched.

I just want to ask Kylo right now, in this moment, if he’d take the map and run away from all of this. It’s the only things I want. But even that, I don’t deserve.

Tears flood my eyes without my permission, emotions that I’ve been hiding from General Hux all week overflowing to be revealed to Kylo Ren.

Concern plasters his face, expression turning somewhere between soft and panicked. “Please…” He says softly, a slight tremble in his alarmed tone. “Talk to me.”

I feel my bottom lip quiver. I turn my head, unable to figure how to control the emotions. I’ve never cried in front of anyone before, not like this. The only other instances were on Hoth and in situations I’ve had to make myself cry to manipulate sympathy. Being unable to hold it back is horrifying. I take a deep breath, attempting to collect myself. But it doesn’t help, my body begging for me to release a sob. I quickly unravel my legs from Kylo’s frame, pushing myself off of him, still avoiding his gaze, knowing that the sight of him would be the thing to break me.

The sounds of the children’s scream, their crying, it haunts me. It lingers in my mind, eating away at me. I could’ve done something. I could’ve prevented their pain.

Am I setting Kylo Ren up for pain through my selfishness as well? What if my plan doesn’t work?

I stumble to kitchen counter, doubling over the structure for assistance in supporting my weight. Pressing my palms against my eye sockets, I feel the moisture it creates. My whole body feels unsteady, juddering with the self-hatred, the regret. I curse myself mentally for being this deplorable. At least before when I killed people, when I ruined lives, I wouldn’t drown in self-pity afterwards. Now, feeling like this, it’s almost even more pathetic.

There’s a lingering anger in myself I recognize and tap into, wondering if focusing on that would help ease the sadness. I sniff, swallow hard, then mutter out the childish question, “How can you
stand it here?"

I hear his footsteps approaching. He keeps his distance though, not invading on the clear boundary I set. He says, steadily, “You should sit down.”

“No,” I wipe my eyes and shove myself off the counter to face him. “Can you stand it here? Do you like it?” My hands tremble at my sides.

His eyes remain fixated on mine. “With you?”

“With The Order.”

He hesitates. He gazes down his hands, picking at the leather of his gloved fingers. “It doesn’t matter if I like it.”

“It does.”

Unable to meet my presence, he says into the floor. “I like parts of it. The parts I don’t like will pay off within due time. Once peace has been restored. Once my purpose has been fulfilled. I remind myself of that.”

I whimper, attempting to bring myself back down to a manageable state, “How do you know what your purpose is?”

He opens his mouth to respond, then closes it upon hesitation. He makes a decision mentally, then reaches out his hand to me, open palm for me to take. “Can I show you something?” He seems almost scared of his own offer.

I glace down towards the gloved hand reaching out to me. I take it, intertwining my fingers with the leather digits as he leads me towards the other side of his quarters, past the bedroom and to a door in the far-right corner. I hold onto his arm as he uses the keypad next to the door to open it, using his calm nature to steady me.

The door opens. He leads me inside.

The room is mostly empty, somewhat small. Dark. The only object within the room is a pedestal with a familiar object sitting on top of it. One that I’ve seen nearly months ago, on his command shuttle. I remember the energy the object emits even more so than I remember the actual object itself.

It’s so dark, so cold. It’s what I imagine death to feel like, fear and hatred. It’s almost as if walking in the room with whatever it is has transported me to a whole different dimension. The energy buzzes from the walls, vibrating against my skull. Kylo leads me around the pedestal to the front of the object. As I stare at it, I hold onto him tighter.

The mask is burnt, charred. The way the black material is curled in on itself reminds me of the disfigured nature of Snoke’s face. It’s twisted, terrifying in a sense that something so broken can still hold so much power. The right eye socket is stretched from the left, the bill of the mask barely having the same resemblance as what it must’ve looked like before. The grates that guard the mouth are curled inward, like long black teeth.

I stare at it, whatever sadness I once harbored now replaced with fear, with confusion.

“It was my grandfather’s.” Kylo says simply, not nearly as effected by the energy. It’s almost as if he takes pride in it.
“Darth Vader.” I say quietly, staring into the darkness of the empty eyes. Now, it makes sense. All the pain, all the power it projects from it’s presence.

Kylo says, explaining, “He fought for so long to bring justice, to bring order to the galaxy. But he was cut short by his own son. Luke Skywalker.” I’ve never heard Kylo use so much malice in his tone. Saying Luke’s name isn’t only hard for him, but it hurts him. “I won’t let Luke ruin everything he’s accomplished. I won’t allow it.”

I say, hushed, still transfixed on the sight of the mask, “How do you know that’s what you’re supposed to do?”

“Visions, prophecies…” Kylo focuses on the memories, replaying them in his mind. “The Supreme Leader has shown me such things, proving that as heir of Vader, I’m to complete what Vader set out to accomplish.”

Hearing him say that connects all the dots in my mind. It answers not only questions I’ve had about Kylo, but also questions I’ve had about Snoke. I know how to manipulate people. So it’s easy for me to see when others are being manipulated. I’m almost hyper aware of it. I turn to Kylo, squeezing his hand, hesitantly asking, “And you trust him?”

“I-” He begins, but stops himself, collecting his thoughts. “I have to.”

I don’t respond.

“And that’s why you’re here too.” He turns towards me, reaching up to caress my face once again. I glance down at the mask again before looking back into Kylo’s eyes. They aren’t full of the brightness I remember from a moment ago. They’re almost fighting to be as dark as the hallows in Vader’s mask. Kylo continues, “I believe that destiny has brought us together. That you and I can work together to bring peace, structure, happiness to the galaxy.”

Now, Snoke is telling him that I’m part of this. That I’m part of his destiny. I remember General Leia telling me of Darth Vader’s lover, dying at the hands of Vader himself. Is that what my place is, in Snoke’s plan? Is that what he thinks my destiny will be? Nothing but a tool to further the legacy of Darth Vader? Or is he just telling Kylo that I’m part of this “destiny” to distract him from my true purpose of being here, to control him, to provide information to Snoke. The fear growing within me forces out the words, “All I’ve done my whole life is take those things away from others.” With a blink, more tears fall, sliding down to his hand.

I wonder if he’ll ever want to escape this with me. If he’ll ever see that Snoke is using him as nothing but a weapon in his military. If this isn’t his purpose, to live in the shadow of Vader, what is? Do I even believe that he has a defined cause in life? I am unsure what my feelings on the existence of destiny are, but if his “destiny” comprises his chance to be happy, I don’t think he should succumb to it. I don’t think he deserves that. No one deserves to be a slave to some unknown greater plan.

He shakes his head, “Don’t say that. You’re wrong.”

I shudder, pulling away from him. The darkness the room supplies amplifies, it’s intense presence growing in my mind. All the pain floods back at once, the images, the sounds, everything. It’s so loud. I don’t know how he can stand to even be in this room. I yell, desperately, “I need to say it! You should’ve seen those children, Kylo!” I step back away from him, covering my mouth with my hand, trembling. “I sat there, completely still, as they watched their parents die! I watched as they were pulled into a shuttle to have their lives taken away! I killed one of your Knights, I mascaraed the people of Hoth, I’ve killed, and I keep killing for a cause I don’t even believe in and I, I-” My back meets the wall of the room. More tears. My body quivers as I utter out the words, “I’m a
monsters.

Kylo bends down to me, looking me in the eyes with tears of his own. The sight of him so emotional takes me off guard. I see myself in the reflection. He nods, not arguing with me, but saying, “I know.”

I stare at him, dumbfounded.

His voice fractures at the words, “So am I.”

It all makes sense now. Why he cares for me, why I care for him. Not just because the two of us both have been created to be these these weapons of war. Not just because both of our minds stripped from whatever we truly are to fit into the mold of what Supreme Leader Snoke's army needs us to be. But because despite all these things, we are still able to change. We can get out.

And I will get us out of here if it’s the last thing I do.

He holds his hand outward again, offering as if we didn't just agree that we're awful, horrible people. A single tear slides across his cheek. "Would you like to lay down with me?"

I nod, taking his hand. I would.

Chapter End Notes

SO it took me a little longer to update and that sucks but on the flip side: SPRING BREAK IS UPON ME IM GONNA WRITE A SHITTON!
Also within the last two weeks I outlined the rest of this fic. Sooooooooooo that's kinda a big deal for me. It's not almost over but... boy. We are inching our way there. Shit is gonna hit the fan HARD.
All that being said, I have a fair amount of deleted scenes and scenes told from Kylo's POV kinda laying in my docs. I was wondering if you guys would be interested in me publishing that and where/when that should take place? There's a few different options; I could just publish bonus chapters every now and then once this fic completes, to give u more content that wouldn't otherwise be there OR I could create a whole separate fanfic just called "Officious Extras" or something and start posting earlier OR I could just not publish them if u guys are like "eee rather just stick to the main storyline and what is purposefully suppose to be there."
Also thank you all so much for the support on the last chapter! your feedback has been beyond encouraging! i am so grateful for it all!

spotify playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRYlRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
Moira

Chapter Summary

"Things come apart so easily when they have been held together with lies." — Dorothy Allison, Bastard Out of Carolina

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Watching Kylo conducting a debriefing is odd. He definitely doesn’t handle it in the same manner of any of the other generals and officers I have worked with. He doesn’t give them any background information. He’s vague, but direct. The officers around me are staring at him in complete paralytic fear. I watch them in curiosity, more than I look at Kylo himself. The man to my right is sweating in excess. I watch one drop glisten down his hardened, chiseled face, right into his tear duct. I then watch as his eye grows bloodshot and he gulps at the pain, too timid to wipe the sweat away. I keep my hands folded neatly on my lap as I lean back in the chair. This is probably the most comfortable I’ve been in a debriefing. I’m not worried about absorbing every last bit of information. I know Kylo and I will most likely speak about the mission and what it requires in casual conversation later.

Kylo stands at the end of the table, opposite to me, arms crossed. He says with a booming authority, “We have recovered several artifacts on the planet of Jakku, but nothing that leads us closer to finding what The Resistance was willing to risk so much to attain.”

My eyes flicker to General Hux, sitting at the other end of the table, nearly as comfortable as me. With the same exact posture, our bodies in identical positions. I place my elbow on the arm of my chair, just to differentiate myself from the man.

He says to Kylo, not even bothering looking my direction, just like when we first met, “See if these artifacts will benefit our Order in any other way. Hopefully the operation was not completely useless.” Hux taps on his holopad, bringing up the image of a temple, the walls stripped away to reveal the inside of the architecture. “I believe that we can find suitable, reliable information during a Gala celebrating a recent deal with the Rebellion and the Resistance. Agent 2319 will infiltrate the event taking place in this building, do what she must to receive intel on what the Resistance was looking for, then leave the scene discreetly. It’s an event most will be off-guard at, they’ll feel safe. They’ll be in the mood to celebrate.”

Hux and I discussed the mission briefly before, but I haven’t really thought about it, itself. Only the events that would come after it. After this mission is when General Hux thinks I will kill Kylo Ren. But instead, it’s when I’ll report General Hux to Supreme Leader Snoke. And hopefully, all hell won’t break loose afterwards.

Kylo Ren’s voice booms across the room to Hux, “That plan seems quite empty, given the opportunity we have. Why not infiltrate the meeting, interrogate the men and women there, then kill them off afterwards? Surely, we have the resources to do so.”

The idea nearly makes me cringe. I remain silent. Any part of me that wants to take Kylo’s side is covered by my ingrained nature to pursue missions with poise, with intelligence.
Hux scoffs, snarking at Kylo, “If only it were as simple as running in there with a lightsaber.”

“It very well could be,” Kylo matches Hux’s malice. “I do own a lightsaber and could manage running.”

“Agent,” Hux snips, despite his physical stature still directed at Kylo Ren. “What do you believe the best method would be? And why?”

Hux knows exactly where I stand. I try to not look too annoyed with the mind games I’m being dragged into, saying with as much clarity and lack of bias as possible, “If the event is heavily guarded, it would be best to keep the situation under control. A large strike on all their army’s higher-ups will result in chaos. Perhaps with the new information I attain, we will be able to destroy our enemies quietly and swiftly, with a more thought-out approach.”

Kylo interjects, “So, we’re relying on information that you may not even find and giving up the chance to take out a building filled with some of The Order’s greatest contenders? Are you trying to drag out this war to last forever?” I know his gaze is penetrating my calm nature, despite me keeping my eyes on Hux. It’s odd but looking at him reminds me of who I’m supposed to be in this setting, one I can set aside my personal hatred for the man. It roots me. There’s a coldness I tap into that I find in his eyes. It’s nostalgic, nearly.

I whip my head towards Ren, my own gaze combating the piercing darkness of the mask, “I’m trying to win this war. If we can keep the enemy contained and comfortable until we are ready to wipe them all out at once, it’ll only be a matter of time.”

He sits back down in his chair with a frustrated huff. “I have no idea in what fantasy situation we’ll be in to wipe out the whole Republic at once. The closest opportunity we have to that scenario currently is this Gala.”

He doesn’t know about Starkiller Base’s intentions. Just like I didn’t before I spent a week with Hux. I exchange a look with the man, Hux’s eyebrows raising, eyes blinking as a response to the frustration the situation supplies. Why the hell is Kylo Ren, Commander of The First Order, not informed about one of the biggest plans The First Order has? The very thing that will win us this war? Hell, we’re currently living on it.

As if Kylo can sense the presence of the information being held from him, he defensively asks the two of us, “What is it?”

Hux rolls his eyes, probably telling the biggest lie he could manage with the words, “Truly, it’s nothing.” He turns back to me, explaining, “I’ll send you all of this information for you to overview. We’ll have an unaffiliated shuttle available for you to use during your travels, along with the appropriate wardrobe needs. Upon landing on Naboo, living accommodations will be supplied at a local hotel in the hub of the planet.”

My breath catches upon the mention of Naboo – Kylo Ren’s favorite planet.

It’s as if that alone breaks down any front I was successfully putting up. As the General begins speaking to the other Officers, my thoughts immediately go to matters concerning Kylo Ren. I wonder if he could come with me? Not to pursue the mission with me, of course, but just to go and enjoy the planet life for a day.

This could be the chance I need to convince him to leave The Order with me.

Once he sees how we could live as civilians, he would surely accept my offer. How every day could
be paradise like that. Our days wouldn’t be filled with violence, our sentiments wouldn’t be interrupted by duties. I can free him from all of that, show him how wonderful our lives together could really be. I know I can. Naboo is the perfect place to do that, if any.

I wipe sweaty palms against my thighs despite wearing gloves, mentally begging for this meeting to be over. I’m faced with the same urgency I felt all week when I was away with him, the urgency of wanting to be consumed by his presence. My eyes flicker towards his figure, then back to the table’s surface. I wonder what the rest of his plans looks like today. We haven’t really discussed the matter.

I feel the mask’s gaze on me again, Hux’s voice still in the background of my mind, undecipherable.

This time, I submit to Kylo’s stare, leaning forward in the seat and keeping his gaze. I place my elbow on the table and rest my chin against my knuckles.

One specific sentence is highlighted in my mind, a sentence coming from Hux, “If there are no further inquiries, our meeting is adjourned.”

The men file out of the room, one after another, following after Hux. Hux looks back at me for the briefest moment, locking eyes with me before continuing out. I can’t help but wonder what the eye contact meant, despite knowing it may have only had that exact purpose of making me wonder, making me feel paranoid. I notice how stiff the men are as they walk past Kylo. How uncomfortable. I slowly push my chair away from the table, swiveling it to the side. I wait until all the men have left until I push off my knees to stand up. Kylo switches off the hologram, still staring right at me.

I walk across the table to him and his hands immediately go to my hips. The direct action gives me confidence to place my hands against his chest. My fingers rub against the thick texture of the uniform as his thumbs press into the skin above my hipbones and he’s pinning me in between the briefing table and him. His large hands feel so out of proportion to my body. He makes me feel so small, in a good way. He makes everything that’s happening seem less important.

“Do you do that on purpose?” He asks, the vibrations from the modulator of his helmet rumbling against my face.

I blink up at him. “Do what on purpose?”

The gloved hands move up my hips, long fingers sliding to fit and form themselves against my waist. “Once you finished kissing Hux’s ass, you seemed to be projecting at me… Loudly, I might add.”

Ignoring the first part of his statement, to recognize that I honestly wasn’t projecting anything on purpose. But I’ll go with it. “Projecting what at you, exactly?” I smirk up at him, palms rubbing up his chest to his shoulders.

He just laughs at the question, cocky and pleased. He repeats back, his grip on my waist growing tighter, “Projecting what…”

I stand up on my toes to slide myself back and sit on the briefing table. It makes my height slightly more on par with his. My fingers travel from his shoulders to his neck, sliding up to find the release hatch of his mask.

He suddenly let’s go of my waist, reaching up to grab my wrists and pin them back on either side of me, against the table. “We should probably leave that on.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Are you implying that you want me to make out with your mask?”

“I’m implying,” his hands run from my wrists, up my arms, causing goosebumps to scatter along my
skin, “that you should report to my quarters after I finish some work down here, then proceed.”

I tilt my head, recalling seminars based around the art of manipulation and seduction, “For many men, it’s a fetish to engage in sexually charged actions in public places. The adrenaline of potentially being caught adds onto the pleasure of the experience.”

He asks, in all seriousness, “Is that something that turns you on?”

I shrug. “No, I don’t think so.”

His hands settle against the sides of my face. He tells me firmly, yet gently, “Well nothing turns me on more than your personal safety. And it’s a lot safer for us in my quarters.”

I laugh at the statement, placing my hands over his and removing then from my face. I hop off the table, “In that case, I’ll make sure I’m especially sheltered from any potential threats to my welfare.”

“God, that’s so hot.” He squeezes my hands in his before he lets them go.

I know it was sarcastic but hearing him say that was legitimately the most sexually frustrating thing I’ve ever experienced. Whatever I was projecting before probably is probably vivaciously declaring to him now. I manage to coolly walk away to exit the room.

“Agent,” He says, getting my attention again. “What were you and Hux referring to?”

I tilt my head, acting confused, “What?” Part of me is tempted to tell him about Starkiller Base. But surely, there’s a reason no one has yet. And the last thing I need to be doing is breaking anymore of The First Order’s rules.

He repeats, “When we were talking about infiltrating the Gala. You two looked at each other.”

I ask, keeping any sign of defensiveness or uneasiness at bay, “You’re asking me the purpose of Hux and I looking at each other during a conversation in which we were trying to convince you that blowing up a Gala filled with military leaders isn’t wise for the reputation of The First Order?”

I notice him shift uncomfortably. “Just-” He begins again, rephrasing himself, “Is there something – anything - you’re keeping from me?”

I stare into the darkness of the mask, creating a mask of my own. “No, of course not.”

His willingness to drop the subject convinces me that he trusts me.

I plunge my fork into the mess of food before me. It’s not supposed to be good food. Just healthy, full of protein and nutrients needed to be in shape. I tell myself that as I swallow another bite, the mystery meat feeling dry as it slides down my esophagus.

R8, sitting on the other side of the table, notices my distaste. “Is there an issue?”

My eyes flicker down at the tray and then back to the droid.

R8 glances to his left and then to his right, acknowledging the other people in the mess hall, from stormtroopers to lieutenants, all scarfing their food down in between their casual conversation. “It can’t be that bad.”
I suppose that having Kylo Ren’s food options recently has made my taste significantly more particular. My eyes settle on the metal plate where the droid’s mouth is anatomically supposed to be, pointing out, “Easy for you to say. You physically can’t be disgusted.”

“At one time, it didn’t disgust you.” The lights in R8’s eyes dim.

I don’t respond, forcing another bite into my mouth, navigating it down my throat in a nature in which my taste buds make as minimal contact with the food as possible.

R8’s comment gives me the extra push to finish the food rather quickly.

I swing my legs over the bench attached to the table I settled into, grabbing the tray and returning it to the dish station at the far end of mess hall. R8 follows me as we exit, making our way down the corridors of Starkiller, across the bridge, and to the main commanding level.

I’m hoping that Kylo is done with whatever he needed to get done with. We’ve gotten into the habit of working out around this time every day and I’m hoping we can stay on that routine. Something about the structure of it is satisfying.

As I walk past Hux’s office, I notice the metal door is closed. I pull my eyes away from the sight, continuing onward to Kylo’s office. The door is slightly open, an indication that he’ll take visitors if absolutely necessary, or if it’s me. R8 stands outside, already ready for me to be done with talking to Kylo. I can tell by his lingering gaze as I enter the room.

Upon entering, I notice Kylo sitting at his desk on his holocron, shoulders hunched forward. He doesn’t even look up to know it’s me, hand waving to shut the door then immediately moving to his mask to remove it and set it on the table.

He looks tired and stressed. Older than he should, which he usually does. But especially now.

He swallows hard, still focused on the task in front of him, “I don’t think we’ll be able to see each other tonight.”

I suck in my right cheek, moving forward to sit in the chair across from his desk. I look around the room, it’s layout and structure identical to General Hux’s. But different in the sense that Kylo has less items, less filing cabinets behind him. Kylo’s office feels more spacious, less worn down. “I understand. Are you leaving base?”

“No,” He says, briefly.

I blink. “Do you have an assignment?”

He bluntly says, “I’m meeting with the Supreme Leader. It’ll be a longer meeting tonight.”

I exhale slowly, keeping my tone easy and pleasant, “Is something wrong?”

He just shakes his head.

I feel selfish for casting my own insecurities on the situation, insecurities concerning what exactly Snoke knows and what he thinks he knows. I purse my lips. “Is he upset?”

“That’s unusual for you.”

“Is it?” This is the first time he looks up at me. His eyes are skeptical, questioning. Testing me.
I can’t help but return the cynical stare with a cautionary gaze back. As much as I can relate to not enjoying speaking to Supreme Leader Snoke, hearing Kylo Ren say it is something new. Especially now that I’m more aware of their dynamic. I should’ve known by the first meeting I had with Snoke. I think I may have, subconsciously. The way he referred to Kylo as a child, talking down on him, complaining about his emotional weaknesses. Referring to Kylo as a weapon to be utilized by The First Order. I take a deep breath, then ask, “Does Supreme Leader Snoke treat you well?”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” His eyes fill with something different now. Defensiveness. Anger.

I straighten my jaw, “Does he degrade you? Is he threatening or unkind or ever-”

“You shouldn’t say such negative things concerning The Supreme Leader.” He pauses, looking back down to his work. “Our Supreme Leader.”

The sentence is a reminder. A call back to yesterday evening. How trusting I was in confiding Kylo Ren in my remorse, in my guilt. Emotions that The First Order would not allow. Feeling his pullback on the issue, I comply to appease him, “You’re right. I apologize.” It’s kind of honest. I did feel sorry. And I probably shouldn’t say negative things about The Supreme Leader to his own apprentice, in a logical sense.

Kylo continues on, glancing up at me, eyes softening, “I would much rather be back in my quarters with you before you leave again. That is all.”

I shift in the chair, sitting upwards, my words coming out as a blubbering mess, “That’s actually what I wanted to ask you about. I was thinking, since it’s on Naboo and you said you enjoyed the scenery and if you don’t have much going on here, you could accompany me?”

He stares at me silently, pulling back from his holopad to lean into the back of his chair.

I continue, trying not to sound too desperate to convince him, “We could go up a day early, before the Gala. And even then, the Gala wouldn’t take long or be too taxing. You could just stay in the hotel while I go and get it out of the way. It could be a nice break from everything, a chance for us to just be together and not have to worry about all of this shit.”

“What shit?” He asks.

“Just…” I run my hand through my hair, trying to not make my situation here sound as awful as it feels, “Work. Responsibilities.”

He stares at me carefully, “Do you think us taking a vacation is practical? In the middle of a war?”

The more he questions me, the more ridiculous the idea sounds to myself. “It’s not a vacation, the trip is in place for the purpose of securing information on the war itself. We’ll just spend one extra day there. I really don’t see the problem for ourselves.”

“You don’t see the problem?”

“Yeah,” My voice turns harsh, “If I go to Korriban to watch you supervise the Knights beating each other up for two weeks, I don’t see why you’re so opposed to coming with me to Naboo – a place you said you enjoy – for two days.”

He rolls his head back, giving out a stubborn scoff, “Are you taking account the time on Korriban you spent talking to General Hux? Or the time you spent arranging to go assist him on Bonodan?”
I narrow my eyes at the man, “You-” My jaw clenches as his eyebrows raise, waiting for me to continue my statement. “If you think that I wanted to go there, to even speak to that piece of-”

“You could have ignored his calls.”

“No, I couldn’t.”

“You could have.”

I snarl, “You’re being arrogant.”

He barks back, “You’re being ignorant.”

“Then fucking enlighten me, Ren.” I notice that I’m leaned forward in the chair now, as he is too. The two of us paralleled with each other.

His eyes flicker down to my lips for the faintest moment, then back up to my eyes. The quick gesture doesn’t go unnoticed. I do my best to remain still.

He merely takes a deep breath and leans back.

I do too. I mumble quieter than I intend, “Will you tell me how I’m being ignorant?”

He isn’t able to meet my gaze, looking at the corner of his desk with his throat contracting, “I haven’t been in a civilian setting since before…” His voice trails off, eyes glossing over.

I ask softly, in realization, “Before you joined The Order?”

His voice wavers, “Before I joined the Jedi Academy.”

I can feel my expression physically sink. Since he was a teenager, he hasn’t been in a normal environment. I have recently, I suppose, kind of. In-between missions or undercover. But I guess in his circumstance, it’s different. It’s not like he could go anywhere wearing his mask. I feel angry, more than anything at Luke Skywalker, at Snoke, for sheltering him for so much of his life, to such an impossible extreme. I reach across the table to place my hand on the back of his, rubbing gently against the leather gloves, feeling for his knuckles underneath. “You’re right… you don’t have to go.” It hurts for me to say, especially since going to Naboo was the thing, the opportunity, to convince him to use the map with me. I can improvise. I can change my plans.

His thumb comes upward, clasping my hand. “If I did go, Snoke couldn’t know of it.”

Of course, Snoke wouldn’t approve. “Yeah, you don’t have to risk that.”

His eyes meet mine. “Or I could talk to him tonight about it. See what his perspective is.”

I remain quiet.

He gives my hand another squeeze before letting go. “I’ll do that, actually.” He stands from his seat, grabbing his mask.

Surprised by his one-eighty on the situation, I ask, just to make sure, “Really? You don’t have to, I just thought.”

“Yeah, we’ll see.” He comes around the table, leans downward and kisses the top of my head before heading out of the room. "I want to go."
I catch up behind him, still baffled by the change of his mental state. As we exit, R8 standing outside the door joins us, silently walking by my side. As we move further and further down the hallway, further and further away from Kylo’s office, I can’t help but settle my eyes on Hux’s door still closed. It nearly sends me into some sort of trance, putting me back into the chair at the kitchen table. Blood. Blaster shots. Horror. The feeling of his hand kneading into my shoulder, my collarbone, my neck.

Suddenly, just as we’re about to pass the door, it opens.

The first one to come out of the room is him; the teenage boy from the Lau household. Skin still youthful, but eyes full of sorrow. His hands are shackled in binders, lip split open and bruised. He wears the grey jumpsuit of the usual prisoners here. He freezes at the sight of me, mouth slightly agape. It’s as if the sight of me paralyzed him into some state of fear. No; of anger. A stormtrooper from behind the boy pushes him out of the doorframe, leading him down the hall. I swallow hard, continuing my steps with Kylo, us walking behind the trooper and boy.

His head turns to stare back at me. I keep my head held high, trying to void my memory of screams, of his curses at The General, at the other troopers on board.

Suddenly, he flips around running at me, full speed, a monstrously wrathful cry emitting from his chest.

He swings his shackled arms up to use the metal of the cuffs to strike down at me, but before contact is made and before I can even process the situation, the kid is hurled into the wall, his back crashing with a thud, levitating with his feet dangling hopelessly. Gurgling sounds arise from his throat as he reaches up, desperately trying to scratch at the choking sensation.

“Ren!” My voice splinters.

Kylo Ren steps forward towards the boy, arm outstretched, and fingers bent at the knuckle. “What breed of imbecile must you be to attack a member of The First Order in front of me?”

The words shock me, as I’m unable to process the change between the person who just compromised his comfort to pursue going on a silly vacation to Naboo with me to a man hurting a young, grieving teenage boy. Hux comes pacing out of his office, making eye contact with me briefly before my attention moves to the boy’s face. In pain, but not scared. Brave. Reckless. Vengeful.

Kylo squeezes his hand, nearly into a fist and the boy lets out a blood-curdling scream.

“Kylo,” I say, my voice unable to hide the malice, the sharpness. “Let him go.”

His helmet turns to me, and I truly feel the mystery it implies. How it doesn’t feel like I know, like I care about the person underneath it all. He stares at me for a good moment before his hand relaxes returning to his side.

Feeling the presence of General Hux and R8 observing, I resist the urge to run to the boy’s aid as he falls to the ground, gasping for air, heaving as his body fights for any stability lost at the hands of Kylo Ren.

As Kylo Ren walks around the boy, he spits down the insult at him, “Scum.”

I stare at Kylo Ren’s back as he begins sauntering away, R8 beside him. When I eventually catch up to them, I don’t find myself walking alongside them completely. I’m about a half-step behind. I try to tell myself that Kylo didn’t know that was the kid from the house I went to. That he was acting on impulse. On a protective instinct. But I can’t tell myself it enough, not enough to subside the sickness
growing in my stomach.

That night, while Kylo Ren is talking to Snoke, I return to his office using the code I memorized to enter. I’ve always been in the habit of looking at people’s fingers as they tap numbers into keypads. And Kylo trusts me too much to do anything to hide it. I would feel worse about exploiting that side of him usually, but after the reminder of his asshole-side today, it’s not as hard to do it without remorse.

The door opens and I close it behind me, making my way to the holopad still laying on his desk. I tap it, bringing the screen to life. It’s all hand-print operated. I can’t access what I want through it without Kylo’s hand.

Do I even know what I want?

If I find where this kid is at on Starkiller, what will I do when I find him? Apologize? Exile him?

One option wouldn’t be doing enough and the other would be way too risky.

Either way, a feeling urging me from my chest is begging me to see him, to confront the kid. I feel for the Alliance ring in my right pocket. Still there. Along with the map.

I open the drawer to his desk, seeing various files carefully sorted by alphabetical order. I push the files back, searching for an access card, an electronic key, anything to get me into the documents library. There’s a few holocrons, some random metal parts, lying around. I shuffle through the files once more, a gleaming silver catching my eye. Bingo. I grab it, thumb running over the bar that allows entry with a swipe. He didn’t even have it hidden. I suppose no one else would be brave enough to steal from Kylo Ren. It’s probably never been a problem for him.

I can just find that kid’s file, figure out where he’s housed, then return this card here. It’s almost too easy and simple.

I shove the key card up my sleeve, making my way out of the office, closing the door behind me, and moving to the nearest elevator to the bottom floor. I’ve never been to this sector before. But I know it exists, from layouts of Starkiller that I’ve studied. The elevator moves downward, beeping with each progression. I stare at the lights blinking off as I descend, steadily making the elevator darker and darker, until the only source of light is the lights from the walls on either side of me and the single dot signifying I’m now in the lowest level of Starkiller Base.

The elevator doors open with a hiss.

It unveils a corridor of darkness, one much like the hall leading me into the Observatory on Jakku. I feel the same physical shift I did on Jakku. When I step forward, a single light illuminates the plain metal hallway and the elevator doors slide back shut, the sound of metal meeting metal echoing deeply. I can almost feel the sound more than I can hear it.

With a curious tilt of my head I move forward. More lights flicker to life with each stride.

I pass many doors, but none with limited access.

Not until I reach the very end of the hallway do I meet a door with a panel to the right side. I slip the keycard from under my sleeve into my palm, bringing it up to the panel.
A small light, resembling those in the elevator flickers. The door opens. I step inside.

The room is illuminated by a large console. A screen, blue and bright, spanning what must be over fifty feet across. The screen displays the many shelves that house thousands of holocrons and data devices. I walk down the aisle to the keyboard laying in front of the screen. Displayed on the screen is a text-box, a single blinking line indicating text ready for input.

A chair, without arms or back support sits in front of the keyboard. It feels smooth and slick. I settle into it’s curve, my gloved hands resting into position on the keyboard.

I type the only information I have:

LAU


I use the arrows to navigate down the list of names, first clicking on Rafune Lau. It takes a moment to load, but when it does, a picture of the father appears in the upper right corner, his information and case file displayed on the right.

I purposely skip over the female names, moving straight to Tuchell Lau. The boy appears, his face hardened and stubborn. His lip isn’t split open yet. The picture looked uncomfortable for him to take. My eyes jump the right his cell information displayed:

FLOOR 9, CELL 201

I sigh in relief, clicking out of the program, returning it to the empty text box. I slide from the stool, making my way back down the aisle to the door. Each step towards the door is a step of relief. Not that I was worried. Not that this would’ve been hard. When I reach the door, I pause.

That same buzzing inside of me. Urging. Curiosity.

I look over my shoulder, back to the screen. The screen nearly strains my eyes. I reach my hand up to the button next to the door, hovering over the opportunity to exit. The blinking line in the text box looks like it’s speeding up in my mind. My vision tunnels in on it. The blinking slows down. Then, it’s barely blinking at all.

Without even consciously making the decision, I rip my hand away from the button, quick steps leading me back towards the keyboard. The blinking is quick again. My pace accelerates into a run, the keyboard getting closer but feeling so much further away with every second it takes me.

Until I feel the keys back under my fingers.

I type quickly, pads of my fingers not giving my mind time to catch up to myself:

AGENT 2319

It loads almost immediately.

I click on the file.

My face is there. The same picture used to expose me to the Resistance. The picture from the Academy. My age is there, height, weight, IQ, status, behavioral reports. There’s nothing from me being drunk and hitting that officer, which is good. Hux pulled through, I suppose. I press down on the arrow button, showcasing exams from the Academy, reports from my higher-ups, everything.
Medical records. I scroll through it all, the images flashing of my whole life. Of everything I’ve worked at. There’s reports from Phasma when I trained with the FN Corps. Case files of my first missions. Of my first kills. I hold down the arrow button, having it lead me to the very end of my after a solid minute of all my victims flashing in front of me quickly, spontaneously. I’ve forgotten most of them. Seeing their faces again is disturbing, bringing my mind to places I previously locked from consciousness. The last thing in my file is a single sentence:

“CURRENTLY ASSIGNED TO ASSIST COMMANDER KYLO REN IN FIELD.”

I sigh, unsure of what I thought I would find. There’s nothing I wasn’t already aware of. Nothing I cared to know. Maybe I just needed to remind myself of who I am, of how great I was at all of this before Kylo Ren came along and gave me a reason not to be.

I click the arrow one last time to bring me back to the front page.

This time, something I skimmed over in the happenstance of information overload catches my eye.

BIOLOGICAL GUARDIAN(S): Ky Moira, Jensi Moira

I stare at those names for a long time.

Even before I met Kylo Ren, when I found myself indulging in the forbidden thought of the longing to leave this shithole, it’s them I’ve blamed for putting me here. They were always nameless. Faceless. Just two selfish assholes willing to sell their daughter into the war machine for extra money. Fuck them. I sit back, clenching my fists, glaring long and hard. Ky and Jensi Moira. Moira.

Moira.

Then, my eyes move downwards.

HOMEWORLD: Takodana

I swallow hard.

STATUS: Active Agent

LOCATION: Starkiller Base

The rest is just bullshit I already know.

I ask myself if I really wanna do what I’m about to. If I should just let the curiosity eat me alive. But once again, my fingers don’t allow my mind to make that choice, clicking out of my file and returning to the text box:

MOIRA

Two names appear: Ky Moira, Jensi Moira

I click on Ky.

His picture is in the upper right-hand corner. When I see his face, a trembling hand reaches up to my own, into my hair line. The hair color. It’s the same. It’s the same texture too. Our noses too. I feel it. It’s identical in shape.

I clumsily click off of his profile to Jensi Moira.
My hand slides across my jawline, feeling how it’s the same angle as hers. Our cheekbones the same structure. I look into her eyes. They’re kind. Kinder than mine. What mine would look like if she didn’t do what she did to me, I imagine. I need to gain enough strength to look to the sidebar of her profile before my eyes are given permission to shift.

STATUS: Eliminated

I think I’ve forgotten what that word means all together.

I skip the age, the height, the weight, the everything to move down to the single paragraph below her basic information. I recognize the structure, the length from the paragraph on Ky’s page. It reads:

“ELIMINATED DURING PROJECT RESURRECTION ON TAKODANA. ONE CHILD. COMPENSATION REFUSAL. NO HISTORY OF EMPIRE OR FIRST ORDER COMPLIANCE. EMPLOYED AS HERBALIST. NEW REBELLION/RESISTANCE SYMPATHIZER.”

I can't move for a long time after reading that.

Chapter End Notes

i wrote the whole ending to this while listening to "Kronos Unveiled" from The Incredibles soundtrack. GOD that's such a good jam. michael giacchino is such an amazing composer. thanks for reading and all the support, once again! <3 next stop: NABOO (and cell 201)
and also "Officious Extras" (or something along that title) will have the first chapter published soon. I'm really excited to share! just gotta polish up the first thing i'm planning to upload.
I hope you all liked this chapter!
<3
Spotify playlist: https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
To Be Better

Chapter Summary

"There is a way to be good again..." - Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next day, during the afternoon, I find myself standing across from the door of Cell 201. Floor 9.

Whatever it is that I’m going to do, I don’t feel like doing right now. But there really wouldn’t be any other chance.

Last night, after returning Kylo’s access card to his office, I went to my dormitory and laid down, staring up at the ceiling. There was no sadness, no revelation of anger, no desperation for revenge. It was, and still is, a hollow sensation. Like The Order has completely scooped out every one of my insides, leaving the rest of me as a shell of what I thought I once was. It’s so numbing.

I used to indulge in the fantasy of what my life would be like if I had parents who loved me. The hypotheticals would come to me often as a child. Where I would be, what things I would like, who I would be. But now, it’s like those fantasies are twisted into some sort of joke. Now, I know that my parents could’ve loved me. They probably did.

And I was still destined to become Agent 2319.

Perhaps the saddest part about it is I’m not even surprised.

All the years I spent resenting them, wondering if they were still alive so I could go shove it in their face that I turned out successful while they’re still just scum. It was all a lie.

They were fucking herbalists. The only connection to the war being sympathizers of the Rebellion and Resistance, which as much as I hate the Rebellion and Resistance, I couldn’t give a shit about merely political views. I wonder if those military organizations would’ve killed two herbalists to brainwash me. Killing two people for the sake of one child. A baby. Knowing that I was that baby, the reason they were killed, fuels a painful guilt that was weighing on my body. One that’s been lingering since killing Eerson Ren.

I pull myself out of the endless thought cycle I’ve already gone through thousands of times today. I know it’s a waste of time at this point.

I rub my tired eyes, looking left and right to make sure the hall is clear. It is. I reach towards the keypad, pressing the access code on the door before my thoughts can lead me back into another labyrinth.

The kid - Tuchell - flinches at the sound of the door, as if it has conditioned him to do so. When his broken brown eyes focus on me, squinting, I see the realization of hatred settle in his face.

He lunges forward with a grunt and scream of rage, his chains holding him back from reaching me, bounding him at each limb. With the same force he charged at me with, he’s equally jolted
backwards, crashing back into the ground. I reset my jaw, stepping inside the room and closing the door.

He remains making exclusively unintelligible grunts and cries, trying to hurl himself at me to attack, the chains yanking him back each time. He already looks skinnier than he did before his capture. His lip is still busted open, eyes sunken in and tired. His dark hair has been shaved off, just like the picture in his file suggested.

I say simply, distancing myself from any guilt his anger stirs within me, “That’s not good for your wrists and ankles.”

“I don’t care.” He spits, the first words he actually produces from the wrathful wailing.

“You will when you calm down.” I step forward slowly, trying to decrease my distance from him to establish a level of trust. “The locations of those bruises have a way of making everything you do ache.”

He clenches his jaw, lip trembling. The gash in his lip is still fresh with blood.

I ask him with a steady tone, “Have you eaten today?”

He lunges forward and to spit in my face.

Reaching up to my cheek, I wipe away the saliva that settle under my eye, doing my best to keep my movements calm and unbothered. Don’t seem hurt. Don’t seem angry. I scoop it with my gloved index finger, flicking it to the ground. I shimmy the straps of my backpack down my arm, swinging the bag in front of me. As I make my way towards the wall of the right, I unzip the first pouch. Leaning against the wall, I slide downwards to sit. When I glance up to the boy he’s watching me cautiously, suspiciously.

I reach into the bag, pulling out a container of food, still warm from the heater it was cooked in. I may have stolen it from Kylo Ren’s kitchen. I peel off the lid, steam exuding from the pasta and meat. I slide it across the floor to the boy, who stands over me, trembling in anger at the mere sight of me. The container stops right in front of his feet. Soon enough, the food’s pleasant aroma covers the ill stench of the room.

I carefully pull a fork from the bag, outstretching my arm to him to grab it. My arm patiently remains still.

He eyes the fork, then me. Pauses. His hand slowly extends out, shaking fingers closing around the fork’s handle. He’s staring at me like a madman. Like some kind of animal. I return my hand to my lap, giving him time to sit down and begin eating. He doesn’t. His fist clenches around the fork’s handle. Squeezing. He takes a deep breath.

Goddammit.

He lunges at me, the fork held high over his head, with the intent to stab my throat.

I sigh and bring up my arm to block the attack. My forearm connects with the inner part of his arm, right above where his shackles are placed. I push his arm over and down to my side, wrapping my fingers just below his skinny elbow. I press my thumb down hard into the pressure point on the inside of his elbow and I hear the fork clatter against the ground as he drops it. He yanks his arm away from my somewhat weak grip and shuffles away, terrified. I grab the fork.

I stare at him, curled up into the corner of the room, as if he’s a shameful animal preparing to be
punished. I remain still, sitting in the same place I was before he attacked me. With a deep breath, I place the fork beside the container of food for him to attend to when he’s ready. The grey jumpsuit looks too big on him. It resembles a tent against his frail frame, the grey making his deep brown skin that once seemed to glow now seem washed out with the blinding artificial lights in the room. They have those lights there on purpose, making them as bright as they can. It decreases sleep and increases stress.

It takes him awhile to look up at me through the spaces in between his fingers, showcasing his wide-set eyes.

I try to think of something reassuring to say to the kid. But I really can’t. He’s not going to answer my questions. Nor is he going to accept any apologies yet. For someone who was trained in taking control over situations, I feel completely helpless. I just settle on nodding towards the food, “The pasta is good. Only the higher-ups have access to good food around here.”

He lowers his arms hesitantly.

I continue, “The shit in the cafeteria is vomit inducing. I can’t imagine what they give you if they give us that.”

His body relaxes more, to tell me, angry voice now practically pleading, “Leave me alone.”

I swallow hard.

“Leave me alone.” He repeats.

I shouldn’t stay here if he wants me gone... Maybe my presence just does make things worse. “Are you sure?” I ask.

“Yes.”

Defeated by his adamancy for me to leave him alone, disappointed by his lack of a response, I consider exiting. What am I even doing here to begin with? I grab my backpack, zipping it back up. But I pause for a moment, then set it back down. I say, leaning forward and keeping my tone focused, “I will leave if you want me gone. But before you make that decision, consider that out of everyone on Starkiller Base, I’m the only one on your side. You’re not going to get that again.”

He gapes at me, “You’re on my side?” Scoffing transfers into a near hysterical laugh. “You drank wine while my parents....” He chokes on the end of the sentence, turning back into the corner to let out a sob. He wipes snot from his face onto his sleeve. His bushy eyebrows narrow and he spits down at the ground, “Bitch.”

I stare at the floor quietly.

He looks up from his arm, yelling again, angry energy returning, “This is your fault! You could’ve stopped him! You’re a bitch! You could’ve…” He sniffles. “I wouldn’t be here. They’d still be with me- If it weren’t for you.”

I wouldn’t be here. They’d still be with me.

I bend my knees up into my chest, resting my chin on my folded arms. “I know.” I know it’s my fault. I know the feeling of blaming anyone, anything I can throw the blame on for me being here, me not being with my parents. I look up to him, forcing myself to keep eye contact with eyes filled with pure hatred of me. “I don’t disagree with any of that.”
“Am I supposed to feel bad for you? Because you feel guilty?” He hisses.

I shake my head. “No, you shouldn’t. I think that your feelings towards me are completely justified. I just…” I look back towards my bag, remembering the med kit I put inside it. I clear my throat, “Your lip is busted. I should fix that.”

“Tell me why.”

I reach over to my bag, zipping open the front pocket once again. “Why what?”

“Why do you want to help me?” There’s a weak tremble at the end of the sentence, one that lingers on.

I set the med kit on my lap, running my finger against the corners of the tin box. “I think there’s a lot of reasons.”

“Give me them.”

I lean back into the wall, remembering the feeling of a different cool metal wall against my back. One so similar. “My earliest memory in life is a room a lot like this one. It was around the same size, also empty most of the time, also quiet most of the time. But when it wasn’t, it was so loud. So crowded.” I swallow hard, trying to regain my mental footing to tell the story, “The First Order puts their youngest children in their stormtrooper program through these behavioral conditioning processes. I was put inside of a cell and every time a screen on the front wall would flash images of anything relating to The First Order, whether that be the symbol, a stormtrooper, Supreme Leader Snoke, I would be sent food or water or a blanket. Sometimes there would be a nurse come inside the room and talk with me, hold me, tell me that everything would be okay.”

“I had to wear this metal band that braced my neck. I remember how cold it usually felt, how it almost felt like it was ingrained into my skin with how tight it was. I would try to find a way to yank it off, but it was on me for good. And every time the screen flashed images that represented the Rebellion, that collar electrocute me. There would be loud noises projected into the room. Sometimes, men dressed as Rebellion members would come inside the cell to beat me. It was to the point where every time an image of the Rebellion appeared, there was a fear that overwhelmed me. I hated that symbol. It hated me. That’s the only thing I knew. The Order was my only option for comfort, for stability.

“Eventually, after a long time of that, they put a gun in the room with me. A training one, so it didn’t fire real blasts, instead just sensory lasers. And whenever the Rebellion images appeared, I could make the pain stop by firing the gun, by shooting whatever it was that was hurting me. Which was always anything that wasn’t The Order. It made my fear, my pain, transition into an instinct to fire a blaster, to eliminate without any second thought or remorse.”

He asks, calmed down, intrigued yet still somewhat stubborn by the way he’s mumbling, “Why do you feel guilty then? About my parents? If they trained you to hate them, did the experiment not work?”

I shake my head. “No, it worked. For a really long time, it worked. It wasn’t just that one experiment either. There were so many tests and trials and training programs on top of the experiments and torture. But where they fucked up was when I first became an Agent. Coming out of the Academy, I was assigned to Captain Phasma’s most elite group of stormtroopers, in the FN Corps. But because of the way I tested in the Academy, they felt that me being a stormtrooper was somewhat of a waste. So, they put me in the Agent program, I trained with them for a while, and I was off on my first mission when I was around your age. I was given a R8 droid and we started completing mission after
mission after mission, getting into this never-ending cycle. They weren’t worried about my loyalty. They were so sure that I was completely faithful to their cause, forever. But I think that because I’ve gotten so used to being undercover, pretending to be someone else, that I entertained the idea of being someone else entirely. Even when I always knew it was impossible. I still felt like a droid at the end of the day, with no emotions nor the capacity to experience emotion.”

The boy scoots forward, trying to nonchalantly grab the food in front of him, as well as the fork. He scoops up a small portion of the pasta and brings it to his mouth.

I continue on as he eats, the corner of my lip twitching at the step forward he made to open up, “Until, one day, I was given a new mission, one where I didn’t have to stay undercover. It gave me the opportunity to start feeling. And what I felt was hatred, bitterness. It was different from the conditioned hatred for the Rebellion, one that I was trained to feel. It was something raw, more human than I’ve ever experienced. I was assigned to work with this person who irritated the hell out of me. I thought he was arrogant, selfish, and childish. One time he stranded me on a moon after a mission, just purely out of indifference to my presence. But it was through this constant, bickering and arguing with him that I realized how to feel other emotions. Emotions like compassion, endearment, sympathy, longing… Love.” I shiver, unsure if I should say what I’m about to. I do anyway, “I’ve come to realize that I don’t want to stay here. I think I know how to leave too. And I…” How could I leave, just run away, and leave all these kids here? Kids who I’m responsibly for imprisoning? I lean forward, my voice lowering, “I want you and your sisters to come with us. We’ll find a planet for you to stay on before me and my friend have to go somewhere else, somewhere where The Order could never find him and I.”

He stops chewing on his pasta, staring at me. “Are you… Are you serious?”

I nod. I’ve never felt more serious about anything.

“How can I trust you?”

I reach into my pocket, fingers fumbling for the ring. I pull it out, flashing the symbol of The Rebellion. He recognizes it immediately, grabbing it from me, squeezing it in his palm as he holds it up to his chest. He pulls it away to run his finger across the metal ridges, pressing the symbol with the pad of his thumb.

I say, quietly, “When your mother and I left the dining room to get a bandage, she gave me this. I offered to hold on to it for her, to hide it from Hux.” I notice a tear fall from his eye down onto his knuckle. “I’m sorry it wasn’t enough.”

I know that nothing will bring his parents back. Or my parents back. But there’s still things to do for the people they left behind. There’s still ways to be better.

I must believe that.

I knock on Kylo Ren’s door, waiting for an answer. Usually, there is one. Sometimes, he’s stuck on the command deck and I must wait for him inside. After a few moments of no response, I assume that’s the case for today.

I punch in the key-code (this one he willingly shared with me,) allowing myself in. My eyes scan
across the cleanly organized, yet empty dormitory to settle on the bathroom door, shut with light shining from the space between the door and the floor.

I roll my shoulders, rubbing a knot out of my neck before kicking off my boots beside the doorframe. “I’m back!” I call to the closed door.

“Oh,” Kylo’s voice says as if he’s been taken out of a trance. “I’ll be out in a moment.”

I rub my fists into my eyes, kneading at the pressure building in my head. My face feels so dry, the feeling of Tuchell’s spitting on my face still lingering. I wipe at my cheek for the millionth time in the place it contacted. I look down at my hands, some of his blood collected in the cuticle of my index finger from helping his split lip. I don’t know exactly how he received the wound. But when I specified the question by asking if it was Hux, he flinched and didn’t respond. That was an answer enough.

The bathroom is quiet, no sound coming from the thin walls whatsoever. I assume Kylo’s probably grooming himself or shaving, something along those lines. I ask him, “Are you decent? Can I come in?”

“Uh…” Kylo needs to think about it for a moment, as if he’s not sure what decent implies. “Yeah, you can come in.”

Cautiously, I open the door, uncertain of what caused his hesitance.

And as I look forward I see why.

“Oh.” I stand there, frozen at the sight of him. Blood rushes to my face, furiously, obviously. He’s in the bath, bare upper body exposed from the water. Although Kylo and I sleep together and have basically covered every level of making out there is, I have never seen him unclothed. The furthest we have progressed was on Korriban, when he almost took off my brassier; emphasis on the word “almost.” So this. I’ve never seen this before.

His shoulders are broader than I imagined (and I’ve imagined), shoulders roped with dense muscles and collarbone appearing chiseled. My eyes move up his exposed neck to his wet hair, droplets of water dropping to bead down what the water reveals of his chest. Looking at him like this is an odd situation. Part of me wants to beg him to sit upwards, exposing more of himself to me. Part of me can’t even handle what’s presented at the moment. I look into the water surrounding him, concealing the rest of him. The water is a blue-green tone with white foam swirling across the surface. It smells like earthy mint, indicated he added herbs to the water.

He remains unmoving, still lounging with elbows resting against the surface to the tub. His face is comfortable, no indication of any embarrassment of self-consciousness. He says, tone smooth, “I assumed you wouldn’t be back until later tonight.”

My feet are still planted into the ground, as if cement dried around their position. I blink, forcing myself to look away, but my eyes being drawn back nearly immediately after their disconnection. “I assumed you preferred showers to baths.” It’s the only statement my mind can even formulate.

He glances up at the shower-head above him. “Sometimes.”

My next words come out in a stuttering, bumbling mess, “I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were – uh – I thought…” I blink, swallowing hard. “Sorry.” I turn on my heel to leave, but I hear the water slush.

I look back, Kylo now shifted to lean over the edge of the tub with his chin in his forearms. I take note of the extent of his biceps. My mind immediately begs me to imagine his arms wrapping around
me from the waist, holding my body against his. He insists, pulling me out of the thoughts, “I wouldn’t have told you to come in if I was uncomfortable with the situation.” His head tilts, eyebrow lowered in concern. “Are you uncomfortable?”

I stammer, “No, of course not.”

“Then why are you standing like that?”

“This is how I always stand.”

“You never stand like that.”

I look down at myself, noticing my arms crossed over my body, fingers digging into the fabric of my uniform at my waist. My knees are locked, toes curled from under my boots. I tilt my chin up, stubbornly, “I’m not uncomfortable.”

The corner of his lips twitch in amusement. He leans back to his original position, draping his arms across the edge of the tub, re-exposing the image of his chest. He says, blatantly, “I think it’s odd that you’re so uncomfortable in sexual situations with me. Not that that’s a bad thing. I just wouldn’t have expected it, considering your self-assured nature in everything else you do, and considering your experience compared to mine.”

Even more blood rushes to my face, nearly aggressively. I cannot tell if I can’t breathe because of his comment of the humidity of the steam in the tub. I manage, “What other times have I seemed uncomfortable?”

He gives me a boyish smile, as if it was a silly question. “Sometimes, my advances make you project a large amount of nervousness. Of insecurities. Like on Korriban, when you removed your robe. Or do you remember that one time, you were wearing Iris Nisedges’ dress and needed assistance with the buttons?”

I question, “I was projecting in that moment?”

He nods.

I blink hard, my eyes feeling dry. I can’t deny that his sexual advances do make me nervous sometimes. Insecure in others. Ways I never have felt during sexual encounters, even in my first times having sex. I try to wrap my head around it, explaining, “I merely care what you think of me, which sometimes can make me feel self-conscious around you in those circumstances.” I splutter the mess of words, stubbornly confessing, “But it’s not that I’m scared to be intimate with you. Because I’m not scared.”

“Ah,” He says, carefully, in thought. Thoughts that must be about us, in sexual situations.

My eyes subconsciously flicker to the empty space in the tub across from him.

His jaw clenches, then unclenches.

“If you asked, I would.” I mutter, unable to hold the eye contacted.

He takes it the wrong way, expression dropping, “If I didn’t directly request it, would you still have the desire to?”

I scoff at the question, “I’m pretty sure since the moment I saw you without your mask, there hasn’t been a moment where I’ve not desired you.”
His eyes turn from concerned to electric in nearly an instant. He traces nearly every inch of my body, up then down, then gaze returns into my own. I inhale sharply, watching his chest rise and fall with the movements of his breath. He sits upward, turning his body in the water to become parallel to me. “Come here.” He says in a struggle to keep his low voice steady.

I do, walking to the edge of the tub. He reaches out to grab my hand, only to immediately bring it to his mouth, pressing his warm lips to the skin of my knuckles, then turning my hand over to kiss the inside of my wrist. My stomach feels heavy, legs unable to stabilize me.

He peers up at me, eyelids heavy with lust, “The Supreme Leader approved my proposal of accompanying you on Naboo.”

I nod slowly, unsure of what that says about The Supreme Leader. Unsure if I’m playing into his game, or if I’m the one who he’s playing games against. With the feeling of Kylo kissing the tips of my fingers, I find myself unconcerned with it. “Thank you – for asking him.”

He nods, lips pressing into my palm. “I wanted to go. I want to be with you.”

“If you ever feel uneasy during the trip, in that environment, tell me and I won’t hesitate to-”

He shushes me, relaxing his hand in mine to interlock our fingers. “I’ll be fine.”

His dripping, porcelain skin shines from the lights above. I notice the beauty marks that speckle his skin continue down his neck and arms. The image of him, so pure, so vulnerable below me is so innocent, despite the not-so innocent way the situation implies. I smile.

“What?” He asks, grinning back at me.

I shake my head at him, glancing down at my feet. “You’re so beautiful.”

His hand slides from my grasp to lightly reach out and curve against my waist. He says, insistently, “You’re beautiful.” His thumb stretches downward, rubbing the outline of my hipbone. He stares at me with intent, asking, “When we’re on Naboo, since no one will be there to interrupt us and we’ll have all night to ourselves, would you like to…” His voice trails off as he becomes unsure how to configure the words.

I nod, my smile growing wider, “Yes, of course. We should.”

“Okay.” He sighs deeply, nearly in relief.

My eyes glance to the empty space in the water once again.

“In the meantime,” He says, noticing where my attention’s shifted. “You can join me, if you wish.”

I stare at him, noticing the darkness growing in his eyes. The desire. I step back, removing my hand from his, nonchalantly reaching to my waist to unfasten the belt. I roll it up, setting on the sink’s edge. I begin unzipping the grey blazer and he glances away, nearly immediately, staring into the water once again, as if he’s surprised that this is actually happening.

I smile, sliding it from my body and folding it before I place it on the floor. I remove my socks, then start removing my pants. “You’re allowed to look.” I say, pulling them from my legs. Despite the heat of the room, goosebumps dot across the freshly exposed skin of my legs.

He laughs, nervously, shyly, eyes still focused downward at the water below him. “I’m being polite.”
I smile at his endearing apprehension. It makes me feel better about my own. I say, reaching for the undershirt’s hem and pulling it over my head, “I thought we established that I was the nervous one?”

Kylo reaches his right hand upwards, thumb resting on his temple. The movement shields me from his expression, probably purposely so. “I’m not nervous.” He counters.

I look down at my body, now only in the standard underwire black bra and black undergarments. I reach up for the bras clasp, undoing it, setting it on the top of the pile of clothes. Then I peel the underwear off, stepping out of the leg-holes. A shiver runs down my spine from the exposure. I approach the tub, pushing back whatever insecurity is creeping within me. I keep my eyes on Kylo, who still not looking at me.

I step up, into the water, right foot first, then left. The water is hot, relaxing to sink into. I lower my body down, parallel to Kylo, crossing my legs in the tub. Finally, he glances upward, only my shoulders and arms revealed by the water now. I notice his eyes tracing along my collarbone. I sit forward, reaching out to grab his hand that once was draped over the edge of the tub. I set it on my knee from under the water, forcing him to lean forward as well.

He says, quietly, feeling the shape of my knee with the bending and stretching of his fingers, “Undo your hair.”

I reach back, obeying pulling the tie that once held together the formal bun. The hair falls against my shoulders and brushes the surface of the water. I notice him still staring, throat contracting. I can’t help but bring my own eyes back down to his frame. He looks even bigger up close, even stronger, even more masculine. I bring delicate fingers to his extended arm. I trace the muscles, moving forwards and backwards, lightly brushing my fingers against his blue veins. His eyes lustful eyes stay locked on mine.

I retreat my touch from him and he lets out an exhale, sharper than he intends to. I grab the soap lying on the shelf to my left and run the bar across my arm, up and down, eyes still secured on his. I switch arms, keeping my movement graceful and slow. Then, once a fair amount of the soap has lathered on my arms, I move the bar across my collarbone, up my neck, then back down again. He bites down hard on his bottom lip.

I lean back further, extending my leg outward, toe then foot resurfacing from the water. I press it against his firm chest, pushing him back slightly, my leg now exposed up to my mid-thigh. “Do you want to help me?” I say, nonchalantly, handing him the soap.

With the slightest tremble in his hand, he takes it from me. He holds my leg steady by the ankle with his right hand, rubbing the soap against me with his left. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice the trail of soap he creates on the length of my shin is wavering, unsteady. But I don’t dare break our stare to examine it too carefully. He stops running the soap upwards at my knee, moving back down each time.

I straighten my leg further outwards, urging him to touch more of me. He complies, moving the soap to my lower thigh. With that, he sets the bar at the tub’s edge and replaces it’s presence with the movement of his hands, alternating between tender strokes and light massaging, working the soap deep into my skin. Every time his fingers reach my thigh, I find my stomach twisting, an ache within me growing in a nearly unbearable nature.

His stare grows more intense, fingers digging deep into my thigh. He dips my leg in the water, the soap rising to surface, then pulls it back out, lips immediately pressing to the inside of my ankle. My breath hitches as I watch him, dragging his lips across the wet skin, leaving trails of kisses as he moves upwards. As he makes his way up my shin, my foot finds itself over his shoulder. I can’t help
but think about how much of me is exposed to him, below the water. How each kiss brings him closer to that part of me.

I reach forward, running my hands through his damp hair, admiring how it’s like silk through my fingers. His eyes flicker up to mine, nose pressed into my skin and lips brushing more and more upwards. He drags his lips up to my knee before leaving a small peck right on the point of my bone, then pulling my leg from off his shoulder, pinning it to the side of the tub. My body sinks down further into the water, underneath his looming figure. As he continues kissing my leg, lips now at my inner lower thigh, I stare at his back, muscular, strong. The way his muscles react to his movements is nearly intoxicating.

His kiss turns into a small nip, causing the faintest moan to travel from my chest and out parted lips. He reacts to the sound by sucking, lightly pressing his teeth down into the raised skin. I roll my head back, mind unable to ignore how all I want him to do right now is completely devour me. I wonder if he’s as desperate as I am. He asked if I wanted to have sex on Naboo. But frankly, I would love to just do it now. His kisses begin to move backward back down my leg.

I respond by closing my fingers around his hair, pulling him up to me before he can get too far away. Immediately, I passionately kiss him on the lips. He shifts himself so that he’s on his knees, comfortably over me, hands clasping the edges of the tub to keep his body steady. With my legs, still on either side of his body, I sink them further into the water, until my inner knees meet his torso. With hungry kisses, we both equally struggle to breath. My hands, lost in his hair, beg for me to allow them to touch him, to press into him, to scratch at his skin, to do everything they possibly can manage. I slowly slide them from his hairline, around his neck, moving down to his chest.

He feels so solid underneath my touch. Yet with my touch, he freezes, out of pure timidity. The contradiction of it is so intriguing, so alluring. My hands move down his chest, slowly to the muscles of his stomach, then returning to his neck to allow myself to have a moment.

He whispers into our kisses, nearly pleading, “Can I look at you?”

I nod, stopping the motion of our lips against one another. He pulls away sitting back and I slowly push myself upwards, my weight dispersing to my hands clasping the edge of tub. I straighten my back and the cool air hits newly exposed chest. The movement allows him to see my skin, all the way down to my navel. I glance up at him, staring at my body. His brown eyes take me in, gleaming, his mouth parted open. I wish desperately that I could have his powers and look into his mind as he would be able to look into mine. I just need to know if there’s any part of him that’s disappointed or underwhelmed.

I notice his fingers twitch against the tub’s edge.

I say, quietly, “You can touch me.”

“What?” He responds eagerly, swallowing hard after, taken aback by his own fervor.

With my nod, he reaches out. I move forward, trying to find the right position for me to stay above the surface of the water, where he can reach me. His hands settle conservatively on my hips, guiding me forward. I find myself settled on the far end of his lap, my legs naturally move around his body. I try my best to fight the urge to slide closer to him, to feel him against me. I look down in the water, unable to see how close he actually is to me. I lower my weight downwards, my thighs pressing into him.

His unsteady hands move from my waist upward to my ribs, thumbs tracing the curve of my breasts. I study his facial expression carefully, trying to gauge what he’s thinking. His left hand moves
behind my back, holding me, right hand reaching around to my front, lightly cupping my breast in his hand. He holds it tenderly, testing it's weight against his palm. I can’t help but think about how easy it would be to move forward into his body, grinding into him, satisfying the ache growing in between my legs.

His light touch gradually transitions into a gentle, careful massage, thumb circling around my nipple. He's hypnotized by watching himself touch me. He presses his thumb into the bud, pushing down deeper. Energy shoots down my body, moving straight to my core. I reach forward, pushing his wet hair from his face again, combing back the oil-black locks. He peaks up at me, eyes full of hunger, then back down at my breast. He leans forward.

As he continues massaging my right breast, his face comes closer to my left one. My breath catches in my throat as his lips press into the underside, moving upwards, lips dragging painstakingly slowly. Between the movement of his lips against my left breast and his fingers, circling my right nipple, it’s nearly overwhelming. Despite how gentle it is, how conservative he’s being with me, the intensity of the situation seems so palpable.

With that thought, he licks around the shape of my nipple, tongue teasing me, moving away and back to the skin above, leaving careful kisses. His mouth returns to the peak, taking it in his mouth, sucking gently. My hands pull his hair lightly, as if I’m signal him to take in more of me, more aggressively.

He acknowledges it by pushing me forward with the hand wrapping around my back. My body slides into him, completely able to feel his shape pressing into my lower abdomen. A light gasp escapes from my mouth at the contact and he moans into my breast, sucking harder, biting down. My jump slightly at the sensation only for my lower body to soon after relax more into his shape.

I begin feeling the nervousness that he was referring to. I suppose I’m so used to having a plan with these situations, to carefully planning out how each step will progress. When I don’t have that control it’s… I don’t know. It’s not bad. I just feel so disordered, unmanaged. The sensation of his length against me, it doesn’t help. I glance down at him as his tongue flicks against the bunch of nerves, then swirls around. I release rickety breath.

My legs wrap tighter around him, crossing them behind his back. I press myself as close to him as I can, hitching my hips upwards, moving my abdomen against his length. My mind subconsciously attempts to compute the sight of it by the way he feels. He pulls his head away from my breast, a wet popping noise emitting from his mouth from the suction he once had. He glances down at the closed space between us, hands settling back down on my hips. I can feel their tremble.

I lean forward, pressing my face against his, his nose digging into my cheek. Our lips lightly brush and I say, words wavering, “Do you still want to wait until we leave?”

He nods, accepting the answer. Starkiller Base isn’t really the place where I want to first have sex with him either, though at this point I wouldn’t mind it too terribly. I say, “That’s okay, we’ll wait.” I kiss him again, our chests pressed against each other. “Do you mind telling me why?”

He sighs, pulling away from me. He looks at me carefully, eyebrow furrowed. His hand absentmindedly traces the curve of my shoulder. “I know…” He blinks, looking away, “About what you were hiding.”

I stare at him, my body going into a full panic. Whatever desperate sexual urges I once possessed seem to vanish. Does he know about me going to see the prisoner? About me originally being with
him for the sole purpose of spying on him? About Hux wanting me to assassinate him? There’s so many things I’m hiding, I don’t even know what to be worried about him finding out.

“It’s alright,” He reassures, sensing my unease. “I wish you would’ve told me, but I understand why you didn’t. It was sensitive information.”

That doesn’t help me. I say, carefully phrasing my words, “How did you find out?”

“Hux told me later that day.” He says, almost bitterly, “Supreme Leader Snoke suspected I’d be too soft to agree with those methods, so he ordered the information to be held from me.”

Still, not quite sure what he’s talking about, I try to ease specifics out of him, “Do you agree with such methods?”

There’s a sadness that enters his gaze on me now. A guilt. His shoulders raise, readjusting. “Millions of civilians are going to die. Do you agree with those methods?”

Starkiller Base taking out Hosnian Prime. That’s what he’s talking about. I urge him, “I don’t… I hate it.”

He frowns. “I do too.”

“Are you going to do something about it?” I ask, curious, trying to downplay my hopefulness that he wants to.

“You shouldn’t suggest such a thing.” He mumbles, “It could be dangerous.”

I scoff, “You’re Commander Kylo Ren. I doubt anything is dangerous for you.”

He sighs, smiling at the statement. But not in pride, or in acceptance. It’s a sad smile, as if he knows deep down inside, it’s not true. He reaches a hand upwards, pushing a strand of hair behind my ear. He says, voiced hushed as if he’s afraid someone will hear him, “Supreme Leader is right. I am too soft sometimes.”

I don’t respond, apprehensive to give my thoughts on what The Supreme Leader says Kylo Ren should or shouldn’t be.

He continues, “Darth Vader destroyed several planets for the sake of taking down the Alliance. He wouldn’t have hesitated. He would’ve saw the greater picture, the sacrifice that those lives would be to the betterment of the galaxy. That’s what strength is – being willing to do the difficult, morally questionable things for the overall good.” The way he says it sounds like a child, reciting instructions from a parent, not truly believing in what he’s saying. Only saying it because someone more important told him that that’s the way things are.

I bite down on the inside of my cheek, saying carefully, “I think that there’s a line between being morally questionable and obliterating a whole planet system.”

He stares at me for a moment, anxiety flooding his gaze. His eyes dart away, looking at the edge of the tub once again. "I just want to be on Naboo. With you. Pretending that none of this exists."

"I do too," I reassure him. I wrap my arms around his body, pulling him into an embrace. He closes his arms around me too. I nuzzle my head into the crook of his neck, allowing myself to be consumed by the warm, smooth skin. His chin rests over my shoulder, hands pressing into my shoulder blades to hold me as close as he can possibly manage. I say into him, "We'll be there soon."
And we will.

Chapter End Notes

WoW so this chapter's a long one. again. i have no self control eep. Officious Extras is taking awhile because i also am making the first chapter long as hell too. so yea. again - no self control.

thanks for reading!

i cannot stress how much all of your comments and support has motivated me. i appreciate it so much <3

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
My thumb slides across the handle of my dagger. The ridges of the grip catches against the pad of my thumb.

Tuchell rolls back the sleeve on his prisoner jumpsuit. I drive the tip of the blade at the hem, making a small incision to allow the folded cloth sewn together to separate. He hands me the Alliance ring. I slip it inside the makeshift pocket, sliding it around to the sleeve’s cloth, securing it.

“There you go.” I exhale, rolling his sleeve back down for him.

He feels for it inside the fabric.

I explain, sliding my knife back onto my belt, “No one will suspect anything, unless you give them a reason to. You’re going to want to subconsciously feel for it, but you have to resist that urge. You have to pretend it’s not there.” He gives me a stressed expression. I try to make the situation seem lighter, easing him, “Even if they find it, I doubt anyone will know what it represents. But it’s best they not discover it in the first place, just in case.”

He nods and tests out its security by letting his hand fall to his side and shake. “How long will you be gone?”

I answer, “Three days, considering travel time. After that, it won’t be long until I can figure out how we’re leaving.”

He nods again, pursing his chapped lips.

“Do you need any more water?”

Just as he opens his mouth to answer, I hear a beep from my comm-link. Tuchell flinches at the noise, eyes darting towards the cell door.

I let the call ring, waiting for Tuchell to answer my question. I give him a reassuring expression to signal that there’s nothing to worry about.

“No, I’m okay.” He says, quietly.

“Are you sure?”

Another nod.

I reach up to my comm-link, pressing the button waiting for a response.

“Agent,” R8 says voice quick, somewhat worked up for the usually calm droid. “Where are you?”
I answer calmly, hiding my annoyance at R8’s babysitting nature. “I’m heading back to my dormitory now. What’s up?”

“You are needed in your room,” He responds, not giving into the light nature of my tone. “Immediately.”

I sigh, taking the opportunity to roll my eyes. “Very well. I am on my way.” I click off the comm-link and turn back to Tuchell. “Keep a low profile while I’m gone.”

He nods, anxiety still present in his eyes.

I soften my voice as an effort to comfort him. “Once we get past this part of the mission, it will be smooth sailing.” I walk towards the cell door, offering a small smile before I exit. “The worst of it has already passed.”

Upon entering my room, I find myself frozen in the doorway.

Hux is there. Sitting on my bed. R8 orderly stands beside him. My eyes dart between the two figures, but ultimately settle on The General.

“Agent,” He gets the greeting in before I can recover from the shock. “It’s certainly been some time since we’ve spoken, just you and I.” His thin red lips stretch into a smile.

I stare daggers into him, unable hold back my snark, “You should have broken into my room sooner.”

The General pushes himself up off the bed to slowly stalks towards me. I notice a garment back laying at the edge of my mattress. “I should have. I figured that I should speak to you one final time before you complete the task I supplied you with. We won’t get the opportunity again, until the deed is done.” He turns towards R8, “Do you mind leaving us to speak in a private, 5D-R8?”

He asked the same thing in the shooting range. I denied it that time too. “Stay here, R8.” I tilt my chin upwards, meeting The General’s height.

“R8,” His voice lowers, and he turns towards the droid. His order sounds more like a threat when he says, “Leave us.”

I remain unfazed, keeping my stare on General Hux’s ice blue eyes while addressing the droid, “Stay.”

R8 turns to me, responding, “I am subject to follow General Hux’s orders, Master. Do not be worried, I am positive that my assistance in this situation will be unnecessary.”

I ignore any urges to glare at the droid, solely to keep my eyes on Hux. I glance downwards, looking at his blaster fastened to his belt, then back up to his eyes.

When the door closes behind R8, Hux says, stepping closer towards me, “Now, now, I have no reason to harm you.”

“Why did you send my droid away?” I stand my ground, undaunted by his proximity.

He leans forward, even closer, “The sake of intimacy.”
I lean in just as close as he’s leaning towards me. So close that I feel his cool, icy breath against my face. I remind myself of the power I have over him. Once I report him to Snoke, he’ll be nothing. No one. Everything that he has ever strived to achieve will come crashing down. My voice lowers, “It usually doesn’t end well for the men I’m intimate with.”

This causes him to let out a laugh, leaning back, just barely easing a fraction of the tension I created. He changes the subject as he readjusts the cuff of his jacket, “I do not understand why you have such a distaste for me. You’re giving me something I want, I’m giving you something that you want. Is that not the case?”

I stand my ground, trying not to let the ignorance of the question get the better of me. “Do you not remember the role you played in my near death on Hoth?”

“A role The Supreme Leader also took upon himself.” He quips, nearly immediately. “Do you dislike him as well?”

I scoff, “Inferring such a thing is ridiculous.” It’s really not. I realize that talking about my opinions on the Supreme Leader would probably not be the wisest thing to do with him. I drive the conversation into a different direction, “Have you entertained the thought that I do not like you because of the way you carry out your duties?”

“So seamlessly?” He raises his eyebrows. “With poise? Power?”

I shake my head, the action intended to make him look silly. “You waste time with scare tactics. While I focus on the mission at hand, you play games, taking pleasure in other’s misery.”

“It would be awfully boring if there were no pleasure involved.”

I pause, unsure how to respond to that at first. Unsure how I should respond, whilst playing into the narrative of who he believes to be; nothing more than a pawn for The Order, a droid. “Perhaps that’s why I am agreeing to this ridiculous plan of yours.” I mumble, crossing my arms. “Maybe civilian life would not sound so appealing if I did find pleasure in such things.”

“What do you find pleasure in, Agent?” He steps towards me once again, regaining the distance he once lost.

I hate him. I do. In a way that I could never have hated Kylo Ren when I hated Kylo Ren. And it’s for a reason beyond the fact that The General has caused so much intentional pain and misery for others, purely for his own satisfaction. I stare at him, trying to get inside whatever power play game he’s pursuing with me. His ice blue eyes stare back with the same analytical nature. I recall, for a moment, who I used to be – a person that I am now so disconnected to. I was someone who looked up to General Hux, who saw him as a respectful war leader. Even after he attempted to kill me while I was undercover as Iris Nisedge, I didn’t think lowly of the man. I understood his job and understood I got in the way of it. I assumed we were so much alike, in our purpose, our mission, our skill. And I suppose we are. Both of us were top of our Academy classes, both of us received the same training, both of us even have the same mannerisms. As I stand across from him, I feel as though I’m standing across from a mirror. Maybe that’s why I hate him so much.

His hand moves upwards. My opposite hand twitches. I can’t help but carefully watch his movements out of the corner of my eye, but I make sure I don’t back down from the eye contact. He reaches upwards and I feel the leather glove just barely connect with my jaw, the leather knuckles sliding down the length of my face. When I remember the feeling of his hand on me at the Lau’s home, I remember sorrow. Pain. Guilt. Fear. It’s the same feeling his touch brings now.
Which is probably exactly why he’s touching me. He likes it. He loves making people succumb to his touch, a touch that reminds them of suffering. He leans in, hand moving over to allow his index finger can trace my ear with precision, “Tell me.”

I don’t let him get the satisfaction he’s looking for, nor the fear he gets off on. My face becomes as stone cold as it’s ever been, voice low and harsh, “Nothing gives me pleasure, General. That disposition has been quite helpful in my life of an Agent of The First Order.”

His jaw ever so slightly contacts. “A shame…” He continues, “One thing I find quite pleasurable is the thought that in three days’ time, Commander Kylo Ren will be dead. I assumed with how much you insinuated you hated him, you would find slight indulgence in this as well.” He inhales sharply through his nostrils and lets the air out of his mouth, practically blowing it onto me. “Do tell me how you will go about the deed.”

I respond blatantly, “I’m going to kill him in his sleep.”

His voice softens, smirk growing, “How so?” His thumb runs back over the curve of my ear.

I keep any reaction deep down within me. My eyes, my voice, dead in a response, “He sleeps on his side, so I will have easy access to his neck. I will drive my knife into the back of his neck and upwards toward the brain stem. His death will be nearly instantaneous.”

“Promise me, Agent.” He purrs, bringing his hand over to the back of my head then downward to my neck. His thumb presses upward, at the nape of my neck, pushing towards the soft part of my skull that I would hypothetically drive my knife into when killing Kylo Ren. “Give me your word that you will carry out this mission…” He hisses, pressing his thumb so deeply now that I assume he’s trying to puncture my skin, “That you will not deny me the pleasure I seek.”

I picture myself in front of Snoke, telling him of all the treason General Hux has committed. I find myself wishing that Snoke gives me the opportunity to kill the General myself. “You have my word, General.” As I stare back into his eyes, I imagine the life from him retreating. Dead eyes going even more dead. Even more soulless. Body relaxed. Limbs gone limp.

He smiles wickedly, thumb retreating from my skull only to allow his hand to wrap around the back of my neck. He pulls me forward as he leans downward. I’m sure that he will brush his lips against mine with the movement. But at the last moment, he tilts his chin upwards, paralleling his lips to my forehead. I suppress a tremor. He eliminates the distance between us.

Out of all the men that have placed their lips on me, I have never felt lips so cold. So dry.

He puckers his lips into the skin, making a faint smacking noise as he plants the kiss into my forehead. When he pulls away, he leans over, whispering in my ear, “Good girl.”

I stare forward, blankly looking at the wall in front of me from over his shoulder.

He pulls back with a sigh, stepping away from me. He brushes his coat off, readjusting the collar around his neck. “Failure would be such a pity. I would hate to see to your death after all you’ve done for The Order.”

He’s a fucking idiot. Is he trying to make me not want to do this? Even if I did not harbor any positive feeling towards Kylo Ren, I’m sure I would go out of my way to not kill him just to spite Hux. It’s like this whole time he’s been assuming he has this power over me, like he’s been manipulating me seamlessly. I can’t wait to see the look on his face when he realizes it’s been the other way around.
He opens his mouth to speak once again, but the door to my dormitory opens.

I don’t know if seeing Kylo Ren is relieving or terrifying.

Kylo freezes in the same manner I did when I saw Hux inside my room. I give Kylo a pleading expression, as if to beg him to make an excuse to get Hux out of here.

Hux smugly says, nodding towards the garment bag lying on my bed, “Do not worry, Commander. I merely just dropped by to deliver the dress Agent 2319 will be wearing to the Alliance Gala.” He saunters towards the doorway, closer to Kylo. “It’s a beautiful number.”

Kylo doesn’t respond, the mask not giving me any indicators on what he’s thinking.

The General walks out on that note, Kylo keeping his faceless gaze on me the whole duration it takes for Hux to leave. I see R8 peeking behind Kylo’s figure.

Kylo finally walks in, slamming the door on R8.

He doesn’t say anything for a long time. He merely just sits on the edge of his bed. He clenches and unclenches his fists with an exhale, then removes his mask to quietly pick at the metal ridges with his gloved fingers.

I give him a moment to cool off before I engage, opting to silently walk towards the garment bag and zip it open. It’s a barely blue, shoulderless evening gown. The color of the blue is so light, it’s nearly opaque. The material is sheer, but so heavily layered it’s not inappropriate. Sleeves hang off the shoulder and pillow out, gathering at the wrist, mimicking the way the bottom of the dress fans outward towards the floor. My finger runs against the embroidery that would run across my collarbone and upper arms, hanging from my shoulders. The silver beading is precise, the placement of the beads mimicking lace. As the beading moves downward, the lace-like pattern progressing to resemble chain metal towards the top of the chest. But it’s not reminiscent of armor. It’s still feminine. It still stylistically fits with the flow of the dress.

I flip open the right sleeve of the dress to find the small lethal injection sewn into the hem. It’s a capsule-like object, the tiny screw fastened on the end to ensure protection from the needle. It’s a precautionary just in case I am captured and need a way out of interrogation. The last time I was given one was when I was sent to Hoth.

I zip the garment bag back up and look over at Kylo who is still keeping his focus downwards on his mask.

He says simply, sensing my gaze, “Hux knew I was on my way here. That’s why he came to you.”

I sit at the edge of the bed, next to him. I know that I need to tell him about General Hux’s plan, and my own, eventually. But I can’t yet. Telling him too soon risks the urge of him going off to kill Hux now. Which will make even more of a mess than this already is. Plus, I need Kylo to be in a good mood for this trip.

I need to convince him, now more than ever, that we can have a wonderful life outside of The First Order. That’s my number one priority.

I run my hand over his back, rubbing up and down. “I despise him too, if that makes you feel better.”

His face is hidden by the draping of his hair, but by the scoffing noise he makes, I can imagine his frown at the words. “It doesn’t.” His finger goes towards a dent in his mask. He rubs into it, feeling it’s indentation. “When I was on my way, I could feel your discomfort. Your hatred… I never used
to sense such things from you.”

I look to my own lap, my hand stilling on his back. “I’m sorry. Is it disruptive?”

“Not as nearly to me as it must be to you.” He says quietly. “I do not want harm to come to you because of your affiliations with me.”

I continue rubbing my hand into my back, reassuring him, “I can take care of myself,” I lean forward, pressing a kiss onto his shoulder.

“Did Hux do anything to you? Has he ever tried to?” He asks, the words coming out roughly, like asking the question is hard for him to muster up the courage to do. Or the implications of the question scare him.

I adjust my body on the bed so that I’m adjacent to him. I lean my head on his shoulder in a position that I can watch my finger trace patterns into his back. My fingers move upwards towards his neck. I find my fingers subconsciously avoiding the place located at the edge of the skull, moving back down to his spine. “No, he hasn’t. And he won’t either. I could take him.”

“I don’t put such a thing past him. He’s done worse.”

“I know.” The fabric of his armor feels so rough. I always remind myself that it’s not supposed to feel nice. It wasn’t made to be touched. Either way, I don’t pull away from him. “I don’t think it’s an issue. He’s just trying to get into your head. He acts as if he has nothing better to do. It’s pathetic.”

"If he does hurt you, I'll quite literally kill him," He swallows hard, leaning into my touch. We sit like this for a few moments before he begins speaking again, “Many men acknowledge your beauty. I hear their projections when I’m near you.”

I use my opposite hand to guide his face to me. He looks tired. The bags under his eyes are prominent, his jaw shadowed with stubble. I glance down at his flushed lips, then back into his worried golden-brown eyes. If I could read minds, and he didn’t wear a mask, I’d imagine I would often run into the same problem. I can’t imagine how tiring it must be, to have access to that much information all at once. How stressful it would be to not turn it off. It is constant, unending for him.

He blinks, attention returning downward to his mask, “You could have pursued anyone possible. Sometimes I worry that I’ve tricked myself into believing a lie, that this is all a conspiracy.”

I furrow my brow, “What is?”

“You choosing to be with me.”

I frown. “Kylo,” I run my thumb across his cheekbone, his skin so smooth. “Why would you think that?”

He sighs. “There’s too many reasons to even begin to tell you.”

“Begin to tell me anyway.” I insist. “I’ll argue against them all.”

He shakes his head, exhaling.

He’s not going to tell me. I stare into his broken eyes and I try my best to project it all, to meditate on how the sight of him feels so right to me. How much I relish the sound of his voice. How I have never realized that caring for a person to this much extent is humanly possible. His lip quivers, eyes softening. I lean forward, “You’re the only choice I’ve ever made.” As I kiss him, reminded of the
warmth his lips provide, the soft sensation they cause, I find my chest filled with happiness. With eagerness. Any emotion that Hux stirred without me has disappeared. I pull away to ask, “Are you ready to go?”

He nods, leaning in to kiss me again.

Kylo Ren pilots the shuttle. Not his shuttle. Just a random shuttle, one unaffiliated with The First Order or any military operation. He’s not wearing his mask. Nor his armor. It’s a beige, loose-fitting shirt with flowing sleeves. His trousers are dark brown, boots made with a light leather. The ensemble makes his skin tone seem warmer. His brown eyes seem more alive. His hair is brushed back, the loose curls neat and brushed through, not messy from taking the helmet on and off repeatedly.

I look down at myself as I stand in the doorway of the pilot’s cabin after exiting the bathroom. I am slightly more used to wearing things other than my uniform. But this is different. I’m not wearing this to become anyone different. These aren’t someone else’s clothes. These are clothes that would be worn regularly on Naboo, given to me, for me. One could say they’re mine.

The dress is casual, but still reaches the floor. It’s an off-white dress, clinging tightly towards the bodice but then flowing downwards from the waist down. The dress is made of a thin, breathable material. It’s so soft and smooth as my skin brushes against it with my movements. Thin straps keep it secured on me, the neckline soft and curving with the frame of my body. There’s a small coin-sized pocket at the right hip where I keep the map of the Unknown Regions.

I adjust the silk cloak that covers my shoulders, then extends down to the ground. It’s a light blue shade, one that kind of reminds me of the sky of Naboo during the daytime. My hair is down, curled, in a fashion that many girls of Naboo keep their hair. The ringlets are somewhat messy, yet still appear soft. Strands of my hair are pulled back, pinned to the back of my head to keep it out of my face.

I am somewhat embarrassed to be wearing such a thing in front of him, for some reason. He’s probably so accustomed to the sight of me in my regular gear or lounging ensembles. I suppose have worn a dress in front of him once before, when I posed as Iris Nisedge. But I certainly didn’t care what he thought of my appearance then. I approach him, taking a deep breath and settling into the co-pilot’s chair.

He swivels his chair towards me, pulling his eyes away from the control panel of the ship. As he takes the sight of me in, I notice his cheeks slightly turn pink. His mouth is slightly agape, as if he were about to say something. But he closes it with an exhale. He tilts his head down, an attempt to hide a shy smile.

He appears so young now, younger than I ever could imagine him being. I tuck a strand of hair behind my ear, my own face feeling hot now. I ask him, “Are the navigational charts I programmed easy to follow?”

He nods, looking back towards me. I watch as his eyes jump around to focus on the shape of my hair, then my collarbone, then my eyes. He reaches out, running his bare hand down my arm, feeling the silk against his fingertips. He runs his hand back upwards to touch one of the curls of my hair. He holds it in between his fingers. “We’ll be there in a few minutes. I didn’t realize that it would take such a short time to get there.”
“Where are we now?” I ask him.

He pulls his hand away from me to reach over at the console. He clicks a button that illuminates the holographic map. A red blinking dot indicates the ship’s position, on a track towards a green marker. “We’ll be closing in soon.”

He clicks it off, sighing, leaning back into his chair. He reaches his hand out once more to rest it on my knee, feeling the fabric of the cloak.

I smile, lightly resting my palm over the top of his hand. “This is so much more comfortable than my uniform.”

He smiles, running his hand against the material. “It’s odd to see you not wearing shades of grey or black.”

I laugh, squeezing his hand, “You think so?”

He smiles brighter, a sight so rare, I try to memorize the lines created from his face stretching. His eyes almost seem to glimmer.

I respond, “I could say the same for you, I suppose.”

“I suppose.” With his laugh, he laces his fingers in-between mine, holding my hand in front of me with a playful sway.

Another odd thing about this trip is the fact that R8 isn’t coming. Sure, the droid isn’t always around. But it’s very few and far between where he hasn’t at least been on the same planet as me. Usually he’s required to follow me everywhere. But I’ve convinced him that I need to be alone with Kylo, in order to establish the trust needed to assassinate him eventually. At first, the droid seemed hesitant. But I really didn’t give him a choice, if I’m being honest.

“So, how is this going to work?” Kylo’s voice interjects my thoughts, “Do we need aliases or an intricate background story?”

I’ll admit that I really didn’t think that far ahead. This whole trip, I’ve taken advantage of not really planning anything and not needing to. Nothing is really life or death. I lean my head over, into the curve of the chair’s backrest. “Referring to you as Kylo Ren in public may be unwise.”

“And calling you Agent 2319 may be questionable.”

I ponder it for a moment, “We should probably establish our fake names now. It’s probably something that will come up.” I encourage, “Pick mine. What do I look like?”

He purses his lips in thought, absentmindedly rubbing my knuckles with his thumb. “Hm,” He opens his mouth, humming a “m” sound. He looks at me analytically, eyes narrowed, “Mi… mai… mo…”

I raise an eyebrow, questioning at the sounds. “Mi-mai-mo?”

“I’m thinking.” He snaps playfully.

“Just say the first thing that you think of.”

He stops making the incomprehensible noises, retracting from whatever he was about to say. Then just decides on, as if he changed his mind from his first idea, “Ayla.”

“Ayla…” I repeat back to him.
“You do me now,” He insists, pulling the attention away from his decision.

I look at him in the same analytic manner, taking in his features and overall aura. I stop myself from blurt ing out the first thing that pops up, something I know I could never say to him.

Ben.

I swallow hard, pushing back the memories of his mother and the pilot referring to him as the name. I never used to even give it a second guess before. I looked at him saw Kylo. And before that I saw Kylo Ren. And before that I saw Commander Kylo Ren. But with time, the label has stripped itself down until at this moment, it’s as if it completely disintegrated. For whatever reason, after the realization, I can’t seem to separate the sight of him from the name I never even knew him by. I want to say it so badly, just to test the name out on my lips. Ben. He’s Ben.

“What?” He asks, innocently grinning, completely unaware.

I say the first male name I can think of before he questions my hesitance, “Edan.”

“And our last names?” He nods, accepting my answer.

I scoff at my first initial thought. Fuck.

“What?” He encourages.

My mind bounces back endlessly between three main options; Solo, Organa, and Moira.

Ben Solo.

I say, shaking my head, bullshitting as the words come, “Ren. But with a ‘w.’ Like, Wren.”

That amuses him. He says, poking fun at me, “Creative.” His attention turns back to the console, pulling himself away from me, right on cue for the ship to exit hyperspace.

The horizon nearly seems to materialize, showcasing the blue-green planet with marbling clouds of white. The sight of it seems so pure, so peaceful, even from so far away. I guess, after living on Starkiller Base, planet made to be more of a machine, it would be easy for the sight to seem beautiful. He readjusts his hand into mine, using his opposite hand to reach the control panel. His fingers stretch across the controls, tapping the necessary buttons to stabilize the ship seamlessly. He settles his hand on the steering lever.

He recites back to himself, “Ayla and Edan Wren…” He shrugs, “It works for now.”

I lean back in my chair, mouth closed. It’s an odd sensation, to try to repress the sound of thoughts. Especially when the thought seems so clear cut. So loud. So sure of itself. I don’t really understand how projecting works. I run through all the times in my mind I know he’s seen inside my mind. There’s the time in the cave, when he sensed my guilt. He mentions sensing certain projecting feelings, feelings that fleet, like my discomfort earlier today with the General. But specific thoughts, that’s something he needs to try to retrieve. Like when he looked inside my mind to see the dream I’ve been having, about the old man in the hut. Or when Snoke wanted to see my memories with Kylo. And even then, I’m not sure to what extent in those memories he saw that I wanted him to see, versus my actual experience.

I glance towards him again.

I say it in my mind once more: Ben Solo.
He doesn’t have a reaction.

I figure that it’s safe enough to repeat.

Ben Solo.

Chapter End Notes

my favorite thing ever is the fan/EU approach to Hux vs the actual canon Hux. he's so damn goofy in the last jedi, but in all the other content he's super manipulative and power hungry and spooky. i think about that a lot and i saw a tumblr post pointing it out and damn.

Anyways, the first chapter of Officious Extras is up, so go check that out if that's something you're interested in reading! School and life in general has been murdering me lately, so I hope that I can continue uploading some quality content at a really consistent rate. But yea, in the meantime, shit's about to get so damn fluffy so yea, enjoy that while it's a thing.

thank you all for reading, once again! <3

spotify inspired playlist:
https://open.spotify.com/user/1234824368/playlist/2yVRylRnOD1Xy3eJC2TTCO
Kylo Ren hates a lot of things. But I don’t think I’ve seen him resent anything as much as he does public hangers.

His expression while being directed into the hanger by flashing arrows in a line behind tons of other shuttles was all but at peace. His eyebrow was furrowed, jaw set. Whenever the slow-moving line would completely stall, he would not waste time easing the ship to a halt, opting to jolt it with a gruff. He often would roll his neck, leaning back in his chair, leg impatiently jittering. I know he has his lightsaber around here somewhere, just as I packed a blaster and set of daggers. I found myself anticipating him to take it out and single-handedly destroy every ship in our way.

I made an effort not to comment on his irritation, or the situations irritating him. I merely swiveled my chair closer to his, resting my hand on his thigh. The fabric of his pants was tough, yet soft under my fingertips. I rubbed my hand against the muscles of his leg and watched his once hardened features soften with time.

He landed the hanger with a sigh of relief, nearly bolting up the moment the ship’s engines stopped in eagerness to get the hell off the vessel. He grabbed the two bags next to the loading ramp, swinging them over his shoulder. I reached out to him, offering to take one, but he merely shook his head and said, “I can get it.”

I gave him a disapproving look as he opened the shuttle doors.

The hanger is large, but quiet. It seems as if any words we say would be amplified and echoed for all to hear. The marble floors and walls make everything resonate. As we navigate through the seemingly endless rows of shuttles, Kylo keeps his head downward as we pass each person. He seems desperate to avoid any eye contact. Some people are walking from their own shuttles, others merely maintenance crews pushing carts along. With his hunched shoulders and downward gaze, he looks nothing less than suspicious.

As we close in on the large doorway to lead to the outside, I notice the large congregated crowd of people gathered at the exit. The people range in ages, in species, in moods. Some are energetic, but others seem miserable, perhaps from traveling or waiting around for their transport. They all crowd around the several vendors and public transit options in a variety of lines and disorganized blobs. Even though there isn’t any sort of dress code here, everyone dresses the same. The clothes all have neutral tones, shades of reds and purples, and regal-like cuts. The sleeves and cuffs flow romantically, while necklines are loose. Everyone’s hair is either done in the most intricate way possible or completely natural, really no in-betweens. Kylo readjusts the bags on his shoulders and draws his lips into a straight line, uncertain. He comes to a stop, squinting at what is visible of daylight through the wide doorway.
I look up to him, reassuring, “We’re in Theed now. The hotel should only be a mile or two away.”

He silently nods, advancing towards the crowd of people. I notice him glance towards a younger man and woman beside the doorway, examining a holographic map of the city. They hold hands as the man points to a location.

Kylo reaches down, somewhat awkwardly grabbing my hand, my fingers scrunched together by his grip. I notice that his hand is warmer than usual. His breath hitches and he steps forward into the crowd with determination. It feels somewhat odd to actually be showing physical displays of affection in public. The past few months have been us going out of our way to not seem interested in each other around others. But no one looks at us as he pulls me through the mass of people. Even as I brush shoulders with them, no one cares to take a second glance.

Kylo’s steps quicken, desperate to leave the congested area. I peek above the mass of people, trying to get a visual on how close we are to a clear space. But I can’t quite see. I’m sure Kylo can, with his height. I let him lead the way, despite wishing I could be the one to do that for him. I don’t necessarily mind the crowds. My discomfort for the situation comes from the anxiety of how Kylo is doing. If he’s regretting coming, if he thinks this all is just juvenile. I know he told me on numerous accounts that he wanted to come, to be here with me. But I think back to when I first brought it up, he shot it down immediately. It was nearly instinctual.

Eventually, after more weaving through the conjunction of people, the space opens, a roadway revealed. I sigh, readjusting my hand in his as I take in the sight. There’s a bridge across the road, leading to towards the Plaza of Theed, where our hotel is located. The bridge spans over a large, running river. From all the way over here, I can see how much the crystal blue water sparkles in movement and with the sunlight from above. The buildings in the distance are all made of marbles and sandstone, while the roofs are covered with a teal-green scaling. Despite the countless buildings, there’s still lush trees and forests bundled in any empty spaces, stretching to the riverbed. There’s a slight breeze in the air, pushing my hair back behind my shoulders, lightly piercing my face. I relax into the feeling, looking towards Kylo.

He takes in the sight of the scenery, blinking up towards the buildings edging the waterfront. He seems so entranced by it all, golden-brown eyes twinkling. I’ve always seen his hair as completely jet black, but in the sunlight, it appears more like a rich brown. With an exhale, he glances left and right on the street and then leads me forward, bringing us to the bridge. I can’t help but smile as he energetically pulls me behind him, his strides much longer than mine.

Once we have progressed about halfway across the bridge, he pauses, turning to the railing. He lets go of my hand to place his palms against the stone banister. He ducks his head over the edge, looking down at the water. He watches a longboat float from underneath us, a group of young adults rowing with ease, smiling and laughing at each other. He looks upward, to the blue sky, taking in the wispy white clouds. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him so relieved. Whatever apprehension he possessed before, it’s all disappeared.

It feels so close; the idea of us being outside of the war, together. It’s so much more possible than I have ever believed it to be.

He pulls his eyes away from the sky to catch me, looking at him. He merely says, oblivious, “Yeah?”

I am unable to repress the urge of gently roping my arms around his neck, then giving him a quick kiss. Our future is so possible. I have all we need. The reminders of the war are so far away from us here. I can’t recall what the mask looks like, nor the feelings of my blasters in my palms. All of it seems like just some bad dream that is slowly fading from my memory.
With a grin, he grabs my hand again and we begin moving towards the city Plaza.

The city Plaza is the long strip of cobblestone road leading to Theed Palace. Our hotel is located towards the end of the strip, down a few blocks towards the shoreline. As we approach the Plaza, the sound of folk music comes into earshot. The acoustic strings, mixed with pipe instruments blend in a way that is upbeat, yet not too overbearing. The street is lined with various vendors selling everything from fruit, art, jewelry, literature, and clothing. Kylo looks at each vendor as we pass.

I ask him, “Are you hungry?”

“A little, are you?”

“Sure,” I say, redirecting our steps towards the nearest food cart.

As we approach the cart, we pass a man in front of a separate cart painting the scenery of the Plaza on a large canvas. I immediately take note of how intricate the colors are, perfectly replicating the Plaza’s beauty. The blue he chose for the sky is a perfect match, impossibly so. The lines of the street and the Palace are so intricate, precise. Art isn’t very valued among The First Order, so I’m not terribly exposed to it. But in glimpses I get in traveling, the craft never ceases to amaze me.

I catch Kylo looking at the painter as well. I lean into him saying, “I can’t imagine how much patience that takes.”

“Yeah,” Kylo says, “but he probably is in this whole different mental zone, where attributes such as patience aren’t as frustrating to maintain, you know?”

I shrug, “No, I don’t.”

“Well,” He explains, slowing down his pace. “I feel like when you do anything that requires artistic ability, or any ability, you have to kind of be outside your own mind. And when you get to that state, it’s a lot easier to deal with things like patience and frustration. It’s like they almost don’t exist in your realm.”

I guess I get that way when I’m target shooting. Or in strength training. I laugh at the idea of Kylo Ren talking to me about being rid of frustration. “I feel like a lot of things you do are fueled by your frustration. Isn’t that how you get your power? Through anger? By being so inside yourself, the angry energy kind of manifests within you as well?”

He shrugs, “Not with everything.” He elaborates, voice smooth, “I used to practice a lot of calligraphy. I can’t imagine putting angry energy into something like that and creating anything legible.”

I tilt my head at the image of him doing such a thing. “You can write?”

He jokes, poking fun at me, “They don’t teach you how to write at the Academy?”

“Everything’s digital, there’s no need to know how to write.” I say, mimicking his playful nature in my defensiveness.

“Oh, that’s right,” He says sarcastically with a boyish grin.

As we’re approaching the cart, I grab a burlap basket from the crate towards the end of vendor. With the feeling of the rough burlap in my palm, I can’t stop my mind from reverting back to the burlap covering the door of the hut in my reoccurring visions. I feel at the bag in my hands, gentle fingers
sliding against any stray threads. This feels just as real as it does in my dreams. I curse myself for the thoughts, retracting myself from them and focusing on the sight of Kylo mindfully examining the fruit in front of him.

He holds up a spherical purple fruit with dark red spotting. He asks me, “Do you like these?”

I nod, pulling apart the handles of the basket to allow him to place the food inside. We make our way down the isle way, additional grabbing a small wheel of cheese and Nuna meat. I tell him as he examines the different loaves of bread, “You should show me your calligraphy sometime.”

He laughs, perhaps at the simplicity of the request, “I haven’t done it in years. It really will not be pleasant.”

“I won’t be able to tell the difference,” I insist.

He grabs a small loaf of bread, setting it into the basket. “If you can find me the right pen and ink, sure.”

I glance back towards the vendor with the artist. There’s different art supplies there. Naboo actually has a market for that kind of stuff. “I can, actually.” I squint closer at the booth, trying to discern what would be considered a calligraphy pen or calligraphy ink.

He nods towards the small selection of wine, “Preferences?”

My eyes fall onto the red wine. It’s not the same wine I drank at the Lau’s home, as they were murdered. But it isn’t dissimilar. It would probably have not much of a different taste. I can almost still feel it sliding down my throat, my stomach struggling to digest it at the sight of the crevasse that the heat of Hux’s blaster created in the space in-between the husband’s eyes. I remember looking at the wine, then the blood spilling onto the table, thinking there wasn’t that much of a visual difference. How if I would’ve just done something there, in that moment, three children would still have a family. Two innocent people would still have their lives. And General Hux would not be able to torment anyone again.

“Agent?”

I shush him, whispering, glancing around to make sure no one heard, “Shh, don’t call me that.”

“Oh, shit,” He clears his throat, “Uh... Ay-Ayla?”

I say, trying to make my tone seem nonchalant, “I like white wine.”

His hand passes over the red wine to grab the white.

After paying, we decide to take the food to the nearest park outside our hotel. Originally, we were just going to get settled in and then eat, but upon passing a public garden, we decided to stop. The garden is covered in white flowers and bushes. Statues of artists and ancient politicians are placed throughout the area on intersections in the pathways. The plants are neatly kept to the point where the vines and bush are kept out of the way of the cobblestoned sidewalk, but not overdone to the point where things look too maintained, in an uptight sense. We sit across from each other on a stone bench, the basket of food in-between us.

Additionally, I managed to purchase a calligraphy pen and ink, with Kylo’s assistance in directing me where such utensils are in the vendor’s booth. Kylo begins splitting the food into halves, one for
me, the other for him. I grab the piece of bread he broke off for me, taking a bite. It’s warmth from
the oven is still apparent. I notice him struggling to twist the cork from the wine bottle, fingers unable
to get a grip at the top. He looks over his shoulder, then after deeming it safe, he stares at the cork
and it slides out of the bottle, untouched, right into his palm.

He looks up at me, smirking.

I reach for the bottle, unable to hide my own amusement, “You’re absurd.”

“Am I?” He yanks the bottle backwards. “I’m still not sure if you should consume alcohol. Must you
be reminded of the last time you were intoxicated? Of how absurd you were at one time?”

I scoff, taking another bite of the bread, it being more of a way to hide my blush of embarrassment. I
say after swallowing the bite, “I’m not going to get intoxicated.”

“Are you sure? I don’t really feel like explaining to the hotel staff why our room was demolished by
a lightsaber.”

Upon the word lightsaber, I nearly choke, glancing to the nearest people around us, a few yards
away. They seem unaware. I shake my head at him, reaching for the fruit, “You would make a
terrible agent.”

“Why do you say that?” He says, taking a swig of the wine, then setting it in-between the both of us.
I can’t tell if it’s sarcasm or not.

“You really aren’t at all proficient in keeping a cover. Or lying.”

“You wouldn’t know that. I don’t lie to you.”

I sigh, taking a swig of the wine. I swing my legs up onto the bench and cross them from underneath
my dress, settling myself.

He nods towards the flowers in the bushes, carving a piece of Nuna out. “Do you know why they’re
called wind flowers?”

I glance towards the white flowers. They’re small with wispy petals and circular yellow centers. “I
didn’t even know they were called wind flowers.” It surprises me that he knows. I doubt that him
and Snoke spend time studying such things.

He chews his food, swallowing it, before saying, “It’s to pay tribute to the wind – how it at one time
blows the petals open, and one day will eventually blow the dead petals away.”

“Live for The Order, die for The Order,” I mumble, not bothering to hide my disgust. The flowers
don’t seem as beautiful anymore, thinking of it in that way. I quickly reroute the conversation, back
to the flowers, “That’s kind of depressing.”

“Not really,” He says, carving out another piece of meat. He holds it on the fork out for me to grab.
“It’s nice, to know that there’s something all-powerful to keep balance.”

I grab the fork from him. “So, you’re an artist, botanist, poet, and philosopher now?”

He rolls his eyes at me, “I’m merely repeating what someone else once told me. Any time I sound at
all clever, that’s most likely the case.”

“Who told you?”
He stares at me, quietly, unsure if he should answer that question or hide behind the silence I’ve become so accustomed to when he’s unsure if he wants to face the answer of my personal, sometimes pressing questions. His eyes soften, then drift away. Words form in my mouth to save him from his discomfort in the question, but I’m cut off by him saying, simply, softly, “My mother.”

I blink at him, trying to mask my shock at him mentioning her. She seems like the very last person Kylo ever wants to discuss, right next to his father. It just seemed like something so untouchable, a route our conversations could never go. I’ve grown to accept that fact, never letting my curiosity breach his comfort. I ask, hoping to the stars I am not overstepping my boundaries, “Do you remember much about the last time you were here with her?”

He answers, “I couldn’t before. But now that I’m here, it feels so fresh in my mind.”

“What do you remember?” I set down the food in my hands to lean forward, giving him my full attention.

He looks down at his lap, his voice nearly in a trace from relieving the memory, “I remember a lot of the Palace. We would stay there for my mother’s diplomatic meetings. We would also pay tribute to her mother – my grandmother – Queen Padme Amidala. But mostly, I remember this one time I was stuck in the bedroom with nothing to do, bored out of my mind. At this time, I haven’t seen my father in weeks and he showed up randomly, just to get me out of that room. We would go swimming down in some private lakes that we weren’t allowed to be swimming in, but he made sure no one found out. And I remember getting so exhausted from playing tag with him in the fields around the lakes that I fell asleep on the transport back. I woke up so confused, back in the bedroom.”

I smile softly at the thought of him being so young, so happy, with family. Around people who love him and people he loves back. “What’s tag?”

Kylo glances up to me, his own smile fading. His eyes hold a certain sort of sadness. No, something deeper. Condolence. “You’ve never heard of tag?”

I shake my head, trying to retract my brain, thinking of if the words ever came up. I hush my voice, explaining, “I know tags, like what we give our prisoners to label them. But not tag in the context of a game.”

He reaches outwards, caressing my cheek in his hand softly, eyebrows knitted together. The pad of his thumb ever so gently skims my cheekbone. I can’t help but become humored at his sudden concern and my own obliviousness.

He pulls his hand away after a moment of contemplation. “You would’ve been good at it. It involves running and catching people.”

“Yeah, I would’ve kicked your ass.” I laugh as I reach for the bread, taking another bite.

His smile returns, “You would have.”

Dusk comes sooner than I expected. Kylo and I really haven’t done much yet, as far as tourist-activities are concerned. But we have talked a lot. In ways we haven’t really talked before. In ways that we have both been too scared to. I suppose wine has helped. I wouldn’t say I’m drunk. But I wouldn’t necessarily say I’m sober either. And by the looks of it, Kylo isn’t either.
The lights wrapping around the archways of the garden’s entrances have turned on. Less people are around us, but more people have gathered a few blocks away, towards the Plaza center for some festivity going on. Music pulses in the background, the sounds of cheering distant.

I lay against the side of his body, holding the bottle of wine loosely in my hand as I listen to his low voice. The sound of him mixes perfectly in my mind with the buzzing effect of the alcohol. I like the way his chest rumbles when he speaks.

“There were so many rumors about my birth, in particular. There was one that I was born with a full set of hair and teeth.” He laughs, his body relaxing into me.

“Well?” I say, returning the favor by leaning back, “Were you?” I glance down at my forearm, the alphabet carefully printed across my skin. I didn’t think to buy him any paper, so he just opted to paint the characters across the length of my arm. It’s so beautiful. He was so careful, yet his hand motions so fluid. It was almost like he didn’t even have to concentrate when doing such a delicate art. With the pen’s gentle pressure against my skin, I struggled to stay still, suppressing shivers. But he held my arm steady with his opposite hand, which helped. He’s very strong and good at holding me. I smile at the fact.

As I look up at him, I can see his eyes narrowing, saying as if it’s obvious, “I don’t remember. I would hope I wasn’t.”

“Lame,” I sigh, taking another swig of the wine. The last swig of wine there is. I clumsily set the bottle in the basket with the rest of our trash. “Would you rank that as your favorite rumor about you?”

He ponders it for a moment, then says, “My favorite rumor is that I wear my mask because I’m secretly a war machine droid.”

I giggle at the idea. “I think that that’s my favorite too. That or I’ve heard some people say that you wear the mask just because you’re super old and your mask makes it so that you’re immortal.”

He reaches his hand downward, running lazy fingers through the curls cascading from my head, down to my arm. When he reaches the end of my hair, he brings his fingers back up to my scalp to run them downwards again. “Sometimes, I wonder how my life would be different if I wasn’t born the way I am.”

I draw circles into his elbow, expression dropping with the idea. “The way you are?”

“Yeah,” He explains, “If I was completely void of the Force. If I were just normal.”

I don’t know how I feel about that idea. I like it, because it means that he would’ve have met Snoke, he wouldn’t have been caused so much pain, guilt and misery. But selfishly, I know that if he was just “normal” he wouldn’t have met me. And when I imagine who I would be right now, without him, an immense sadness rushes over me. I merely ask him, entertaining his thought despite my mixed feelings of the concept, “What do you think that would be like? What would you be?”

He pauses to twist a strand of my hair in-between his fingers, curling it then releasing it so that it falls back into it’s original position. He returns to the combing motion, “A pilot. I think I’d want to be a pilot.”

I nod slowly, making the connection in my mind. Like his father. Kylo Ren is probably the best pilot I know. It makes sense. The whole fantasy of him, not being Force-sensitive, still living with his family, being a pilot; it makes so much sense.
“What about you? What would you be?”

I respond, “I’m already completely void of Force powers. So, I guess we already know the answer to that.”

“No,” He says, interjecting, “If you weren’t in The Order. What would you be?”

I don’t have hobbies. I don’t have interests. I guess I enjoy watching holo-movies. But everyone does. My skills include lying to people, killing people, and fighting people. I don’t know what I would even be good at, outside of this. Did I even think that far into my plan of leaving The Order? What am I without them? What would I even be able to apply myself to? I say, voice quieter than I intend it to be, “I don’t know.” But I do know. I would be nothing.

He doesn’t take the answer as a discouragement. Instead he starts listing ideas, with no hesitation, “You could do a lot of different things, you’re so intelligent. I feel like you’d be very good at math. You’re logical and sensical. Or anything to do with technology. Or science. You’re really good at problem-solving, in general. Or maybe a doctor, since you’re so patient and precise.”

I don’t know why exactly, but the simple answer is nearly the most reassuring thing anyone has said to me. I wrap my arms around him, pulling him into an embrace. I say into the warmth of his shoulder, “Thank you.”

He gives me a quick kiss on the top of my head, wrapping an arm around me. He sounds somewhat confused by my thanks, but nevertheless responds with an indulgent, “No problem, I guess,”

I nuzzle myself against him more, his frame steadying my somewhat off center of balance. He is so firm, so strong. I let more of my weight press into him and I readjust myself so that I can look at the garden’s view. The white flowers nearly glow in the orange sunset’s light. When I look at the sky, a mix of purples and oranges and pinks, I can make out three of Naboo’s moons, carefully lining the sky.

He asks, “Do you want to start heading back? See what’s left of that festival?”

“You want to attend a festival?” I ask, pulling myself off him. I gather the trash left from our dinner, throwing it into the burlap bag.

“Might as well just see it, while we’re here.” He responds, grabbing our two bags of luggage.

I don’t really know what the people of Naboo are celebrating. I don’t even know if there’s a specific purpose. Perhaps they’re just celebrating life itself. I wouldn’t know any better. The Plaza is lit up with string lights, zig-zagging across the skyline. Many people carry lanterns local artist sell on the streets, others have small yellow lights strung around their necks or wrists as jewelry, and there’s a few with sparklers. People scatter in the Plaza’s center, dancing to the music being played from the band under a balcony. The music is classical, not as messy as the music being played in the Plaza earlier. But still, just as joyful.

Their dancing is so free, nothing uniform. There’s a group of perhaps intoxicated young adults sporadically dancing in the distance, then there’s a mother and three children dancing not too far away from then, holding hands in a circle, ringing around with laughter. Then there’s some couples holding each other, swaying back and forth. As the plaza extends, it’s nearly filled with different groups or family all dancing in their own way.
Kylo says, “When we come back some time, we should go to the concert hall. I went there when I was little. It was incredible, to hear so many individual musicians all contributing to this one, overall powerful sound.”

When we come back. I grin at the thought of it and the thought that he already has convinced himself that we’re coming back.

Suddenly, I feel a tug at my sleeve. Instinctively, I jump, attention shifting straight towards the source, my mind running through multiple options of defense. A child, no older than the middle child of the Lau’s is there, holding out a strand of lights. She looks up at me with big blue eyes, the blue especially brought out by her green skin. “You don’t have starlight jewelry yet!”

I glance to the small table set up behind her. A small boy sits at the booth, patiently watching the people who pass. A sign hanging front the front of the booth reads in a messy handwriting, “STARLIGHTS = ONE CREDIT”

“It’s more expensive when you get closer to the Palace. These are some of the ones from last year we saved. We decided to resell them!” She explains, proud of the deal.

I laugh at the concept, “You're quite the business strategist.” I dig into my pocket, finding the spare change from buying the food. My fingers brush the map of the Unknown Regions as I do. I pull out a credit, handing it to the child. She excitedly reaches out, accepting the coin, then holding out the strand of lights to put my neck into. I can’t help but grin at her enthusiasm as I bend down to her height, allowing her to position the necklace on me. She carefully places it around my neck, small gentle hands separating my hair from the lights.

Her mouth forms an “o” in a small gasp, saying, “It looks so pretty with your cloak. It makes you sparkle.”

“Does it?” I say, aiding her amusement, looking down at the way the light reflects from the light blue silk.

“It does! You’re like a princess!” She exclaims, a light bounce to her demeanor.

I hide try my best to mask the embarrassment the statement makes me feel. I avoid Kylo’s gaze beside me, knowing the contact would only make me feel even more self-conscious. I look down at the lights stung down my neck, untangling them. “Thank you very much,” I say, smiling down at her.

“Thank you!” She waves as we walk away, onto her next costumer.

As we walk away, Kylo reaches towards my collarbone, touching one of the lights. I feel somewhat silly for wearing such a thing, even though everyone else here is wearing one. Kylo’s hand moves from my collarbone to form against the small of my back. I look up to him, eyes tracing his regal profile against the warm lights of the town. He seems so at ease, comfortable. His face isn’t set in stone, nor are his eyebrows furrowed in concentration. It’s all relaxed. He looks back down, smiling at the sight of me, then eyes catching something in the distance.

I glance behind me to try to decipher what he sees, but I can’t make out anything before he’s walking towards it, his frame blocking my vision. I follow him, throwing our trash in the nearest wastebasket on the way.

He’s making his way up stairs to the roof of a building beside the palace. I laugh at him, trying to follow him seamlessly through the numerous people dancing around us, “Where are you going?”
He looks back, waving his hand at me to come forward, “Come on, just trust me.”

I roll my eyes, advancing forward. He holds his hand out for me to take as he leads me up the stairs on the side of the building. “Are we trespassing?” I ask him, looking around at the people below us making sure none look concerned.

Kylo merely ignores the question, continuing up the stairwell, my hand loose in his from his lengthened strides. Finally, he reaches the top, his hand pulling away from mine with his sigh of relief at whatever it is that’s up here.

I climb up beside him, asking, “What is-”

I see it and whatever question I was once formulating dissipates into thin air.

It’s probably the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

The night stars stretch across the Naboo sky, three moons now clearly visible. The moonlight shines so brightly against the darkness of the sea below. I can hear the waterfalls pouring from the edge cliff we’re on in a distance. I guess I never really made the connection we’re on a large cliff, right now. I didn’t realize how far from sea level we actually are either. But as I look at the cascading waterfalls, it’s undeniable. The buildings across the city are all lit with similar lights from the lanterns in the Plaza and around my neck. It mimics the stars, as if the city is mirroring the heavens itself.

I glance around the rest of the roof we’re standing a top of. The balcony has no roof, but an opening to the inside of the building that descends underneath us. There’s a window showcasing the inside of the shop, showcasing a sign that reads, “CLOSED.” From the looks of it, it seems to be a shop selling herbs and medicine.

I don’t ask Kylo if he’s been up here before. I know the answer to that question, by the nostalgia in his eyes. His face is relieved to be back. But almost sorrowful he’s ever left.

I also don’t ask him, to allow myself to make my own memory. One for myself. One of my only memories that doesn’t belong to The First Order. Just to me. I step forward on the roof, taking in more of the scenery. I am not bitter. I am too separated from The First Order right now to be bitter about what they did to me. It’s only relief. Relief that one day, this is what I’ll be feeling all the time. I know it. I do. I don’t know how I could’ve ever lived any way other than this, it’s so clear to me now. This is the dream that I used to always scare myself away from having. This is the freedom I’ve yearned for.

And as I look into the stars, I realize how different it looks from any of the other stars I’ve seen before. It may as well be a completely new galaxy.

I reach up to the map in my pocket, unable to repress my lip from quivering. I look towards Kylo Ren once again, to find him already looking at me. He glances towards the positioning on my hand over my pocket.

I remove my hand to place it in his palm, fingers interlocking with his.

“Thank you.” I say, simply, taking the sight of him in. The loose brown tunic flows against him with the night breeze, his hair softly moving with the motion as well.

He says, stepping forwards, head bent downward to meet my eye level, “For what?”

I tell him, running my thumb against the back of his hand, “For coming here with me. I’ve been to Naboo before. But never with you. And that’s made everything so different.”
He smiles to himself, looking at the horizon, then back to me. He smiles wider.

I ask, my nose crinkling, “What?”

“Everything is different with you,” He closes the space between us. He presses a velvet-soft kiss to my temple, then ducks his head back down to look in my eyes as he says, “I didn’t think it was possible to be this happy, after everything that’s happened.” A sadness lingers in his eyes, a timidity of opening up in such a way but a determination to do so, as if it’s important for him to let me know, “I didn’t think I was capable of it. But now…”

The copper in his eyes flickers, matching the warm lights of the city line. It clicks in my mind, the differences of what we’re feeling. While I’ve never experienced this kind of happiness before, he has. But he’s forgotten it. It’s been nothing but a memory for him, a reminder of what has been and could no longer be. I don’t want it to be that way for him. Or me. I want this to be the rest of our lives. I would do anything to ensure that.

“I didn’t think such a thing was possible either,” I breath into him, kissing his lips. Both of us break the brief kiss in unison to smile even more, our foreheads pressed firmly against one another. Our lips meet once more, my arms reaching upwards to wrap around his neck.

He closes his arms around my waist, holding me securely against him, much like he did when we first kissed on Hoth. But Hoth was so cold, so full of confusion, while this is so warm, my mind so clear. His nose rubs against my cheek, positioning us in an angle to where he can kiss me firmer. He does.

As I kiss him back, my chest swells with enchantment. Our lips move so slowly against each other’s, but it’s so concentrated, so purposeful. He pushes me backwards, into the wall of the shop, not bothering to break the kiss.

I pull away, glancing inside the room, making sure there’s no one inside. He uses my movement to kiss the part of my neck I’ve exposed to him. He starts under my jawline, moving against the hollows of my neck with persistent kisses. He mumbles into my skin, “No one’s there,” I don’t really register the words as eligible words, but more as sounds. The sound of his low, rough voice, nearly pained with lust causes me to swallow the saliva forming in my mouth, parting my lips to catch my breath. He buries his head in the crook of my neck, sucking at the most sensitive section of my neck, causing my shoulders to slightly hitch. His hands knead deeper in my hips, pushing his lower body against mine, his knee in between my legs. His teeth catch my skin as he offers me a deep groan of pleasure. The noise resonates throughout my body, intensifying the buzzing, insistent craving.

I run my hands into his hair, breaking apart the soft curls with my fists. Through half-opened eyes, I look back towards the horizon, the stars growing brighter as the darkness of the night intensifies. I mumble, unable to formulate a sentence, “Hotel…”

I feel his smile against my skin. “Hotel.” He repeats back, then lightly pecking the skin he once passionately kissed on my collarbone. The shy grin plastered on his face nearly breaks me right there.

He begins walking away, my hand in his. But I find myself unmoving. I glance back towards the horizon, one last time. “Wait,” I dig my hand into my pocket. For a moment, I think about telling him. Asking him right here, right now. I’ve never felt this sure about it. The scenery is beautiful. Everything is perfect.

“Yeah?” He looks back towards me, so attentive.
I open my mouth. The words form in my mind.

In my imagination, I say, “I know a way out of this. A way The Order could never find us, and yet we could be together, somewhere safe.”

And in my imagination, his eyes go wide, mouth parts open, trying to ask “how” but not gaining the mental concentration to.

As I pull out the map from my pocket, I tell him everything. I apologize for taking so long to bring it up. I explain that I was just scared he would say no, that he wasn’t ready yet, but now, after seeing him here in the starlight, I’m sure of it.

In my imagination, I’m sure he’ll join me. How couldn’t he? If he feels what I feel right now, he would do it in a heartbeat.

And in my imagination, he does.

But here, in this moment right now, my hand retreats from my pocket. I merely say, words hushed, “I just want to take it in, for one more moment. The scenery.”

He looks relieved, exhaling and letting my hand go. He turns to the horizon, “Of course.”

I turn towards the scenery but don’t really look at it. I don’t know why I’m too scared to ask him. If I’m too scared to now, will I ever be courageous enough? I shouldn’t feel this uncertainty. I’m specifically skilled in manipulating people into doing what I want.

But I haven’t been doing that with Kylo. I haven’t been pretending to be anything else with him, other than the truest form of myself.

For the first time, selfishly, I wonder if maybe I should’ve done things differently. In a way that would ensure his answer.

“You seem uncertain,” Kylo says, somewhat solemnly. He takes a deep breath, turning to me to say, “If you do not wish to do anything tonight, I promise that I will not hold it against you or be angry or-”

“Kylo,” I interrupt.

He interrupts me again, hand moving upwards to rub the back of his neck, “I promise, like, we really don’t have to do anything, I was very nervous anyway, so if you changed you-”

“Kylo,” I raise my voice, stepping towards him. I caress the elongated frame of his face in my hand, standing on my tip toes to press a gentle kiss into his cheek. As I pull away, I stare at him intently, my assurance overpowering whatever worries he has about my desires. I let the map leave my mind, The Order leave my mind and I keep myself in the fantasy I put myself in when we first landed. The fantasy I put myself in when I first found the map, when I slept in his arms on Korriban. For a fleeting moment, I feel undercover. Undercover as the person I want to be, with the life I want to have. I let myself indulge in the role. I keep my voice, low, steady, “I want you.” And I do. So much more than he knows or can assume.

One day, I’ll tell him. One day soon. But tonight, it doesn't exist. I don't want our lives to include an elaborate plan of running away. So I pretend it doesn't.

I feel his tremor under my fingertips. His eyes soften. He can only manage a husky, yet relieved, “Hotel?”
I smile. “Hotel.”

Chapter End Notes

heres another 7000 words yeet. and there were so many little scene ideas i had that i cut. i didn't wanna drag anything down (more than i already have with the past few chapters im just paranoid and want to make sure no stone is left unturned as we come down to the wire here im so sorry.) andddd im not sure how i feel about this one? like I love it, as a writer, because i personally know the importance it has in the story, but idk if i conveyed it well enough to not have it seem boring and overly romantic (like who the fuck wants to see them grocery shop probably no one but i also wanted them to seem NORMAL and do NORMAL PEOPLE things instead of just slaughter people together hauhdffawue). like this chapter is cheesy. i know. it's reallyyyyy cheesy. but that's kinda the point in a way and asudfhawiefn idek i wanted to pay tribute to the anakin/padme scenes in the sequels but i also didn't wanna be super cringy like some of those scenes and hhhhhhhhh like i just want this fic to be good. and i am really proud of certain parts i've written. but sometimes i get so in my mind about it and i get really scared what happens in my updates disappoints people. god i really sound selfish and ungrateful because i know that there's so many fics out there that don't get near the amount of attention as mine does, and they're even longer and even higher quality. and u all are so nice to me, seriously its insane to have so much support for a project. idk man. life. i just can't believe i've almost been writing this fic for a year now. so much shit has happened in that time span, its so hard for me to think that i wrote the first chapter in a high school stats room just because the teacher pissed me off and i didn't wanna learn stats to spite him. and yea, i really care about this story, a lot more than i thought i would. and caring about things can be stressful sometimes. i just hope u all like this chapter and if you dont im sorry at least they're gonna fuck in the next one LMAO

ANYWAYS

yea plz pray for me because i have a Corrections exam in t-minus 13 hours. also thanks again for all the support and love literally im such a quitter, i would've given up a LONG time ago without it.

also hotel is code word for intercourse
Room 412

Chapter Summary

“What she had realized was that love was that moment when your heart was about to burst.” — Stieg Larsson, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kylo and I both stare at the fingers of the elderly woman typing at the key panel. She types somewhat slow, the panel of buttons making a clicking noise each time she presses a letter. She glances back down to my verification of room purchase that The Order secured for me, displayed on my holopad. Then reads through it once more. Her eyes squint back up at the holographic projection of our information. Her finger reaches up, clicking the key that deletes previous characters.

Kylo lets air escape from his nostrils slowly shifting his weight on his legs.

I glance around the lobby for another time. The hotel’s interior follows closely to Naboo’s other aesthetics. A lot of marble. The architecture is all held up by large pillars, stretching to the next floor. Large mosaics are craved into the walls around us, golden designs stretching across the length of the room. A crystal chandelier hangs above the fountain in the center of the area. I stare at the water flowing from the spout of the fountain to the pool below it. The sound of the water sloshing takes over my mind.

“Names?” The woman speaks, breaking whatever trance Kylo and I were both in.

“Ayla and Edan Wren.” I answer immediately, hoping the question means that the checking in process is almost complete. I didn’t foresee this to take long at all, considering I already had the room booked so many weeks in advance.

Kylo speaks up, classifying, “With a W-W-R-E-N.”

I hold in my laughter at the specification and give him a look once the woman turns her attention back to the key panel. He smiles warmly back at me, happy that he could amuse me. The smile is something that I have grown accustomed to on this trip. He readjusts the bags on his shoulder.

The woman hands me my holopad once again, along with two keycards. She points towards the FA-5 valet droid in the doorway, “Your room is on the fourth floor.” The droid is tall, atomically built like a human but has no facial features, merely just sleek linear designs of gold against it’s black finish.

I grab the holopad and keycards, turning to find Kylo already approaching the elevator. The droid reaches out to grab Kylo’s bags, saying chipperly, “Hello, Ayla and Edan! My name is FA-5-693 and I will be assisting your stay here. I will be available for providing you any food, service, travel aid, toiletries, or assistance you may need during your stay at Theed’s most prestigious hotel. I also come programmed with information about Naboo’s culture and history. Did you know that Naboo’s main export is plasma?”
“Yes,” Kylo says, blankly handing the droid our items, “We’d like you go to our room.”

“Please.” I add on, trying to appease the droid.

“Right this way!” The droid turns, walking slowly towards the elevator. It pushes a button and the doors open.

Kylo and I walk in, standing on either side of the droid. I glance over to see Kylo already staring at me, jaw shifting with impatience. I stare back, taking a deep breath. The anticipation is practically radiating off him. His eyes are dark, nearly swallowed by his pupils. I can’t help but imagine how the night is going to go in my mind. Naturally, I’ve calculated out each beat of the night and mentally played through all possible scenarios. I can’t help but create conditions for myself of what he wants to do to me and what I’ll want to do to him. I wonder if he thinks such things as well. I’m sure he does. I wish I could see what he thinks about. I want him to show me.

“May I ask the relation of you and Ayla Wren?” The droid interjects our stare, addressing Kylo.

Kylo stutters, blinking away from me, confused, “Wh-what?”

“Is the last name an indication of blood relation or marriage?”

“Um,” Kylo starts, pulling his gaze to the ground. I see the blush forming in his face, “It’s, uh, marriage.” He utters, wincing at himself.

I find myself blushing too.

“Congratulations! Naboo is a wonderful place for married couples to visit! Statistically speaking, it’s the number one desired destination for newlyweds! Also, we have many discounts for couples in the spas available! Are you here on honeymoon?”

I remain staring at the ground, still unable to look at Kylo when he answers, practically stammering, “Yea – um, yes.”

The droid beams proudly, unashamed, “Our rooms provide a romantic and scenic atmosphere designed with the likes of you in mind! The walls are secure and sound-proof, making sure that you have the freedom to do whatever you’d like without fretting over privacy issues. As well, the rooms have different settings regarding lighting, mood music, and erotic entertainment if you would like to-”

“No that’s okay.” Kylo’s words blurt out all at once, desperate to get the droid to shut up.

The droid remains quiet, calculating a response to Kylo’s answer.

Kylo says, barely able to force the words through a swelled throat, “Unless, you need to… um, do that… or want to.”

It takes me a moment for figure he’s talking to me, and even a longer moment to realize what exactly he’s trying to suggest. I glance up to him, his eyes searching for mine, shoving his fists nervously into his pockets. I shake my head, looking away to hide even more of my embarrassment. “No, no thanks.”

The doors open, finally and reveal a long hallway with numbered doors. The maroon carpet creates a warmer atmosphere of the space, the archways connecting the hallways of doors. The droid leads us to a room that has the number 412 on the panel next to it. Kylo grabs the bags from the droid immediately nodding at the panel to me. I use the key card, already between my finger and thumb to
swipe at it, causing the door to swoosh open.

Kylo orders the droid in a restless mumble, “Leave us, now.”

The droid responds, quickly, “If you need me, please alert me through your holopad.”

Kylo walks into the room and I follow behind him. He closes the door without responding to the droid. As the door shuts, he exhales sharply, sighing.

My eyes scan the room, taking the sight of it all in. It’s very high luxury. The First Order usually provides me with the best, but this is something on a whole different level. The walls are covered in a light cobblestone, floors made of shining marble, so clean that every item of gold-lined furniture reflects into the ground. Doorways in the room are all regal archways. On my right, the first archway leads to a kitchen area with a small table, a bowl of fruit sitting on the center of the surface. Several windows surround the kitchen, offering a view of the Palace. A clear door connecting the windows leads to a balcony on the outside.

The main living room has several sofas and chairs, all surrounding a holocron projector. The sofa has tons of pillows and blankets made from rather expensive-looking fabric spread across it’s expanse. Highly decorated potted plants and flowers contained in vases are in the corners of the rooms, the center of the tables, and placed in any spaces that would other wise feel empty. A crackling fireplace is already burning across from me, giving the room a warm glow.

On the left is the bedroom. I peek into the space, trying not to seem too eager. The bed is large with white sheets and pillows, a crystal chandelier twinkling above it. I advance forward, placing my holopad and the keycards on the table with the holo-projector, located in the middle of the room.

As I turn around, I see Kylo placing the bags down at the door, still giving me that stare from the elevator. Eyes hungry, needy. The mere act of him staring at me like that is enough to make my lower abdomen twist on the inside, the heat within me growing. But there’s still something stopping him from doing whatever he’s thinking about.

His lips part and he takes a breath, yet cannot produce the words he attempts to say.

I blink at him, asking, “What is it?”

He glances over to the bedroom for the briefest of moments before he pulls his attention back to me. His face is still aggressively red from the elevator ride up. I notice his fingers bend and unbend. He slowly steps towards me, taking my face into his stilled hands, leaving a tender kiss on my lips. He exhales a shaky stream of air, the breath intertwining with my own. His hands now are already so much more timid than his hands on the roof, just moments ago. Fingers that once dug into my hips, grabbing at me to attempt to satisfy the need to feel my body against his, are now barely able to make contact with my flushed cheeks without retreating in fear.

I whisper to him, reaching a hand upwards to rub his forearm, “What’s wrong?” I open my eyes, keeping our foreheads pressed together.

His eyes remain closed, only giving me the sight of long, dark eyelashes. My eyes travel to the several beauty marks that scatter his face. I’ve memorized them by now and often look at them in the same order every time, starting with the one above his right eyebrow, then downward to the one under his right eye, jumping to the one next to his left nostril, ending on the one laying on the very far left of his face, just where his jawline and cheekbone merge and face sinks inwards.

“I want you…” I whisper softly, repeating the words I once told him that caused his amber eyes to
flicker with pure lust. Although his eyes remain closed, I notice the electric sensation that shoots throughout his body with the words, his balance slightly wavering.

He lightly kisses me once more, even lighter this time, the pads of his fingers now the only thing making direct contact with my skin. His palms merely ghost above the shape of my face. He says, voice tensed, “I want you too. Far much more than I should want anything.”

He says it, but I still sense the hesitation. Nevertheless, the words create a rumble throughout my body, begging for me to do something to relieve it. I remain patient. I draw my hand back on his arm, curling around his bicep. I say, gently, “I’m going to go get ready. Would you like to come with me?”

He nods against me, still not moving.

I’m the one to pull away, bringing my hand back down the length of his arm and intertwining my fingers in his. We exchange a final stare, his gaze so concentrated, yet eyes somewhat panicked.

I lead him through the bedroom to the bathroom connected. The bathroom is alike the rest of the rooms with the stoned walls. This time, the floor is tiled though, as well as the ceiling. There’s a large shower, the shower-head made to stream the water evenly from straight above, mimicking rain. I approach the sink, glancing upwards to the mirror mounted across from me. I almost forgot I was still wearing the lights around my neck.

I let go of Kylo’s hand, reaching forward to grab a washcloth folded at the sinks edge. I turn on the sink, letting warm water pour towards the drain. I damped the wash cloth and extend my arm, rolling up the sleeve of my cloak. I give one final look to the calligraphic alphabet Kylo wrote down the length of my arm.

Kylo grabs the washcloth from my hand, opting to do it himself. He holds my wrist steady with his left hand and manages the cloth with his right one. He presses the cloth into my skin, allowing it to soak before he pats it down the length of my arm. As he moves, the bleeding ink is revealed from where the rag once was. He holds my arm over the sink, so that any dark droplets rolling down my arm fall into the drain. The only sound in the room is the running water and our breathing. I make an effort to synchronize my breath with his, but he’s not breathing at any particular rhythm. Once he has pressed the cloth into every area with the ink, he carefully brings the rag back upwards, sliding it back down the length of my arm. I reach forwards to the soap on the counter, opening the cap, and then drizzling it down the length of my arm.

“I could teach you,” he says, focused on the task at hand. He works at the soap, creating suds.

“Hm?” I stare at his long fingers, delicately moving the cloth against me.

“I could teach you how to write if you wish.” He holds my arm under the running water. “I could teach you so many things you never gotten the chance to learn.”

I lean my head forward into his warm shoulder, relishing the idea of it.

He rests his chin on the top of my head as he reaches for a dry cloth. He removes my arm from the running water, lightly patting the skin dry. “I could teach you how to cook. How to meditate. History.”

“I know history,” I say softly.

“No,” He responds, turning the water off. “Beyond what was restricted by the Academy’s curriculum. There’s so much more. I want to learn new things, just to teach them to you.”
He releases my arm and I retreat from his shoulder, my attention now turned to my hair. I reach back, fingers fumbling to find the pins keeping the front strands out of my face. Kylo merely replaces my hands with his own, stepping behind me to carefully pull at the metal. He’s gentle, making sure he doesn’t tug on any of the curls in the process. He sets the pins on the sink’s edge as he finds them. They make a faint clinking noise with the contact.

I picture us on some unknown planet, him sitting me down, telling me stories of the past that would otherwise be forbidden for me to know, considered blasphemy. “I would like that, Kylo.”

He pauses, looking up into the mirror. In the reflection, his eyes meet mine, then he turns his attention back to my hair.

“What is it?” I ask him, leaning back into his warmth.

“I…” He starts, but then the sentence is left broken, only leaving mystery.

I urge him, “Tell me,” I reach upwards, hand curving into his bent elbow.

He pulls out the final pin, then combs out my hair with his fingers. The once structured curls turn softer, smoother. He seems too fascinated with the process of that to tell me what he initially was thinking. I form my mouth into a straight line, deterred by the wall that was suddenly put up in what’s supposed to be something more intimate. Maybe I over-romanticized the idea of us having sex. I thought that this one time, sex wouldn’t be a formality. That it would symbolize something, have meaning beyond whatever desire it brings. But, how is it supposed to be that way when he cannot even tell me what he wishes to before the act? If I can’t even bring myself to tell him about the map, either? I don’t know. I really don’t have a clue what sex is supposed to be like when it’s not used to weaken others.

I try my best to keep my defeat hidden.

He reaches downwards at my neck, pulling the string of lights above my head, then placing it on the sink next to the cloth. The movement leaves chills across my spine, causing me to ever so slightly shudder. Kylo brings a hand to my hair, pulling it all to one side to expose my neck. He nuzzles his face into the skin, giving it an innocent kiss before wrapping his arms around me, pulling me back against him.

I lean into him, sighing. His arms fold across my stomach, holding me as he presses kisses from my neck, up to my jawline, then to ear. He nibbles softly on my earlobe, nose pushing hot air into the curve of my ear. I rub my hands gingerly up and down the arms that hold me. I want to beg for him to say anything, for words to be transferred so close to my hearing. I want to feel his whispers.

He does, releasing my earlobe from his teeth. He mumbles, cursing, “Stars,” His hand reaches upwards, covering my own, “I could never deserve this.”

I don’t know how such a magnificent, inexplicably powerful and complex person would ever second guess to think if they deserved me or not. Our relationship is unbalanced, and not in my favor. I open my neck for him to nuzzle more into, succumbing to his words. I mumble, “You deserve so much more than you know. I want to show you that, more than anything.”

He hums into my neck once more, “You’re deserving, as well.” I distract myself with the lack of truth in that statement, focusing on him pressing himself further against me as he tries to aid whatever ache is prying at him. His hands twitch, nearly demanding to get under my clothes. But he’s far too hesitant to allow them to do so. Not without me initiating it first.
The checklist runs through my head like code. The first thing to do in sexual encounters is to make the subject feel isolated from any outside worries, fears, or responsibilities.

I grab his hands that wrap around my body, untangling his arms from my waist. I lead him out of the bathroom and into the bedroom. “Sit down,” I whisper to him. He obliges, letting go of my hands. He settles himself on the end of the bed, palms pressing into his thighs.

Once he’s settled, I stand in a position to where he can clearly see me. I let the silk cloak delicately fall from my shoulders, down the length of my arms. He stares at the skin of my shoulders as it dots with goosebumps. I place the cloak the nearest wall hook, approaching him with a subtle swing of my hips, my chest out. I stand in between his knees, looking down at him, pushing his hair behind his ear. In tracing his ear, I find admiration in the boyish, child-like nature of how it sticks outwards. It’s a characteristic that is usually hidden by his hair, when not hidden by his mask. The lights of the dimmed chandelier above him twinkle in the reflection of his glossy eyes.

I stroke his cheek with affectionate hand, guiding his gaze up to mine. “What can I do to help ease your nerves?”

He scoffs at the question, shying away from my stare in embarrassment. “The source of my anxieties surrounding this circumstance is nothing that you could help.”

I raise an eyebrow, my hand sliding from his face to neck, then settling on his shoulder. I curl my fingers around it, massaging the skin, “There’s nothing at all I could do?” I run my hand over his chest, feeling the strength that lies beneath the thin fabric of his tunic.

His adam’s apple bobs up his throat. His hands tentatively reach out, resting against the curve of my thighs, right below his eye level. I tilt his chin upwards with my index finger. He says, apologetically, “I just… my fear lies in the possibilities of disappointing you.”

I draw my fingers back down his chin, tracing the contours of his neck. “I have not been disappointed with the amounts of sexual arousal and gratification I received from you thus far. I do not foresee that being an issue.” I draw my finger down his sternum. “I haven’t given you any… sexual gratification.”

“Haven’t you?” I pause my hand, staring at him. “I would argue against such a claim.” I lower myself downwards, on my knees, in between his legs. His hands, once on my thighs now are left empty, dazed. He slowly lowers them to either side of him. The action of positioning myself in such a way is ultimately just a tactic to get his mind less swarming with nerves and more focused on fantasies and desires. Additionally, to get me to a place where I can remove his shoes. Still, I peer up at his face, as he’s trying his best told hold back his shock. I plant a small kiss on his inner knee and then reach for the buckles of his boot, unfastening them. As he straightens his leg, allowing for me to slide the boot off, I rest my head against his thigh, nestling into him. I notice his hands pressing deeply into the covers that surround him. I gaze up at him, absentmindedly removing his socks as he remains looking down at me, jaw clenched.

Once his boots and socks are not of concern, I use my hands to slowly travel up the length of his legs, then to his hips and across his chest. I run my hands across the skin in the way that I recall getting a reaction out of most men. Slowly, and pausing as I near the groin. But then passing the area, teasingly. It’s very much reliant on the concept of wanting more what one cannot have. I let out a steady stream of air, looking down at myself, making sure the dress is hugging my body the way it’s intended. I suck in my stomach, the air in my chest pushing more of my breasts against the bodice.

I notice Kylo ever so slightly hiss, turning his head. He stares at the corner ceiling of the room.
I reach up to his face, tilting it back to me. I lightly press a kiss on his thigh, then another slightly further up, the fabric of his trousers soft against my lips.

His hands dig into the covers, and he takes a deep breath. He manages to say, in a pinched voice, “You don’t have to do this.”

I keep my tone low, moving to his other thigh, pressing my lips into his leg, “Do what?”

“I don’t know, you’re being...” He struggles to find the words, finally settling on, “Calculated.”

Calculated? I retreat from him and sit back, letting myself rest my weight on the soles of my feet. Calculated. “I thought.” I begin, trying to wrap my mind around why calculations would be a bad thing. I start my sentence over, “That’s how it supposed to be, though.” It’s how I’ll be able to know what to do, what he wants, and how quickly to give it to him.

“How what’s supposed to be?”

I stand to my feet, suddenly feeling humiliation from the compromising position rather than confidence. I don’t answer his question, opting to ask a different one, “What’s wrong with being calculated?”

He doesn’t answer, just looking away from me. “I’m sorry,” he says quietly, trying to retract his previous words, probably wishing he didn’t say anything to begin with.

“Tell me what I did wrong.” I demand.

“No, no, nothing, you just...” He’s so quick to deny it, but hesitant to justify his answer. He struggles to find the words, “You weren’t projecting anything whatsoever. And it feels like you’ve done that – exactly that – before.”

Suddenly, whatever insecurity I didn’t feel before is ever so present now. Sure, I was a little nervous, but in a childish way. Now, however, I’m questioning everything I’ve thought of doing. The whole reason why I wasn’t insecure before was purely because I have calculated it all. And now he’s saying he doesn’t want me to be calculated. I say quietly, “I don’t know what you want me to do.”

“Agent,” He says. My stomach flips at the sweetness he uses in my name. He reaches out, tenderly grabbing my hand. “I’m not your mission.” He kisses my knuckles, big brown eyes blinking up at me. “You don’t have to treat this like you would a mission.”

That’s really all I’ve ever wanted to have with him, in the most basic form. Something outside of a mission. And he wants that too, for me. I see that.

My eyes start to water, in a bittersweet way. I reach down, gravitated into his open arms and eyes nearly begging me forward. Our lips meet with no regard to what a kiss should be like. Nor am I contemplating ways I could alter the kiss to heighten his arousal. I kiss him in the way my body tells me to. In the way he responds to me. It’s outside of thought or logic. As I lower into him, hands trying to find a place to settle, he scoots backwards, guiding me onto the bed with him.

My hands fall naturally to either side of his head, fingertips stretching to even just barely rest against his disheveled locks. I keep my weight distributed on my knee and hands, stabilizing my body above him as he settles into the mattress underneath me. His arms reach up, hands forming at my ribs to pull me down into him. I comply, lowering to my elbows and pressing my body down. The long dress makes my legs somewhat restricted, but I manage to settle my leg in between his and the other bent at his side.
The kiss is more of a full-body embrace than anything, our bodies incredibly close, each limb finding a way to fit into each other’s. His fingers dig into my exposed shoulder blades, pressing my chest into the firmness of his own. Our tongues simultaneously brush against one another’s lips, finding a way to meld into each other, combining and multiplying the heat of our mouths all at once. He tastes so clean, so fresh. I’m unable to determine if the taste white wine from earlier originates from my mouth or his. The full, soft lips are so plush, so comforting. Our tongues caress each other, both with equal levels of urgency, both with equal levels of generosity.

His fingers move from my shoulder blades down to the back of my bodice. His fingers zig zag across each hook, fumbling to understand the mechanism of the hatches. The anxious nerves once return, evident by his sudden pause in our kiss, the pre-established rhythm breaking. I pull back, reaching a hand to his face, allowing my thumb to trace the bottom of his lip. I open my eyes, astounded by how beautiful he is like this, lips swollen, eyes filled to the brim with humble eagerness. I drag my thumb across his lip once more, smiling down at him. “It’s kind of a pain, I apologize.”

He lets out a huff, trying to unlatch the dress. “No, it’s fine, I just can’t find a…”

I sit up, turning around and settling in between his legs. I pull my hair over my shoulder, exposing my back to him. A shudder overtakes his fingertips against my back and his breath against my neck grows unsteady. He trails his fingers to the first hook, but before they even attempt anything, hot lips press into the hollow my shoulder blade creates. I draw in a deep breath at the sensation of his lips moving to my spine, sucking the skin lightly, teeth present but not biting down. He pebbles kisses down my spine to the top of my dress, then begins to work at unhooking it. Each hook is undone, one by one, as he is careful to make sure that nothing rips, nor his fingers do not pinch my skin.

As he moves down, I find myself needing to hold the dress against me to keep it covering me. The back of my bra is exposed to him in no time. He stops breathing for a moment, as well as he stops unhooking the remaining clasps. A light finger traces against the lace material that he newly revealed. He tests the texture of it against his senses, brushing his lips at the top of my spine. He mumbles the simple words, “so pretty,” into my skin as he continues working at the dress. The urge to lean into him, pressing myself against him once again, overwhelms me. It takes far too much effort to resist personally attending to the growing heat between my legs.

Once his hands run up the length of my back, I know he’s done. I carefully slide my arms out of the straps, holding the dress against my chest. I scooch forward, realizing that I’ll have to step out of it. My toes meet the ground and Kylo finds himself sitting back on the edge of the bed. I can feel his hands turn my body towards him once again. He reaches up, holding the top of my dress in between his index fingers and thumbs. His eyes flicker up to mine, as if to ask for permission to pull it downwards.

I grant him the answer by unfolding my arms across my chest, the weight of the dress now completely supported by him.

Slowly, he lowers the fabric of the dress, revealing my undergarments to him inch-by-inch. I watch his eyes take in the new skin as it’s revealed, moving steadily to avoid revealing too much of me too fast. The air feels so cool against the newly exposed skin. I was conscious to ensure that I wore something that would be visually pleasing, yet not too overbearing. The off-white undergarments are simple, but far more feminine than what I wear daily. It’s not until he sets the dress to the floor that I comprehend just what position I’m in. His eye-level is right in line with my navel, gaze able to take in all of me. From the curve of my hipbones, to the way the hem of my underwear clings to my skin, then to the subtle bow on center of the waistband. He reaches out a hand, sweeping callused fingers against the length of my thigh. Looking upwards, I hope to the stars he does not notice my face
reddening with each moment.

Just when I think that he’s going to scoot back on the bed, making more room for me to join him, he merely places his other hand on my thigh, holding me still, palms forming a subtle grip. Then, the weight of his palms shift, naturally turning my body around. I inhale sharply, staring into the doorway to the bathroom, hyper aware he’s quietly observing my whole backside.

He stays like that for a moment, my inability to see his expression nearly eating me alive. His palms are so still on my thighs, he sounds so quiet. The only thing he’s doing actively is looking at me. My arms cross around my chest, as if he were just staring there too.

Suddenly, the bed squeaks and his hands drag upwards, settling on my waist, and then his body, so tall behind me, presses into me. Now, without the cloak or dress, he feels so definite against my back side. He kisses at my neck, the area probably already littered with bruises by now. His hands hold me still at my waist, granting him the ability to grind against me. He bucks his hips, slightly whimpering at the sensation it provides him. The sound surprises himself, as he hesitates to continue kissing my neck. For me, the noise is merely electrifying, almost eliciting my own moan as well. I need him to be touching more of me. Less politely, less conservatively.

I reach down to his right hand, removing it from my waist and placing it over my breast. He sighs into my collarbone, peering over me to watch himself squeeze desperately at the skin. His hand once clasping my hips snakes around my waist to hold me stiffly against him. The hands feel so large, nearly swallowing my body whole as his fingers span to reach as much area as he can manage. He paws at my breast, watching the skin’s reaction to his pressing and pulling. His thumb pads against my nipple, rolling against it’s stiff shape. My legs suddenly are not strong enough to stand on their own. I lean against him, rocking on his length. He bites down into my shoulder in unison of his fingers pinching my nipple, causing my head to roll back in pleasure and back to arch. It’s not near enough though. We’re not doing enough.

I need more. It scares me how much I need more.

I turn my body around, sounding incredibly authoritative when I say, “Lay back down.”

He obliges immediately, his eyes locked onto mine, as if he’s telling me he’s fully at my disposal. The idea itself causes another rush of heat to form in between my legs. I climb up on the bed next to him, but he merely flips me on my back, yet again non-compliant with whatever plans I formulate. I find myself back on Korriban, when he was about to remove my brassier, when all of this was supposed to originally happen. I look towards the nightstand next to us. There’s no comm-link to go off. No one to interrupt. It sets in that this is about to happen. That in merely moments, he’s going to be inside of me. I can’t help but writhe under him, so impatiently.

I notice the slightest smirk form on his face as he lowers his face in the middle of my chest, above my breasts. He presses his lips into the skin, moving to the side to burrow his cheek into the warmth my chest provides him. He reaches up, fingers gently teasing at my nipple from over my brassier. He kisses the heap of my opposite breast, peeking back up to me and studying my reactions. He pushes down hard into the bud, causing my hips to roll back in pleasure and back to arch. It’s not near enough though. We’re not doing enough.

I need more. It scares me how much I need more.

He rewards the reaction with a kiss to my nipple, pulling his face away to speak, “You look nice in lace.”

“Thank you,” I sigh, trying to grind my hips upwards against his thigh. It’s agonizing, seeing him so clothed while I am so ready to do this, right at this moment. I thought that I would be the one to have the patience, to encourage use to take things slow. I can’t help but passive-aggressively snip, “You
look nice without clothing on."

He’s amused by this, pulling away from me and sitting up. The absence of his touch is pure ice, pure solitude. He reaches behind him, pulling the collar of his shirt over his head. Finally. In a swift movement, he exposes his bare upper body, just as muscular and defined as I recalled from inside the tub. He bundles the tunic into a ball and throws it across the room. I try not to awe too much at his physique, nor marvel at how massive he appears. He may be inexperienced. Or nervous. But by the smug expression on his face, both when he was in the tub and now, I know that he knows he looks good.

That in of itself urges me to gain back dominance in the situation. I push him back over onto his back, settling myself to straddle him. I push his hair out of the way, exposing his neck, returning the favors of the endless nipping and kissing he gave me earlier at such sensitive skin. I dig my hips into his, rubbing at his form, assisted by the guidance of his hands on my lower back. His fingers stretch downwards, then retreat up, as if he’s still too hesitant to touch my where he desires. I suck at the space behind his ear, nose carded into his hair. My hands reach down, feeling the muscles under my fingertips. His abdomen tenses underneath my touch, back arching for me to press more into him. I oblige, feeling my way back up his chest.

He reaches upwards on my back, feeling for the hook of my bra, so similar to the hooks of my dress. With the practice the dress gave him, he’s able to immediately unhook the garment. It falls off my chest, loosely laying in the space between us, straps looped around my biceps.

I sit upwards to remove the article all the way, trying to do it as quickly as possible to return to kissing at his neck. However, I’m stopped when he practically yanks it off me, hands moving to pull at my thighs in order to slide me up his torso. The position ends in me now straddling his abdomen. He places a palm on my back, bending my body downward for him to take a breast into his mouth, immediately sucking and licking incessantly. I steady my hands on the headboard, a gasp caught in my throat. He’s so enthusiastic about it. His tongue explores the skin so eagerly, wanting to touch every nerve in every way he possibly can.

He switches to the other breast with a wet pop, immediately to tug the nipple gently with his teeth. My fingers dig into the golden curves of the headboard, gripping at the metal. He indulges in the taste of me, devouring the skin he’s given. He sucks hard on the nipple in his mouth, a stiff tongue flicking it, repeatedly. My mouth is stuck open, still frozen in a gasp from his initial contact. I circle my hips into his waist, which only encourages his tongue to move faster, more precise. My toes curl and he stops the motion, releasing the suction he had on my breast, widening his tongue to caress the sore skin before pulling away. I sit back up, his hands reaching forward to gently massage my breasts.

I look at him with weary eyes, shaky hands closing around his forearms. I can’t help but make the connection that he is very good at operating his tongue and mouth. I imagine his flushed face pressed in between my legs, holding me down with his strong arms as he uses the same motions of his mouth on the area that feels the most sensitive, the most deprived at this moment. The thought nearly makes me drool. He cups my breasts in his hands for one last moment before reaching back up to my hands, pulling them up to his mouth, kissing at my fingertips, my palms my wrists. He reaches up, un settles hands finally finding their place in caressing my face.

He pulls me down to him, locking our lips together. He hums into the kiss, pushing back my hair. The sweat of both of our faces is already so prominent.

“You’re so angelic.” His words are shaky, but sure. “So radiant…” He kisses me once again.

No one’s ever described me in such a way. I mumble his name, so enthralled with the way he’s
“Shh…” He barely shakes his head, “Don’t.” He tries to continue the kisses, but I stop him.

“Don’t?” I ask.

“You don’t have to refer to me as that.” This, this sounds unsure. He says it so weakly, with so much fear behind his voice. “Can you… can you try saying it? My name?” He practically begs, pleading, “I want to hear you say it.”

“Your name?” I swallow hard, afraid that what he’s requesting isn’t matching what I am thinking of. He can’t be. There’s no way he’s telling me to do such a thing. I play it safe, just asking for further explanation, “Kylo?”

“No,” He swallows hard. His fingers begin excessively tremoring against my face, the caress weak, yet so desperate. I pull away to study his expression, transfixed on me. His eyes are watery, lip quivering, “Say it… Please.”

I don’t think I’ve ever said the name before, not aloud. Back in the cockpit of our shuttle, I wanted to. Ever since that moment, of connecting him to his real name, I’ve tried to dissociate the two from each other. For his sake. I assumed he wouldn’t want to be associated with that anymore, that it was a thing of the past. Yet, it’s lingered on the tip of my tongue this whole trip, subconsciously prodding at my mind, pestering, nagging. As the word forms in my mouth, I can’t help but truly, deeply believe in what I’m saying. I’m not quite sure what that means, but it’s what I feel. I look him in the eyes, uttering in a breathy voice, “Ben.”

His eyebrows immediately crease and his tremble heightens. The emotions in his eyes are so complex, so jarring. I hold his hands steady against my face, trying to soothe him, trying to calm him down. He merely threads his fingers back into my hair, pulling me down towards him. He presses lips against mine again, whispering, “Thank you.”

There’s a certain sadness that comes over me when I realize how nice it might feel, to hear the sound of one’s name uttered from a lover. I don’t think that being called Agent would ever elicit such an emotion. Nor Ayla. Not even Moira. He may not ever be able to call me anything with such importance, so I relish in the happiness in knowing that I can give him such a thing. I think I’m content with it being this way. I whisper, rubbing my nose against his, “Would you like me to call you that when we’re alone? When we’re together like this?”

He nods, whispering into me, “Please,”

“I can do that.” I flutter kisses into his lips lightly, delicately before pulling myself off him, keeping my hands on his body, constantly stroking at his skin, easing him. “I like saying it. It feels nice. Ben…”

He sighs, craning his neck up to press his lips into mine once more.

I reach down to his trousers, carefully undoing this laces at the top. As I untie them, I pull back to sit atop my knees. He sits up as well, resting his head into my shoulder while I work at the laces. Once I think it’s loose enough, I pull down at the fabric. He lifts his hips, supporting his weight with his palms. I try not to stare at his undergarments, nor his shape under the boxer briefs when I pull his trousers down. I avoid the sight in the same I way I once avoided the sight of his face after removing his mask, so long ago. I have to hide a smile at the memory, not wanting to give him the wrong idea.
I throw his trousers off the bed and roll on my back, sliding my thumbs under the waistband of my undergarments, intending for him to remove his as well.

He grabs my wrist stopping me with a somewhat panicked, “Wait,"

I retreat my grasp, “Yeah?” I drag my fingers against his forearm, rubbing his skin, trying to project all the comfort and compassion I can to him.

“Do we need anything? I brought, uh, contraceptives, I didn’t know if-”

Cutting him off, I explain, “No, you don’t need that.”

“Are you currently on birth control?” He asks, the words seeming so unnatural coming from his mouth. It makes me wonder if he did research before this trip.

I laugh lightly at his ignorance of my condition. Birth control. I suppose you could consider it that. Having that conversation with him here and now is the absolute last thing I’d want to do. “Yeah, we’re good to go.” I let his arm go, bringing my hands back to myself.

“Okay,” he says, sighing.

I notice him wait for me to remove my underwear before he moves to remove his. We both don’t look, nor watch each other during the process. As I slip my legs out of the garment, I stare straight upwards at the chandelier, providing so much light above us. A lot of light. I swallow hard, glancing down at myself, making sure everything is properly groomed and nothing odd or peculiar has happened in between the last time I’ve looked at myself and now. It looks like normal, like it always does.

When Ben stops moving besides me, it indicates he's ready. I turn my head towards him, pressing lips into his shoulder before I roll over to straddle him once again. I keep my hips hovering over his and press my lips into his one last time.

He tries sitting up, to get closer to me, but I lightly push him back, instructing with tender words, “Just lay back.”

He obeys. As he does, he glimpses down at me for the first time. He twitches, mouth agape. When I place a hand on his chest, I feel how quickly his heart is thudding. I stare at him as he stares at the sight so foreign.

Slowly, I lower myself against the underside of his length. As soon as my wet folds brush against his erection, he lets out sensitive hiss. I carefully guide my hips upward, using the wetness that’s accumulated in between my legs to slide up his length, then back down again, lubricating him. He is so solid, so large underneath me. I stare only at his entranced face as he watches me move, wondering to myself if I’ll ever gain the courage to look downwards. As my clit brushes his tip, his hips jerk impatiently.

The sudden movement, ironically enough, causes me to glance down by instinct. Immediately, my gaze is frozen at the sight. The concept of virginity suddenly feels as though it applies to me. He’s so big. I’ve always had this general knowledge, considering I’ve felt him against me before, but I just assumed he felt so large because everything feels emphasized with him. I didn’t actually think… I exhale, suddenly realizing that this could present itself with more complications than I initially assumed. Especially at this angle, looking down from my body, having it right there to compare it to my own size. It lays against his stomach, pre-cum glistening at his slit.

I swallow hard, raise hips off him, then glance back up to him to find him already staring up at me.
He looks away, turning his head to hide his face. I pause, taken aback by the action. He remains hiding his expression. I follow the movement of his head with my own, not allowing him to hide such a thing from me.

He purses his lips, releasing them into an exasperated smile. In surrender, he returns his head forwards, blinking his expression back into seriousness. “What?” He asks, terrible at being nonchalant. He reaches upwards, laying lazy hands on my waist.

I narrow my eyes, “You’re laughing at me.”

“I’m not laughing at-”

“Tell me why you’re laughing at me.”

“I’m not,” This just makes whatever concealed laughter erupt from him, he shakes the bed with the low rumble of the noise.

“I’m not having sex with you until you tell me what’s so amusing.” I order, my voice gaining an interrogative tone.

Ben looks up to me, sighing in compliance. Suddenly, a light buzzing sensation enters the back of my skull.

I squint my eyes, confused.

Then it clicks.

“Godammit,” I mumble. I was projecting. I was fucking projecting my intimidation of his size.

He laughs, relieving my mind of the sensation, then leaning forward to kiss me, “It’s okay.” He sits upwards, pressing lips into mine. “I trust that we can work through such complications,” He mocks my subconscious word choice.

I shove him off me, pushing his weight back into the mattress. “Bastard,” I can’t contain a laugh at my own.

He grabs my wrists, pulling me down, encasing my lips with his again, holding me against him so I cannot so easily pull back this time. He hums into the kiss, contently, grinding back up to feel himself against my warmth. His heart is beating quickly all over again, breath reverting to an unsteady rate.

I press my lips into his cheek, then pull back to look a him. He smiles warmly at me, and I smile back, the tone of the room suddenly much lighter now, more comfortable. I brush the sweat drenched hair from his face, asking him, “Are you ready?”

He exhales smoothly, pushing back my own hair. “Yeah,” His eyes dart around my face, taking in my expression, ultimately steadying on my eyes. “I’m ready.”

I nearly drown in the sweet eagerness of his words, so youthful, so innocent. I press my lips to his one final time, using the movement to raise my hips off him. Although my lips already feel so sore from the excess kissing, the electricity, the passion, it’s all still there.

I sit up, reaching down to grab his member from underneath me. The moment my fingers gently press into the hard, heated skin, he inhales sharply, hands flexing and unflexing, trying to find their place clutching the sheets at his side. I wrap my hand around his shaft, holding it upright.
Catching his breath, he whispers, pleading, voice so strained, “Look at me.”

I obey, keeping my eyes on his as I tilt his erection upwards, pressing him against my core. His mouth hangs open, dry, nearly pained with the sensation of merely his tip positioned against my opening. Despite him not being at all inside me, the feeling of him consumes me, his warmth already feeling as if it’s shooting up the length of my body.

I slightly sink down into him, slowly, his girth stretching at my insides. I let out a shaky breath, wincing at the sharpness the sensation causes. I place my palm on his chest to steady me, then continue. Remaining obedient to his request of looking at him, I stare right into his dark, dilated eyes, finding distraction of the initial discomfort as I lower my hips further feeling more of him fill me. The wetness accumulated between the both of us assists me in the action. His hands desperately reach out and he hisses, grabbing my thighs for stability. Fingers dig into me, nails jabbing at my skin, as I press down deeper.

He breaks the eye contact, looking down at the sight of him disappearing into me. I move further, feeling him prod against me from the inside, pressing into my walls. We share a sharp gasp at the sensation. I glance down at how much more of him I have to take, suppressing any whines that threaten to bubble up within me at the image of him halfway inside of me. With a deep breath, I push back down again, filling the rest of myself with him.

He groans loudly, fingers now burrowed at my skin. His pubic bone is against my own, affirming the fact that he’s all the way inside of me. His brown eyes flicker back up to mine, body quaking from underneath me.

I do my best to set aside the growing hunger within me, the pure lust stemming from the connection of our bodies, to ask in a patient tone, “Does it feel alright?”

His chest heaves, eyes darkening. He readjusts his grip on my thighs, moaning out the word, “Move.”

Gladly, I oblige. I pull myself up slowly just to sink back down into him, eliciting a whimper from his mouth. He rolls his head back, sweat dripping down his forehead. I build up a slow, steady rhythm, finding myself rocking into the unhurried movements. When I roll my hips forward with my thrusts, I feel him from inside me press against a specifically tender part. I shudder at the sensation, yearning for it’s return.

He utters in a breathy voice, “Come closer.”

Unsure exactly what he means by that, I replace my hand that once mounted me from his chest to the mattress beside his head. I lower myself on my elbow, careful not to have him slip out of me as our bodies press into each other. His hands hungrily run up my body to the sides of my face, encasing me in a kiss, so cluttered, so unfocused, teeth clinking against each other and lips smacking off target.

I continue moving, the friction of our bodies making me feel so dizzy. I pull away from him, forehead still pressed deeply to look in his eyes. His mouth remains half-open, throat contracting with the effort it takes for him to suppress any noise his body aches for him to release. Desperate to hear him, to hear what I do to him, I pull out of him more, then push back into him faster. Merely doing this once is enough for him to moan against my lips. I kiss him hungrily, swallowing the sounds as I quicken my pace even more, entranced with the aching throb his body tends to, deep inside of me.

His breath quickens, and he mumbles, “You feel.” A sharp inhale, “so good.”

I lean forwards, nuzzling my nose into his hair, kissing at his ear. “What does it feel like?” I ask him,
barely able to make the sentence project from my weakened tone.

“You’re warm,” He rasps, “so tight.”

I try to think of praises to say to him, of how to form words that capture how much I care for him, but nothing comes to my mind. Everything is too foggy in my mind, consumed by a buzzing sensation, blinded by pure infatuation.

He reaches down, hands lightly caressing my backside, then moving back up to my shoulder-blades. He presses me against him, desperate for us to be even closer, as if that were even possible. I circle my hips even faster, creating the sound of slapping skin. Our short breaths grow even sharper. I do, angling my thrusts to where he presses up into the curves of my walls, where all the tension inside of me seems to be located. I shudder at the contact, throwing my head back, going faster yet.

I can tell that he’s right on the edge. He groans deeply, eyebrows furrowing, teeth clenched tight. For a moment, it’s there; the reminder of the power I have. A power that no one else could have over him. A power that I should be using in the name of Snoke. Or Hux. The First Order. And there’s also a temptation, a part of me that wonders if I could tap into that power to satisfy the rapidly growing sensation inside of me. The thought of it feels so dark, so cold.

But that thought is immediately countered by the pure intimacy the situation provides. How just as we are so connected physically, we’re even more connected in our futures. My fate lies in him. He’s freedom, he’s everything I want.

“I-”

I stare into his heavy-lidded eyes, quickening the thrusts even more.

“St-” He hisses the sound, sitting up abruptly, merely angling him deeper inside of me. He curses under his breath, reaching at my bottom, quickly pulling himself out of me. I fall on his lap, empty of him, confused.

I wipe my brow, catching my breath, “You can finish inside me, I don’t-”

He tremors, flipping me on my back so he can climb on top of me. I notice his arms shake, struggling to support his weight. Different position. That makes sense. I bring my legs upwards to wrap around his torso and hand down, to assist in guiding him into me, but he ignores it, merely untangling my legs from around his body and pinning them on either side.

As I try to ask him what he wants, he crashes his lips to mine, wobbly breath merging to my own.

Suddenly, he breaks the kiss and sits atop his knees in between my legs. The large hands tighten around my thighs to reaffirm his grip on my pinned open legs. I gulp, trying to configure what he’s doing. He’s just staring at me, observing my core. I try to push back whatever insecurity the situation stirs within me. Being so exposed to such contemplative eyes, such a curious gaze, I can’t help but wonder if there’s any negative remarks he’s making, anything that isn’t to his expectations.

He blinks up to me, sliding tender hands up and down my thighs to reassure me. The callused fingers cause my shudder, my center yearning for his attention. My body writhes beneath him.

He says, tending to my impatience, “Can you…” a gulp, “Can you touch yourself for me?”
I blink up at him, surprised at the request. I suppose it’s a common thing that men enjoy watching, especially considering their preference for visual stimulation. But it’s not something I would have expected from him to request in such a straight-forward manner, especially during our first time. And especially when he was so close to finishing. It would have made much more sense in foreplay.

I nod, trying not to convey my confusion, as I do not wish for him to mistake it for a discomfort with his request. I reach up to my mouth, wetting my fingers with saliva, then bring it down against my entrance. I notice a slight tremor of nerves take over my fingers as I start sliding them up and down the folds, settling into the feeling of my own touch.

I’ve done this in front of men before. And every time I’ve done it in a way that was so conscious of what I was displaying. I moaned in a way that was orchestrated, purposely bit my lip when their eyes glanced up to my mouth, painfully overreacted to the feeling of my own finger penetrating myself. They pleasured themselves as they watched, which is what I fully expect Ben to do. But as I stroke up and down my flesh, he just watches, intently, making no effort to satisfy his own needs.

He watches if it’s some intricate puzzle, some code to be deciphered. His eyes flicker up to mine, as if to offer encouragement, fingers resettling more comfortably on my thighs to keep them spread apart.

I swallow, unsure if I could do this theatrically for him. To say that I’m having sexual urges is an understatement. I may as well do it seriously, to please myself. I slide my finger against the wetness of my opening, leaning my head back, relaxing into the bed. Masturbation isn’t something I do ever, unless it’s for the sake to aiding someone else’s pleasure. So it takes me a moment of somewhat mindless stroking to get myself into the right mindset.

I let myself indulge in the sensation my finger brings, how the direct contact is what I’ve been itching to have. I tease the opening of myself, sliding a finger it so easily, with barely resistance, due to the incomparable size of what was penetrating me before. I find myself yearning for the presence of him back inside of me. I try to replicate it with the movement of my finger. I quicken the movement, exploring the inside of myself with each thrust inward. The preciseness of my finger and new angle of my hips allow me to press into a specifically tender part of me. I shift against the bed, trying make it easier to reach. I curl my finger into the spot, thrusting forward, setting a rhythm on the movement.

Breaking me from my concentration, Ben asks, head slightly tilted, staring, “Are you bending your finger upwards?”

My mouth feels dry, unable to answer the question. As I open my eyes, glancing at him in between my legs, I cannot bring myself to stop the movement of my hand, itching to satisfy the growing warmth within me. His voice only added to the urgency. “U-huh,” I sigh, trying to configure why he would ask such a logistical question.

He only nods, looking back down at the way my fingers work with my body.

I push another finger in, trying to increase the pressure, desperately attempting to replicate the feeling of being full of him. I let my palm rub against my clit, the area feeling so incredibly sensitive, yet so neglected. I slide my fingers out of me, reaching upwards, rubbing circles around the nub, teasing myself, before impatiently rubbing at it from under the hood, creating a steady friction.

I look up at Ben, still thoughtfully just watching. His hands twitch against my thighs. It clicks. This wasn’t a request he made to satisfy a fantasy of his. He wants to learn, to teach himself how to touch me before he attempts it.

The mere thought nearly breaks me. He stopped, right before finishing, because he wants me to
finish with him.

I moan, pushing against my clit harder before pulling myself away to grab his wrist. I say, breathless, trying to pull his hand closer to me. “Touch me,”

His left eye twitches in trepidation, glancing down at my center than back up to my eyes.

I urge, “Please, touch me,” I can’t help the whine in my tone, the desperation for his fingers against me. His fingers are so much larger than mine. So powerful. Yet so gentle, unpredictable. I want to see his face as he feels me for the first time, the innocent curiosity, the eager determination.

He raises his hand from my thigh, subtly twisting out of my grip. I let my hands fall to my sides, gripping at the sheets around me to brace myself. He lightly reaches down to my thigh, scratching the skin with ghost-like touches. It’s to comfort me, to provide affection. He’s so painfully unaware how much it teases me. His hand travels down the length of my leg, so slowly, only further away from me as he considers his strategy in this.

I shift towards him, impatiently keening, “Please,”

His eyes flicker up to me, surprised at my urgent request. There’s something behind his surprise though. A deep, dark arousal solely stemming from me begging for him. He glances back down again, reaching downwards, placing his hand an inch above my core. He lets himself take in the heat radiating off of me while he stares at my face. His hand gently presses against the curve of my mound. I bite back the urge to grind into his hand, relishing in how his hand covers all of me of easily. Slowly, he slides the light touch down the skin and then back upwards.

His middle finger presses in between my folds as the movement continues, picking up the wetness as he moves. His middle and index finger dig into my folds, scooping at the fluid, then working it back around my flesh. I didn’t think that gentleness could be so incredibly painful. He works small circles up and down the length of me, massaging. His fingers move upwards, nearing my clit at a painfully slow rate. But when he does reach it, I lurch at the contact, suppressing a whimper in the back of my throat.

He continues at the spot, not teasing, but not offering me any relief either. His fingers go stiff, hard, rubbing with a precise motion, gauging which touches elicit the most reaction and then focusing his efforts there completely. I moan, head digging into the mattress. No one’s every been so conscious of me, so intent on bringing me as much pleasure as they possibly can.

Warmth builds within me as he continues rubbing at the nub, energy building up within me that begs to be release. I roll my hips into his hand, aching to reach that point. My breathing is inexplicably unsteady, heart palpitating, eyes watering. I open them to catch him already staring at me in captivated adoration, focused on keeping the placement and rhythm of his fingers all perfectly in tune to what earns him the most reactions.

Whatever expression I give him pulls him upwards, body canopying me, shifting the angle of his hand to continue working at the spot. He nuzzles his nose into my cheek, hot breath hitting my face, his hands now able to bend more into me, to press with a firmness the angle before didn’t allow.

He whispers, “I like this.” A light kiss against the corner of my mouth, fingers pressing deeper, voice tortuously low, “Do you like this?”

The question is ridiculous. If I have ever projected anything ever, it’s right now projecting my pleasure. Partly due to my lack of ability to find words, I don’t directly respond. He pushes harder and a pathetic whimper in satisfaction is the only way my body is capable of answering the question.
He glances down to the space between us, eyelashes fluttering against my cheeks. Suddenly, his fingers leave my clit, swollen, still needing attention. The pad of his finger presses into my opening. He wastes no time with endlessly teasing, immediately twisting the length of the digit inside of me with a grunt, curling it right into the most sensitive part of me. I gasp, pushing back onto his hand, body begging for the sensation to continue.

He pulls it out all the way, then back in again, the movement establishing a rhythm for his fingers to work inside of me. His fingers are so graceful, so purposeful. I roll my hips against him, rubbing my clit against his palm as he prods at my core, stimulating me in a way I had no clue I could be stimulated from another person. The heel of his hand presses against me, rolling against my clit, fingers curling up, puppeteering the build up within me.

“Are you close?” He rasps against my lips, not letting his words stall the rhythm of his fingers.

I nod, feeling myself on the edge of it. I inhale sharply, the heat, the pressure, everything about to combine and reach it’s peak. He continues, working at me relentlessly, frantically. My head turns dizzy, vision blurring.

Suddenly, his fingers retreat from my core, and his heated length is nudging me open. I reach down, desperate to continue the rhythm on my clit as he struggles to angle himself inside of me. His tip pushes into me, warranting him to thrust his hips, the rest of him filling me completely.

We both moan at the sensation of each other’s bodies. His thrusts at first are uneven, uncoordinated, but so persistent. The jutting of his hips against mine, burying himself as deeply as possible into me as he can manage, brings me even closer to that edge I felt before. My fingers work at my clit harder, the area so stimulated, so sensitive. I pull my hand away abruptly, fully knowing that the feeling of him inside of me, the image of him above me, the sound of his moans, will be enough to bring me to my climax.

He grabs my hands entwining his fingers within mine, hips digging deeper, pubic bone pressing into my mound. I clench around him, everything so much tighter. I stare into his eyes as he stares into mine, so intently, the combination of darkness from the lust and sparks from pure love, enthralls me. I meet each of his thrusts with a roll of my hips, our bodies in perfect sync with each other, working together to meet each other’s needs, to find each other’s climax.

He slams down into me with a low grunt, the single movement undoing me. All at once, all the energy within my abdomen erupts throughout my whole body. I gasp, not bothering to hide my cry at the deafening pleasure taking over the expanse my body. My blood boils, fingers digging into his, vision of him above me blurring. I roll my body into the feeling, back arching and whole body convulsing. I do my absolute best keep my gaze on him as the bursting sensation overwhelms me, toes curling, core clasping on his shape. The feeling is so overwhelming, so loaded with pure bliss.

He keeps moving, slamming into me, dragging my orgasm out to a nearly painful duration. Just as I am unsure that I can take more of the pure, overpowering pleasure, he digs himself into me one last time, crying out in ecstasy. Warmth deluges within me. He stares at me with half-lidded eyes, hands crushing mine, body shuddering and twitching at the waves of pleasure that course within him.

He collapses against me with an exhale, my frame consumed by his weight. He doesn’t pull out of me, opting to grind himself into me slowly once more with his face dug into my neck. I initially hiss, so sensitive to any touch. But the slow, gentle thrusts are so calming, so tender. I close my eyes, then open them, trying to stabilize my foggy vision. He stills within me, fingers now limp over mine. It gives me the opportunity to slide my hands from under his, wrapping my arms around him, encasing him in an embrace. We’re both drenched in sweat, heartbeats rapid against each other’s chests. My legs are aggressively trembling.
I tilt my head over, pressing lazy lips into his scalp.

He pulls out of me with a groan, trying to stabilize his weight on his elbows. Fluid leaks from me, hot and sticky. Rolling off me, he plops into the empty space next to me, clearly fatigued. My sweat feels so cold without him on top of me, goosebumps speckling across my naked figure.

Ben’s hand grabs mine, unable to do much else. I try to squeeze his hand, but even my fingers feel numb.

We lay on our backs, gasping, trying to catch our breaths. I don’t think breathing has ever been so difficult. I didn’t know pleasure could be so paralyzing.

As I manage to turn my head to his, he manages to turn his head to mine.

We gaze at each other in some impossible combination of exhaustion, infatuation, soreness, and passion.

A smile reaches both of our lips, our expression mirroring each other as we release a tired huff of laughter. We struggle to lean into one another, moist, swollen lips locking for a moment before pulling away to allow us to return to our lovesick gaze.

He sighs, eyes closing in bliss, “Stars, I’m tired now.”

My smile inexplicably grows wider, straining my cheeks. “You can go to sleep,” I pull my upper body up, never before feeling it’s true weight, “I’ll be back after I clean up.”

He glances downward at the space in between my legs, throat contracting from the sensual image. He sits up, grabbing my shoulder to ease me to lie back. “I’ll help you.”

I obey without any argument, letting my body relax back into the plush bed. As he stands from the mattress I get a full look at his figure, glistening with sweat. His muscles are so prominent, body so sculpted as if it’s a product of some divine artist. I admire the moles that dot his skin, much like stars cluttered in an organized mess of constellations. I stare in awe as he steps into the bathroom, reaching for a clean towel and letting it soak under the sink. My gaze returns upward, at the chandelier above me, crystals of light creating several sporadic splotches of light on the ceiling.

Soon enough, Ben returns, sitting at the edge of the bed. He brings the cloth up to my face, wiping at the sweat coating my face. He looks at me in adoration, saying with a shy smile, “That was nice.”

“Nice,” I repeat back to him. “It was nice.” I laugh, relaxing into the pillow.

He removes the cloth from my head, bringing back to the space in between my legs. He wipes upward, the cloth meeting my clit causing me to snap my legs together, wincing at the overstimulation.

He folds the cloth over, patting the area below gently, avoiding pressing too hard, “I’m sorry, are you sore?”

I respond, still noticeably short of breath, “A bit, but that’s normal.”

He nods, taking in the information with consideration. He stands to his feet once again, pulling the rag away, “Do you need anything else? I think I’m going to grab some water.”

“Yeah, can you get me some too?” I sit up, pulling my matted, messy, sweat-drenched hair to behind my shoulders. I consider a shower, but honestly am far too exhausted to do that. The only thing I
really wish to do right now is lie with Ben.

Ben.

I smile down at my lap, loving the way it sounds in my mind.

He returns with a glass, handing it to me before unzipping our luggage. I take a sip, letting the cool liquid satisfy my dry, sore throat. I resist the urge to chug it obsessively. He slips on a pair of loose sleeping trousers, then digs deeper to find a pair of my undergarments and one of his looser tunics. He places it next to me on the bed, taking a sip of his own water before crawling under the covers next to me.

I take another gulp of water, setting it on the bedside table, then slip the undergarments and trousers on, eager to join him under the blankets. As I climb under the cover, he impatiently pulls me into the warmth of his chest, pressing his lips to the top of my head. Our legs tangle in between each other, arms clasping around each other’s waists. He tucks the blankets against my body, settling into my shape.

I mumble into his warmth, “I feel like I lived an entire life just in one day.”

He stills against me. A hand reaches up, stoking my hair, thumb massaging at my scalp. “And we still have an entire life to live together yet.”

I have heard of a sleeping aid method called “lullabies” once before. It is an arrangement of music, usually something soft and soothing, sang to a child. Conventionally, the mother sings the song. The lyrics convey something comforting, using poetic rhyming schemes to formulate a melody.

No one has ever sung me a lullaby before, but I imagine it works much Ben saying those words to me. As I sink into the comfort the sound of him saying such a thing brings, sleep has never been so easy to submit to.

Chapter End Notes

so The Sex Chapter (TM) will be the longest chapter in this fic, lmao. its really unlike anything i've ever written before and i know it isn't anything super kinky but i just feel like kylo being so virgin-y and agent being so overly sexualized in her past, them just having really loving vanilla sex makes a lot of sense.

I really hope u all liked it.

<3 <3 <3 thank you so much for reading! i appreciate you all beyond what i can express.
“No one ever really gets used to nightmares.” — Mark Z. Danielewski, House of Leaves

When I wake up, Ben is gone.

I had that dream again, awakening my body with a violent jolt. The one where the man was in the hut, shielded from the rain, inviting me to sit with him. It seems far too simple of an image to be so reoccurring, to feel so bizarre. I pull the covers around me tighter for a moment, scooching to Ben’s spot on the bed to try to find it’s warmth. But it’s not warm. It’s like he was never even there.

I sit upwards, peering into the archway door of the bathroom. It’s open. But the room is empty. For a moment, I wonder if he isn’t here at all and he was never here to begin with. Maybe my time on Naboo was all just some kind of dream. That’s what it felt like it was. Maybe it felt like that for a reason.

“Ben?” I call out with a dry voice. I reach upwards to my eyes, rubbing away the sleep. I swing my legs from the bed, wobbling to stand, bringing one of the thinner blankets once surrounding both of our figures with me. Crossing my arms, I wrap it tightly around my frame, walking through the living room.

It’s empty too.

My stomach drops.

As I walk through the room to the kitchen, my eyes frantically dart around, searching for him. I walk straight for the windows, showcasing the black sky, slowly transitioning into the blue dawn of an early morning. I snatch the door handle and push my body forward onto the balcony.

I see Ben, body curled into a fetal position in a chair, his back towards me. He looks like a terrified child, so small. So broken.

I stand in the doorway, completely paralyzed by the sight.

His limbs tense, sensing my presence. With unsteady hands he reaches to his face, wiping away the remnants of whatever tears must be cluttering his cheeks. He mumbles weakly, tilting his head away from me, “Yeah?”

I close the door behind me, stepping forwards. His messy hair shields his expression. The sight of him like this, combined with my confusion, is painful. Excruciating even. I say softly, coming to his side, “What awakened you?” Quickly, I remove the blanket from my body and place it behind his frame, covering his flushed bare skin. A shiver courses down my naked legs, wind piercing through the thin fabric of the loose tunic. I look out at the skyline before us of Naboo. The city, once bustling with life is now so vacant, so quiet. It’s as if we are now its only inhabitants.
Ben makes no effort to accept the blanket but does not completely reject it either. He responds avoidantly, voice carried with a slight tremble, “You shouldn’t be up. You need to be fully rested for your mission.”

I frown. I know exactly what woke him up. Asking him was somewhat pointless for me to do. It’s the reason why most nights he chooses to wait until I fall asleep to make his attempts. Why he’s already awake before I wake up. I settle next to him, yet still give him the space he may wish to have by resisting any urge to lean against him. I explain, quietly, “My dreams have awakened me as well.”

His already anxious state melts into the slight panic his tone brings, “Are you still having the visions?”

I nod, but then realize his head is still burrowed away from my direction, unable to see. So, I answer once again, verbally, “I am.”

He flinches at the response, digging his face into the crook of his elbow.

This time, I can’t help but reach out to him, placing a hand over his bicep. As I touch him, a buzzing energy consumes me. The experience is somewhat psychedelic, what I’d imagine if I were ever to be under the influence of intensive drugs. It’s so chaotic. But also, heavy. Painful, dark. I narrow my eyes, trying to decipher it. How can merely touching him illicit such an energy within me? Different from anything I’ve ever felt when touching him before. Different from anything I’ve ever felt at all. Is it?

No…

It’s familiar.

I mentally press into the energy, as if I were interrogating it, testing the waters. Everything is so dark, as if I were trapped inside of an endless tunnel. It’s the tunnel on Korriban with the lurking monsters, the same monsters I used to dispose of Eerson’s body, monsters that I later killed to protect Kylo Ren. Then, it’s the mask of Darth Vader, the justification of doing wrong, the entitlement, the death. But more than anything, it’s when Supreme Leader Snoke entered my mind.

It’s invasion. It’s… Snoke.

“Ben…” I whisper, opening my eyes, pulling my hand away. The presence fizzles out.

He winces at the sound of his name – that name.

“What’s going on?” I am practically begging now, voice breaking with the word, “Please.”

He basically rolls over, into me. He grasps onto my body desperately, the energy that I once felt with a single touch is now all encompassing, consuming me. I hold back a gasp, pushing aside any fear to wrap my arms around him. For a moment, I fight back the inexplicably dark force, but my eyes water merely in the effort. It surrounds me, seeping into my skin. It’s as if gravity is pushing down me through the floor. Sinking. Suffocating me. Kylo Ren – Ben – holds onto me tighter as his body shakes with silent sobs. I notice a potted plant on the table next to us rattling, the sound of the pot on the glass tabletop shattering my eardrum.

What The Force is and what it can or cannot do is something I do not understand. But Kylo Ren using it never has truly, deeply scared me. The closest he came to it was when he entered Iris Nisedge’s mind. But even then… Kylo Ren using the force never has horrified me the way Supreme Leader Snoke using it has. And I feel that fear right now, as I desperately try to remain holding him...
against me despite all the pain, all the fear it erupts in my mind. I wonder if he feels it too. If he feels my terror, or if it’s projection is lost in the abundance of energy. If it’s so strong from just touching him, how strong, how powerful does it feel for Kylo?

He cries, clinging onto my tunic, “I can’t stop it.”

The tone of his voice is something I’ve never heard before. It breaks me. The constricting darkness surrounding me is suddenly no comparison to the sound of his feeble, hopeless tone.

“I miss them so much,” He cries into me, “I need them.”

I reach a trembling hand upwards stroking back his hair. The energy grows stronger, tempting me to retreat from his grasp, but I ignore it stubbornly. I hold him against me tighter, as if I were mocking the temptation, “Your family?”

He nods his head against me, “No matter how hard I try, I can’t let them go. I’m so weak, because of it.”

I hush him softly. “That’s a lie.”

His cries intensify. His tears begin to soak through the fabric of my tunic, bleeding into my shoulder. “You don’t understand,” A sharp breath, “It’s holding me back. If I continue like this, if I can’t rid of these feelings, I won’t be able…” A gasp, then shudder, “I’ll be unable to…” He loses his sentence in another cry of anguish.

I know as much about family as I do The Force. There’s that darkness again, that hopelessness begging to me to give into it. I can’t help him. I may be the most ill-equipped person to help him. I ignore it’s endless probing, shushing him once again, “I don’t know much about love, but in my experience, all it’s done was give me strength. It’s given me things to fight for. I was so weak before you, Ben.” I clutch onto his hair, repeating with a fragile, breathy tone, “I was so weak.”

There’s a certain exhaustion in the confession, “I have no idea what it is I must do. What I need to accomplish to rid myself of these nightmares, this pain. What if it never ends?”

It’s in this confession, that I’m brought back to the Resistance Frigate with General Organa. Hearing her confession as well,

“Tell Ben I said that I still love him. And tell him that I still am waiting for him to come back home.”

I never did tell him that she said that. I always assumed that it would be meaningless. I didn’t even necessarily believe Organa, as I was too blinded by my distrust for the woman and what she represents.

I wonder if I should tell Ben she said such things.

The darkness around me rises again, much like a wave stretching across a shore with growing tides. If I do tell him, he could want to go back, to make amends with his mother. With the Resistance.

A place where I could never go.

Not after everything I’ve done. If they do decide to spare me, it would only be on the behalf of Ben Solo. Plus, the moment I escape, I know that The First Order will set every bounty on me possible. All my crimes against the galaxy will be transparent. Would anyone on that side ever be able to forgive me? Or would they always harbor a distrust for me? A deep hatred, impossible to be completely snuffed out?
Would I be able to forgive them?

I hate The First Order, I truly do now. But I also hate The Resistance. And The Rebellion. I hate all of it. If it weren't for resisting, for rebelling, The First Order would not have to made me into such a monster. The thought of being around The Resistance regularly, the people who I’ve been so conditioned to want to kill… How could I live like that?

But how could I live without Ben?

And as he sobs into me, I also wonder how Ben could live without his family.

If this is what he feels without them, if he’s so intensely haunted by the mere act of missing them, how could I let him continue like this? Lives with our family is something we both have been robbed of. The only difference is, his is still possibility. Maybe.

I blink away at my watering eyes, taking in a sharp breath. I force myself to say, “Leia told me to give you a message when I met with her. I haven’t given you that message yet.”

“Tell me,” He stills, waiting for my response. He tries to take in a deep breath, but it remains choppy, divided.

I stare out into the vast galaxy, wondering what would be like to have to go into the Unknown Regions alone. How miserable I’d be. How much I would regret saying what I’m about to tell him now. Maybe love is a weakness, as it is stopping me from doing the one thing that I set out to do; leave with him. “She’s waiting for you to return,” A deep breath, “and she still loves you.”

The dark energy lifts for a moment, everything now burning, in the way an overheated light bulb burns one’s skin. I can’t see it’s intensive light. But I feel it. It makes me realize just how cold the dark energy was before. “I know.” He sniffs.

I hate that him already knowing this causes me relief. I ask him, “Do you wish to return to them? If you had the means, would you?”

“No,” His voice is steadier, more authoritative, than before. “I can’t go back.”

“Why?” I ask. For a moment, I indulge in the thought that maybe he doesn’t want to go back because he knows I can’t. Because he wants to stay with me, somewhere else that isn’t The Order or The Resistance; The Unknown. My heart flutters in the most childish way at the possibility.

He pulls away from me. His face is blotchy, eyes red. Wet strands of hair from sweat and tears stick to his cheeks and forehead. “It’s too late. Too many things have happened. Luke…”

I encourage as his voice disappears into terror-stricken silence, “What about Luke?”

The darkness returns, all at once. As if the light was some sort of dam, holding it in until it could not stop the overflowing power of the dark, cold water. “Stop.” He creases his eyebrows in the pain of the invading energy, muscles tensing once again, “Just know it’s impossible. And you should never insinuate such a thing again.” I notice his grip getting tighter on my clothing, an indicator that his pain from the energy is increasing.

Without hesitation, I pull him back into me. There’s a gnawing curiosity to know about what Luke Skywalker did. But there’s a larger desperation to stop the pain he feels. I know that talking about it will only make things worse right now. He’s already revealed so much. I pull him back into me and kiss the top of his head, rubbing his back protectively. “I’m going to make things better for you,” I say. “I promise.”
“I told you, I’m not your burden. I don’t want you to view me as a problem to tended to—”

“Ben,” I say sharply, cutting him off. “After the Gala, everything is going to change. I… I have a plan.” I wince as I say it, knowing there’s no turning back. It’s a promise that I will tell him about the map, a contract that soon, there will be no more hiding from him. No more lies between us.

“A plan?”

“Tell me,” I ask, before I can get too deep into such a commitment, “If I knew of a way to end this all, would you stand by me?”

He shivers, “There’s a way to end it? All of it?”

“There’s a way out.”

He nods into me, finally calming down, “I’ll stand with you. We can end it together. All I’ve ever wanted to do was finish this.”

I stare into the stars as I hold him. As I look out, I wonder if any could be close to our future home, our future life together. The darkness disappears slowly but surely, sun in the distance rises. For the first time since sitting with him, I take a deep breath then exhale slowly. For the first time, I am not scared to tell him about the map. But doing so now is not suffice either. When he's already so emotionally confused. I ask him, “Would you like to lay down? Just for a few more moments, before I must leave.”

He nods.

Ben rises to his feet, attempting to stand. I support him with the side of my body, letting his frail, yet heavy, figure lean against me. We walk away from the balcony, each step closer to our destination than the one proceeding it.

I tell myself that as a reminder. A reminder that everything will come together. As long as I just make it through this final mission.

For a brief moment, I wonder if I could just leave with him right after the Gala. Forget about everything on Starkiller. I would not have to entertain General Hux’s assassination attempt on Kylo Ren, nor would I ever need to expose General Hux’s plan to The Supreme Leader. Speaking to either of them ever again would be out of the question.

But those thoughts are immediately pushed back by the image of the Lau family. A family I now am liable for. I lower Ben onto the mattress, climbing up next to him. He holds me tightly, my back pressed into his chest. I try to convince myself to forget about the children, to forget about the promises I’ve made them. To Tuchell, specifically.

Then, I ask myself how my life would be different if there was anyone to ever make such a promise to me, when I was a child. I ask myself if I would ever wish my previous life upon anyone.

I don’t think I would. Nor do I think can knowingly let that narrative play out for the Lau children. Especially after everything else I done to them.

So I won’t let it.

He wraps his arm around my stomach, holding me tighter, “Could you feel any of that?”

I respond, unsure of his question, “Any of what?”
“The darkness… The light. I could feel The Force projecting from me. It was so uncontrollable. I’m sorry, if it caused you distress of any kind.”

I shrug, not wanting to give him the impression that him emotionally opening up to me is a burden. “I don’t think I felt it.”

He takes in the information before saying, “It’s worse tonight than it usually is.”

“Why is that?” I ask, trying to dial back whatever concern floods my mind. The fact that such a sinister energy is usually there to some extent, tormenting him every night, haunts me myself. There’s an unjustness that the nightmares haunt him the most when he’s had a good day, away from the war. It’s as if it reminds him that good days end. Why does his mind do this to him? What motivation does this energy, the same energy manifested in The Supreme Leader, have? For a moment, I wonder if it is Snoke, somehow violating his mind from a galaxy away. It would make sense. It would keep Ben under his control. But I convince myself that such a thing is impossible. No creature could be that powerful.

Then, confirming the potent fear building within me, he digs his nose deep into my hair to speak next to my ear, “I’m unsure. It’ll get better once I return to The Supreme Leader. His guidance will relieve the matter.”

My body suddenly feels so cold, so dead, in his arms.

The Force isn’t the one providing the darkness this time. It’s my own mind. It all comes from me.

My fingers drag across the jewel encrusted hardware that lines the fabric clinging off my shoulders, chest, then around to my back. As I twist from the hip, the gold and silver beading catches the chandelier’s shine, producing sparks of light. My hands go downward, smoothing out the light blue tulle fabric that descends to the ground. It’s an opaque material, thin and flowing, but the numerous amounts of layers are able to shield the sight of my figure from underneath completely. The pillowing sleeves reach down the length of my arms, everything flowing with even the subtlest of movements. I reach into my sleeve, rolling the bunched hem of the fabric back. I feel for the back-up lethal injection, ensuring it’s location; a ritual I do every time I go undercover. I roll the sleeve back down when my fingers meet it’s presence, then look back into the mirror.

My hair is structured in a twist, held together with a metal v-shaped clip in the back. It’s civilized, with no distinctive braids or stray curls. The dress will be enough to get attention. Overdoing the hair might be overkill. I sigh, staring at my reflection, trying to find the mindset of the girl who would be wearing this dress, attending this event.

She’s a member of the Republic. General Hux gave me the name “Annae Brie” to work with. In my mind, she is a historian working with The Republic to ensure its history is well reserved. She’ll have knowledge about observatories, The Emperor’s observatories. Going to one, someday, would totally trip her out. General Leia mentioned to her that they’re looking for an artifact that is in these observatories, but never told her exactly what it is. Annae is curious to know. And someone, probably a Resistance male ranging in the age of twenty-one to forty-five will tell her after drinking a few glasses of champange. Because she’s easy to talk to. She’s pretty. Kind. And she has a genuine, trustworthy nature. Maternal. Wife-material. Cute. She doesn’t have many of her own problems. Her only problem is that her curiosity can get her into cumbersome situations. But in a cute way. When she is sad, or crying, she’s a pretty crier. Never violent. Pacifist? Maybe. She likes the idea of
pacifism, but also understands that The First Order must be eliminated, even if that implies taking violent action... That truth makes me feel kind of sad in fleeting moments.

I smooth out the baby hairs surrounding my face and blink at my reflection. The makeup coating my eyelashes make blinking feel like an unnatural task. I purse my lips one final time, smoothing out the substance that glosses them over. I then exit the bathroom with a smooth exhale through my nose.

Upon entering the bedroom, I look at the dress I wore yesterday and the one I wore this morning and afternoon, both carefully folded and placed on the dresser’s surface. Ben must’ve done that while I was getting ready. I stare at it for a moment. Ben and I spent the morning just laying in bed idly, watching random programming on the holonet surrounded by the breakfast the FA droid provided us. After that, we eventually walked around some of the neighboring shops, but did not buy anything. He made a suggestion to buy me some things, but I explained that anything we wear, own, or purchase on this trip must be destroyed before we return to base.

I approach the folded garment with quick steps. I reach for the zipped pocket, feeling around for the outline of the map. With every stretch of my fingers that I do not feel it, a pit grows in my stomach. But eventually, my fingers clasp around the small storage unit, squeezing it.

Footsteps enter the doorway. Immediately, my hands go behind my back, keeping the map secure in a fist.

Ben enters the room, looking at me with bright eyes and a nervous gulp.

Blood rushes to my cheeks and I grip the map tighter.

He glances down the length of my dress, then, back up to my face as he steps towards me, each stride so purposeful. “Agent,” He says, summoning me to close the rest of the distance between us.

I respond by stepping closer.

He reaches out to me, a request to grab my hands. I relax bent fingers, uncrossing my wrists from behind my back to place closed hands into his palms. He says, deeply, “I wish your reasoning for looking so beautiful did not involve being put in such circumstances. Are you armed?”

I shake my head, staring at his large hands forming around my own, so much smaller. The edges of the map dig into my flesh. “If I were, infiltration would not be possible. It’s a high security event. They’ll have several detectors for those sorts of items.”

He frowns.

“I’ll be safe. I always am,” I assure him with a smirk, leaning forward to offer him a kiss of reassurance.

He pulls back for the main purpose of glancing down at the dress once again, then looking back in my eyes. His grasp readjusts on my closed hands. “You’re bringing your comm-link at least? You have a way of communicating if something goes wrong or if you need back-up?”

I explain, “I can’t risk that either. They could easily be monitoring all communications in the area.” I take a deep breath, trying to project my confidence as much as I can. “I’ll be fine.”

His jaw contracts in doubt.

“I promise.” I offer, hoping my word is enough. “I’ve done tasks like this several times before. These types of missions are child’s play.”
It is enough. For the time being. His shoulders relax and he gives me a small nod, anxiety still present in his eyes. “Okay,” he says, eyes catching the jewels stretching across my shoulders, hemming my dress, “Did I drop in the comment about how you look beautiful somewhere in there?”

I nod, unable to contain a smile, “You did.”

“That child was right, last night. You look like royalty.” He pulls my left hand forward, kissing my wrist, then using his thumb to open my hand.

I keep my emotions as stable as possible, but my breath completely stalls. His thumb brushes against my empty palm before his lips press against it. The map in my opposite hand feels as though it’s burning at my flesh.

“A princess.” He says into my palm.

My grip on my right hand tightens. I say, trying to add a sense of humor into the heavy compliment, “I’d hate to see the state of the kingdom I’d have power over.”

“Why limit yourself to a kingdom when offered a whole galaxy?” He hums softly. He pulls my right hand upwards, thumb pushing into my palm.

Before he can breach my closed fingers, I throw my arms around him, wrapping my arms around his neck. He smiles into the crook of my shoulder, exhaling as his arms reciprocate by wrapping around me. I stare into the wall across from us, wondering what he meant by his words. Wondering if in my attempt to hide the map, I validated something I have no means of fulfilling.

But his arms are so strong as he embraces me. He’s so warm. My anxieties seem to melt away with his touch.

I sigh, pulling away. “I should be going.” I say, using my free hand to grab his. I give it a squeeze, pulling the hand with the map down to my side. The anxiety in his eyes refill. “I’ll be okay,” I stand on my tip-toes, kissing his cheek softly. “I promise.”

He keeps his callused hand in mine for as long as possible as I back away. Eventually, after I’ve taken a few steps back, he lets go. His gaze is hypnotized on the sight of me leaving. Taking me all in, as if it were the last time he’d get the chance to. I want to reassure him that it won’t be, elaborate on the fact that if I survived Hoth, if I’ve survived The Moon of Jabiim, if I survived lying straight to Snoke’s face, I could do this easily.

I turn away from him once I’ve entered the living room, making my way towards the door. My hand itches to readjust the map’s positioning, to hide it somewhere less inconvenient.

“Agent,”

I look back, seeing Ben standing in the doorway. He crosses his arms, shoulders slightly slumped. The thin clothes look big on him with this posture. There is a boyish, childish nature to his expression. I ask, “Yes?”

“I…” He begins, then changes the structure of the sentence, “Come back as soon as you can. So we can spend more time together here before we must return to Starkiller.”

I nod. “I’ll do my best.”

He purses his lips, looking downwards.
“I’ll be back soon, Ben. You have my word.”

With that, I exit, closing the door behind me. I tuck the map securely into my brassier before advancing down the hall.

I find myself dragging fingertips across the edge of the speeder as it zips gracefully through the expanse of the Naboo roadways. The drive is a short one, as the ceremonial hall is located in the Palace. But the drive seems longer today. I find myself wondering what Ben is doing now, without me. I also find myself haunted by the sound of his crying, his anguish at the dark force taunting him. I try to replace those thoughts with the memories of just the night before, and the more recent memories of this morning. How romantic it was, how sweet it was.

I wonder if it should be this difficult to remember what that felt like, yet so easy to remember the dark moments.

I shake all the thoughts away. It doesn’t matter. Annae Brie wouldn’t care for Kylo Ren. If anything, she wishes to see his demise. Thinking of his atrocities cause her stomach to flip. The mask makes her uneasy. If Annae Brie were ever to meet him, she would cower at the sight of him, at his power, at his bloodlust. She’d assume he’s a creature, disfigured by his hatred. I lean my head into the side of the cab.

The slick, silver speeder slows upon the entrance to Theed Palace. Several people crowd the opening, dressed in long elegant gowns or expensive suits. I close my eyes, exhaling slowly. It’s crowded. That’s good. Getting in will be the hardest part, just because I’m not in control of it. General Hux organized that portion of the mission for me. He said that with this name, I should be given clearance without any questions asked. But nothing General Hux ever does is very reassuring.

Annae Brie. I am Annae Brie. Of the Republic. And tonight, I am going to find out what the Resistance wanted with the Archives of the Empire.

The thing Agent 2319 should’ve found out when meeting with General Organa. She didn’t, due to Organa’s ability to distract her out of getting real answers. She didn’t because of Kylo Ren’s continual love for a mother who drove him to the other side of a war. It’s obvious Agent 2319 and Kylo Ren are incompetent when it comes to winning a war. Perhaps they do not belong in such circumstances.

Annae Brie does. These are her friends, her mentors, the people she respects. I narrow my gaze on the Palace’s entrance, tilt my head upwards. My face relaxes. As the cab stalls, I sit upwards and smooth out tulle laying across my lap. I open the door, smiling at the droid operating the vehicle, “Thank you so much,”

The droid chirps happily. Annae Brie would find charm in such a sound. I giggle, endeared.

The dress moves with my movements, gracefully brushing the cobblestone roadway. I approach the Palace, noticing Naboo-issued soldiers guarding the doors. They remain laxed, speaking to the guests soliciting outside the events in a leisurely manner. Unaware that their Gala is about to become infiltrated by The First Order’s best Agent.

I walk up to the archway, following behind two older women in lavender gowns. The walk, arm in arm, approaching the guard. I glance back, pretending to be taking in the site of the city while I listen
to the questions the guard asks the women. How are you? Name? A beep. Then, have a great night.

I turn my head back around, meeting the man’s eyes. He older, his face wrinkling with time, skin like leather. I smile at his warm expression, raising my shoulders with excitement.

“Hello, mam!” He smiles back, “How are you doing this lovely night?”

“Oh,” I peek over him into the Palace’s main lobby. I can’t see it, but I’m sure it looks exquisite. The mere thought is enough to cause the adrenaline to rush through my bones, “I’m absolutely splendid!”

The man chuckles at my youthful excitement, “Wonderful, may I say, you look as though your glowing!”

I blush, glancing down with shy eyes, “Why, thank you, Sir. That’s so kind of you to say.”

“Of course,” The crinkles around his eyes soften, smiling settling into a comfortable grin, “Name please.”

“Annae Brie.” I beam.

He scrolls through his holopad, nearly instantly finding it. Then, he holds the holopad up to my face, scanning. I fight to relax the muscles controlling my expression in an effort to hold back whatever excitement I have for entering the palace. There’s a beep. “Go on right in.”

“Thank you!” My face resumes to it’s usual, ecstatic-to-be-alive manner. I practically skip inside, offering a polite wave to the guard.

The main lobby of the Palace is humongous, nearly the size of the hanger, cluttered with rows and rows of bronze columns, wrapped in illuminated lights. The lights reflect back on the marble floor, creating the illusion of an even brighter room. As my feet take me across the geometric patterns tiling the floor, my heels clink against the solid ground. I follow the mass of people moving up the spiraling stairs on the right.

Before coming here, I studied a layout of the Palace, just in case. I’m assuming the Gala will take place in the main ballroom. I drag my hand across the cold, smooth banister with my movements. The people around me walk side-by-side, laughing at each other’s jokes, complimenting one another’s attire. The women in front of me with the lilac dresses speak about the progress of their children’s education.

I mindlessly watch my hand sliding against the banister.

Upon reaching the top of the staircase, I follow the mass of people through a large archway. The stringed choirs of instruments slowly fade into earshot. They play tunes that are classical, romantic. They play even more elegantly than the orchestras that played on the Plaza last night. When I enter the ballroom, I am overcome with the shining golden scenery.

The room is huge, two stories tall, windows reaching all the way up and then down the furthest wall from me to showcase the scenery of Naboo’s oceans and valleys below the cliff. At the bottom of the widows sit the orchestra, light from the sunset pouring in from behind the musician’s figures. The walls are filled with gold decorative trimmings and designs. In-between the intricate designs are candles mounted on the wall, all lit, only adding to the golden glow of the area.

I glance upwards towards the ceiling, where a painting stretches across it’s surface. The painting showcases a heavenly scene, of mythical angels in the cosmos. I return my gaze downward to the floor. It’s covered in bronze and golden tiles, all placed strategically to form geometric patterns across
the ground. In all the golden light, my dress seems to stand out, it’s cool tone of blue making me feel like an outlier.

I stroll forwards into the room. I repeat my identity to myself several times. Annae Brie. I smile, rescanning the area with astonishment. Naïve. Excited. Curious. I run the expressions on my face like a code. Annae Brie likes fairytales. She imagines that tonight, it’ll be like some kind of fantasy come true. A princess looking for her prince.

My eyes go upwards, above the entrance I walked in to find a balcony with three people, Senators I assume, watching below, leisurely sipping champagne. This draws my eyes towards the servers carrying around platters of various fancy drinks. The glasses serve as even more things to catch the light, sparkling.

After strolling into the room for a few moments, briefly offering smiles at a few of the guests while analyzing the individuals making up each groups on the side. One that particularly sticks out a group comprised of three middle-aged couples and one man, dateless. He looks average. Not attractive, yet does not have any remarkably unpleasant features. He’s most definitely the odd one out of his group, probably lonely. From a distance, I notice his shifty eyes, bored. Looking for something else to catch his attention rather than the conversation being put forth around him. I hold back a scoff.

This is far too easy.

I approach a group next to the one the man belongs to, all comprised of younger women, giggling together. I wave politely at the Twi-lek woman, wearing a sparkling orange ensemble that compliments the teal of her skin. Her brown eyes blink up at mine, noticing my attention set on her.

I step into the circle, directly across from my target, beaming, “I apologize to interrupt, I just couldn’t help but compliment your gown! It’s gorgeous!”

The woman laughs, humbled, a slight blush reaching her cheeks, “Stars, thank you! Yours is exquisite, so that means a lot!”

The woman next to her, a blonde with pale skin and blood red lips, joins in, “That shade, the tonal qualities is great for your complexion, for your hair. Oh my goodness,”

I hide my smile with a raised hand, blinking away from the woman in shyness right to the eye contact of the man in the group next to us. Our eyes meet for a moment. Annae Brie would like this man. This man would be the prince, in her whole fairytale fantasy. My eyes stay on his for a brief moment, taking him in with pure shock of the love-at-first-sight sensation, then I blink back to the woman to pull myself out of the brief trance. “Yours too! It’s so amazing to see everyone look so beautiful! I love it! It’s truly a great way to celebrate such a wonderful union!”

I can see the man staring at me from out of the corner of my eye.

As I listen to women around me continue conversation, now including me, I play with the earring, opening my neck up to his vision.

“Are you with The Resistance?” The Twi-lek woman asks me.

I shake my head, “No, I currently serve the Rebellion as a historian.”

“Really? Are you new around here? I really haven’t heard much about your position.”

I shrug, “Yeah, artifact hunting and research always been something I’ve done on my own. It wasn’t until just recently that I started applying my efforts for the benefit of The Rebellion.”
“That’s really honorable of you. History is one of the most important factors in war, yet so often overlooked. We have to make sure that it’s being protected.”

“I totally agree!” I beam. I make sure my smile is bright, yet not too obnoxious, perfectly framed to where the man can see me. “That’s why I do what I do.”

The man’s gaze is on me, now locked.

It’s almost too good to be true, how easy this will be. Sometimes, the first target I set does not always work out, meaning I must move onto someone else. But tonight, it seems like I won’t have to worry about resetting my focus. Everything is falling into place so quickly.

Annae Brie’s smile becomes so much more real with that fact.

As the women continue talking, I make sure to nod in agreement to whatever they say. I can depart from the group soon. But not too soon. I don’t want to make myself too available to the man.

“Have you seen Dameron yet?” The blonde asks the group, glancing around her shoulder.

We all shake our heads. I'm not sure who “Dameron” is, or if Annae Brie would know who he is. He may be a household name for Rebellion or Resistance members.

The Twi-lek asks, “I didn’t know he was attending! Are you serious?”

The blonde smiles, “I was surprised too. If you see him, direct him towards me. I really would like to meet him before the night is over.”

“The man is so charming, so funny. When he shows up, you won’t miss him.” The Twi-lek asks me, “Have you ever met Dameron before?”

I shake my head, absent-mindedly twisting a bead on the top hem of my dress. The man steps out of his group circle, towards me. Perfect. “I’m afraid I have not.”

“You definitely need to!” The woman beams. “It’s really an honor, considering all he’s done for the fight.”

I agree, matching her level of enthusiasm, “I would love to meet the man! All I hear is wonderful things.” I meet the man’s eyes again. Then, I glance back towards the women, “I’m sorry, excuse me.”

Once I separate myself from the group, he nearly immediately approaches me. He’s bald, a scar stretching across his ear to the top of his skull. His eyes are grey, hardened like stone. He smirks at the sight of me as I pause.

I look down at myself, shyly self-conscious. I make sure all the jewels are in the right place as they lay across the horizon of my collar-bone, the tulle of the dress is smooth. I reach up a tentative hand, pushing a strand of hair back behind my ear. I glance up again, but this time I do not let my eyes leave his.

I lightly curtsy at the man upon his approach, eyes remaining locked on his. “Hello,”

“Hey,” His voice is raspy, deep. He seems somewhat cocky, maybe a womanizer-type. That would explain why he came here alone. He probably isn’t a fan of settling down. He may have wanted to come here by himself just to be able to meet someone like me. “You here without a date, sweetheart?”
I blush at the pet name, “I suppose so. I’m one to try to find my date as the night goes along. It’s far more exciting that way.”

He likes that answer. He nods towards the center of the room, “Then you’re free for a dance.” He holds out an open hand, callused and bruised. He’s definitely an active part of this war. Maybe a Captain. Which is odd. Usually only politician-types attend these things. He’s hopefully Resistance. That’s the one thing that I need to find out, if this is going to remain my target.

I take his hand, allowing him to lead me, “I am.”

He holds my hand folded in between his thumb and palm, walking towards the middle of the ballroom floor. Once we’re in an open spot, he pulls me to him, keeping our hands folded in the same manner while conservatively resting his hand on my lower back. But his grip is prominent. Assertive, even.

“What’s your name?” He leans downward to whisper this into my ear, huskily.

I tilt my chin upwards, saying as softly and as sweetly as my voice allows, “Annae Brie.”

“That’s a pretty name, it suits you.”

Yep.

He introduces himself, swaying our bodies to the music, “Barid Slate. I haven’t seen you before, so I’m assuming you’re Rebellion?”

I nod, “I am. I specialize in the preservation historical documentations and search for new artifacts. You’re Resistance, I suspect?”

“You suspect correctly,” Adrenaline from the success rushes through my veins. He pulls away to smirk down at me, “What gives you that impression?”

I glance up and down his body, then return my stare to his stormy eyes, telling him what all Resistance members want to hear, “You have a certain hard edge about you. When I look in your eyes, I see strength. But also hope. A fiery spirit that isn’t able to be put out, no matter how hard the bastards try.”

“They try,” He laughs, pulling me closer to him, “they really do. First Order bastards, you know how it is. So pompous. Entitled.”

I scoff, “Oh, I know.”

We stay silent for a moment, just enjoying each other’s company dancing. I already am running through the millions of ways I could go about this. I never suspected that my last mission as an Agent of The First Order would be one of my easiest.

I ask him, “What’s your title within the Resistance?”

“Master Sargent. Was able to take a day off my main mission to make it to one of these. Dancing isn’t very first-nature to me. I apologize if I’m off-beat.”

I shake my head, rejecting such a claim, “You’re a wonderful dance partner! I suppose I wasn’t prepared to be speaking to someone so close to the combat tonight. Thank you for all of your service. Really.”
He smiles, flattered, “You’re welcome. That’s truly appreciated. Not a lot of us get to come to these, so it was nice to get a group of guys out for once. Take a break from all the action.”

I nod, “Yeah, that would be nice. You deserve the break.” I imitate the small talk conversation, “Have you been visited Naboo much before?”

“I really haven’t. This is my first time I’ve gotten the chance to come. It’s pretty neat, right?”

“It is! I used to come here a lot to study at the museums and institute. The scenery really is beautiful!”

He asks, “What do you study?”

Holy shit this is amazing. I ask myself if this is even real. I knew it wouldn’t be difficult, but this easy is unprecedented. “Pretty much everything involving history and artifacts. Right now, I’m pretty knee-deep into topics like the history of Ryloth, ways to infiltrate the Archives of the Empire, and methods to combat galactic terrorism.”

“No way, the Archives of the Empire?” He laughs, shaking his head, “That’s such a coincidence that you say that.”

“Why’s that?” I tilt my head. If I can get the answer this early in the night, I’ll be ecstatic. I didn’t even have to really flirt or offer any truly romantic gestures. I can just go back to Ben and spend the rest of the night with him. I can tell him about the map, about everything. We can take a look at it and figure out what route we should take. Maybe he knows more about how to configure which planets are habitable and which are not, with such little information shown from the map.

“The Resistance has currently been looking into that exact information.” His eyes leave mine and find the waiter serving champagne across the ballroom. His feet gradually let off the dancing rhythm, becoming stationary. “I haven’t gotten a drink yet, would you like one?”

I nod, letting go of his hand. “That would be lovely.”

He sets off, approaching the waiter.

I sigh with a smile, relaxing my shoulders. I haven’t even been here for a half hour and I’m already with a Resistance member talking about the Archives of the Empire. Stars. I glance around the room, taking in the beauty of the situation. My eyes travel across the gold trimming of the walls, traveling around the room. I glance back towards the balcony, now seeing the senators joined by another figure. Just as I am about to pull my gaze away, the man turns slightly.

Then, he's facing me.

My whole body freezes.

His does too.

His body is positioned right in front of the balcony’s doorway, the light obnoxiously shining around him as he’s elevated above the ballroom. There’s nowhere to hide. Not now. Despite the incredible distance between us, I can see his fingers tighten around the champagne glass. His strong jawline clenches. His mouth is a gape. Brown eyes narrowed.

Suddenly, I’m back on the Resistance frigate, pinning the pilot’s hand above his head for escorting me across the hall. I’m back to watching his untrustworthy glare as I sit across General Organa. Upon the flashback, I recall what Organa referred to the man as.
The name gets lodged somewhere in the cobwebs of my mind.

His eyes transition from shocked to furious. He hands his champagne to the Senator next to him, turning towards the staircase down to the ballroom floor. He doesn't take a single step without his eyes on me. I can't move, my feet cemented into the hard ground.

Finally, my mind reaches the conclusion of his name.

Poe.

Chapter End Notes

here are some references:

Agent's Dress (Sleeping Beauty, left)
http://exhibitions.fitnyc.edu/fairy-tale-fashion/?url=gallery-sleeping-beauty

The Ballroom (Peterhof Palace, St Petersburg)

Also, wanted to do a little nod to the movie Notorious from Alfred Hitchcock, since that movie was a really big inspiration in this work! The scene with Agent holding the map in her palm while Kylo holds her hand is a tribute to that! :)

Thank you all for reading, as always. I'm sorry that this chapter was uploaded somewhat late. Unfortunately, because next week is dead week and then there's exams, idk how soon I'll update... I really hope I can quickly. I apologize if it takes longer than usual. <3
"Give somebody a hand and he'll take an arm.” — Haruki Murakami, Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman

Panicking is something I never have to worry about. It’s not my nature.

But now, panic is the only thing I know. I hate the sensation more than any other. It’s as if oxygen has been cut off from my throat, my heart curling in on itself, stomach threatening to purge itself of all it contains.

Poe moves slowly, stalking down the steps like an animal approaching its prey.

It’s how I imagine myself walking towards targets. It’s how I’ve been trained to approach people I hold the upper hand of, or eventually intend to have that hold over. But Poe is a pilot. He hasn’t been trained like I have. This… this is completely natural for him, to float down the stairs with a gaze on me that is nearly ravenous, completely encapsulating.

There’s no way I could make it to the exit in time. Even from the top of the balcony, he would be closer to it than I. I examine the two Naboo guards standing on either side of the entrance. They’re armed. One makes eye contact with me, perhaps wondering why I’m standing in the dead middle of a dance floor un-moving. Poe’s feet reach the ground, pivoting to a straight line towards me.

I quickly look towards the man I once was dancing with. Goddammit, what was even his name? Slate. I think? Something like that. He’s making conversation with the waiter, holding the two drinks in his palms, completely unaware of the complexity of the situation he’s brought himself into by speaking to me. Completely unaware of just how much I want him to return to me, to interrupt what Poe is about to do. I need that information on what the Resistance want with the Archives. Before I can escape, I have to get it somehow. I’m not leaving without it. The First Order needs that information to keep them preoccupied while I make my escape with Ben. Failing would put too much of spotlight on me. Failing has never been an option.

Unable to stop myself, I turn back towards Poe, still staring at me, dark eyes locked on me much like crosshairs lock onto an enemy’s coordinates in the cockpit of a ship. I notice two of the women I once spoke to earlier in the night approach him hopefully, only to be ignored with his stubborn focus on himself.

Accepting the unavoidable fate of confrontation, I take a deep breath and tilt my chin upwards. He’s just some pilot, trained to fly ships and shoot lasers at things. He’s young, probably full of that Resistance nativity. He can’t be violent in his approach. It’d cause too much of a scene, especially now that the Resistance and Rebellion have formed a stronger alliance than ever. I can get out of this. I don’t know how, but I can. That’s what I tell myself.

As he moves closer I can make out the young texture of his skin and how it contrasts the stiff,
expensive material of his tuxedo. His physical appearance is vibrant. Warm. The candlelight illuminates him in a way that compliments the tone of his skin, the darkness of his hair. But his eyes remain cold. Jaw clenched.

Just as he closes in on my position, merely a foot away from me, I hear a voice interject the moment, “Hey,”

Poe and I turn break each other’s zealous gaze to direct our attention towards the interruption.

Slate stands adjacent to us, holding the two champagne glasses in loose palms. He’s taller than the both of us, broader. He even looks more intimidating with the scar stretching across the surface of his scalp. But how relaxed he is, compared to how tense Poe and I are is the one thing that truly separates him from the moment. He nonchalantly takes a sip of his champagne, then extends his index finger around the curve of the glass to gesture back and forth between the thick air between Poe and I, “You guys know each other?”

I open my dry mouth to bullshit an answer, but before I can, Poe says blankly, stating irony just as intense as his gaze, “We’ve crossed paths once or twice.”

I feel my eyebrow twitch at the subtle disdain in his voice.

Slate puffs out a nervous laughter, a natural response to attempt to ease the awkward tension. “Should I not ask?”

I allow Poe to answer that one.

Suddenly, his expression softens. He breaks the eye contact with me to look up at Slate, grabbing his shoulder in a buddy-like manner. “Nah, tonight is not a night of the past. It’s about the future of the Rebellion, of the Resistance. What we can accomplish together!”

Slate chuckles and I manage a timid laugh. I reach for my drink that Slate grabbed in the hopes to exclude Poe from the dynamic as much as possible.

In mid-reach for the glass, my hand is grasped by Poe’s, interlocking callused fingers with my own. He holds our hands in suspension, our arms physically blocking Slate from our bodies. Poe smirks to him, “I was hoping to catch up with her, though.” His opposite arm wraps around my waist, palm pressing me forward with an unsteady stumble to my steps. "You mind if I steal a dance?"

I look up to his mischievous grin, my body now against his. The distance between us that once was so heavy is now completely diminished with the proximity of our forms.

Poe exchanges the glance to me, “I am just dying to hear about what she is up to, as of late.”

Slate glances down at the champagne in his hand, once meant for me, then returns his gaze upwards, “Yeah, I guess that’s fine.” He lightly nudges me with his elbow, “I’ll see you around?”

“Of course,” I reply, despite the doubtfulness of that possibility.

Poe readjusts his hand into mine as my gaze settles back on his face. I watch, waiting for the charming expression to diminish into the hateful glare. With a deep exhale, barely stable, I patiently wait. I need the time to assess the situation. I take in his natural charm. He’d be the perfect poster-child for the Resistance. Strong jaw-line, cocky grin showcasing bright white teeth, 5 o’clock shadow, and curly dark hair. I narrow my eyes.

Just when I’m expecting him to break the silence, he takes a step forward, forcing me to take one
back. The movement startles me, but I immediately rebound my footing to follow his dance. Quickly, I realize the movements as a simple waltz. His hand cradles mine more gently, opposite hand curving from my lower back to mid-spine, grip eased.

He doesn’t say anything for the first few moments of our dance. I don’t either. I really can’t wrap my head around the concept of saying anything. I just watch the figures dancing around us from over his shoulder.

“So,” The voice is low, husky, against my ear, “What brings you here tonight?”

I merely revert the subject back to him, “I was hoping to ask you the same thing.” I swallow, regaining my bearings. “I thought that events like these were for politicians and academics. Does the Resistance have so little of those, they are forced to send their pilots?”

He chuckles deeply, a rumbling sensation. “Is that what you are? A politician or academic?”

“Yes, actually,” I pull away to look him in the eye, not letting up on our dancing. It’s a challenge to him. One that I force myself into, as if to challenge myself. To prove to myself I am in control. “I’m a historian of the Republic.”

“Ah,” He pursues his lips, pretending to go along with it, “That’s a brave claim.”

“Not really,” With a spin, I feel my body’s weight transfer from my feet to his palm hand that supports my back. “I am well informed on historical subjects.”

“I’m sure you believe that you are.” He says, smugly.

Then, my motives click into place. He’s witty, charming. Like me. It’s a rarity for others to give him a run for his money. I’ve already determined that he’s incredibly cocky. If I can break that, I might just get the information I need. I’ll have to be a little subtler than with Slate, I’m sure. More patient. But it’s not impossible. “Oh, and I’m positive you attended a plethora of history courses in between your piloting training.”

“You’d be surprised what you learn when you’re not subjected to brainwashing from such an early age.”

I blink at the statement, unable to respond quickly. The words don’t sound right in his friendly tone.

He picks up the lack of momentum I dropped in the conversation, “You’re still pretty young. Probably a child of Project Resurrection? Now that, that’s some history to study. Really interesting shit, you know? Heartbreaking that so many children were separated from their families. Do you study that as a historian?”

I quip, “I am well aware of Project Resurrection. While it may not be in line with your stiff ethics, it has proved successful in providing us a capable military. More successful than anything your pitiful Resistance has produced.”

“You got me there,” He sighs, “Our pitiful Resistance has a strict no-imprisoned-child-soldiers policy.”

“What’s the plan?” I ask, trying to veer away from talking about such a topic. “Are you going to dance me to death?”

“Damn, it’d be cool to get rid of you that way. How theatrical.”
“Truly.” I roll my eyes.

He holds me tighter, giving him the opportunity to say quietly, “You can’t be naïve enough to think that you’re going to be able to leave Naboo a free woman.”

I shrug, “I’m definitely not naïve enough to believe that you know what you’re doing. Is that what this dancing is? Stalling until you conjure up a plan?”

“I could have you under arrest at the snap of my fingers.” He smugly boasts.

“And ruin such an important night?” I tilt my head. “Because you know, if you even try it, I would make the biggest scene. It’d be quite embarrassing for everyone involved.”

He glances back towards the guards, then returns his attention to me. “A little bit of embarrassment isn’t going to outweigh the reward a member of The First Order locked up somewhere in a cell.”

Yet, there’s still hesitance. He’s not powerful here. He’s out of his element, only to rely on his rugged charm and wit. Which is what this dancing is. Buying time, trying to figure out answers while keeping me trapped against him. He doesn’t know the protocol for these sorts of situations. I play at the idea, “I see what you’re doing.”

He narrows his eyes, suspicious, “Really?”

I take the opportunity to pull away from him, only to spin with the swell of the music, his hand as an axle to the movement. When I return from the whirl, I land closer to him, pressing myself at a near inconvenient distance. Our dancing becomes less ranged, yet more intimate. I tilt my head up, saying with a sultry tone, “If you’re not stalling, the only reason why you’d be dancing with me is because you want to.”

“Don’t flatter yourself, sweetheart.” He scoffs.

“Sweetheart?” I make my mouth form into a small o-shape. He falls exactly in line with the stereotype of men easily to get information out of. He didn’t bring a date. He’s adventurous. Probably impulsive. Leaning into him, I let the breath of my words hit his lips, “I like the sound of that.”

Cornered by my accusation, he responds, “The other words I associate with you aren’t quite as polite.”

I flutter light eyelashes, “I’d love to hear them sometime.”

He over-exaggerates his amusement with my words, trying especially hard to pass them off as ridiculous. “Whatever flirtation game you’re pulling isn’t going to work with me,” He laughs.

I cock my head slightly, ever so slightly rubbing my palm up and down the length of his shoulder, “Flirtation game?”

“I’ll have you know, you’re not my type.” He says this matter-of-factly, with so much assurance. It sounds like a challenge.


He merely chuckles at the description.
I continue, taking his lack of response as an invitation to elaborate. “Perhaps such qualities wouldn’t be so desirable if you considered a more civilized option. The First Order teaches us to be poised, graceful, but most of all,” As I pull back to lock my eyes onto his, I’m positive that I’ve got him under some sort of trance to some degree, “We are taught to serve.”

His adam’s apple bobs up his throat. He leans in forward to brush his lips against the stray hair next to my ear, his words like silk, “Not what I meant by type.”

“I happen to be flexible, so,” I hum back, in the same singsong manner, “what exactly is your type?”

He pulls me closer than ever, lips now lightly brushing against my ear. It’s a movement that brings me back to being in bed with Ben, listening to his voice so close to me, feeling it more than any other sensation. I wish I were there instead of here. I pull myself out of the memory, back into the tension in between Poe and I. And with one simple word, spoken in the same low, smooth tone as before, all the tension is relieved,

“Male.”

I back away from him, cutting off any form of physical connection, simultaneously trying to mask my unbalance from the rejection. Shit. Well, romancing him isn’t an option.

“You’re cute though, it was a nice try.” He laughs smugly, reaching for me to rejoin the dance.

Impatience floods through me, all coming from the same place the humiliation came from. Rejecting his reach, I stammer with a raised voice, “Cut the bullshit. What’s your next move? I’ll do whatever to receive that information, all negotiations are on the table.”

He shifts, shushing me, physically pulling me back into the dancing formation despite my stiffened figure. He glances left and right, making sure no one noticed my harsh pull back. “Negotiate?” He attempts to ease me back into the rhythm of the dancing, keeping voice down to a merely a mummer, “Why the hell would we negotiate with such an upper hand on you?”

I go along with it, until I can figure a better option. “You have information that I want. And I have information that your precious Resistance is going to need.”

“And why would we trust you?”

I scoff, finding myself revealing a damning, yet necessary, truth to him, “You’d be surprised.”

He stops the dancing once again to look at me, taking in my expression. “You know…” A sharp inhale. He sucks in his right cheek before saying, “I don’t understand how The First Order would mess up like this. Surely, they know better than putting agents on missions that overlap with previous operations. If they managed to get you in here, they should have checked the guest list – which I am on.”

I don’t respond, eyes reverting away. I am unsure if him figuring this situation out is a good or bad thing. Does it make me more vulnerable or more relatable, if he knows that I am not completely a golden child of The First Order?

“Did they get sloppy?” He asks, sincerely interested. “Or do they not know about your encounter with Leia…” The realization sets in, “Ya’know, that would explain a lot.”

Maybe it’s a defeat that he was able to decipher the situation that easily. Maybe it’s a victory that I established even the slightest bit of trust between us. “Listen,” I tell him, voice lowered, yet with an inescapably vulnerable sincerity to it’s tone, “I know you don’t know what you’re doing with a
situation like this. Get me in the same room as someone who does. You can keep me in cuffs the whole time, a blaster pressed to my head, while I talk to them. I just…” This is usually the part of the mission where I make up some good-hearted motivation to aid in convincing someone to take sympathy towards my request. But in that, I am reminded of the severity of my actual intentions, ones not manufactured. What may happen beyond me, if I fail. The children’s lives who count on my success, Ben’s future, my own future… Everything I’ve ever cared about is in jeopardy if I don’t get this information back to The First Order. The idea of using that to evoke sympathy makes me feel sick. The idea of giving that information up makes me sick in general. “Please, let me talk to someone willing to listen.” I mumble, hating the weakness in my voice.

With a gruff of defeat, he snatches my hand, pulling me off the dance floor.

As he drags me through the mass of people, whether that be couples dancing or Senators congregating, I take one last look at the ballroom. It really is beautiful. The warm candlelit walls are etched with gold trimming and lined with windows showcasing the vast valleys of Naboo. It’s a golden heavenly dream. Illusion.

I’m sure someone like Annae Brie would have loved it.

Poe leads me to the landing platform a few staircases up from the ballroom.

He’s been mumbling words into his comm-link the whole time. I wonder if security is monitoring his communications. If they were, they probably wouldn’t care too much about what he’s saying. I don’t think he’s stupid enough to say anything that would incite panic. He holds my wrists behind my back, as if it really is detaining me. I allow him to believe it. His grip is strong, irritating. But I figure that trying to convince him to let up on it would be useless. I don’t want him to feel like I am a threat. Just in case there is a moment in which I need to be one.

He seems to know exactly where we’re going. And I have my own guesses too, as I’ve studied the layout of the Palace before arriving.

Poe pushes me through two glass double doors at the end of an expansive hallway. We find ourselves on a balcony. The balcony reveals a large landing pad, lights lining a neat circle into the ground.

A familiar sensation of panic settles in, wondering if he plans on shipping me to another planet. I remember my promise to Ben of my quick return, a promise I intend to keep.

The nighttime air of Naboo pierces my face, brisk wind blowing against my face. I find it hard to believe that it was just last night that I was on a roof not too far from here with Ben by my side. In a mindset where the Resistance didn’t exist, nor The First Order. Or even this mission. Now, it’s so heavy. It’s everything.

Suddenly, the landscape of Naboo that once was filled with so much promise is stripped away to become something else. Just another landscape for a mission. Another potential battlefield. I glance up as I watch a small frigate narrow in on the landing pad. The wind from it’s engines create a more violent wind, whipping my hair out of it’s neat twist and into a mess of an updo.

I glance towards Poe.
He feels my stare as he observes the horizon, rather than the more obvious presence of the ship. Yelling above the engines, he naturally pursues the ludicrous notion of small talk, “It’s really beautiful here!”

I don’t take the bait for the friendly conversation, instantly reminded of how quick he was to bring up the misfortunes of my upbringing. Both of our intentions aren’t good. I’d rather not waste more time pretending to be friendly in banter. I merely look up at the ship, wondering how to play my next move. What should I expect? I try to get my story straight, a routine I’ve found myself entering in all situations as of late, but I don’t even know what angle go at this in. I let myself exhale and attempt to trust in whatever improvisational skills I possess.

There’s not much more I can do.

And that scares me.

“What?!” Poe asks, the naïve cockiness so evident, “Bummed that your plan didn’t work out like you’d hoped??”

I don’t engage once again.

He pauses then, “I don’t understand how you care enough to do any of this shit! It’s not like you’re in this war because you chose to be - if you are from Project Resurrection! If I were you, I would have booked it the first chance I got!”

The frigate lands in front of us. The engines hums to a stall. The wind stops.

I look to him as he waits patiently for the ship’s deck to open. The brown locks of curls framing his face settle, tousled rather than smoothly brushed as before. I say, the first words that can remain at a gentler tone due to the loud engines of the ship no longer filling the air with violent noise, “Then I guess I did choose to be.”

“I guess so,” He shrugs. “Makes me feel less sympathy for you all, when you put it that way.”

I stare at him. He said that so nonchalantly, so casually. “Whatever helps you sleep at night,” I snarl, taking the opportunity to lead myself up the cascading ramp.

He huffs, pulling me back by my wrists, “Whatever helps me?”

“Yeah,” I glare back at him. His ignorance leaves me incredulous. “You seem well aware of Project Resurrection - of the kinds of people the Order puts first in line for you to kill. People who were raised in laboratories and training arenas and shooting ranges. Children who were raised to be nothing but meat shields for the higher ups. Expendable human sacrifices guaranteed to be killed off. And you do… You kill them. And you take pride in it. As if it’s an accomplishment, not a formality, for them to die.”

“You…” His eyes go wide. His grip loosens on my wrists. There’s a tenderness to his expression, but also a fight to convince himself that I’m lying to him. That I’m being manipulative. Maybe I am. I cannot tell. If I am, I am unsure what motivations I have to engage in such a conversation. “You kill our people too.”


“Then don’t try to pretend like you’re on this moral high ground.” He says, malice evident, as if he stirred within me a huge revelation.
He didn’t. I just respond, bored by it all, “I don’t.”

I turn my head, continuing to walk up the ramp.

This time, Poe doesn’t stop me.

He throws me into a conference room on the ship with the words, “Don’t try anything shady. It’s won’t end well.”

I rub at my wrists as I settle into one of the many empty chairs. This conference room feels familiar.

I look around the metal blank room, reserved for only a table with a hologram and revolving chairs. Suddenly, I am back on The Finalizer. I used to always be the first to show up at debriefings. I would obsessively read over the files on my holopad in the empty room before any officers or lieutenants arrived. As I eased into the life of an Agent, I wasn’t so paranoid, wasn’t so early. And eventually, the debriefings became less about the missions and more about wondering what ridiculous thing Commander Ren would do this time.

I can hear Poe talking from the other side of the door. It’s not anything decipherable. Just mummers, the low rumble of his voice. I find my fingers subconsciously feeling for the outline of the lethal serum sewn into the hem of my sleeve. Then, I press an index finger to the curve of my brassier, pushing against the data storage unit holding the map.

When I feel it, I lean back in the chair. The chair bends with the movement. My hands return to my lap.

Exhale.

I allow my eyes to close. There’s a comfort in the darkness. I try to trick myself into thinking I’m somewhere else, closing my eyes just as I am here. Anywhere but on a Resistance owned ship. I wonder if they are preparing to take off, taking me to their base. There’s really nothing I could do to stop them unless unless I could get my hands on a weapon. Maybe they plan on taking me somewhere to be executed. Interrogated. Maybe it’ll be like the time I was trapped on Hux’s ship, just given the death of being thrown in the middle of space. A pit forms in my stomach. For Ben. For Tuchell and his sisters.

When the door opens, my eyes open.

General Organa stands in the doorway.

She wears a plum dress with a taupe woven poncho over it. Her grey hair is brushed down, laying softly down her shoulders with the slightest natural curl to it. I notice the rings on her fingers, blue crystals wound in silver. There’s a boldness in her eyes when she looks at me. But also, a kindness too.

I don’t try to manipulate any emotion in my own eyes. I only look at her. The mother of Ben Solo, a boy I held in my arms as he wept over missing her, just this morning. I imagine Ben Solo in childhood, sitting at the same bench that we sat at, but his mother in place of me. She would place him on her lap, telling him of the origin behind the name for wind flowers. Wind blows the petals open, then one day blows the petals away.
I picture the flowers as she settles in the seat across from me.

Poe places himself into the chair beside me. His hand rests on a blaster, pointed at me as it lies on his lap. I’m not familiar with the type of blaster, with how powerful it is or isn’t. I wonder what I would have to do to make him shoot me.

She waits for me to speak, giving me the floor as if she’s an Officer from my debriefings.

I force myself to look in her eyes, pushing a sense of strength into my voice, “I wouldn’t be here if you would have told me what you should have the first time we met.”

Leia speaks, trying to counter my unintentionally venomous tone with a certain tenderness, “And what’s that?”

It’s a silly question. She knows. She has to. “I asked you to tell me what you were looking for on The Finalizer. You told me that you would trade that information for the status of Kylo Ren.” My voice wavers with the pseudo name. “I gave you his status. And yet, I am still wondering the later.”

She leans forward, keeping her fingers intertwined on the table.

I can’t help but look back to Poe’s lap, his finger ghosting the trigger of the blaster. I wonder how much Tuchell will suffer if I prolong this mission for longer than it must go. How much his sisters will suffer as well. I told him I would be back in two days’ time. Are they going to keep me for longer than that?

“You look stunning,” She says, eyes tracing the beading of my dress, then the lines of my face. “It’s quite different than the attire you wore in our first encounter. All that black armor and that dark hood… It seemed more like a costume.”

I stare at her smile, trying to find even the slightest hint of façade in it. I can’t. This makes me frown more.

She sighs, her smile fading. “Can I offer you anything to drink?”

“No.” I quip. “I intend on leaving as soon as you supply me with the information you promised.”

“When we first met, I don’t remember such an insistence on receiving more information than what I gave you.”

I raise my voice, unable to stop the clench of my fists, “When we first met, you specifically told me things that you knew would distract me, you-“

“You listened.” She says calmly, unphased by my anger. “I did not tell you anything untrue. My intentions were not to manipulate. You asked me why I attended the mission. I told you it was the possibility of encountering my son. That was the question and honest answer. You didn’t seem to care why the mission existed to begin with.”

She’s right. I wasn’t focused enough to receive the right answers from her. This only makes me angrier. I blink downwards, trying to find my bearings, to push back the bubbling emotions within me. I look back up to stare her dead in the eye, saying with the most First Order-brand, authoritative tone I got, “We know you want – no, need – something in the Archives. From the Emperor’s Observatories. Tell me what it is.”

“I thought you wanted to negotiate?” She crooks her head, curiously.
“I’ll tell you whatever you want to know about The First Order.” I sneer, “But you have to tell me this one thing first.”

“Why would you be so quick to sell out The Order for such a specific piece of information? Information that would serve them?”

I lower my brow, growing impatient. “Revealing my motivations aren’t part of the deal.”

She nods slowly. In her brown eyes, I see Ben Solo. In the soft curve of her jaw. In her stubbornness, in the way that she is able to make me feel out of control in such situations. So weak. So humbled.

“What’s your name?” She asks quietly.

I stare, hating her for wanting to know such a thing.

“That is the first piece of information I request.” She states. “I suggest you supply it to me if you plan on getting any answers.”

I swallow hard. Then a quiet, “2-3-1-9.”

She nods, as if I said something that wasn’t absurd. Not just a combination of numbers… an actual name.

“And you’re an Agent?” She follows up.

I guess that is obvious by now. “Yes.”

“How long have you been with The First Order?”

I snap, “You’re wasting my time with such pointless questions.”

“I don’t think it’s pointless.” She replies, so collected. I hate it. It’s like she’s rubbing it in my face, that I’m impatient right now and she’s not.

Suddenly, the door to the left opens. I flinch at the noise, unaware of how lost in the interaction I was. I look towards the door to see a golden protocol droid with a large serving tray. Contrasting the overwhelming glimmering gold finish to the droid, the droid’s left arm is blood red. It looks so cheap, compared to the rest of it. The tray is filled with a variety of Naboo foods, and two glasses of water. I glance back down at Poe’s lap, his hand still clenching the blaster. I return my attention to the droid. It places the tray next to Organa.

With an orderly, politely tone, the droid begins, “Mistress Leia! I have brought a variety of food items for you and your guest, as you requested.”

“I’m not eating anything you give me.” I reiterate, words directed at Leia.

Suddenly, it feels as though I’m sitting across from Hux again, in the Lau Residence. There’s that pressure, that impending doom of something eventually going terribly wrong behind a glass of wine or plate of food. I try not to let the sudden retrieval of the memories phase my expression.

The droid chirps, now aiming its tone to me, “Well, if you change your mind or need anything for that matter, I will be nearby to offer assistance! As a guest the General, you are of highest priority! My name is C-3-”

The pompous droid ignites a burst of impatience within me and I cannot stop myself from pushing
off of the chair, standing to my feet to gain a height on the situation. I snap, ignoring Poe’s gun now
drawn on me, “Piss. Off.” I point at Organa, trying to resist the trembling sensation threatening to
take over my limbs, “What do you want with the Archives? Tell me.”

“Oh my goodness!” The droid’s empty arms go upward, overwhelmed, “I – well – I certainly
apologize! I will… I will be leaving now.”

The droid shuffles out.

I mentally curse myself for the outburst, so unlike me. So unwise. I don’t back down from it though.
It’s too late to do that now.

Leia tilts her head, curiously as she looks upwards to me. She remains completely unphased, just as
before. I can barely look her in the eyes. God, there’s so much Ben in the expression, that nearly
breaks me alone. She asks, “How long have you been with The First Order?”

I answer the damned question, just to get it on with, “Infancy. What do you want with the
Achieves?”

The barrel of Poe’s gun presses into my arm, threatening for me to sit down.

I do, not giving him the satisfaction of acknowledgement.

“Why should we trust you?” She persists.

This is just getting redundant. I spit at her ferociously, yet unable to hold back my desperation,
“Because I’ll tell you anything about The First Order you want.”

“I cannot accept information from you.”

“Why the hell not?” I scoff.

Suddenly, her voice raises at me. Not out of impatience. But out of authority. Out of a necessity to
get me to understand her point of view, “You infiltrated a high-profile Resistance Gala. You put
yourself deliberately into a situation in which you were bound to be caught-”

“I would not have gotten caught if Poe wasn’t there, I didn’t know-”

“You are an Agent of The First Order, trained to infiltrate situations such as these and receive
information through the means of lying, deceit and manipulation, all without giving any viable
information away-”

“That’s not what I’m-”

“You have been with The Order since infancy. You are high enough in your position to have
worked alongside their leading Commander. I’m sure you’ve been on many missions like this before,
doing whatever it is that you have to, for them and-”

I snap back, “This isn’t for them.”

A head tilt.

Shit.

Leia reaches out and wraps her hand around the cup in front of her. She brings the brim to her lips,
blowing on the steaming liquid slowly before taking a sip. She places the cup back down. “You’re
here for that information because you’re personally interested?”

“I…” I swallow hard, trying not to panic at the completely unprecedented slip of my words. “I just need to give them something. Something believable.”

Leia continues the seemingly endless prodding at my psyche, “You know, when we first met, you weren’t as restless. You seem impatient. Am I keeping you from something?”

I force myself to process the conversation as nothing more personal than an interrogation. And interrogations are all about voice and stress control. “I have time.”

“Really?” Her brow raises ever so slightly. “Because it seems to me that you’re doing is trying to buy it, by getting this information. That’s why you need it so badly, right? It’s not for them…” She repeats back to me, so easily deciphering the code I didn’t even realize was so clear, “It’s for you.”

I exhale as slowly as I can, trying my best to seem untouched. This seems like it’s going nowhere for me, yet she’s getting each question she was initially curious about answered with every sentence I give up. “Look,” I let the exhale become a sigh, trying to wrap my head around what I’m about to offer her. I remind myself of my priorities. Running away with Ben. Saving the Lau children. Putting them somewhere safe. That’s all I care about. Not The First Order. Not the Rebellion or Resistance. They can do whatever, amongst themselves. Ben and I won’t be around for the outcomes of it. “If you tell me what it is you need, I’ll get it to you.”

I hate the added responsibility. Dealing with Hux’s assassination ploy and now having obligation to the Resistance? Perhaps I could just not fulfill my end of this deal down the line. I don’t see any reason to.

Leia’s right eye twitches. “Why would you do that?”

I remain reserved.

“Tell me what your angle is.” She insists.

“I gave you my offer. I’m not giving you anything else.”

She says, simply, “You have yet to earn my trust.”

Bullshit. That’s completely bullshit. “I could’ve killed you the first time we met. I should have. It would have been so simple,” I turn towards Poe, “And you – I could’ve killed you too by now. It would’ve been a huge success on the First Order’s hand. I could’ve been a war hero.”

Poe’s jaw contracts.

I turn my focus back towards Leia, “You’re an idiot if you do not take this opportunity. Absolutely insane.” I cross my arms, rolling my eyes, “You sent out a whole fleet for this information, yet when I’m giving you a chance to receive it, you don’t take it. I cannot possibly wrap my mind around such foolishness.”

She responds with no beats to fill the silence, completely taking on the rhythm of my words, “Foolishness is you trying to pretend like you do not need me to comply into your plan as well. It appears we need each other. You want information from me. I need information from you. We’re even.”

She’s right about that. I haven’t denied that at all. It’s the extra information in which I am concerned about. I mumble, “I don’t understand why you insist on knowing my motivations. I don’t care to
know yours."

“That’s how you earn my trust.”

I blink, glancing down at my lap and breaking the eye contact.

I suppose the fact that no one has known my plan has always been a security for me. It’s not a very solid plan, I must admit. It’s been very fluid, changing with each event and molding into something different. It’s been somewhat improvised. Part of me is afraid to tell her just out of fear that she’ll tell me it’s stupid or irrational. Which it’s not.

I don’t want to share it.

It’s so safe in my mind, just for me to know, just for me to deal with. I trust myself with it.

How could I give it up to the General of a military of which I have fought against my whole life? This plan is the only damn thing that’s ever mattered. I feel the map pressing into my skin more than ever now, how it’s sharp ridges cut indentations into my flesh with each inhale.

“Agent 2319…” She says it so gently. No one’s ever said it that kindly before. It’s different from Ben’s voice. It has another element. It’s maternal.

“Don’t call me that.” I say, voice now weak.

“You told me that was your name.”

“Well, it’s not.” My fists are clenching now. I turn my head away, shielding myself with the stands of hair that hang from the now messy updo. There’s a slight tremble to my lips of which I cannot repress.

She doesn’t deny it. Only a simple, “If you tell me what you're doing, we could help you. I just need to know what we're dealing with…”

I can’t respond now.

“You’re close with Ben.” She admits, offering a hand to reach out to me. I keep my eyes away from the gesture, all the while melting into it’s presence out of the corner of my eye. “I trust that there’s a reason why.”

My eyes involuntarily catch hers. I don’t break the gaze. "He has nothing to do with our conversation.”

She accepts my rejection of her hand, laying her palm flat on the table, yet still outreached to me. She says, the sentence sounding so tender, so nostalgic with her smooth, kind tone – a tone that no doubt belongs to a former Princess, “If he cares for you, I do too.”

I look away, “Don’t bring him into this.”

“It’s hard not to.” She says with a sad smile, “I can’t really talk with anyone about him anymore.”

I spit at her with malice, “What about Han Solo?”

She stills.

I add on, “What about Luke Skywalker?” I’ve never said the man’s name before. Just the mere act brings back images of Ben’s pain, of his trauma. “I’m sure he has plenty to say about Ben.”
She glances down. Still keeping her strength in demeanor, but now showcasing a side of her that’s disappointed. She diverts the subject, getting back on track, “You need my help. Tell me what it is I can do and if you supply me what I need from the Archives, it will be done.”

I swallow hard. I don’t like needing help.

And I don’t like admitting that I need it.

But getting the Lau children somewhere safe, without The First Order finding them… I don’t know if doing that alone is wise. Especially if the moment we leave, we’ll be chased down. I’m sure that The First Order won’t put the children as high as a priority as finding us. But it’s still as risk. One that I don’t want to take. Plus, the Lau family already had connections with the Resistance. Maybe this isn’t a bad idea. Maybe meeting Leia today had a reason behind it. Am I just trying to trick myself into believing her lies for hope? For reassurance? I search for the answers deep within my mind, asking anything to tell me what to do.

And for a moment, there’s an answer. It’s not verbal. It’s not even definite. It’s just a sensation that runs through my psyche, one pulling me towards the woman in front of me. I exhale, seeing if the feeling lingers.

It does.

I don’t trust it at first.

It doesn’t try to convince me otherwise.

But the moment I entertain the thought of trusting her again, the feeling returns. It’s so reassuring. The Lau children would be safer this way. It’s hope.

“There is one situation I could use assistance with,” I whisper. I know how much of an unimportance promises hold. I promise people things all the time with no intentions of upholding them. But for some reason, I now need to hear her validate this. “Promise me that if I tell you, you’ll do this for me.”

“What is it?” She says, no eagerness in her voice to know. Only a patient kindness.

“I’m…” Deep breath.

I question it once more.

Before the doubts can devour me, I cling onto the feeling with near desperation. I look back up at Leia, uttering, “I’m deflecting from The First Order.” I shudder at the words, stunned that they ever left my mouth. Poe shifts in his chair. I recollect myself to continue, “But before I can leave, I need to complete this mission. Failure will draw too much attention to me.”

Leia asks, “Why not just leave now?”

“Returning to Starkiller Base is vital to my plan,” I explain, “There are a few prisoners I wish to free before I make my departure. This is what I need your help with – protecting them while The Order attempts to locate me. I could arrange for you to pick them up somewhere while I divert The Order’s attention. I can supply them with credits. But you must find housing for them in civilian territories. No warzones. No military bases. Additionally, you must regularly check in at first to ensure their safety and run security checks. And give them a droid or something too.”

“A droid? What kind?”
“One that specializes in childcare.” I swallow hard.

“It’s a lot.” She nods, leaning back. “But it’s a deal.”

I sigh deeply, slouching back in the chair. Okay. It’s out. It doesn’t make me feel any less anxious. But it does make me feel different. “Now, about the Archives.”

She doesn’t go along with the jumping subject right away, clarifying, “And I suspect that when we come to pick up the prisoners, you will have the information I need.”

Shit. I guess I must uphold my end of the deal now. All things considered, I don’t really mind. I can easily access the Archives and find whatever it is they need. “Of course.” I assure. My eyes glance over to Poe’s lap once again. His finger no longer rests against the trigger guard. His palm only rests against the handle, laxed. It’s his guard down.

There’s a slight buzz spread throughout my body. Adrenaline. Victory. No... Don’t give into it yet. My cockiness got the best of me earlier.

I exhale smoothly, leaning forward, "Leia," Her name feels so smooth coming off my tongue. It's such a pretty name. I'm somewhat envious of it. "I need this information if the rest of my plan is to be executed."

She nods, compassionately. There's the compassion of Ben Solo once again. I let the reminiscence overwhelm me now, projecting all the association with him to cover any ill feelings I have towards her. Perhaps that is why she finally confesses, "We need all the information you can find on The Unknown Regions."

The data storage unit burns into my side against me. "The..." I gulp, "The Unknown Regions?"

She continues, explaining, "We're looking for a planet. But we have no clue how to get to it. We know there is navigational data leading to this planet that exists, data we found in the Pilio Observatory years ago, but-"

"Use that map." I say simply.

She second guesses telling me the next piece of information. But she does, despite her judgement, "It's no longer in my possession."

"Why? Who has it?"

She looks up to me with sad eyes. Eyes like I'm supposed to know. "Ben?" I ask, under my breath. She shakes her head.

"Who?"

She still doesn't answer.

I remain patient. This whole thing seems so delicate now. I feel as if I'm a surgeon, carefully pulling aside tissues of skin to get to the most vital piece of information. Trying not to make one wrong move, to blow it after coming so far.

I clear my mind. Who has it? Perhaps a better question is who would have taken it away? A name comes to my mind. The man who I used to entertain the idea of being a legend, but now has a reality confirmed by Ben. A man who is not fighting... Not anymore. "Luke?"
She looks up to me, eyes large, sparkling beautifully, but so sad.

I urge, "Where is Luke? Does he still have the map on him?"

I say the question, then realize how silly it is.

Luke used the map. They're not trying to find a planet. They're trying to find Luke Skywalker.

The realization that washes over me is that of intoxication. They're desperate. They're so desperate that they need to find Luke Skywalker. Who ran away. Who hurt Ben and then ran away.

Leia quickly diverts the subject, "But onto your other portion of the deal, I have a few questions concerning some of the bases and star destroyers in the possession of The Order."

I glance towards the blaster on Poe's lap one last time, making the movement of my eyes seem like a reaction to pulling information from my brain. It wasn't. I pull the subject back, saying with a solemn tone, "Ben never told me what happened with Luke."

Poe's barely touching the blaster. He merely stare's at Leia's face, sympathizing with her. They both are lost in the thoughts of whatever did happen with Ben and Luke.

I beg in a breathy whisper, "Tell me."

Leia opens her mouth to speak.

And I tell myself that Ben will tell me the story another day.

I whip around to Poe, grabbing the blaster from his lap, avoiding its aim by jutting back in my chair. I twist the handle with a brutal grip, the gun immediately tumbling out of his loose clasp. He yelps in pain. I don't waste a moment to stand to my feet, bringing him with me as I press the blaster to his temple, locking his neck with my arm.

He tries to squirm. But it's useless. I hold him defenseless in front of me. My index finger brushes the trigger, already so acquainted, ready to pull it at any moment's notice. Organa's on her feet, still remaining calm. Professional. She gathered herself quickly from the emotions.

I'm not sure if I ever trusted Organa, or if that was part of the acting. But all I know is that this - holding Poe at gunpoint - is what is comfortable. I have power in this situation. I won't be betrayed. I won't be tricked. And with Ben and the Lau children to worry about, I can't afford to be betrayed anymore.

I press the barrel into Poe's hair. I say, viciously, my voice restored to it's usual state of strength, of order, "Now, I'm going to leave Naboo. You're not going to report me to any security. And we'll stay out of each other's way from now on. Okay?"

She laughs, looking at me as if I'm insane, raising her arms to submission, "Do it. Leave."

We both know her or Poe will alert security the moment after I exit the room. For this reason, I consider shooting Poe right then and there, like the Best Agent of The First Order would. And then killing General Organa.

But I don't. Probably because of Ben. Only because of Ben.

I shove Poe into the table, his gut hitting the metal edge of the surface. He doubles on the ground, trying to regain his footing. He glances over his shoulder, staring at me with rage in his eyes.
I step backwards, finding my way out of the room. I keep the gun aimed at the two Resistance heroes.

Before I can exit fully, Organa asks, "You were telling the truth," Her chin tilts upward - another Ben mannerism, specifically when he's cocky - "about your plan. Weren't you?"

I shake my head, "Of course not." A sly smile spreads across my face, "Live for The Order, die for The Order. That's all I know."

And that was perhaps the biggest lie of them all.

Chapter End Notes

IT'S BEEN A WHOLE DAMN MONTH I AM SO SORRY

Again, i had to finish up the semester and move back and rekindle with my family and find employment ahhhHhHH like it's been crazy i havent even unpacked yet :') but now im back and im excited to share more and stay tuned for more chapters coming up! i know this was a really inconvenient time to take a break, narratively, because where the last chapter ended and the nature of this chapter, so i apologize :'( i've missed it so much tho, i hope everyone's still semi-invested cause i sure am!

so Agent was a huge asshole in this chapter so yea that sucks it hurt to have her be so mean to Leia but she is just so broKeN aND SCArEd anD BEiNg tHIS WAY IS WHO SHE IS SOMETHING EVEN IF SHE TRIES TO TELL HERSELF OTHERWISE :( and queer-baiting has been making me annoyed lately so i just wanted poe to explicitly say he likes boys(TM) so there's that

Also a new Officious Extra will be published soon! before chapter 38 here, probably! There's a lot of the extras I wrote but just haven't really finished, so i promise i haven't completely abandoned that.

ALSO i haven't really plugged these things lately, but i have still been updating the playlist and pinterest board kinda sporadically, but not really enough to mention it every upload so yea just putting that out there
Security never chased after me. No alarms sounded off. The Palace did not go into lockdown.

As I raced down the cascading steps towards the east exit of the Palace, I took each stride prepared to pull out the blaster from my dress’ pocket and fight my way out through waves of Naboo guards.

But I never had to touch it.

In fact, I never even had to reroute my exit plan. It was a straight shot with no complications.

Upon bursting out the doors into the Naboo night, I find myself immediately looking towards the landing pad I came from. I squint my eyes, focusing in on the slick silver shuttle, wondering if Leia Organa is staring back. What is she planning? How is she going to go about trying to stop me?

I pull my gaze away from the shuttle and down to the pathway leading towards the main road. Surely, she’s trying to throw me off. Maybe she sent out her men to ambush me around the street corner, when my guard is down, when I’m most vulnerable. Or she sent someone to follow me, to find out where I’m staying so she could find any associates on this mission. Does she know Ben is here too? Can she tell, with the Force? I don’t know.

I walk up and down a few blocks and through several alleyways, always looking back to see if there’s anyone following. Always looking up to see if there’s any drone droids hovering above me. There has to be a catch.

I weave throughout the streets of Naboo, deep in the maze of the city. I memorized each turn I took. Forward a block. Then a right. A left. Right. Straight. Left. Another left. Forward. Right. Then, I slipped into an alleyway to kill time.

As I lean against a brick wall, I wait for the whole Rebellion to turn the corner with handcuffs open, ready to clasp around my wrists. I cannot help the yawn surfacing from my body. I rub at the sleep in my eyes, careful to not smudge my makeup too terribly.

I wait longer.

I try to ignore the fact that it’s getting late. And I miss Ben. And frankly, I just want to leave Naboo so that I can even more quickly leave The Order. Impatience has never been a problem with me. But this, the suspense of Organa’s inevitable attack, is particularly testing me.
I stay in that alleyway, hand over pocket with blaster, waiting, for another ten minutes. It’s far too late for anyone to take notice. It’s been so quite the whole time, so boring. I sigh, reaching up into my hair to pull out the mess of the twist. I drop the hair clip against the wall for someone to find and either sell or wear for themselves. I won’t be needing it ever again.

I shake my hair out, push off the wall, and then make my way down the alley. The pebbles crunch with each step I take, each stride leading me closer to the front of the building, into the streetlight. They have to be there, waiting for me. They have to be.

I peek around the corner.

No one.

I wish this woman would just attack me and get it over with already.

I stare down the length road, looking for any sign of life, but the city is completely asleep.

With no other choice, I make my way back to the hotel, trying to make sense of what this means. Why would she not kill me? Or capture me? Try to torture me for information, try to use me to lure Ben back? There’s so many opportunities she’s missing. I don’t understand. This outcome, of me getting away unharmed with sensitive information on the Resistance, is the worst possible scenario for her… and she’s just letting it play out like this. For a leader of the Resistance, she sure isn’t resisting very much. I cross my arms across my chest and shiver from the cool night breeze.

I just can’t comprehend it.

I also can’t comprehend the fact that she’s willing to risk so much, just for information that gives her the possibility of finding Luke Skywalker. Could finding him actual change the whole outcome of the war? Could one man be that powerful?

No one should be that powerful, to be able to singlehandedly decide the fate of an entire galaxy so easily.

As I walk down the streets of Naboo on my way back to the hotel, I try wrap my head around the situation. I find that I cannot manage such a thing. So, I tell myself it doesn’t even matter. Soon, Ben and I will be gone. So soon.

I open the door to our room to find Ben already standing, pacing in the living room.

Relief washes over him immediately and in just a few strides, he’s hugging me tightly. I wrap my arms around him, trying to indulge in the feeling. But at the same time, I cannot help but be overwhelmed by the sensation of solace, of the Resistance not being around to capture me. They would’ve done it by now if they were going to… Leia Organa spared me.

And I spared her too.

Ben’s arms squeeze my frame, the sensation overall making me feel more needed than wanted by him. I bury my head into his warm shoulder, taking in his clean scent and the soft fabric of tunic. The way that he’s so relieved by the mere sight of me causes me to drown in the affection.
Ben pulls away but remains holding me close with hands on my waist. “You’re back.”

“Of course, I’m back.” I reach upwards, cradling his face in my palms. I bring my thumb to the soft skin underneath his eye, smoothing out the darken ring from sleepiness. “Did you doubt me?”

He tilts his head over, kissing the inside of my palm. His eyes flutter up into mine with the sweet melodious words, “Such a thing would be foolish.”

I smile at him, leaning forward to press my lips into his briefly. He’s so much warmer than I am. I didn’t realize how dried out my lips were from the dry, cold Naboo night until feeling how soft his are.

He hums into my kiss, pulling away to say, “And I do want to hear all about it. Have you eaten yet? I know it’s late, but if you’re hungry, that FA-5 droid can bring us food.”

I pause, processing what I’ll have to tell him. Not just about this mission – which includes meeting with his mother and discovering his mysterious evil uncle is being sought out by the Resistance. About my plan too. About Hux’s play, that I’ve been pretending to go along with. Everything I haven’t told him yet, I have to now. And just thinking of that makes it impossible to imagine eating. “No, it’s okay, I ate there.” Shit. I didn’t even mean to lie that time. I add on, “I actually have to talk to you about a lot of things.”

He frowns, bright expression suddenly diminished into concern. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, yeah…” Deep breath. “I’m fine.” Where do I even begin with it all? How should I phrase it? For something I’ve thought about doing for so long, I have no clue how to execute it all.

“Here,” Ben leads me towards the sofa, gesturing downwards, “Do you want to sit?”

I obey, just to kill more time before I have to talk. Goddammit, why did I wait until the last minute? I should’ve just told him last night, overlooking the Naboo skyline. That would have been perfect. Everything was set up for me, and I blew it, just to tell him in a hotel room right before our return to Starkiller. At least he won’t really have time to process it. Maybe he’ll take the offer up on impulse, if anything.

Additionally, so many things have happened since last night.

I have never felt closer to him than I do now. Maybe I was right to wait. I can do this. I try to repeat that mantra over and over again in my head, waiting until it becomes believable. It never really does.

“You’re nervous,” He bites his lip, an action that begins him chewing at its center. He thoughtfully reaching his finger forward, pushing back a stand of my hair from behind my ear, “Talk to me…”

“I…” Inhale. Exhale. Do it.

What if this, me putting this off for so long, is the thing that makes him not want to go with me? What if he’s offended that I lied, that I kept so much?

“It’s okay,” He leans forward. His hand rests on my cheek, caressing my face carefully.

I just need a little bit more of him saying it’s okay, of him reassuring me that he wants me, that he wants us. Then I can do it. I stare at him, basically pleading for him to give me the validation I crave.

He tilts his head forward, “If we’re at a dead end, it’s fine.”
My thought process freezes, the statement throwing me off.

He continues on, elaborating, “I really thought that The Force was leading us towards answers in Jakku, in that observatory. And that obviously was a waste. It’s okay if we have to drop this mission all together. It’d be nice to know what The Resistance is looking for, of course, but I have full confidence that we don’t need it to destroy them. We have so much to use against them already.”

“Oh.” Is all I can initially manage. “That’s not what I’m-”

“Agent,” He begins, “It’s alright. I know that last time you didn’t return with the information I said some things that made you…” He ponders it, then settles on the word, “upset. But I won’t be angry if you couldn’t do it. I understand.”

My defensiveness is unstoppable to repress as I snap, “I got the information.” I don’t even bother to pull back how the assumption makes me feel so inadequate, how his reminder that he said things that made me “upset” makes me slightly irritated.

Any worry or concern is immediately swept off of his face. He beams, eyes glistening with repressed excitement that blinds him from whatever emotions his words stirred within myself, “You did?”

“Yeah, of course,” I respond casually, trying to downplay his effect on me. “But I-”

Suddenly, he’s kissing me. I am slightly taken aback by the action. I think this is the first time he’s kissed me and I didn’t want him to. There’s too much anxiety for that. Too much disinterest in what he’s so excited about. This is the first time it just feels like lips on lips and there’s nothing “magical” buzzing underneath. Like every other kiss I’ve ever received. I don’t reciprocate, but I don’t think he can tell due to the exhilarated nature of his actions. There’s a spark of life in the way his lips part against mine, in the way his fingers weave into my scalp, one that I cannot relate to in the discovery of a successful mission to aid The First Order.

When he pulls away, he’s absolutely beaming, ecstatic. “Well?” He asks, “What were they after?”

“Uh,” I respond. “They were looking for any general information on the Unknown Regions. A map.” Specifically, the map that I have on me right now. Which I need to talk to him about. Now.

His eyebrows scrunch in confusion as his grip on me falters. “What could they need in the Unknown Regions?”

I take a deep breath. I tell myself that his reaction will be fine. He’ll handle this like an adult and it might even make him want to escape from The Order even more. He probably doesn’t want to deal with Luke ever again. And he doesn’t have to. Everything is fine. “They’re trying to find-” I look up, into his eager eyes. I prepare myself, mentally, all while trying to dampen the reveal’s effect with a casual tone, “I guess they are looking for Luke Skywalker.”

The name paralyzes him.

The only thing that changes is his eyes. And in his eyes, an incredible fear overwhelms him.

As I reach out, an effort to comfort him, he stands to his feet. He walks away from my presence, only to face the wall opposite to my body in front of a long table decorated with a potted plant. He stares at it, unmoving. I try to conjure up the words to say, what to follow up what may have been a bit of a revelation. But trying to deflate the situation might just be the thing to make it explode. Additionally, I don’t fully understand the dynamic between Luke and Ben. I don’t have the slightest clue how to address it.
Right on cue to that thought, his hand slams across the potted plant on the tabletop, sliding it across the counter, sending it crashing to the floor. The sound of the glass vase shattering splits my eardrums. The sight of his back heaving with angry breaths all while he’s in such casual clothes, without his mask, is so unsettling. It seems like a glitch, completely incorrect.

I close my eyes, inhaling slowly. “Ben-”

The sound of his name only sets him off again, as his hand extends to reach to grab a lamp across the room, the Force willing it into his fist. Once in his hand, he only smashes it into the ground, snapping the metal rod of the lamp in half while it’s light sparks into a chaotic flickering before ultimately dying out.

I stand to my feet, approaching him in an effort to take control of the situation. I tell myself to push past any judgement, any annoyance I feel towards his reaction. He’s just hurt. Just angry. I can help him.

He turns towards me, face red, already sweating bullets. Immediately, he spits, “Don’t,” backing up into the kitchen, probably trying to find something else to throw.

I disobey his request and continue approaching him, like a trainer would approach a ferocious beast. I say as smoothly as I can manage, “Everything is okay. Just go sit down.”

He doesn’t listen, reaching back towards the kitchen table and flipping it with the simplest flick of his wrist. It’s glass tabletop shatters into thousands of pieces, scattering the floor. “It’s okay?”

He mocks, looking over his shoulder. He flips around, now stepping towards me. His finger points outward at me, voice at a peak of anger and volume, “You realize what this means? What them seeking the navigational charts implies?”

I try to explain, keeping my voice at a reasonable volume, “If it implies anything, it’s that they’re desperate.”

The explanation doesn’t satisfy him. The cabinet doors of the cupboards lining the wall fly open. “Someone knows where he fucking went! They just have to use the map to get to there!”

Oh. I guess that’s true. I suppose I didn’t really care enough to put those pieces together.

My realization provokes him once again and he pulls a plate into his grasp, throwing it across the room to the wall.

“We’re in a goddamn hotel, you’re destroying private property.” I grab his wrist, stopping him from grabbing another plate.

He yanks his wrist out of my grasp, pulling another plate to him to just throw it into the floor. More shattering. “Luke Skywalker is returning and you’re concerned with the fucking hotel!”

He’s being ridiculous. I’ve never seen a man act as if he were such a child. The immaturity so prevalent when we first met is so obvious now. “He’s not returning.” I push down more anger, keeping completely calm to combat his rage. “They need that information to find him. And they won’t get it. We have it.” I have it, more specifically.

Shit.

I have the one thing the Resistance and now The First Order are desperate to find.
He finally takes what I say into consideration. A lightbulb flickers in his mind as he stares at me, hair covering his face in a tangled sweaty mess. He approaches me with purpose, only to walk right by me and into the bedroom. I exhale, following him, desperate to keep up with his long strides and stop him from throwing anything else. He goes to the dresser to grab the comm-link, clicking it to life with his thumb. He barks into it, ordering the connection, “Starkiller Base.” He shoves the comm-link into his ear and begins walking around the room to grab stray clothes, hurriedly stuffing them into our suitcase. “This is Commander Ren. I need all intel within the Archives of the Empire to be put under lockdown. No one touches it until further word from Supreme Leader Snoke or myself.”

He clicks the comm-link’s button.

Then, he says, “Tiru Ren.”

He waits for the connection to become established.

Then orders, “Get all the Knights together. All of you will be going to each of the Emperor’s Observatories, collecting any information you can find on the Unknown Regions. I want every square inch searched and secured. Be ready to receive more details soon.”

He doesn’t even wait for a response to click off the comm-link.

He starts pacing, hands shaking, breath unsteady. It’s almost like he’s recharging, to break more things.

I stand still, unsure how to go about deescalating the situation. How am I even going to bring up my plan now? When he’s like this? I knew he’d have a reaction to the news to the search of Luke Skywalker, but this is unprecedented. He’s not thinking. Everything is purely impulse, purely rage.

“Please,” I approach him carefully, “Come here.”

He doesn’t. Instead he mumbles under his breath, “Why now? How do they know where the temple is if Luke used the compass to get there? How would they even use the map if they don’t know where they’re going with it?”


He ignores me completely to continue his strain of verbal thoughts, “Who else has seen that compass…”

Then, he finally looks up to me.

His face settles into that of revelation, of questions flooding his mind finally being answered.

I have no clue why. I haven’t seen the compass. I don’t have the slightest grasp of what he’s talking about. I run a hand into my hair, asking with impatient desperation, “What? I haven’t seen it.”

“You haven’t…” He whispers in understanding.

I scrunch my eyes up at him, dazed by the vague, inexplicable statements.

“When you said that we could end it all, that you have a plan. I was so blind to it, but you had the answer all along.” Any anger that was once possessing every fiber of his being has ceased. A starved, boyish gaze returns as he takes in the sight of me.

I glance behind me, at the rubble of his temper tantrum. Then, back to the lovesick boy in front of
me. It doesn’t make any goddamn sense.

His eyes sparkle emphasized from the chandelier above us. “This is how we can end it – by finding Luke Skywalker.”

The statement is so naïve, it nearly stuns me. I don’t think he’s ever said anything so obviously juvenile. I try to keep those judgements apart from my tone as I calmly ask, “How would finding him end things?”

“Eliminating the last embodiment of the light side of the Force.” He explains, a small smile forming at his lips. “It’ll end The Force’s conflict, thus ending the galaxy’s conflict, ending my conflict. Supreme Leader always said it was my destiny, to destroy him. I used to doubt the possibility… But I see it now. The First Order will finally reign. We’ll win. And you and I…” He steps towards me again, trembling hands reaching towards my face. He holds me so gently, despite how strong he just proved to be, how angry. “We’ll be at the top of it all. Together.”

He leans forward, not giving me time to respond, pressing his lips to mine to kiss me deeply.

The action nearly destroys me.

He pulls away to click on the comm-link once again. He says the name, “General Hux.”

I can only stare as he walks back to the bed to zip up the suitcase.

He speaks, “Send out a galaxy-wide bounty on a man by the name of Lor San Tekka. Offer The Order’s greatest reward for information on his whereabouts.”

I can only imagine how General Hux is taking the vague order. Probably not as quietly as I am.

Ben only spits into the comm-link as he throws the suitcase off the bed, onto the floor, “Just do it.”

He rips the comm-link off his ear, shoving it into his pocket.

He holds his hand outwards towards me, “We have so much work to do when we return.”

I don’t take his hand. All I’m able to do is utter a quiet, “I wasn’t done talking to you.”

“We have time to talk all you wish on the ship back to Starkiller Base.” He says, laughing at what he thinks was such a simple, silly request.

Is it?

I’m beginning to think that it is.

And now, bringing this plan up to him… He’ll take the map from me if he refuses. We’ll use it to find Luke Skywalker. And Kylo Ren will rule the galaxy, under Supreme Leader Snoke’s thumb.

Nothing will change for me.

I’ll still be trapped here. And I will be for the rest of my life.

I don’t realize I’m crying until I feel a tear dart down my face.

“Hey…” He drops the suitcase to shift all attention to me. Hands, now steady, grasp my face like once before. He collects the tears against his thumbs, quietly shushing me, “You’re so full of fear. I feel it. There’s no reason to be fearful now. Not anymore.”
I don’t respond, tears cascading even more rapidly.

“It’s so terrifying to accept your destiny. I spent my whole life denying what I was meant to do. I still have days where I doubt it,” He tilts his head, “Like last night.” He places his soft lips on my forehead before looking back into my eyes, continuing on. “But all that doubt is gone in moments like this, where everything comes together. In moments when I’m with you, I know I belong here. You’re what’s right about The Order.”

I hate myself for crying in front of him yet again. But it’s not like how I’ve cried before, sobbing pathetically because of my guilt or because of The Order trying to kill me. This is quieter. Just a steady stream of tears rolling down my cheeks into his hands, as he holds wooden face. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I whisper.

“You will. It’ll be our Order, soon. Reformed. Polished to how we see fit…” He corrects me.

Is that what he truly believes? Is that what Snoke convinces him? Even still… “Why?” I blink, more teardrops following the action. “If this war is causing us so much pain, so much anguish, why must we be a slave to these destinies?” I grab onto his forearms, pleading up to him, finally taking initiative within the conversation, “I make you happy. You make me happy. Isn’t that all that matters? Don’t you want to be happy together, away from all of this pain?”

The idea humors him, as if it’s absurd. “You would prefer to ignore our higher calling?”

I’m still not even convinced that this is our higher calling, that anything is calling us to do anything. All there is, is Snoke manipulating him. “What if there was a way we could?” I feel myself trembling again. “What if, logistically, it was all set up in a way that The Order could never find us and we would be free.”

“Running away, to pursue a life of waste?” The premise makes him scoff.

I don’t think hearing anything has been so physically painful.

“While millions are dying from this war? While the whole galaxy is up for grabs?” His brow lowers, his tone lowers, “You know I can’t leave this behind. The First Order needs me. The galaxy needs me.” He pauses. Then, “But it also needs you. Your visions from The Force only prove this. It will all make sense so soon, and once it does, you’ll know. You’ll know how important you are in all of this.”

I shake my head, trying to depart from his grasp. Why can’t he comprehend that I don’t care about my vague “Force visions?” He just pulls me closer, urging me to hang on.

“You’re not listening to me.” I snap, “I don’t want to be important.” I can barely manage to push the words out of my constricting chest, “I just want to be happy. With you.”

His hands fall from my face, giving into my pull away from him. As soon as the absence of him settles, I realize just how lonely that is. I’ve forgotten that solitude.

His expressions drops. “Are you not already?”

I don’t think true happiness is possible inside The Order.

With the pain that strikes his eyes, I question if I was projecting my doubt. He looks down, away from me. “Because I am. I’m already happy with you.”

“Ben…” I begin, unsure where to go.
“I don’t understand you.” He says quietly, anger returning bit by bit to his tone. “If you are so unhappy here and you don’t care for working to make it better, why didn’t you just leave after Hoth? I told you I would help you.”

I sniff, reaching upwards to wipe my own tears away with the absenteeism of his hand. “I couldn’t.”

“No. You could have. You didn’t want to.” He returns to staring me right in the eye, this time his eyes narrowed bitterly. The gaze is still strong as ever, but full of accusation, of intimidation. “Tell me why.”

I don’t know. Not completely. I try to conjure up the answer within my clouded mind, ending up with the conclusion, “Leaving The Order seemed so abstract at the time.”

He responds, tone rich in sarcasm, “And in the time in between then and now, what revelation occurred to change your objectives so drastically?”

“I got to know you. And you got to know me. The Order is just a formality now.”

He laughs at this.

I shiver at the harshness in the sound.

“In all the ill-thoughts I used to harbor towards you, I never once took you for a self-centered coward.”

I try not to process that statement completely. He’s hurt. He’s just saying that because he’s hurt, and he needs to protect himself. He doesn’t truly mean that. Tears race down my face more quickly in the denial of the statement.

As if he knows that I’m trying to defend such an insult in my mind, he continues, “You know what I was considering last night? When we were on that rooftop?”

I don’t answer.

He does, in such a factual matter, “I felt how happy you were here, I saw how happy you were, and I was tempted to ask if you wished to stay on Naboo while I returned to Starkiller. I derived a plan of reporting that your cover was blown at the Gala and you were killed. The Order wouldn’t try to find you. You’d be free to live a life you never got the chance to have. I selfishly concluded to not mention the idea. I’m not sure if it’s because I believed you cared too much about this war to leave, or because part of me was so frightened you would accept the offer. I can see where you stand now.”

“No,” I whisper, begging for his trust in my words, “I wouldn’t have agreed to that.”

“You still can.” He glances towards me, fists unclenching, angry gaze softening into something significantly more sentimental. “It isn’t too late, if you wish.”

I hate myself for entertaining the idea for the briefest moment.

I could give him the map to the Unknown Regions right now and he could find Luke Skywalker like he wants, and I could be free, like I want. I could force myself to forget about the promise I made to Tuchell Lau. I’d never have to see him or his sisters again. I could start over as a real person in this galaxy…

But I know that I can’t do that. I care about Ben too much to do that, I am too indebted to the Lau children to do that. Logically, the idea seems so insane, so impossible to even consider. Is that what
he thinks of me? That I could easily part from him, so suddenly, so abruptly?

“I’m not leaving you.” I tremble. “Why would you even go about asking me to?”

Then, without missing a single beat, he says so nonchalantly, with all the confidence I’ve ever heard him exert, “Because I love you, immensely.”

The effect the words have on me is the sensation of a blazing heat, so scorching everything is frozen. I stare at him, once again unable to move.

He continues, “And as much every part of my being morally disagrees with you becoming a deserter, my best interests reside in your freedom...” He looks down, shamefully, “I recognize that freedom has never been quite accessible for you.”

It’s not because I’m surprised by the revelation that I cannot move. It’s just that I’m startled that such a thing was said. To me. It’s never been said to me before, in no context whatsoever. For so long, I never even could have dreamed of it happening. But now, it has.

I must stay in a paralyzed state for a long time, because he tries to pull me out of it with the word, so militarized, yet so full for adoration, “Agent…”

And in that moment, it finally sets in that he calls me that like it’s a real name. Agent. I don’t think it’s felt this wrong before now. If we were to go off to The Unknown Regions, would he still call me that?

The tragedy of my reality sets in, that I could never be who he wants me to be.

And he could never be who I want him to be either.

No...

I don’t accept that. I won’t allow that. I’m going to find a way. There has to be a goddamned way. I didn’t come this far from where I started to just give up, to accept what seems so obvious, so inevitable. I don’t believe it to be true, I don’t believe fate to be so cruel, to finally dangle in front of me such a dream, such happiness, only for it to be revealed as a path straight back into The First Order’s grip. I cannot accept that.

Kylo Ren isn’t the boy standing in front of me right now. Kylo Ren is Snoke’s creation. Snoke is the true problem. That’s what is keeping Ben back from running away with me. It’s all Snoke. All the manipulation, all the lies. That’s the whole reason why he’s so tied to this idea of fulfilling his destiny, of living out his grandfather’s aspirations.

My plan isn’t over.

It just needs tweaking.

If I can configure a way to prove to him that Supreme Leader Snoke is manipulating him, only pretending to care for him to use him as a weapon for the war, I can convince him to leave with me. It’s not over yet. I haven’t failed.

My mind is nearly intoxicated with the fantasy once again, putting the shattered pieces of the dream back together in my mind. It doesn’t look repaired. It looks brand new, refined. Perfect.

With this newfound hope, I find myself professing, “I love you too.”
Saying it for the first time feels just as staggering as hearing it.

Before I can fully register the words, he’s walking towards me, closing the distance between us. It’s not the rushed steps full of determination, of purpose, that I experienced right before he first kissed me. These are slower, feeble. And when he does meet me, we do not kiss. Our arms wrap around each other, holding on as if it were the last thing we ever get the chance to do, as if any moment the other would disappear.

I find myself clinging onto the fabric of his tunic, face buried into his shoulder, taking him in as much as I possibly can. His breath is so hot in the crook of my neck, his arms so needy. In the complete consumption of his presence, I can barely register his words, void of any former confidence, of any rage. It’s pure weakness. “Please, do not stay with me if you do not want me. I can’t… I won’t be able to bare it.”

I hold on to him even tighter, surprised such a thing is possible. “I want you. I’m not leaving you,” I reassure, finding the same weakness in my own voice. It’s so odd, feeling a man so powerful, so large, yet so incredibly weak and scared. We both hold each other, wrapping one another with limbs fueled by fear. I cannot quite tell if that makes the terror divide or multiple.

We remain like this for as long as we can possibly manage until it is inevitable for one to let go. I’m not sure if it were him or I. I don’t think it really matters.

We then leave Naboo.

There are three quick beeps echoing from the shuttle’s overhead speaker.

I glance up to the red light that blinks in the corner of the crammed storage room, the only room in this shuttle besides the even smaller bathroom and loading dock. Perhaps a warning that the ship needs to be taken out of auto-pilot? We may be closing in on Starkiller.

I look away from the light, bringing my attention back towards Ben, his head dug deeply into my shoulder. As if he senses my preoccupation, he thrusts harder, eliciting an immediate moan, my body tightening to his.

His mouth presses against my ear, allowing me to hear his quick and short breaths so out of rhythm to the drawn-out bucking of his hips. I squeeze my legs around his waist, pulling him further inside of me. Arching my back against the wall, I push myself further against his pelvis.

“Are we close?” I get the question out between quick inhales.

His hands readjust their grip on my thighs, squeezing belligerently at the skin. He pulls his heavy head off of my shoulder to press his forehead into mine. His dark eyes gaze into mine deeply, jaw clenching tight. He accelerates his pace, my center throbbing even more intensely at the sensation. He rasps, “I’m close.”

I don’t dare to take my eyes off of his, unable to pull myself away from their passion. “No,” I try my best to pull the words out cohesively, despite the overwhelming pleasure possessing my body, “Are we close to Starkiller?”

He growls, a low noise from deep within him, one hand leaving my thigh to reach up to my face. He slides the sweat-drenched locks of hair off my cheeks, his lazy hand falling down to settle on my
neck. His hand is so large, compared to my neck. He must notice either my body tense in anticipation, or my eyes flicker with lust as he touches the sensitive area. He very lightly wraps his fingers around my throat, further pinning me against the wall.

I roll my head back, unconcerned with whatever question I once had. I project all the encouragement I can, trying to get him to not shy away from the motion, trying to reassure him that he doesn’t have to be so cautious with me. I allow myself to indulge in the lack of control such position allows, his strength, his movements the only thing supporting me. The angle allows for him to thrust right up into my core, all while giving me a complete view of his lust-consumed gaze.

He grunts, “Who cares?”

Right. Closing in on Starkiller. “The ship won’t advance until it’s manually piloted.”

His thumb extends upward, tilting my chin to bring flushed lips to his. In the kiss, the fingers wrapped around my neck close, ever so gently squeezing. I whimper, fighting back the urge to pathetically beg him for more of that.

“It can wait.” He mutters.

Without me even conscious of the action, my hand grips around his bicep, clenching at it as if to plead from him to be less gentle, less considerate. His eyes flicker down to the sight, then his fingers squeeze at my throat harder. The muscle of his arm flexes under my touch, soft skin turning so solid. I keep my mouth open, gasping for air, the pressure of it all adding to the pressure between my legs. My head digs into the metal wall of the room, Ben keeping that same intense glare on me. He watches himself fuck me. He gulps.

I whimper, knowing the sentence will be taken by him as a challenge, “We’re going to be late for our arrival.”

“I’ve forgotten your aptness towards being prompt.” He grumbles, twisting my neck so that my head turns. He presses his lips to my ear, saying sinfully taunting, “So punctual.”

I cannot repress the shudder the sound of his voice creates throughout my body. I snip back, forcing the words through the space left in my windpipe, “As I’ve lapsed on your inclination towards tardiness.”

Fingers congest around my throat even tighter. He pulls his head away to get a better view of me. I writhe against him, so close to my release. It builds deep inside of me, a band tightening, bound to snap at any moment. He quickens his thrusts once again, the deep strokes only multiplying the sensation. With each snap of his hips, I feel my chest tighten, my head grow dizzy, my core clench. I grind back into him with all I have, trying to push myself off the edge. Every time I feel as if it’s there, the sensation only lingers, taunting me, teasing me.

He sees it, how near my orgasm is. I can see the power, the cockiness, through my half-lidded eyes. He has the knowledge that he is the one in control of it, he is the one that will supply it to me. He pulls my head forward once again, kissing me sloppily. When he pulls away, his tone is that when we first met, that of arrogant authority, “If you’re really so concerned with the matter,” fingers dig at my throat even harder, “come.”

The word shocks me, such an order coming from him never being present in these situations. I begin to wonder if I only imagined it.

He sees my doubt, then demands, “Do it.”
My body involuntarily convulses to the sound of his voice, body quaking before my mind catches up to the shattering pleasure. An irrepressible moan escapes me, my figure lurching into his, crumbling at the presence of him still deeply, quickly penetrating me. It’s painful, the combination of him thrusting through my orgasm and squeezing at my throat, but the pain only accentuates the uncoiling pleasure.

He releases my throat, hands gripping at my backside to pull me as close to him as physically possible. With frantic thrusts, he shudders, then groans, head burying itself back in my shoulder. He’s undone with one final pounding motion into me. He twitches within me and bites down on my shoulder hard. I whimper softly, so sensitive to every place he touches me, somehow simultaneously feeling everything, yet each nerve ending so individualized.

He pushes me back against the wall once again and I slide downwards slightly, due to his weakened frame. My arms wrap around his broad shoulders, fingers carding into his hair. He slowly thrusts in and out of me a few more times, the movements excruciatingly slow, yet so much to process. His hands fumble around the frame of my body, taking each inch in before moving onto the next, no longer focused on pleasing me but now concerned with just processing how my body feels, as I am doing to him. I exhale into his ear, trying to regain the mental capacity to say something, anything.

He thrusts out of me, hands gripping my thighs, and he carefully places me on the cargo bin next to us. I glance down at our uniforms scattering the floor, then back up to him. His body glistens with sweat, the frame of him looking like that of a statue at this angle. So much bigger than me, so crafted specifically to rage wars.

I mumble under my breath, “shit…” as I reach down, my clothing too far away for me to grab without getting up.

He kneels downward on the floor where our garments lie, placing an innocent kiss on the point of my knee. I weakly smile at the small gesture, watching him separate my clothes from his. He doesn’t bother handing me mine, nor putting on his own. He merely nuzzles his head into my lap, trying to improvise some form of cuddling in the cramped space. I reach downward, pushing his tousled hair out of his eyes. That sex was very different to any sex I’ve had before. Primarily because most of it consisted of so many conversations. It seemed casual, but intimate. No one racing to orgasm, no one really trying to orgasm until the very last minute. It was like we only started it for an excuse to be closer to each other. We both wanted it to last for as long as it could. He closes his eyes, looking as if he could fall asleep right here. I hum, humored by the sight.

He opens his eyes to glance up to me, still out of breath as he asks, “Huh?”

I shake my head lightly, pushing more of his hair from his face, “Nothing.”

“Would you be bothered if we are late?” He asks in consideration.

I laugh at the shift in his tone, so different from the sexual assertiveness he exerted moments ago, “No, I don’t care.” If anything, I figured he would be the one to care with all his Luke Skywalker stuff to do. My fingernails dig into his scalp, massaging the skin through the thick, dark locks. “R8 may bitch at me, but I’ve grown to expect that.”

Ben closes his eyes once again, relaxing back into me. “Just explain the situation to him.”

I scoff. “I’m not telling him that I am late because I was engaging in sexual intercourse.”

“Engaging in sexual intercourse…” He purrs, “Is that how you define us making love?”
I’m relieved his head is on my lap, eyes closed, because the amount the statement makes me blush is quite embarrassing. I combat the bashful reaction by saying, “I’m not telling R8 that I was late because I was making love either.”

“That’s fair.”

“You know,” I begin, the incident so fresh in my mind, “The first time we went to Korriban, R8 told me that he suspected we had a sexual relationship based in our hate for one another.”

He laughs at the idea of it, “I’ve considered what that would be like once, briefly before.”

My hand stills on scalp, “Are you serious? When? How early on?”

He just chuckles low at my inquiries, turning his head to kiss my leg.

“Tell me!” I probe.

“When is the first time you envisioned us having sex?” He asks, the question a formality for his answer.

“Probably when R8 said that. Which, I might add was when I still didn’t know what you looked like, so it was not a very clear image in my mind.”

“And that was the first time we went to Korriban?”

“Yeah.”

He chuckles a bit more, hand dragging light fingers up and down the opposite leg to the one he rests his head on. The movement tickles slightly, especially when his hand turns once it reaches my knee and the light touch transitions into more of a scratch from his fingernails. He answers, finally, “When you returned from the Moon of Jabiim.”

I freeze, stunned, “After you nearly killed me?”

“Yes,” He answers, hypnotized by his hand dragging across the length of my skin.

“Why?” I fume, “That was like… You were so pissed at me, I was so pissed at you, how could you have considered such a thing at the time?”

He shrugs. “People are often pissed at me. I am well aware of that. No one does anything about it though.” His index finger circles at my knee, “I knew very early on that I didn’t scare you – a beautiful woman who just so happened to be assigned to basically follow me along every mission. It almost seemed as if it were set up for something intimate to happen between us eventually - set up by destiny itself. I did all I could to fight it, though. To convince myself otherwise.”

It seemed that way because it was that way. It was set up in a manner where I could receive information on him as easily as possible. I wonder if Snoke knew this whole time, that our eventual relationship would be the outcome of things.

I can only imagine how much Snoke will regret doing this whole thing by the end of it, when Ben and I escape. I doubt I’ll be able to see the look on his face when he receives the news that his apprentice is free, but I know for certain it will be a thing I imagine often.

I sigh, “Yeah, it seemed pretty inevitable.”
“You’re forty-seven minutes late.”

I stare at the droid blankly. "Missed you too."

R8 didn’t talk to me from the moment Kylo Ren and I exited the ship, up until we returned to my dormitory. Now, he stands in the doorway, staring, waiting for an explanation.

I don’t have to give him one. So I refrain.

“You have never been even one second late to anything, ever, in your entire history within The First Order.” The droid says, the same condescending tone.

I raise an eyebrow, “It’s not like I had anything to do upon my arrival.”

“Nothing at all?” The droid quips.

I am taken aback by his snark. He usually is a bit subtler with it. I reach up to my hair, undoing it from the bun that was only assembled to be worn from the walk of the shuttle to my room. “Is there something I should be attending to?”

The droid is flabbergasted at my response. It takes him awhile until he eventually says, volume raised, “Tonight is the night you kill Commander Ren and leave The First Order.”

Oh, right.

“Yeah, so I need you to reach out to Supreme Leader Snoke, I should probably meet with him as soon as possible.” I shake out my hair, walking towards my bed. I plop down on the mattress, lying back.

The droid remains unmoving. “Why?”

“I don’t know,” I sigh, “I’ve been thinking about the whole plan, the logistics of killing Ren, and it seems considerably risky. He is a very light sleeper and if he were able to sense my motives, he could easily-”

“Agent.” R8 cuts me off, “If you do this one thing, you will be granted complete freedom.”

I shrug, bullshitting the words, “Maybe I want to stay with The Order. I mean, they provide me with a place to live and food. And I’m not sure if I could trust Hux to uphold his portion of the deal. What he is trying to pull is treason. I thought you were programmed to be against that sort of stuff.”

“I am programmed to guide you towards a compromise between your best interests and The Order’s best interest.”

“And treason is within my best interest?”

“You certainly seem to act as if it is.” The droid’s tone snaps, so coldly, so quickly.

I inhale slowly, my light expression slowly fading into one more serious. I explain, calmly, collected, “If I report General Hux to Snoke, it will ensure my loyalty to The Order and eliminate me from the risks that pursuing this mission entails. Killing Commander Ren is vastly more complicated than killing weapons dealers or politicians, R8.”

“I am well aware of the personal complications this mission presents itself with.” R8 responds.
“That’s not what I meant, I-”

“It’s why, though. Your compassion for him is why you are not going through with it.” R8 steps away from the doorway, approaching my bedside. “You may never get an opportunity like this again.”

It’s not until he says that, that I realize just how many opportunities I have to leave The Order. They seem to be plentiful nowadays. I say, despite that fact, “And I recognize that. I made my choice with that in mind.”

R8 steps away. Eyes flicker, analyzing me. Double checking for any sign of deceit. I stare back, unafraid. I know exactly how R8 deciphers lying and I know exactly what to do to ensure he doesn’t read it from me. R8 says, “Did you know the average life expectancy rate for an Agent of The First Order?”

I pause, taken aback by the question. “Uh, no.”

“Nineteen years old. Ninety percent die in their first three missions.”

I scoff, “Well, I think I have that statistic beaten. Why would The Order even send out people so ill-equipped, so-”

“Do you know the longest time an Agent with a one-hundred percent success rate has gone before expiring?”

I don’t answer. “Expiration is only a conspiracy.” I fully understand that it isn't, but technically, it is a "myth." The concept being fake is what The Order wants us to believe, which is what R8 should be promoting.

The droid answers, ignoring my challenge of the term, “Approximately fifteen years.”

I do the math in my head. I’ve been in the program for ten years.

R8 can see me computing the facts. “No Agent who begun their work in childhood has lived past twenty-five.”

I stare at the droid. “I don’t know why you’re telling me this. Because of my connections with Kylo Ren, they won’t find it so easy to expire me or whatever you-”

“No. Do you really think anyone here cares about you and Commander Ren?”

I remain silent.

“If you do not leave now,” The droid’s tone lowers, “The probability of your death is at incredible odds with each second passing. Especially after Hoth, in which, they already attempted to kill you.”

“And Kylo Ren saved me.” I snap with the same relentlessness R8 is exhibiting. I lie on my back, kicking off my shoes. It’s frustrating, to not be able to tell the droid about my plan to leave for The Unknown Regions. I want to be able to talk to him about it. But I know I could never do such a thing. He’d report it immediately, especially with the progressions of the Luke Skywalker search. “I appreciate your concern, but really, you have nothing to worry about. Just schedule that meeting with Supreme Leader Snoke. That should be the first priority.”

R8 says, volume lowered, “I did too.”
“What?”

The droid’s tone stabilizes, “I went to Hoth too. I found your location when General Hux captured you on his ship.” The droid looks up, yellow eyes flickering, “I saved you too. Every time.”

He’s right. I never really thought about that.

R8 says, “And that is what I am attempting to do right now, in convincing you to go through with this plan. Because if you deny the execution of this task, I will not be able to help like I have in the past.”

I look softly at the droid, my best friend since I can remember, my only friend since I can remember. I realize that I am unable to project confidence to it, like I would be to someone Force sensitive like Kylo Ren. There’s only my self-assured expression, my steady tone, to offer him, “Thank you, R8. But I need you to schedule that meeting with The Supreme Leader.”

R8’s eyes dim. They rarely do that, especially when the rooms lighting is at a normal level. “Is this really what you choose?”

“Yes.”

The droid nods, then turns away. He stands in the corner of the room, where he powers down every night. I strip my clothes down, eliminating everything but my tank top and undergarments, throwing the uniform messily on the other side of the bed. I tuck myself under the covers, then look up to R8, staring blankly at the floor.

I smile at the droid, trying to give the droid a sense of everything being okay. Because I am confident it will be. I say, warmly, “That will be all, R8.”

The droid’s eyes shut off as it powers down.

Chapter End Notes

hey guys! Thanks so much for reading ! I really enjoyed writing this chapter and i hope u do too. Its been kinda hard to write because i get my writing urges at like 4 am and i just started working third shift so its like im in the middle of my lame job dying cause i wanna write then i get home and the feeling is gone lol its weird. But things really pick up from here on out so i cant wait to share more!! Thanks!!!
Indifference

Chapter Summary

“But that afternoon he asked himself, with his infinite capacity for illusion, if such pitiless indifference might not be a subterfuge for hiding the torments of love.” — Gabriel García Márquez, Love in the Time of Cholera

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I count to sixty.

I learned in an android programming class at the Academy that sixty seconds is how long R8-5D takes to be fully powered off, in complete shut down mode.

My eyes slowly open, looking up at the droid in the darkness. Its yellow eyes are dark, completely unlit, shoulders slumped forward. Then, I sit up, careful to make sure my movements are fluid. Nothing harsh, nothing loud. I turn, reaching for the clutter of clothes at the foot of my bed. Slowly, I slide the black trousers onto my legs, standing to my feet to fasten clip at my waist. Not letting my eyes leave R8, I reach to the dark grey blazer, carefully pulling the zipper along the zipper-track all the way up to the high collar. As far as I know, the droid only awakens if it receives any First Order alerts overriding it’s shut down, or after seven hours, enough time to prepare breakfast for me by the time I wake up.

But at the same time, I’ve never left my dormitory at night without any intention of telling R8 where I was going. Let alone, have I left intentionally keeping that information from him.

After fastening up the tall leather boots and slipping the gloves back onto my hands, I reach back into my hair, pulling then twisting it into the ordinary low-bun. I reach down to my nightstand, grabbing the comm-link and securing it into my ear. Sneaking towards the kitchen, I grab a loaf of bread from the counter. Then, a bottled water. I place the items into the bag lying on the table, swinging the bag over my shoulder.

I approach the door to the hallway, reaching forward to press the button to open it. It slides open with an obnoxious hiss. I stare at R8, still completely undisturbed.

Then, I exit.

The hallways are fairly empty. At this time of night, the base almost seems as though as it’s in a different dimension. The sound of the soles of stormtroopers boots slapping across the metal floors is missing, the distant modulated voices are gone, and there’s no sibilating of busy opening and closing doors. Only faint beeping of mouse droids and ambient air moving through the ventilation system. For some reason, I find a comfort in it. How peaceful it seems, despite how violent the location implies.

Maybe it’s not as bad as I think it is. Maybe, I could manage staying here, if it means staying with Kylo. Isn’t that what love is? Some sacrificial bullshit? If I can’t convince Ben to leave – which I will – but in the impossible circumstance that I don’t, would I be willing to sacrifice my desire to leave
The Order for his desire to stay?

For a moment, I indulge in the idea that there is nothing inherently wrong about The Order.

The first thing I notice when I enter Tuchell Lau’s cell is his black eye.

The second is the toe-curling musky scent.

He flinches upon my arrival, but immediately eases up at the sight of me. His body, once curled into the corner, relaxes, knees bending away from his chest, arms reverting to his sides. He somehow manages a half smile, “Hey,”

I swing my black bag from my shoulder, grabbing the loaf of bread from the easily accessible pocket. I break the heel off, handing it to him with a warm, “I brought you this, if you’re hungry.”

He obliges immediately, taking the bread from my hands. I settle myself against the wall, sitting down to his level, then slide the bottle of water to him as well. His black eye seems fresh. From my experience with getting black eyes, it looks as if it’s about two days old. I do not want to explicitly ask about it, triggering any memories. I remember how much I would despise it when I would return from places or training and R8 would ask me about how I would receive my cuts and bruises.

Maybe R8 asked because he cared, the same reason why I want to ask Tuchell. I didn’t think that way about R8, at the time though. I can only hope Tuchell knows I care, now. Or, at least that I think I do. I’m trying to.

Tuchell says, mouth full, “When are we leaving?”

I hate the sound of that question. It begs for such a specific answer. One of which I do not have. “That’s what I came here to talk to you about,” I begin, still unsure of where exactly to start, “We’ve run into some complications.”

His face drops, hand holding bread freezing.

I continue, ignoring the guilt stabbing at my side from looking the disappointed child in the eye, “So, I went to Naboo and apparently uncovered this revelation that has to be dealt with before we cut and run.”

Tuchell says, “Why don’t we just leave while everyone’s preoccupied?”

“One of the people we’re leaving with is kinda obsessed with this thing. But I’ll deal with it and then we can go.”

Tuchell frowns, “That’s so stupid. If they aren’t serious about leaving, they can find their own way out.”

I frown too.

Tuchell resumes eating his bread, but now slower, with his shoulders hunched forward. “What did you even find?” He asks between mouthfuls.

I entertain the idea of not answering that question truthfully. It may be unwise to tell him. If someone finds out he knows, it could be easily traced back to me, and that would not be good for either of us.
But, the curiosity gnaws at me, the questions of the legends of Luke Skywalker. Ones I was not allowed to ask. The Order only taught us that Luke was the last Jedi Master, the death of his kind after Kylo Ren defeated him. But I’ve always known of the rumors swarming that story. As I moved up higher in the ranks of The Order, I realized how many people seemed to act as if they knew something else, something so much more. I never really cared enough to wonder what it was though.

But what I do know for certain now, if I’ve picked up on anything from Ben’s reaction to the news of Luke’s whereabouts being sought out, is Kylo Ren definitely did not defeat him.

I answer, a slave to my curiosity, “We now know the Resistance is looking for Luke Skywalker. So we’re going to try to find him first.”

Then, as if I didn’t come in here and tell him that our escape will be delayed, every bright ounce of hope returns to his expression, beaming back at me, “Luke Skywalker? The Luke Skywalker?”

I nod, taken aback by the sudden shift of mood.

He grins ear to ear, brightly exclaiming, “We have to find him! Where did he go?”

I shrug, not quite feeling secure in telling him any more information than I already have. Am I the only goddamn person to hear Luke’s name and not have an extreme emotional reaction? I say, “I don’t know. But I’m not really concerned about it. I have an idea to convince my friend to back out of this whole Luke Skywalker scavenger hunt, and if that doesn’t work, I’ll just go find him myself and get it over with. But after that, we can leave and-”

“No, no, you can’t let The First Order find him,” He reaches out, interrupting me.

I stare blankly at him.

“We need to get him back to The Resistance. With him, everything can change!”

I narrow my eyes, trying not to let my disdain for the child’s naivety – so much like Ben’s – slip into my tone, “Listen, this war is too complicated for one Jedi to change everything. There’s so many layers of inner working parts of The First Order’s power that will be impossible to dismantle with just one man.”

“He did it last time and the time before that,” Tuchell explains, words coming out quickly, all in a mess of excitement, “Did they ever tell you how The Empire was defeated? Really? My mom told me the story, when we were on the Resistance base a few years ago.”

I allow him to continue, trying to decide if I will eventually tell him that whatever the Resistance says about Luke is probably just as much of a lie as what The Order tells me about him. “I wasn’t informed.”

“Oh, so, when Luke Skywalker went to the second Death Star to confront Emperor Palpatine and Darth Vader, he was able to defeat the Emperor alongside Anakin Skywalker and-”

“Anakin?” I can’t help but interrupt, confused at this added name into the equation. I haven’t heard of an Anakin Skywalker. Is there really another fucking Skywalker to worry about?

“Yeah,” He says, as if I’m stupid to not recognize the name, “Anakin was Vader. Luke was able to convince his father to turn against Palpatine and fight alongside him.”

“Oh,” I guess it would make sense for Vader to have a real name. I never knew that it was Anakin, though. Maybe that’s why Kylo Ren hates Luke so much, for destroying the persona of Vader he’s
so intent on worshiping. “Sorry, continue.”

“If we can get Luke to defeat Supreme Leader Snoke, like he did Palpatine, The First Order won’t stand a chance. We can build up the New Republic and—”

“Tuchell, listen,” I know that’s impossible. If Supreme Leader Snoke were assassinated, a new Supreme Leader, one no better, would rise almost immediately. Jesus, Hux is probably waiting for that moment, drooling at the thought of it right now. The thought of Supreme Leader Hux makes my body feel as if it’s curling in on itself. “Luke Skywalker ran away. I doubt he even wants to come back. Even if he did, it’s too late to stop The First Order.”

Tuchell’s eyebrows scrunch, obviously getting impatient with my different view on the situation. He’s so defensive of this man as if he personally knows him, as if he hasn’t only heard of him in legends. “He could. Why does The First Order even care to find him if he can’t help the Resistance, if he doesn’t scare them, if he—”

“Well, that’s not what I’m doing here.” I cut him off. He’s right. I know that for Ben, finding Luke is personal, but that doesn’t explain Supreme Leader Snoke feeding Ben all the lies about how defeating Luke is his destiny. Maybe it’s just to add to the emotional manipulation Snoke holds over him. Maybe it’s because Supreme Leader Snoke actually needs Kylo to destroy Luke. Either way, it doesn’t matter in the grand scheme of my plan. “All I’m trying to do is get out. And I want you to get out too, with your sisters.”

“Then why don’t we just go? Right now. Tonight?”

“I told you, my friend—”

“Your friend obviously doesn’t want to leave if they care so much about killing Luke.” He snaps back at me.

I swallow hard. Yelling at a teenage boy isn’t mature of me. Or wise for the situation. But this whole thing is making me so goddamn frustrated. I refrain from the urge.

Tuchell says, practically begging, “Don’t you want to fuck them over? Leave with a bang? We should go bomb their hanger, set this whole place on fire, ruin any chance they have at finding Skywalker before we leave. We can do so much here. You can do so much.”

“We need to leave quietly. Anything else would be acting out of impulsive anger and potentially—”

“It would.” He says, so easily. “And I am angry. If they did what you told me they did to you,” He sits up straighter, jaw tightening, swollen black eye twitching, “Why aren’t you?”

I respond quietly, “I’m too tired to be angry. I just want to be done with all of this.”

He scoffs, “Whatever.”

The teenage attitude is something I don’t entertain, refraining further arguments. I cross my arms, bending my fingers into the leather of my gloves. After taking a moment to inhale, then exhale, I mask my frustration with an unconcerned expression. One I mastered but haven’t used in a while. I wonder if I’m still convincing enough. I grab the bag I previously set down.

Tuchell notices this and quickly gulps down the rest of his water bottle, then rolls the empty container to me.

We sit in silence for another moment.
As I stare at the wall across from me, he absentmindedly brings his hand up to his face to fell the edge of bruised skin around his eye. The room feels smaller than before, and yet, the presence of the base around us so much larger. From everything to the blinding, undimming artificial lighting above, to the knowledge a festering super weapon is being fueled beneath us. I am sad for the boy, for thinking that Luke Skywalker could stop any of this from happening.

But, then again, he believes that Luke could stop it because Luke already did. With the Death Star. Twice… that is, if The Resistance is telling the truth. Which is definitely not guaranteed. But, it would explain what happened to the Death Stars. It was as subject avoided in the Academy.

Then, he speaks up, “As soon as we leave, the first thing I’m doing is going back.”

“Back?” I ask.

“To the Resistance. That’s where I’m going.” He establishes, looking forward with such a sense of urgency, of heroism in his eyes.

It hurts me, my ribs concaving on themselves. “After all this, you want to return?”

“I need to, now.”

This makes me wonder if he’s even worth trying to save. If all he’s going to do is put himself back into this war, should I even be bending over backwards to help him get out? He’s just going to end up either dead or captured, by the hands of The First Order. Joining the Resistance at this point is a death wish. Especially knowing what I know about the plans to obliterate a whole star system of the remaining Republic senate.

For a second, I consider telling him about that too.

But that information getting out at this point would be far too dangerous for me. For Ben. And Tuchell is far too emotional to know such information.

In the next second, I regret letting my mindless empathy drive myself to visit this kid in the first place. I regret making my whole promise of escape, because I was fooled into thinking it would be simple. I didn’t know he would want to go right back to where he started. I didn’t know Ben would be so blinded by his hate for Skywalker.

I stare at the shackles binding the boy at the ankles. He’s too old to become a stormtrooper, surely. If not too old, too obviously non-compliant. His sisters may be young enough still. This kid will probably just become some sort of maintenance or factory worker. That’s what his parents were undercover as – factory supervisors. I can’t hold back a small, sad laugh at the irony of it all.

He turns towards me, responding to the cutting sound. “What?”

“Trust me,” I stand to my feet, dusting myself off. I throw the bag over my shoulder, “You’re going to regret trying to fight them.”

I don’t know exactly what he mumbles back to me. But it almost sounds like, “You’ll regret not trying.”

I stare down at the kid, watching his foot turn, tapping the floor. Tap. Tap. Tap.

I don’t think too hard at whatever thoughts he attempted to invoke within me. I only say, “I will inform you on updates in my plan. Just hang in there a little bit longer.”
“Yeah,” he says dismissively.

I leave.

That night, I decide to go back to Ben’s room.

I figured that it would be safer to sleep there if Hux decides to kill me when he discovers that I didn’t assassinate Kylo Ren. Maybe he’ll be more understanding towards me going through with the assassination with all this Luke shit happening. All I need to do is to make it to my meeting with Snoke tomorrow. Once Hux is out of my way, the escape plan will be clearer. Maybe not perfectly apparent. But at least clearer than it is now.

I use the padlock, punch in the code, then open Ben’s door.

I anticipate his body lying on the bed, stationary yet awake. I anticipate the steps it will take to reach his bed, his arms extending outwards to beckon me into his form. So when I realize that the bed is empty, I am slightly taken aback. I glance up to the bathroom’s door, revealing yet another empty room. My eyes switch to the door, holding Darth Vader’s mask. Closed.

“Ben?” I call out, approaching the door. I give it a slight knock. No answer. “It’s me.”

Nothing.

I open that door as well.

Ben isn’t there. But the mask of Darth Vader still is. Although I really have no reason to, I stare at it, not thinking about anything in particular. Just taking in all the energy it radiates, energy of darkness penetrating and encapsulating my mind. I remember the last time I saw it, how it feed off of my sadness, my guilt. How it multiplied everything I was feeling, and now even pulls at the fabric of my mind, threatening a spiral of chaos. Yet, it doesn’t really scare me. Maybe it should.

I walk around the room, finding myself sitting on the chair across from the mask. My fingers lightly trace the sides of the chair where I envision Ben sitting, where he feeds off of this power, basking in the promise of legacy the item brings. Darth Vader… Anakin Skywalker.

I lean back, eyes unable to leave the skull-like mask – a shell of a persona created for destruction. I wonder how much the Emperor was alike Snoke. I wonder if Palpatine found it as easy to manipulate Anakin as Snoke manipulates Kylo. I wonder if Anakin had anyone like me, someone who was going to try to show him the truth about his Master, to get him to run away from this all…

If Anakin would have run away, to some unknown and untraceable planet, would the Empire still be thriving today?

With The First Order now in power, would it even make a difference?

Maybe Ben is the difference.

Maybe, I am just an intruder on this whole unraveling of destinies and legacies and I am better off just running away, alone. Perhaps I failed.

And maybe Luke Skywalker left this whole shitshow because he felt the same way.
The difference is, no one would come looking so adamantly for me. Not The Resistance. Not The First Order, unless killing me would be convenient. Would Ben, even?

I nearly scoff at the fact I asked myself that. I speak up, humoring the mask with a thick sarcasm embedded into my tone, “What do you think of all this shit?”

The mask stares back at me, sunken in eyes just as dark and dead as before.

I prod, wondering if Ben feels this ridiculous every time he interacts with the item, “Am I only eligible for advice if I’m of the Skywalker bloodline?”

More silence. No change in the energy, either.

I lean back into the wall, “Cause Ben seems to act like you’ve got all the answers.”

A beat.

“Alight...” I continue, awkwardly trying pull a thread to make initiate sort of conversation, to spark any reaction from the energy, “Leia told me that you killed your own wife. I’m not saying I believe her, but if you did, what the fuck?” I tilt my head, trying to imagine how that went down. In those thoughts, I imagine what Anakin looked like underneath his mask. I wonder how much he resembled Ben. I sigh, pushing up from my knees to stand. Before I exit the empty room, still unconvinced of anything more to the masks presence than an overall creepiness, I point at the object and warn, “If Ben and I ever do the whole marriage thing, hold off on the newly-weds advice.”

I leave Ben’s room, going to the next place I anticipate him being.

When I enter his office, I find that it is not empty like his bedroom. But it’s not occupied by him either.

Lex Ren turns around to the sound of the opening door, once facing an opened cabinet and rummaging through the items. “Oh, hey!” She exclaims. She’s in full uniform, mask set down on Kylo Ren’s desk. She digs in the filing cabinet, pulling out a flat holocron, then grabbing her mask from his desk. She seems in a rush, but not overwhelmed in stress. Excited, anticipating.

I glance around at Kylo Ren’s office, cluttered with opened files and books and data entries. Nothing like how I remembered it before. “Hey...” I say, downplay how phased I am at the scenery, at her. “Isn’t this all just so exciting?” She beams up at me, walking around his desk to stand in front of me. I’m blocking the exit.

I move out of her way, but she doesn’t leave. She’s waiting for an answer.

I ask, “What’s exciting?”

She laughs at the question, “We’re going to find Luke Skywalker!”

“Oh...” Of course that’s what she’s excited about. “Yeah, pretty exhilarating stuff.” I say with all the effort I can to make it not sound sarcastic. Luckily, she seems too distracted to really notice.

She looks upward, obviously in some sort of fantasy daydream trance, “I want to be there, when it happens.”
“It happens?”

“When Kylo kills him, I want to be there to see it.”

I realize in that moment that she, and the other Knights of Ren, probably adopt the same ideas of the death of Luke Skywalker being the end-all to the galaxy’s war. So much joy radiates from her presence at the idea of peace finally reaching the galaxy, just because one old man, who has been completely uninvolved for the past fifteen years, will be killed. I can’t imagine accepting such a ludicrous idea. But then again, it’s never been within Snoke’s best interest to impose that idea on me. I ask her, diverting the subject, “Do you know where Commander Ren went?”

“He’s still in the conference room with everyone else.” She says it like she assumes that I already knew he was in the conference room to begin with, like I was invited. I wasn’t.

I follow her down the hall. She’s practically skipping, steps light, head tilted upwards.

As we walk, I try to get a good look at the holocron she grabbed. But her arms are swaying to much with her steps, posture bouncing with each stride. She says, explaining the mouthful of information, “We already have a few leads, but so far our best is Lor San Tekka. Kylo said that he’s our closet connection to Skywalker. If we can find him, we can find Luke.”

Ben mentioned the name before, when telling Hux to set that bounty. I ask, “Who’s that?”

Lex shrugs, “I didn’t ask. But I trust Kylo when he says the Force is leading us towards him.”

Of course, she didn’t ask. I make a mental note to just bring it up to him myself later.

Upon entering the conference room, whatever part of me that was initially overwhelmed by his cluttered office is immediately overshadowed by this clusterfuck. All the Knights sit at the conference table, rummaging through files and going through data projected on holocrons. On the main holocron at the center of the table projects a map of the Unknown Regions. I’m familiar with the territory, with how much I’ve looked over the map on me right now. But this map isn’t near as updated as mine, barely a fragment of what I have. It only displays the Unknown Regions to a point of which the Supremacy lies.

I feel at the outline of the map in my pocket. Suddenly, this uniform is contracting me, inexplicably hot. The Knights all look up upon Lex and I’s entry, most of them without their masks other than Kylo and Tiru, the Kel Dor man.

“Agent 2319,” Ren says, beckoning me to the head of the table as he absentmindedly zooms into a location on the holocron. He types something into his holopad. “I was just about to contact you. You’re exactly who I need at the moment.”

The simplicity of the statement makes my chest swell. I hold back any acknowledgement at the suggestion, to keep things professional for those around us, but try to project my reciprocation to see him. I approach him, walking past the seats of the Knights as they return to their work and small chatter.

When I reach Ben, I hush my voice for only him to hear, “It’s so late, do you really think now is the time to be starting such a complicated investigation?”
He doesn’t respond directly to that. He opts to say without even looking up at me, not as nearly concerned with his voice’s volume, “Have you written a report yet on the Gala mission? Any information on who knew of this plan to find Skywalker can prove itself useful in our search.”

I never thought I’d live to see a day where Ben is telling me to write a report. Is that really what he ‘needed’ me for? Embarrassment creeps over my mind as I mentally curse myself for being comfortable enough around him to assume it could only be that he genuinely wanted to see me. That he felt as if he needed me. Shit. He wants me to write a report that will be detailing my meeting with General Organa. Which, I still haven’t brought up to him… I haven’t mentioned that I met with his mother, proceeded to spare her, then she proceeded to spare me. Shit. “Yeah… I need to talk to you about that.”

He says, still so preoccupied with the map in front of him, typing relentlessly away at his datapad, “I’ll just read about it in the detailed report you are about to write.”

I step away from him, slightly taken aback by his snarky tone. A few weeks ago, it wouldn’t have phased me in the slightest. But now, it seems so odd. I respond evenly, “I’d rather speak to you about it first.”

“Well, I’m slightly preoccupied.”

“Obviously.”

“How many missions have you been on by now,” He snaps back, responding directly to my sarcastic tone by multiplying it in his, “has it not been enough to where you’re accustomed to writing reports immediately afterwards?”

“I don’t understand why you can’t take a second to have a conversation about this.” I hiss down at him, still trying to avoid making our conversation a show for the Knights. But I feel their eavesdropping, their glances of curiosity.

“I don’t understand why you need to have a conversation when you could just do what I asked you to.” He fires back, setting the datapad down to finally look up at me. He’s not concerned at all about the Knights hearing.

So, I decide I’m not either and I raise my voice slightly, “Maybe if you had said conversation, you would understand my reasoning.”

“Go ahead,” He leans back, waiting for an explanation, “if you deem it so completely necessary.”

I glance over at all the Knights, now blatantly staring up at the two of us. Kylo is so unbothered by their formulating opinions, by whatever they are thinking of the uncomfortable situation. I know why. Because he looks like he has the upper hand. Because he’s acting as if he isn’t interested in my requests, as if I’m just some subordinate that should be writing a report for him. He’s acting like he used to, around me. Unashamed, unbothered.

I put aside any of my hurt feelings to snap down at the man, assuming my former role as well, “Commander Ren, I am requesting that you spare five minutes to privately discuss information too sensitive to disclose around unauthorized individuals.”

He stares up at me, the mask unable to give me any indication of his reaction or what he’s thinking. So I examine his body, looking for any twitch of his fingers, any flex of his arm, anything that’s even slightly a reaction.

I forgotten how much it taunted me to try to get a reaction. I’ve forgotten it so much so, I don’t
realize that that is what I’m trying to do until I already say, “I know my time isn’t deemed near as valuable as yours, but still I do not relish in you wasting it.”

He stares at me for one moment more, then completely stands up, making his way out of the room quickly without given me any time to catch up to him.

After I said it, my throat burns, my skin on edge. Although I feel justified in the words, I can't help but hate the odd nostalgia speaking with him in such a way brings.

I scurry behind him, following him out into the hall. He turns to me, immediately hissing down, “What?”

I step back away from him, unable to even process his immature tone, his complete impatience, “What the hell is your problem?”

“What the hell is your problem? I’m in the middle of trying to track down the last Jedi in the galaxy’s existence and your insistent on having a chat about the report you should’ve written by now?”

“I didn’t realize it’d be such an inconvenience.” I retort, the words setting in as truth after I say them. Am I an inconvenience to him? Insecurity overwhelms me. I attempt to reassure myself that it’s only because of what Snoke has instilled him to believe, whatever happened between Luke and Ben that harbored such an ingrained hatred.

He exhales, trying to force his words to turn softer, but cannot completely manage it, “My Knights are on this mission too, whatever you tell me, they need to know as well.”

“I don’t know if I can tell them about what happened at the Gala.” I reply, unable to hide the shame in my tone. “I just want to talk to you about it first. And we can decide if they need to know together.” I should’ve just told him earlier. This secret is probably one of the least offensive ones I’ve been keeping and yet it’s about to warrant a whole argument while I’m in the middle of trying to escape and he’s in the middle of whatever the hell it is he thinks he’s doing by finding Luke.

I notice his shoulders slightly slump downward, as if whatever fiery energy that was once within him has been drained out. He doesn’t verbally respond, but he begins walking slowly down the hall to his office. I follow him, confused by the sudden solemn nature in his presence. I want to reach out to him, to lay my hand across his back, but the action in a public hall of Starkiller doesn’t seem appropriate, even now at this hour. I glance upwards to the surveillance camera mounted on the ceiling as we enter the room.

He lets me inside first, closing the door behind us. I silently find myself in a seat across from his desk. But he doesn’t move away from the now, closed door, opting to remain standing, a weak voice projecting out, “Did you...” A slight buzzing hits my skull. It’s not intrusive. Just curious, somewhat impatient, needy. I pretend like I don’t feel it. “Why do you feel guilty?” I hear the crack in his voice bubble through the modulator. “Talking to me about this brings you apprehension. Doesn’t it?”

The question takes me aback, but the pain in his voice as he says it is nearly piercing. If I answered his question, I would have to say nothing short of ‘absolutely’ if I were being honest. But that’s not what this conversation is about. So I don’t answer. Instead, I reach out to him, “Hey,” I try to grab his arm, “come here,” I attempt to comfort him, to intertwine my fingers into his, but he flinches at my touch, stepping away.

He repeats, firmer this time, “What did you do?”

“It’s just that the nature of which I received the information on the Resistance’s mission wasn’t very
conventional, which is why we’re talking about it and—"

“Just say it.” He cuts me off, voice brash.

I pause, somewhat confused by whatever assumption he already came to in his mind. Should I just come right out and say it? How do I do that without giving any context? I sigh, “Do you know of the Resistance pilot, Poe Dameron?”

He doesn’t move.

I continue, throat tightening, “There’s this esteemed Resistance pilot who I met the first time I boarded your mother’s ship. And he was at the Gala. So, my cover was pretty much immediately blown.”

Suddenly, his whole body relaxes, “Wait, what?” He exhales, walking to the chair next to me. He sits on the arm of it, looking downwards at me. He reaches out, grabbing my hand, as if it’s an apology for rejecting my hand once before, an apology for whatever he was thinking. I stare down at his thumb in confusion as he rubs up against my knuckles, moving back and forth. “Ok, sorry, yeah, go on.”

I ask him quietly, staring down at his hand over mine, “What did you think I was going to tell you?”

He shakes his head.

Part of me knows that answer to that question, it becoming all the more clear when replaying the way he reacted to my hesitance to speak. It wouldn’t be completely absurd for him to jump to the conclusion, knowing what I have done in the past to get information. Does he really think I would do that now? Does he trust me that little? How often is he reminded of those things? Because I do not think of them often. I try to repress that as much as I physically can. I look away from him completely, desperately trying to hide any part of me that’s hurt.

He speaks softly, modulator barely able to pick up the faint, “I’m sorry.”

“No,” I respond, stabilizing my voice, “It was a fair assumption.”

“Don’t say that,” He responds. He pulls away from me to reach up, removing his mask. But I don’t watch him, opting to stare a hole into the floor. I can tell that he sets the mask on his desk by the metal clanging against the surface of the table. He continues, pleading, “I apologize, I was not thinking clearly, and I love you and I—”

I nearly flinch at the confession of love once again, this time not because it’s surprising or so filled with compassion, but because I am reminded of how much I do not deserve someone, anyone, to love me. I blurt out, desperate to change the subject, “Poe ended up taking me to this shuttle, where Leia was. And that’s how I found out about their plan to find Luke. She told me.”

He doesn’t respond.

This prompts me to look up at him.

I immediately notice his distress, so easily hidden by his mask before. He’s back to looking purely exhausted. His eyes are bloodshot, watery and surrounded by purple skin. It reminds me of Tuchell. But instead of being beaten, Ben’s psychical appearance is purely an effect of a psychological state. I try to recall what he looked just hours ago, in the shuttle coming back from Naboo, so healthy, so human. This is something completely different. What happened since I’ve last seen him?
He asks, trying to hold back any emotions stirred within him, “Why would she tell you?”

Because I told her about my plan to free child prisoners and defect from The First Order. I respond, “I managed to talk the information out of her. I merely wanted to tell you first about her being involved before I wrote up the report because I didn’t know how you’d take it, or if it should be something I keep off record completely.”

“Yeah,” he says absentmindedly in thought, “You don’t have to worry about that.”

“About what?”

“Keeping any information confidential.” He answers. He stares at the ground where I once did.

I furrow my brows. Keeping information confidential is the main thing I have to worry about now. “Well, no one else knows about me meeting Organa, when she attacked the Finalizer. My cover being blown on Naboo wouldn’t make any sense without that knowledge. I had this other lead that night that I could report was my real way of getting the information. I’m sure I could make something believable up.”

“No.” He says, sighing deeply. He reaches up towards his neck, rubbing as if he’s trying to massage the stress away, “Just write exactly what happened. You shouldn’t lie.”

“But it won’t make sense.” I repeat back to him.

“Snoke, The Knights and I will be the only ones reading your report.” He looks towards the door, obviously distracted. It seems as if each second, he grows more and more disinterested in me, as if that were even possible at the beginning of our conversation.

“But Snoke doesn’t know I met Organa.”

He doesn’t respond to that.

“He doesn’t.”

He resets his jaw, only to remain in silence.

It all sets in.

And when it does, I immediately reject it. Snoke can’t possibly know. If he did, he would have killed me by now. I try to find comfort in his dark diverted eyes, wondering if there’s any possibility that I’m only being paranoid in coming to the conclusion. Maybe I’m taking any of Ben’s reactions out of context. As my mind throws out excuses, I whisper, as if it’s remaining a secret that was only meant for Ben and I, “How long has he known?”

“I don’t know…” Hesitation. “A few weeks, maybe.”

I back away from him, horror running through my veins, a barely audible, “how?” pushed through my sore throat.

“I told him during our return to Korriban. Just – Agent,” He says, trying to calm down whatever combination of anger, confusion, or terror is stirring within me. He continues, “He sees everything that’s in my mind. Everything in everyone’s mind. I told you, there’s no hiding anything from him. I tried to keep it from him for as long as I could, but it was eating me alive inside. I knew it was only a matter of time before he found out.”
I shake my head in disbelief, “He hasn’t confronted me about this at all.” Plus, I kept it from him when he looked into my mind. At least I thought I did. Was that a failure too? I don’t even know how to know at this point.

“He’s not upset with you. He understands you were trying to protect me. If anything, he’s still pissed at me for not being strong enough to do what needed to be done. Which, by finding Skywalker, I can make it up to him. I have the situation under control.”

I lean back in my chair, trying to process the information. Of course, Ben not killing Organa is great news for Snoke – just another thing to hold over his head, to guilt-trip him into carrying out Snoke’s bidding. Snoke told me himself that Ben is fueled by his failure. But that still doesn’t tell me why Snoke hasn’t killed me. My whole job was to spy on Kylo Ren for him. And he now knows I was explicitly holding information from him to protect Kylo. Is it too late to pretend like I haven’t been? If I reveal everything that’s happened to Snoke tomorrow, will it still seem like I’m not doing my job?

What is Snoke planning?

I should’ve known that everything Ben and I share is also information available to Snoke. This happened when Snoke first found out about our relationship. Why would I not expect it to happen now? Did I think Ben would be more willing to be secretive towards information Snoke is susceptible to killing me over?

Ben continues, desperate to get me into his mindset, so painfully unaware of the revelation he just revealed to me, “You don’t understand what she does to me. You saw it, on Naboo. How any reminders of them – my old family – can completely sidetrack my mission. How the light side of the Force can feel so deceivingly tempting. I had to talk to Snoke about seeing her, he was the only one who could help me with that.”

I nod. “I couldn't.”

“That’s not fair.” He freezes, tone low.

I shrug, rolling my eyes. I have better things to worry about than Kylo Ren needing Snoke more than he needs me. Like Tuchell. Like Snoke now knowing I withheld vital intel from him. Crossing my arms, I stand to my feet, trying to move past him, “I have to go.”

“No, you don’t.” He says, stepping in front of me. He looks down on me sternly, “I just wish you wouldn't be so dishonest – unashamedly disrespectful – to our Supreme Leader.”

I blink at him, partly in shock, “What kind of a statement is that?”

“You completely disregard everything he has done for me.” He's taken aback by my shock, completely ignorant of how ridiculous he sounds. "Without the Supreme Leader, I would still be stuck at the Jedi Academy, studying under a man who longs for my death, with a family who see's me as a disease on their lineage, an uncontrollable monster. Without the Supreme Leader, I would be nothing.”

I always knew Ben blindly defended Snoke. But I never heard him be this blatant about it. I retort, unable to hold back my disgust in his affiliation with Snoke, “And without you, the Supreme Leader wouldn’t have a Skywalker at his disposal.”

His brows furrow as he steps away from me. “Don’t suggest that.”

I beg, trying to cater towards the historic side of him, “Don’t you see the repetition of history in all of
this? Palpatine and Vader, now you and Snoke? It’s the same thing. Palpatine used Vader for whatever Force powers he possessed and now—"

“You have no idea what you’re talking about.” Ben snaps.

I snap back, bettering his intensity, “I really don’t know much about what I’m talking about, but at least I know I have a clear mind. I know that I’m finally thinking for myself now, that I’m—"

“Sure,” He scoffs, “Did Organa tell you that?”

“No, but I—"

“Why didn’t you kill her?” He sneers. “Both times you met her. Why didn’t you just kill her? With her out of the equation, the Resistance will surely crumble. Yet, you have denied the opportunity twice.”

I stare at him in shock. “I know Snoke tries to convince you otherwise, but I really think that she loves you.” I say quietly. "She's your mother."

He looks me right in the eye as he says, “She's my mother?” Bitterness enters his tone, seeping deeper and deeper with each syllable as he continues on, “What emotional value does having a mother hold over you? Your mother was shot to death before you could even walk.”

Every fiber of my being feels frozen, limbs unable to move, heart stopped. It’s as if he restricted me of all movements by using the Force. But he’s not using the Force. Nothing more than words, than truth.

The words come so easily to him to say, way too easily, “And now, after your whole life of being brainwashed, you believe that you are right to tell me that I’m the one with a lack of judgement?”

I try to wrap my mind around what he’s saying, what he’s suggesting, but there’s so many flaws in his argument. I try not to get stuck in the fact that none of what he’s saying is untrue. I focus on the purpose of his words. They are just defensive tactics, defensive justifications. I manage, “You’re fighting for the people that brainwashed me. For an organization who has forced me to trade my childhood, my innocence, for the pursuit of information. For the people who shot my mother…” I ask, quietly, “How did you know they killed my parents? I was told that I was sold into this, but…"

He says, blatantly, “I read your files. They were Resistance sympathizers, supposedly, correct?”

I nod.

He laughs, the sound dark, “So, they didn’t even fight for what they believed in. I suppose that gives context to your indifferent disposition.”

“You’re an asshole.” I whisper, looking away from him. More tears gather in my eyes. I push them back with everything I have. It usually doesn't work. But this time it does.

He reaches over for the mask, saying lightly, “That’s quite immature of you.”

“No,” I shake my head, then look back up to him, able to stare him in the eyes with a newfound bravery, a finality in what I’m saying, “You're an asshole.” I say that so much louder that time, as if it's a declaration, as if it's law. The strength I find in my voice gives me strength to continue on, no longer wary to keep him in a good mood so he'll escape with me, "You say that you’re going to reform The First Order, yet endlessly defend a man who is going to obliterate a whole planet system and kill thousands of innocent people. You standby idle while hundreds of children are brainwashed
and trained to fight for your master's cause, and even more parents are slaughtered for noncompliance of giving up their children."

He clenches his jaw, face no longer lifted with the light nature of his attitude, the unconcerned state of his demeanor. He takes a small step away from me.

And I step forward, raising my voice, meeting his gaze with an elevated chin, "You continually make remarks about how I am a coward for my indifference, you mock my desires to live a civilian lifestyle, and yet you do not act on any of your own personal beliefs. You are not only indifferent, but entitled, merely a vessel to a man who has tricked you into thinking that your family doesn't love you, that he is the only one you can rely on. You pride yourself on being Darth Vader's descendant, all while ignoring that you are also the descendant of Leia Organa, Han Solo, Luke Skywalker and Anakin Skywalker - the man who you choose to ignore destroyed the Empire." I say that, not entirely sure if it's true, but just based off of a feeling that it is. I trust in the feeling.

"Don't-" He starts.

"You're the coward." I shake my head at him, voice cutting over his. The boy stares back at me wide-eyed. Tears start to gather at the brim of his eyes, but I push past the part of me that loves him so deeply, I disregard all my sympathy towards him so that I am brave enough to say, "And I saw that from the moment I first met you. No mask, no pseudonym, no family lineage can hide that from me."

His bottom lip trembles as he represses whatever emotion is threatening to erupt from within him.

I wait for his response, standing my ground firmly.

Suddenly, all in one quick movement, he tilts his head downward, shielding his face with messy dark locks as he replaces the helmet back over his face. He mumbles before the modulator can pick up his voice a weak, "I have so much work to do."

I cannot help but feel the same.

So I go back to my room, sitting up on my bed and spending the whole night meditating on what I wish for the Supreme Leader to believe the truth is and typing up report, after report, after report.

I do that until R8 turns back on.

"Master!" The droid says. "You're already up? You have one more hour until you are scheduled to be awoken."

I nod, "I feel well rested now."

"Excellent!" R8 says, "Because your request went through for the meeting with the Supreme Leader and he will be able to speak with you this morning. The Supreme Leader personally responded to your request, wanting me to inform you that it has been too long since the two of you spoke! He looks forward to your reunion."

I smile back at the droid, "As do I."
hey guys! i know its been awhile, i feel like i have gotten to the point where i apologize every update for how long it takes me. it'll get better, i promise! i'm just feeling very grateful at the moment for all the support and love this fic gets, so i really hope you all enjoy this update. i really cant wait for the next one, i've been anticipating it for such a long time.

you may notice that this is no longer out of 45 chapters, just because this chapter was originally a LOT longer than i expected, so i had to split it up into two (legit she was supposed to go meet with snoke in this chapter and all that was following that was supposed to happen, but yea, it just would be WAYYY too long of a chapter). so basically, im kinda off track my original chapter count, but once it's more finalized, i'll add it back in. please let me know what you think! i appreciate everything so much! :) (alternative title for this chapter is Agent Goes Off in D-minor)

playlist is here!!!
and here's the pinterest board
and this is the link to the companion fic with deleted scenes and kylo pov scenes and flashbacks and all that fun jazz
Chapter Summary

"Sometimes when you let people do things to you, you’re really doing it to them." - Gillian Flynn, Sharp Objects

Chapter Notes

it's been awhile, here's a few recaps:
- Agent 2319 is about to meet with Snoke to expose Hux for treason and get him off her back so she can run away with Ben and child prisoners she believes she's responsible for imprisoning
- BUT Kylo Ren revealed to her that Snoke knows about many of her treasonous acts, and has known for awhile. Kylo wasn't able to hide it from him, all the while Agent was continuously lying right to Snoke's face
- ALSO everyone - especially kylo - is on the hunt for Luke Skywalker after Agent 2319 uncovered the Resistance's plan to find him. The Resistance believed The First Order had information on the Unknown Regions to help their cause,
- BUT agent unknowingly stole it, for her own purpose of using it to escape the Order
- NOW agent must expose Snoke to Kylo Ren as his lifelong manipulator, if she ever wishes for him to join her in her quest to save the imprisoned children, Ben Solo, and herself...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

An agent’s standard morning routine starts out with going to the training room for one hour. All agents know that exercise is vital to start the day off well, as intensive morning training can prepare the body for stress. If heart rate has been adapted to high levels in the morning, further events in the day may be less distressing.

The next thing to do is consume a large amount of protein. Today, because of my lack of sleep, I additionally allow myself to take a few capsules of caffeine. The capsules feel rough as they slide down my dry throat. I drink more water, upon the realization of my dehydration. Agents should never be dehydrated.

I do not think about Commander Ren and his current activities concerning the mission to Luke Skywalker. Thinking about this is a waste of my time, as it has nothing to do with my own work. All I think about is the investigation that I was assigned to, the revelations within that investigation I have uncovered. And how I am looking forward to presenting it all to the Supreme Leader.

I also take a cold shower, careful to make sure every part of me is well-kept, well-managed. After drying off, I grab a small jar from the sink containing a gel-like clay designed to dry to the skin, then be pulled off to refresh and exfoliate. It takes about five minutes to harden. I spend those five minutes combing back every last one of my hairs smoothly into a slick low bun, twisted tightly at the nape of my neck. I peel the facial mask from my skin, slowly, ignoring any pain the hardened gel causes on
the soft skin. Then, attend to my uniform, R8 just returning from having it cleaned pressed to perfection. Not a single stray thread nor wrinkle to disrupt its dark grey fabric.

I slip into the full ensemble, tall boots and all. But before sliding the leather gloves onto my hands, I open the cabinet of my bathroom to remove a few cosmetic items. Usually, considering I sweat them off in my daily routines, I neglect their use unless I am undercover. But today, it is necessary to hide the bags gathering underneath my eyes. Also, I find a need to hide a few small blemishes that appeared. These blemishes are most likely due to stress. I tell myself that I am not stressed. Agents of the First Order are confident. I use a cream consistency brighten my eyes, making me more alive, more appealing. Perfect. I am perfect. I am the best Agent of The First Order. Top of my class. Highly-esteemed by General Hux. Sought out by the Supreme Leader himself.

I slide the gloves on, straighten my collar for the millionth time and look at myself in the mirror.

Agent 2319.

Live for the Order, die for the Order.

I got this.

Suddenly, the comm-link secured in my ear beeps to life. I nearly jump at the noise, the sound echoing in my ear painfully. A growing ache multiplies at my temples with each high-pitched chirp. My eyes strain at my reflection before I turn away. Desperate to get the persistent beeping to become silence, I ask R8 on my way back into my bedroom, “Who is it?”

R8 traces the establishing connection. When identifying it, the droid hesitates, then says with a particularly unenthusiastic tone, “Commander Ren, again.”

My jaw clenches, trying not to give into the urge to take the call, to apologize for my bluntness, to see him just for a single moment before I have to perform this bullshit display for the Supreme Leader –the last person I want to see out of everyone in this galaxy. I ponder for a minute how worried Ben must be, that I meant my harsh words as anything other than tough love, as something malicious. Does he doubt that I care? He must be scared, if he keeps attempting to contact me. Especially when he is so preoccupied with Skywalker.

I’m scared too.

Shit. Shut the fuck up. Stop thinking like that. I can’t afford to think like that. I did not stay up all night forcing myself out of that mindset to so easily sink back into it. Kylo Ren is nothing more than my subject, my victim. I show no remorse for the man-child, after he’s exhibited such traitor-like behaviors towards the Order. He’s weak, easily swayed by sentiments towards the people he deems as family, easily disrupted, chaotic, unpredictable, soft.

Nothing like me.

I quickly grab my holopad from the counter, making for the door while muttering, “Ignore it.”

If R8 responds, I don’t hear it before the door closes and I’m already making my way through the hall.

After turning on the holopad, double checking to see if the audio recording device is already pulled up and ready to be activated, I turn it back off and force myself to not think of it’s presence again. Doing so could be fatal.
I walk with my head held as high as I can manage, comfortably, forcing my steps to not be too quick, nothing indicating I wish for this to be done and over with. And I enter the empty elevator with the same demeanor, clicking the button to send me down to the Command Deck. I don’t entertain the thought of any of the Knights or Commander Ren being down there, because I do not care if they are. I tell myself that over and over.

But before the elevator can shoot all the way down, it stops. I anticipate a group of stormtroopers, an officer, anything but a familiar face.

What I get is General Hux.

His face brightens, parodying true enthusiasm, when he sees me, “Agent 2319!”

I keep my face forward as he steps in, beside me. What a cruel twist of fate. For a split second, I entertain the idea of the Force being omniscient and controlling every event, all living things, because it seems like an explanation for coincidentally running into this man at this moment. The Force must finally be punishing me for being such a piece of shit for so long. “Hello, General.”

He says, “Ren was up all last night, I assume, working on the Skywalker case?” He reaches towards the panel of buttons, but then realizes the button marked “C-D,” symbolizing the “Command Deck,” is already pressed in. He retracts his hand.

I respond, not thinking twice about his destination, “Yes. It’s quite a shame the opportunity did not present itself the way we intended.”

Hux sighs, “Goddammit.” He adjusts his uniform, the small red pins on his chest, then his collar. “The man must sleep sometime. Perhaps his exhaustion will make the task easier.” He slicks back his hair, smoothing any stray strands.

“Perhaps.”

Silence overwhelms the elevator. I try to not drown back into my own thoughts, the silence a transport directly into anxiety, into fear, into everything I would be completely rational to worry about. Instead, I stare at the blinking dots above the elevator door, indicating our descent towards our destination. It’s slower than I remembered.

“All of this is quite ridiculous.” Hux speaks up, an effort to make conversation.

“Hm?” I look over to him. His white skin seems even paler than usual. Especially with the blinking white light projected from in front of us. He’s nearly translucent.

He remains incredibly still as he speaks, “The amount of resources we’re putting into finding Luke Skywalker. Skywalker has not been a threat to the Order for over a decade. And now our main priority is to find him? For what? Ren to amend a personal grudge?”

“From what I know of the situation, I can affirm that it is absurd,” I say this, trying not to allow myself to indulge in someone else finally having the same view point as me. But part of me can’t help it. Maybe, I should allow it for a moment, considering the role I am about to play. The role and my own mind merge as one, for the time being.

“The moment we stop entertaining mythical legends, the Order can flourish to a state the Empire never did.” Hux says, finding himself pleased with the image his mind creates.

Despite agreeing with him, I challenge, “As far as I can tell, the Supreme Leader greatly enforces the Force remaining an integral part of leading the Order.”
“And what of it?” He says simply.

I don’t know if him suggesting he opposes the Supreme Leader is the wisest thing he can do, especially before my meeting. I almost scoff at the irony, his blind overconfidence.

But before I can get the chance, he finally moves, statuesque position now turned to face me, frosted blue eyes piercing into mine almost as if they were weapons, definitely no part of a something that possesses a soul. The corner of his thin lips twitch into a pleased smile of excitement, that of a wild beast before feasting on it’s caught prey. “You should attempt to lead Ren back to his room, convince him to take a break. See if you can get the job done this afternoon.”

“I currently have other engagements I must attend to.” My voice is unwavering, logical and unknowing of the fear he invokes. In the fire of his cold eyes, I find myself in realization. I always thought that General Hux was unsettling because of his lack of humanity, but that was never it. It’s the way he twists his humanity into something bloodthirsty, depraved for power. It was never the lack of emotions, it was the intensely passionate emotions for destruction.

But I have no reason to fear the General now. I have the upper hand here. I hold his career in my hands. And today, I will destroy it.

He asks, “You’re going to see him now, are you not?”

“No,” It’s a fair assumption, considering I’m also going to the Command Deck, which if it’s anything like it was last night, it’s completely raided by Ren and the Knights. I try to cater towards Hux’s distaste towards Ren, “I would prefer to be as uninvolved in finding Luke Skywalker as possible. Especially when I have other business to take care of.”

Hux presses, “Your only official assignment is to assist Ren.”

I am unable to resist the small pull at my lips as I reply, “And what of it?”

The elevator doors open with a violent hiss.

I continue down the hall, making my way to the ramp stretching over the expanse of the base’s infrastructure. I notice out of the corner of my eye Hux glancing back at all the doors I ignore to step onto the ramp. Some part of me indulges in the fact that I managed to crack the shell he creates for him, enjoying his paranoia, his anxiety. He walks beside me as we cross the ramp, the troopers coming from the opposite director stepping aside to make way for us.

After completely crossing the runway, I don’t bother to look at the door to Commander Ren’s office, nor the door to the debriefing room he and the Knights are likely in. But passing it does remind me of my comm-link. Although R8 most likely silenced any more calls from Ren, I reach up to it to pull it out of my ear, press the power button, and place it in my pocket, ignoring the map wedged into the pocket’s corner. Hux watches this.

I want his curiosity to push him to ask me what I’m doing. I want to see his weakness, I want him to succumb to it just once before I finally ruin every twisted fantasy he’s every dreamed about, every psychotic nightmare he’s worked to achieve. But he just keeps walking beside me, quickly, nervously fiddling with the cuffs of his black coat. He glances vigorously as I continue passing the doors, walking closer and closer to the one at the very end of the hall – the one where the ridiculously ginormous hologram of Snoke resides. Two troopers stand guard, ready to escort me in. I wonder if Hux knows yet. I wonder if he can tell by the uncontainable smirk settling on my face.

Just as I pass yet another door, now only six away from Snoke’s makeshift throne room, he blurs out
the question, “What business?”

I look back at the man as I walk forward, smile, and then settle in between the two elite troopers standing guard to the familiar door. A door I know. A door Hux knows, certainly. Realization settles on his face, yet I still make it perfectly clear to him by saying, “No need to be impatient. Such a virtue is quite unbecoming of a man your rank.”

His throat contracts. It’s as if all his emotions are about to bubble over, completely breaking, destroyed. I’m so close to destroying it. I will destroy it.

I turn to enter the room, looking over my shoulder to say back to him as the silent troopers escort me inside, “You’ll join our conversation soon enough, General.”

When I see the look on Hux’s face as the door closes on him, I know that whatever emotional stress has been worth this moment. He’s shocked, worried, completely vulnerable. Such a wonderful blend of all those things. He’s everything he tries to inflict on those around him.

And soon he’ll be nothing at all. Bastard.

I return my attention forward to take in the large room. The projection is already on. Snoke is already here. He was anticipating this. But I was too. His presence towers along the far wall as the blue, illuminated image peers down at me. He looks so much more intimidating like this than on the Supremacy, where he is in his true form. He’s larger, less human here. Seeing him in this state is nostalgic to all the holocrons I’ve had to watch of him speaking throughout my life. It takes me back to childhood, studying countless speeches of him, forcing myself to feel in awe by his sovereignty. It takes me back to several months ago, walking into this exact room to bow before him. I don’t bow today.

I remember his appearance was such an anomaly to my mind, no words present to describe him. There’s a word so prominent now, one I am now unafraid to admit.

Monster.

The Supreme Leader leans back in his throne chair, beckoning me forward, “Agent!” He beams, voice lower and louder than it was in his throne room, “We have so much to discuss, don’t we?”

It takes a split second to encapsulate myself with the role I must play.

I confidently walk down the length of the strip to approach my Supreme Leader, allowing myself to seep in the awe of his wise, unendingly powerful presence. My footsteps echo with each step, the large room encapsulating me. I tap into the darkness of the room, first visually as the only lights are the small red illuminations outlining where the wall meets the floor and the projection of Snoke itself. But also the darkness his presence omits. I felt it on Naboo, during Kylo Ren’s turmoil. I feel it now. It affirms Snoke’s omniscience.

I allow it to manifest similarly in myself.

It gives me power.

I speak up, projecting my voice clearly back to him, “We do, my Lord! I believe that the work I have done will be quite beneficial to your cause.”

“Do you?” He scoffs, assuming.
He assumes that I’m not outing Ben Solo. He assumes that I am a traitor. That I no longer care for the Order.

He’s wrong.

I begin, pulling out the holopad from underneath my arm. When the screen lights up, I immediately am met with the audio recording function of the holopad, ready for activation just as I left it.

I press the button, starting the audio recording.

Then, I immediately minimize it to open the report.

“I have written nearly fifty pages of reports and psychoanalytics on Commander Kylo Ren. This study spans over the course of my whole mission, outlining each one of the instances the Commander has shown weakness and vulnerability.” I don’t mention that I wrote it all last night. I don’t dwell on that mentally, either. “But of course, I would be happy to discuss it verbally with you, as well, for the purpose of giving you the most insight possible. We can overview the information and decide what plan of action to take.”

Snoke leans back, so smugly asking, “Everything is in there?”

Writing the reports were somewhat freeing. Everything that the reports have in them is true, things I’ve been hiding for months now. Details about Ren being unable to meet with Organa, Ren saving me from General Hux’s ship after those bounty hunters captured me, and even more personal moments, like Ren’s hesitance towards using Starkiller Base’s weapon, or his recollection of moments with his family on Naboo. Snoke already knows everything. Ren has ensured that, with his inability to withhold goddamn vital information. But it was so relieving to put it all on record from myself. “Yes, Supreme Leader.” I mirror his confidence. “I must inform you that there are events I did not inform you of previously, for the purpose of maintaining Commander Ren’s trust. But now, as I believe I gotten down to the root of the problem, I can present this information to you.”

“Oh, before we get into the details of some of our communication errors, I must ask,” Snoke presses, “What do you believe the root of the problem is?”

“The un-reversable effects of Kylo Ren’s upbringing.” I say, simply. “He’s been raised in an environment where family is supposed to be everything to him, where he craves comfort and validation. I believe that this obviously is a weakness but can be used to reaffirm his loyalties with the Order.”

Snoke doesn’t respond.

I force myself to remain steady, staring up at the projection. I wonder for the briefest moment if it froze.

But then, he speaks, “You present to me this as if it’s new information.”

I nod. “It’s the conclusion I have reached.”

Snoke laughs deeply, the sound resonating in my feet through the floor. My gut begins to sink, my throat ever so lightly twist, at the humiliating sound. He says, “I could have told you that such factors would be his weakness from the moment the boy was conceived. The child and I are so close. But this is merely common sense, I would say.”

Be Agent 2319. Be who you were, who you wanted to be before all of this. I reply, forcing an unwavering courage into my tone, “I would say that too. My mission was to see if this weakness was
strong enough to effect Ren’s loyalty, and I have determined that it is. I extracted that information for you and now we are in a position where we can work on the solution.”

“And the solution is?”

I pause, the steady beat of the conversation thrown off. Fuck. “That is where I seek your guidance, Supreme Leader.”

He scoffs. Smiles, wickedly. Then waves me forward, “Agent, please, come closer to me.”

My eyes flicker down to the end of the runway, then back up to the holographic giant before me. I obey, taking two steps forward. The toe of my boot is a foot away from the end of the runway. He removes his frail, thin arms draped in the heavy dark rob, from the comfort of lounging against his throne. He lays them across his knees. As he leans downwards, I can see so much more clearly the details of his face that the hologram is able to pick up – every grey scar, every age mark. My neck cranes to remain staring up into his eyes, still seemingly so far above me. Yet too close. With the image ducked down, the light from the window above him shines brightly, right onto me. It’s exposure. It’s defenseless.

“Young child,” His voice, low, nearly a growl, is the quietest I’ve heard it thus far. A technique I often use to create a sense of intimacy with my victims. Am I his victim? “When we first were acquainted, I believe I told you to be a good influence on my apprentice. To lead him in the right direction, more towards me. Is this correct?”

“You are correct, Supreme Leader.”

“And now,” He goes on, voice condescendingly gentle, “You come to tell me that you were purposely exploiting his weakness to expose him to me. Was exposure your mission’s goal?”

“No, Supreme Leader.” I respond blankly. Everything blank. I push back any shame that would creep on me during failures in my training days, any shame I felt in the cave when admitting I killed Eerson to Ren, any shame I felt locked in General Hux’s ship, any shame on Hoth. Any shame of failing my Order. That’s what Agent 2319 would do.

“I already know the boy’s weaknesses, I know everything about him. Every thought he has. Every desire he harbors. I reside in his mind. Do you-” He staggers, “Do you doubt my power?”

“Of course not, Supreme Leader.”

The Supreme Leader leans back and closes his eyes in concentration. Suddenly, there’s a pressure buzzing at the back of my skull. The same when Kylo Ren attempts to peek into my mind, but this one isn’t as subtle, nor polite. Yet, isn’t as close either. It’s a distant probe, sharp, invasive. It comes from a different era, from a different operator. I hold back my wince, sinking into the meditations of who I am - Agent 2-3-1-9.

The sensation is so similar to when Snoke was physically in front of me, carving into my mind with his own. Now, we are nearly a whole galaxy away and he can still enter my thoughts, my psyche. It’s not scary, in a sense that I have anything to hide.

Because I don’t.

I devote everything I am to the Order, so I am not scared of what he sees.

It’s petrifying in the sense that one being can be so powerful.
It’s petrifying in the sense that I could be so horribly stupid, so wrong to think that I could have helped the Order by diverting the Supreme Leader’s orders. I thought… I assumed that if I exposed the Commander for his monstrosities, I would expose him as a weak link, one that begged for his elimination. Kylo Ren is not to be eliminated. He is a weapon, a valuable one, as the Supreme Leader said. I should’ve helped mold it, helped contain it. Thinking that I was wiser than the Supreme Leader was foolish.

His power is amazing, unmatchable to any man. The shame of failure manifests back over me, causing my lip to quiver ever so slightly. Tears prick my eyes at the mere thought of failing such a deserving, wonderfully divine being, combined with the strain his reaching into my mind’s boundaries. Have I failed my Order?

“Please,” I whisper, my voice cracking. I contain the weakness, trying to put my strength on display, all while mentally recoiling at his authority. “I do apologize for all of my mistakes, Supreme Leader. But I do believe I am still in a position carry out whatever it is you require of me.”

The mental probing grows, now feelings as if a physical object is penetrating the flesh of my mind. It transcends time and space but still feels so literal, so physical. My toes curl, fingers clench, teeth grit. It’s searing, splicing, so fucking painful. I ignore that. Despite wanting to cower from the energy, I try to assess it. He’s scanning. Scanning for a reason not to trust me. Prodding to pluck out moments with Commander Ren. Moments where I was supposed to be influencing him to be a better Commander, not forcing him into a corner to eliminate. Why do I dislike Ren so greatly, why do I strive for his demise? Is it because he goes so far against everything I was taught? Everything I am? Or is it a jealousy? That he was given the power, the legacy, I am denied.

The legacy I deserve.

The probing stops.

Snoke rips himself away from my conscience, a knife removing itself from flesh.

That’s the most painful part of it all.

I bite down hard on my cheek, eyes watering. My knees nearly give out at the pain. I don’t know how I manage to stand. But I do.

As he chuckles the response, I can’t help but notice how out of breath he is, “It is truly, ironic to say, but the two of you are so much alike.”

That genuinely takes me off guard. “The Commander and I?” I question, forcing my words steady. What could he have possibly seen to make him think that? My gut turns again, twisting in apprehension. Even though Snoke is out of my mind, I waste no time repressing it further down.

“No, of course not,” Snoke retorts, “General Hux. That’s the other reason you have requested to speak to me today, correct?”

Did he see that in my mind? Or perhaps R8 was specific when sending my request to speak with him? I didn’t intentionally project anything about the General when Snoke entered my mind. What if he could see beyond what I preformed to him? I pause, gathering my anxiousness, then respond, mirroring my prior confidence, “Yes, Supreme Leader. I believe that the General, even more so than Kylo Ren, has exhibited signs of betrayal. Ones I consider to be significantly more alarming.”

“I’m listening.” Snoke leans back, offering me his attention.

I begin, “General Hux offered me the opportunity of becoming a deserter if I agreed to assassinate
Commander Ren. In doing this, the General has endlessly threatened me, making several attempts at
timidation for my corporation in his schemes. If needed, I could supply proof of his requests.”

“No proof is needed,” He assures. Does he already have proof? Or is he just trying to flex his all-
knowing front. Or, maybe, he trusts me, because he saw it in my mind? “I am surprised you refused
him. Is that not an appealing deal? No other agents get a deal like that.” He asks.

“Death is the only thing that could depart me from the Order.” I respond, blatantly.

“Hm,” He peers downward at me. He hesitates. I focus on standing still. Then, after another
painstakingly long pause of analyzation, he continues on, “Well, I will send orders for General Hux
to report here immediately and we can decide what to do with that humiliation of a man. But in the
meantime, I also must address your mission with Kylo Ren.”

“Continue,” I nod, trying to distance myself from the excitement bursting through my veins of Snoke
belittling the General so openly. It’s so satisfying to hear.

Supreme Leader Snoke begins typing at the armrest of his throne, presumably sending those orders
to General Hux now. “For the time being, try to be a better influence on him. You should hear some
of the ridiculous prompts he has brought to me since you came into the picture. It really does make
your presence counter-productive.” A pause, then head tilt, “Which, as you know, is fatal.”

I reassure, “Of course. Whatever Ren has proposed to you has not been mentioned to me. I was
unaware.” This, this is the truth.

“Really?” He begins, “Just this morning, as we spoke, he was attempting to work up the courage to
mention his dissatisfaction with our stormtrooper program, specifically with Project Resurrection. I
assume, it’s out of sympathy for you. Do you speak ill of the way you were raised to him?”

“Of course not, Supreme Leader.” I say, holding back any shock that Ren would consider proposing
such a thing. Did what I said to him yesterday actually resonate? Does he actually want to get
things to change?

I didn’t realize I could affect him, in that way.

“And you mentioned he harbors doubt in our plans with Starkiller Base?”

I nod. “Correct, but I have attempted to reassure him that Starkiller Base is a necessary, remarkable
symbol of the Order’s power.”

“You should have tried harder, Agent.”

I swallow hard, silence settling in between us for a moment.

Before I can recover, he continues, “While you do serve as a motivation for him to win the war, I’m
not sure that domestic life is quite the motivation I wish to use for his conquer.”

“I’m unsure what you mean, Supreme Leader.”

His eyebrows raise, “He didn’t mention his intentions of starting a family with you after the
Rebellion and Resistance has been eliminated?”

“What?” I whisper, in shock. Quickly, I reconstruct my composure, “No,” I don’t think about the
reveal. Don’t let that sink in. Don’t let that matter. It doesn’t matter to me. Agent 2319. Live and die
for the Order. I interrupt temptation of the thoughts by saying, simply, “He did not tell me that.”
“He kept that from me as well…” His voice lingers. “He tried, at least.”

I mentally push away from the idea, begging it doesn’t truly settle within me, “I’ll discourage him from such a foolish fantasy.”

“A foolish idea it is.” He chuckles, as if I told him a joke. “Can you imagine the boy as a father?”

I force myself not to. I don’t think about him with a child. Our child. Holding it gently, rocking it, feeding it, allowing it to sleep against his chest. I don’t imagine what it would look like, what features of his the child would possess. I don’t think about any of that. Nor do I think about how having a child could help him. It could bring him away from all the pain he feels. Ben loves caring for things, and he’s quite good at it too. I don’t think about how he would be an excellent father. I fight the urge to clench my fists, burying fingernails into the leather of my gloves.

Snokes retorts, “He can barely manage himself. And you – a mother?” He glances down to my stomach, laugh settling into a merely amused tone, “I just couldn’t bare to inform him about your…” His eyes return to mine, “deficiencies.”

My body freezes.

Deficiencies.

I never really paid much thought to my deficiencies before.

With a tight jaw, I manage a nod. Then, a painful, “I’ll bring it up.”

“Don’t.” He shrugs, “We’ll use the information later.”

Later. I latch onto any of my curiosity, trying to distract myself as much as possible from the sadness, the self-pity, the embarrassment, manifesting so quickly, building like blocks one on top of the other. It’s so heavy, inside of me. I need it to stop. I blurt out, “Use it for what?”

“To aid your separation.”

I blink, somewhat taken aback. The word comes out weakly, “Separation?”

“Well, of course.” He goes on, “You spent all this time cultivating a relationship reminiscent of all the things I’ve starved him of, all the things I’ve spent prying one by one from his life, conditioning him to hate, and now he misses those very things? I cannot have that. I feel like I’m moving backwards with him.”

“But I have control over him, I can influence him, I can-”

“I already have all those things, Agent.” He sneers, “You still so easily forget that.”

“Then what do I have that you need?” I utter out, nearly desperate. I am patient, but he’s so frustrating with his circling conversations and implied knowledge. The repressed emotions all come back, right back to the forefront of my thoughts, threatening to burst out of me. Ben wants to start a family. Ben wants to try to reform the Order. I have no idea what Snoke knows or what he doesn’t. I’m so lost. Even more so than before. I take a deep breath, swallowing all the emotions back down.

“What am I doing here, Supreme Leader?” I beg, voice cracking for the first time in the conversation, “Please, guide me.”

“Well, for starters,” His voice lowers again, quiet, smooth. “He has compassion for you. Perhaps this proves as an opportunity to remind him of the consequences compassion can have.”
I shudder. “Supreme Leader, I—”

“And you also are having visions, I presume?”

I narrow my eyes. Did he see that in my mind? Or did Ben tell him that too? “What is the Force trying to show me? What does it all mean?” Does he know? Can he see it?

“It means you must go about business as usual, until these visions are fulfilled… You will help us find Skywalker.” He tilts his head, “And once you do, we shall talk about the next steps with your mission with Ren.”

“I—”

The door hisses open from the back of the room.

I whip my head around to the sound.

General Hux storms down the runway, face red, his holopad out and activated. He doesn’t look at me, opting to look to Snoke and then back down at his screen, alternating his gaze frantically. He only yells, out of breath, “I have an itemized list of all the times Agent 2319 has demonstrated suspicious behaviors organized chronologically, Supreme Leader! The list is expansive, but I would be glad to verbally go through every entry individually! From there, we can decide in what actions to take to punish her accordingly!”

Stars. I nearly roll my eyes. Most of my suspicious behavior is directly correlated to schemes he orchestrated.

Snoke wastes no time in responding, “Suspicious behaviors like plotting assassinations, General?”

I hold back any delight in the bluntness.

General Hux stammers, “Supreme Leader, I have no idea what the girl told you, but I have viable proof she cannot be trusted, if you just—”

“That won’t be necessary,” Snoke waves the matter off, “General, you’re such a pitiful, sad man. Always so concerned with besting my apprentice. If only destiny granted you with the lineage he had, we might not be running into such issues this evening. Issues concerning your limitations, his fragility.”

General Hux swallows hard, obviously in internal pain. I remain standing forward but cannot repress a twitch at the corner of my lip.

“How dare you attempt to corrupt this faithful agent of the Order.” He sneers, “She serves us very well. You try to convince her into desertion? It's truly a war crime, General.”

Hux trembles so slightly.

Snoke goes on, ”Kylo Ren may have the temperament of a toddler, but at least he is a true warrior, of rage, of passion. If you want the boy dead, why must you be so discreet?”

“I don’t—”

“Kill him yourself, coward.”

Hux is silenced by the order.
“You can’t, can you? So dry in the Force, so defenseless against what you could never understand.” Snoke taunts with an underlying ferocity, his voice raising to a point it never quite did with me, “The Force doesn’t care for you, such an unworthy man, born of shame, of illegitimacy.”

I glance towards him, unable to resist the temptation to watch him sink further into his failure. His eyes are glossed over, throat incredibly tight. He looks as if he’s about to cry, to scream, to burst into nothingness.

I turn my head back towards the Supreme Leader, tilting my head up. I exhale slowly, my composure threatened by such sweet satisfaction.

General Hux seethes, holding back as much as he possibly can through gritted teeth, “She is working for the Resistance, she is a traitor.”

I conceal a laugh. I’ve done many questionable things but working for the Resistance is not one of them. I anticipate Snoke’s response.

Snoke says, “Is this because her frequent visits with that prisoner?”

My whole body stills.

Hux freezes too.

It’s the same panic that struck me at the sight of seeing Poe Dameron on the top of a staircase in the ballroom. Not failure, not shame… Worse than that. It’s the shock of complete and utter revelation. It’s nakedness, it’s a cover blown, it’s everything I have been fighting against.

Then, Hux states, “Yes, actually.”

“Agent, will the boy… ah, what’s his name?” A pause for consideration. Then, “Tuchell Lau. Will he distract you from retrieving the map to Skywalker?” Snoke asks, blatantly.

Suddenly, I think I’m going to throw up. He saw.

He saw everything.

Tuchell Lau, more than anything, more than recording this fucking whole conversation, is the thing I tried to conceal most in my mind. If he saw that…

He saw every single thing.

Does he know I’m recording him now? Is he just pulling me along for his own amusement, seeing how long it takes for me to break under the pressure, under the stress of finally knowing what he knows.

“I believe I asked you a simple question, Agent, of which the answer could be either ‘yes’ or ‘no.’” He continues so casually, as if the revelation hasn’t shredded me from the outside in, as if he isn’t talking to a blatant traitor of the Order.

“No,” I stammer. No is the only answer to that question.

“Good, because if you don’t retrieve that map,” His voice remains so steady, far too normal, when saying, “I can assure you that your death will be quite the event.”

I swallow hard.
Getting that map is all I’m good for now.

But if Snoke saw everything… he can see that I already have the map. Sure, we don’t know where Luke would be, but I have the map. And he knows it’s far too dangerous to leave me with it.

Why doesn’t he take it? Why not just kill me now? Teach Kylo Ren about compassion’s consequence and tell the General to murder me right here, in cold blood, for him to personally watch. It doesn’t make sense.

“General,” Snoke refocuses his attention onto Hux, “Please do not let your personal interests of her death interfere with my personal interests of continuing to explore her uses to us. Can you manage some self-control?”

General Hux nods, seemingly fighting the urge to squirm.

Snoke’s attention turns back towards me, voice settling into a finality, “There is a way to be good again, Agent…” A kindness in his tone that settles. I’ve never heard such a thing from him before. It, in of itself, is calming even. I don’t know if that makes me even more alarmed. He reaches out, as if he were to touch my cheek. The hologram of his hand sizzles when itcontacts my skin, scattering thousands of pixels around me. He soothingly purrs, “You can come back from being such a disgraceful failure.”

I concentrate on holding back a tremble.

“Good luck, 2319,” He turns to Hux. “And to you, Armitage…”

The holocron flickers off.

Ben was right. There is no hiding from Snoke.

Chapter End Notes

I KNOW ITS BEEN FOREVER IM SO BAD
AND I KNOW THIS ONE BRINGS MORE QUESTIONS THAN IT ANSWERS IM SORRY
i hope you all like it none the less. next chapter, i promise, there will be tons of long awaited answers... it's finally time to figure out what the FUCK is going on and where this thing is going. this final act is gonna get wild. so strap in. i hate hyping it, but boy am i excited to share. i always say this, but thanks so much for the support! i hope you guys still have it in you to read these last few chapters. HOOO boy.
(also i did that thing again to where this chapter was supposed to go on 5000 more words but i didnt want it to be such a long upload and i also kinda wanna write ahead, so expect a new upload VERY soon)

playlist is here!!!
and here's the pinterest board
"Then God said, 'Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.'" Genesis 22:2

Chapter Notes

trigger warning: Graphic Violence

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Immediately, I gasp, bringing up a palm to my mouth. I shuffle away from the throne, turning back towards the door. Inhale. Exhale. Breath. It’s too fast. I can’t stop breathing fast. What the fuck is even happening right now?

I don’t understand.

Why am I not dead?

Sweat drips down my brow, into my eye, stinging. I clench it shut, reaching up to rub at it. With blurry vision, I look over to Hux, still frozen beside me, staring at the throne Snoke’s hologram once sat.

Hurriedly, I switch on the holopad, as Hux is paralyzed by whatever tribulation is running through his mind. Squinting at the screen, my trembling fingers click out of the bullshit report on “Commander Kylo Ren.” Thank the fucking stars he didn’t ask to read it. I was really counting on that. Snoke doesn’t strike me as the type to have an inclination towards paperwork. I click on the audio file.

It’s still recording.

I stop it.

Then, I save the file.

All the air in my stomach releases, an apprehensive relief coursing through my veins.

I turn the holopad off.

The relief is short lived, easily re-veiled by anxiety.

If Snoke knows everything, there’s no explanation for him not killing me now, for him not taking the map, for him not taking my recording of him. I doubt he needs me that desperately. Even if I’m buying into the whole concept of me being the one to find Skywalker, he knows that I could very easily run away now. He knows I don't care about Skywalker. He wouldn't have let me win so
much.

This is no victory.

I turn to Hux, staring at his still profile. Almost still. Completely still, if it weren’t for his gloved fingers tapping against his leg. He bites his lip hard, suppressing it’s quiver. Hux is still alive. Hux can attempt to murder a Commanding leader of the First Order – the Supreme Leader’s very own apprentice – and not be executed or even punished outside of verbal degradation… How the fuck does that work?

I stare at him longer, in disbelief. Until another question surfaces.

How does Hux know about me visiting Tuchell?

I whisper to the man, despite the uncertainty that my voice will be enough to take him out of his paralytic shell-shock, “I’m not working for the Resistance.”

He asks in the most monotone, the most robotic, tone I’ve ever heard him exude before, “The purpose of visiting the prisoner, then?” The question is quiet, but it echoes so much in the dark, empty room. We are far too small to be in here by ourselves. The emptiness of the room is a guest in of itself to our conversation.

I don’t answer him. Instead, my mind wanders. The way Snoke spoke to Hux, so much like he speaks down to Kylo. My bloodlust for the General calms. It’s never done that before. I look at him and find no hatred within myself. I examine what I find. It’s something different than loathing, entirely. When I look at the General, so numbly broken from his master’s words, so indoctrinated by what the war created his mind to be, I only find pity. Sympathy. Even understanding. I see Ben Solo.

I wonder if Hux proposed the assassination ploy to me earlier, before I fell in love with Ben Solo, if I would’ve accepted. I’m sure I would have. A dark image flashes my mind of looming over the resting body of Ben. I can feel the dagger in my hands. I’ve killed subjects in their sleep before. What would’ve stopped me? I would have done it, then refused to leave the Order. I would’ve served under Hux directly. We would have made a great team.

He closes his eyes, exhaling a steady stream of air. I keep my gaze locked to his, searching for a connection, for anything. He keeps those cold, blue eyes on the ground. No longer part of a droid, no longer part of a monster… He was a child without a childhood too. He asks me, quietly, “Was it compassion? Guilt?”

“For Tuchell?” I ask.

He nods, confirming his question.

I don’t find a lie. I don’t have the energy to make up another story, to become a different person. I’m not sure if there are even any more lies left I can tell. The truth has chased me for so long, cornering me, until it swallowed me whole. The truth is all-consuming, possessive, even. I was never any match for such a force. I answer, succumbing to his sudden vulnerability with my own, “Yes.” I want to ask him if he’s ever felt such a thing like compassion or guilt. I refrain from the curious urge.

He nods once again, processing.

I ask myself if I should reach out to him. I am not sorry for what I have done, for reporting him so connivingly. He brought that upon himself. He deserved it. But it’s not about deserving. For a moment, I relish in the fact that if I was able to come out of whatever grave the Order buried me in,
even Hux can. I am not foolish. I know it may not be sudden. It may take time. But I do not think it’s entirely impossible. In his face, full of distress, of humiliation, I am reminded of how desperate I was to have someone, to be told everything would be okay. I was so starved for compassion, so blinded by loneliness. He must feel those things too. He must.

I find myself reaching out to the man, placing my hand on his arm.

He flinches at the contact.

I keep my hand relaxed, gentle on his bicep. The leather of my glove is rough against his dark overcoat. I don’t let it deter me. In the touch, I feel blood of the Lau mother and father splattering onto my face, I taste that musky red wine, see the life stripped from their eyes still wet with tears, the gut-wrenching terror striking like a blast of energy to their children. I remember his rough hands smearing the blood into my skin, with a grasp that mocked what it is to caress. Then, I am reminded of what all my hands have done. All the blood they were responsible for shedding. All of the life they have squeezed out from the throats of innocent people.

In the touch, I find brotherhood.

He reaches up, grabbing my hand from his bicep. The leather of our gloves sticks together in a way that’s inconvenient, uncomfortable. It’s a reminder of how unnatural this is, how members of the Order should never touch hands in such a tender way. He lowers my hand back down to my side, letting go once it’s in place, all while keeping his eyes on the empty throne. He takes a deep breath, then weakly mutters, “I don’t know why he wouldn’t kill you.”

I don’t know why Snoke wouldn’t kill him either. But in searching for an answer to my question, I find an answer to his, “He still needs me, for now.”

His expression relaxes in complete understanding. His gaze finally locks to my own. We hold it for a moment. I cannot breathe.

I ask him, the silence an opportunity, “How did you find out about Tuchell?” A small, sad smile reaches my lips, “Where did I go wrong?”

He tilts his head, icy eyes flickering at the question. They nearly entrance me with the way they reflect so much of the little light that the room exhibits. They’re crystalized. Then, his same hand that once removed my touch from his reaches upward. Unsure of his actions, my breath catches in my throat, muscles tensing. I think he’s going to touch my face, but his fingers move past it. To the back of my neck.

Two fingers press underneath my twisted hair, right at the edge of my scalp. The leather pulls at my hair, massaging it’s way into a particular spot, right at the nape of my neck, underneath the low-styled bun. I can’t help but scan him for any explanation to the action, but his face remains dead, unreadable. As it usual does.

“What terrifies you the most about the Supreme Leader?” He asks, curious.

My eyes flicker into the outstretched hand, then to his face. My gut twists, unsettled by the touch. I can’t help but feel set up by it, judging it as some sort of entrapment. Guilt for the assumption briefly nudges at me.

His eyebrow twitches lightly. “You may tell me,” His tone softens. I glance downward as his feet slightly advance towards me. He cranes his head downwards, not allowing the close distance to disturb our eye-contact, “he terrifies me, as well. More than I wish to admit.”
“I’m…” I swallow hard, trying to examine the nature of his touch. It feels like he’s trying to make sense of me. Yet, toying at me. Almost like he’s blind, feeling at an object to assign meaning to it. Such a particular spot he’s touching, as well. The placement of his finger at the dip of my bones is far less than natural. I focus back on the question, “I’m not terrified of what he can do to me. Or of his authority. It’s how much I don’t understand him… It’s, it’s almost as if…” I struggle to come to a conclusion, “I’m scared because I don’t know if he’s as powerful as he claims, or if he’s even more powerful and he’s just holding back.” I squint my eyes, “Why are you asking me this?”

He nods, processing. Then, “His power resides in politics. When it comes to religion?” A slight scoff. “He is not as mighty as you presume.”

I shiver, “Did you just witness what happened? How easily he entered our minds? He does the same thing to Kylo Ren – who even knows how the Force works – and he’s unable to stop him and I don’t-”

“Shh…” The shushing noise is nearly that of a lullaby, soothing, smooth. I melt into it, succumbing to his careful touch. I tell myself that it’s ok. It’s okay. We are alike. We understand each other. I repeat the mantra a few times. Hux tilts his head, examining the way my terror contorts my face as if he’s a scientist studying a rare specimen of species. He keeps an index finger on the back of my neck as his thumb runs across my jawline. I tremor at the trace of his presence ghosting over the areas he touches, then forsakes. He sing-songingly explains, “You asked me how I know about the prisoner. I discovered the same way Snoke did. And rest assured, the Force had nothing to do with it. But he will tell you it does, he will tell you he seeped into every corner of your mind, because when you believe he can…” He blinks, “That’s when he does.”

“You prevent him from entering your mind?” I exhale.

He shrugs, “I can manage it in moments. But I am not as consistent as I hope to be. It’s a slow skill to learn. But I do wish to learn it.” His index finger runs quicker circles around that spot on the nape of my neck. “If he trusts he does not need to break your mind to enter it, he will not waste his time with such effort.”

I didn’t try to prevent Snoke from entering my mind. I let him in, willingly, giving him a false image of me. I played a role. A role he already believed me to be – Agent of the First Order. Did he fall for it, then? Do I still have the advantage here?

Suddenly, his finger is pressing into my head hard. Painfully. And he says, in the tone of a scholar, “You have a scar here. Barely visible. But if you search for it, you will find it. Perhaps you would be able to still feel it.”

I narrow my eyes, confused at the sudden conversational shift.

He continues, rubbing circles around the area, “All agents have it. Given the information agents can come across, and the nature of their work, implementation of an internal tracking systems is vital.”

My lips part. I don’t understand. I blink, frozen, repeating the simple words I can’t quite remember the meaning of, “Internal tracking system?”

“Implanted during a process of procedures when you first became an agent. Limited members of the Order know of the device’s use…” His head tilts the other way, curiously waiting for a reaction.

I rip away from his grasp, reaching up to where his fingers once pressed. It takes all the effort I can muster to stable my hands to feel for it.
I can’t feel it. It can’t be there. That’s impossible.

He’s lying to me, trying to trick me into thinking I’m stuck here. He’s lying. He’s trying to bring me down to his level, to his brokenness. He’s lying. I sneer, “Bullshit.”

Hux remains unphased, “You disbelieve they would install such a precaution?”

They would.

I pull my hand away to rip my glove off, then returning my fingers to the area on my scalp. Frantically, I search for any evidence of it’s existence. He’s lying. I don’t know why, but he’s lying. He has to be.

Then, there it is. A slight raise to my skin.

My fingers freeze, chest collapsing in on itself.

Hesitantly, I inspect the area, dragging the tip of my finger back over it.

It’s an elevated slit. Evidence of an incision. Proof of an intrusion. I tremble, once gentle and analytic touch turning hysterical, pulling at the skin, prying at it. It’s in my fucking head, they put something in my head without me knowing and it’s just been there. Resting, operating within me. I pick at the disfigurement, pulling, digging, doing everything my bitten-down nails can possibly allow.

He explains, immersing himself in some kind of pleasure my reaction gives him, “Your body has grown around it, molding it within you as you’ve grown. It rests in your spinal cord, deeming it’s removal impossible. There’s been two who have tried. Both died in the process, one even with the help of medical professional.”

I need it out. I have to get it out of me. “How do I…” I back away from Hux, still fixated on ripping at my scalp. I try to feel for it underneath skin. How far deep is it? When I blink, I notice my vision blurring. The room seems to spin, my psyche crashing around me, my insides plummeting to my feet. I tremble, desperately, “I need it out of me.”

“How do I turn it off?” There has to be a way to do that. There has to. There fucking has to.

“You don’t.” He shrugs, “But perhaps I could’ve. That is, if you helped me. The time for that has passed though, hasn’t it?”

I think I’m about to throw up. I do everything to hold it back. I push away implications my mind creates, of him being my only way out, of him being vital to escaping. Of me making the wrong choice. I disgust myself at the thought of it. I go back to thinking I may throw up. “Why are you telling me this?” I heave.

There’s a twinkle in Hux’s eyes. What was so dead, so broken before, seems to resurrect within him… I’ve forgotten his nature. He likes this. He likes knowing what I don’t. He likes knowing I need him to tell me. It makes me even more nauseous.

I couldn’t care less about playing any power games with him now. I don’t fucking care about any of that. My weak, quivering voice nearly breaks into a pathetic cry, “What’s going on?”

“Anyways,” He continues, “When I requested this information, I noticed that every piece of
questionable data on you was already sent to the Supreme Leader last night, in a detailed report.”

“Sent?” I shiver at the implication, “By who?”

“2319,” He coos, reclaiming his step forward. I fight the urge to step back, giving into the fear overwhelming me. I hold my holopad close to my chest, hugging it, squeezing, trying to build up a wall between the man and I. He finally speaks again, gently, bathing himself in the sight of how the confusion is torturing me, “Are you playing dumb with me? I must admit, it is quite amusing.”

I frown. The only one I can think that has access to high security information and want to report me is Hux. But it wouldn’t make any sense, considering he was still under the impression that I was going through with our deal. Hux is the only one who was aware of my failures to the Order. Did Tuchell mess up somewhere? Did the Order try to cut a deal with him, for ratting me out? Tuchell is the only person possibly to have done this. That is, anyone other than Ben…

Ben.

“Did…” I sharply inhale, unable to bare such a thought. “Did Kylo…”

“Your droid, actually.”

I step back.

A strangling sensation overwhelms my organs.

I'm being suffocated.

Hux scoffs at my revelation, the sound taunting me, “R8 receives the data of your tracker actively. By the time I asked, the droid already sent the information to the Supreme Leader. I'm assuming Snoke only knows what R8 knows. Unless you were stupid enough to let him figure out something else.”

“I…” Emptiness consumes me. My heart ceasing to beat, my blood chilled. “I have to go.”

I turn away suddenly towards the aisle leading down to the exit. My vision tunnels around me. Walking has never been so hard. I walk faster. I hug the holopad tighter. In failed attempts to steady my hands enough to put the glove back on, I give up, shoving the leather material into my pocket. It rests next to the comm-link. Next to the map. The confusion is the most painful part. The desperation for answers, for a reason why all this is happening.

I refuse to trust a word Hux says.

I hug the holopad even tighter.

The transplant in my head can’t be real. R8 reporting me can’t be real.

None of this is real.

Because if it were, my plan was doomed before it began.

It was doomed from the moment the Order took me away from my family, from day one of my conditioning.

I am doomed.

Tears threaten to spill down my face rapidly as I open the door, racing down the halls of the
Command Deck. My quick steps form into a run. The momentum pushes the tears from my eyes. Stormtroopers stare at the sight of an agent, such a well-respected, highly esteemed position of power, completely and utterly broken. Nothing at all like a true agent of the First Order. A failure, an outlier in the process. I avoid looking towards the doors to my left, doors of which Kylo Ren may reside in, planning strategically to find and capture Luke Skywalker, with his acclaimed Knights of Ren. Too preoccupied to lend attention to me. Too devoted to ever want to leave his mission here. My face burns with embarrassment.

As I run across the Command Deck, I try to think of the time I could handle walking down this very hall proudly.

How did I get here?

I let out a sob, reaching up to the back of my head, scratching furiously at the scar, now irritated and sore. The white helmets turn with my movements, faceless black visors for eyes, staring. They don’t have faces.

They took away their fucking faces.

“Agent!”

Hux’s voice calling out my name – my name, Agent – only makes me run faster, nearly stumbling at a slight rise in the floor.

“I wasn’t quite finished with you!” He continues the taunt.

I don’t look back. I remain staring at the movement of my feet.

Where the hell am I even going at this point? Where can I go?

I hold the holopad so tightly, it’s as if it’s a part of me, pressing deeply into my chest.

“Will someone please put an end to this!” Hux’s impatient voice is far away now. He isn’t bothered with the concept of chasing me. He has other people to do that for him.

I glance up, and then around. The white armored men cave in around me, consuming me. I drown in it, frozen, as their bulletproof fingers try to wrap around my arms. I never realized how horrifying the masks look. How barely human, but not nearly enough. I keep my arms folded around the holopad, twisting away from their grasps. They pile around me.

I sneer at Hux, “What?”

He blinks. Two times.

The stormtroopers around me wait for his response, blocking my path.

He nods towards me, pointing at three of the troopers to my right, “Walk with us.”

Hux moves quickly back down the hall, the direction I was headed. Two stormtroopers push me alongside him, one behind me, forcing my heavily planted feet to stumble forward. They stabilize their formation around me, ensuring I have to move along with them. I do, begrudgingly.

“Where are we going?” I ask him, my voice a pitiful whimper.

He doesn’t answer.
“Hux.” I force my words to harden.

He ignores me.

We enter the elevator.

I try to see where his fingers press into the buttons to send the chamber. But the stormtrooper ahead of me blocks my sight. I try to peer around him, only then to be blocked by Hux’s body, readjusting his footing.

He glances over towards me, devilish smile growing with our eye contact. He sees right through me. “I thought you valued patience.”

I shiver, my throat tightening. “What more do you want from me?”

He slowly turns away, back towards the door of the elevator. It moves upwards, to a destination unknown to me. He never answers that question.

My knees feel as if they’re about to give out, my body begging to curl in on itself.

I try to meditate, to separate myself from my body. Techniques taught to me to resist torture. But as I retreat into my mind, I can only remember the device lodged somewhere in there, just as functioning as I am.

I am the First Order, anatomically.

Of course, R8 would turn me in for any suspicious behavior. He’s a fucking droid. He can’t feel, can’t care. He’s everything I should be, everything I could’ve been. I’ve reported suspicious or inadequate behavior in members of the Order before too.

I hate the tears that slide down my face. I hate the sensation of my chin quivering, holding back the urge to scream.

Hux turns towards me once again, staring.

I turn away, trying to hide my face into my shoulder.

“Coward.” He scorns, roughly, “Look at how pathetic you are…” He turns to the faceless trooper, “A great example of what a weak mind can do to you, in the Order. We must learn from the mistakes of others to better ourselves.”

A weak mind. I sniff, glaring back at him. Tears still fall, but instead of meditating on peace, on separation, I connect myself to the hatred, the darkness, festering within me. I hate this man. I no longer can attach myself to any sentimental connection our similar upbringing implies. I don’t sympathize. In the hatred I feel for myself, for all I’ve done, there’s a similar hatred to him. I imagine strangling him with my bare hands. I could win, if we fought. I know I could. I would tear him to shreds.

“You have three troopers here…” I sneer. “You surround me with three of your men and then claim I’m the coward.”

“Agent, I am fully confident in how swiftly I could kill you.”

Four versus one. All highly trained. Hux, slightly less than my equal. Could I take them all? I use my peripherals to study the way the trooper on my right is holding his gun. If I could swing my right leg
around, kneeing him swiftly in the groin, then grabbing his gun, I’d have to shoot the man behind me, the man to my right, then, Hux, all in a row. All while, hoping the man I initially took the gun from doesn’t have enough time to disarm me or throw off my aim. Also, hoping Hux’s reflex to grab his own gun is delayed.

Shit. It’s not realistic.

Besides, Hux already has a hand on his holster from under his coat. He's scared of me.

He should be.

“Whatever you need to tell yourself, General.” I taunt him, in the same nature he loves to taunt me, “But ultimately, Snoke was referring to you as the coward. He said no such thing to me.”

There’s a flicker of pure hatred in his eyes, one that I match with my own. Before he can verbally respond, the elevator doors slide open.

We’re on the cellblock level.

Floor number nine.

I didn’t think any more of me could break. It does.

“No,” I growl at him, “Whatever it is you think you’re going to accomplish here, you won’t.”

The stormtroopers grab at my arms, pulling me forward. Hux’s steps leading us are slower than his usual stride. He’s dragging this out. We pass cells 184, 185, 186…

“You already won,” I snap, “I’m fucking stuck here and I’m miserable and you won.”

Hux still doesn’t respond, leading us further forward. 191, 192, 193…

I squirm against the troopers, each step adding to the desperation growing throughout my body. “Hux - I know how to find Skywalker! I’ll go find him, I’ll give you all the credit for it, I don’t care, just don’t touch that kid!”

Hux silently begins look to the numbers printed above each door. 197, 198, 199…

I lunge forward, trying to stop his path, only to be pulled back by the troopers. But it’s obnoxious enough for Hux to finally turn to face me. He raises an eyebrow, unimpressed.

I heave, urging, knowing nothing else would keep his attention, “I’ll do anything.” It's exactly what he wants me to admit.

He cocks his head.

I didn’t realize what I said until the silence that proceeds the words sets in. Would I do anything? If it meant Hux not hurting this child, a child I promised safety, a child I’m responsible for imprisoning to begin with… Would I be willing to give up my own life, my life with Ben, everything?

All of those fantasies are already impossible.

There is no more life for me in the Unknown Regions, there never was…

But there still could be for Tuchell, for his sisters.
And that matters significantly more.

I listen to the strong force within me telling to do everything within my power to protect this kid. I don’t know if it’s what having a conscience feels like. Or something else entirely. But either way, I repeat, stronger, “I’ll do anything.”

He sighs, a slight roll to his eyes, “Assassinating Kylo Ren is out of the question… what else are you good for?”

“General,” I plead, trying to harbor my disgust with the man to utter, “whatever you want, I’ll give. Whatever it is. Just please…”

I stare into his eyes, so blank. So cold.

“What I want…” He ponders it for a moment. His eyes scan down the length of my form as he bites his cheek in thought. I force myself to not waver at the gaze, to not succumb to the utter hopelessness threatening to instantaneously destroy me. He purses his thin lips, taking a step towards me. For a moment, I glance to the familiar door to our right. Cell 201. Then, I return his gaze. He lets the moment simmer between us, full of hatred, of desperation, betrayal. He says, voice low, quiet, lethal, “I am fully capable of apprehending, myself.”

He turns back towards the door. He taps the code into the panel. It opens.

Everything from this moment on happens so fast.

Tuchell glances up, hopeful, probably assuming it’s just me and we’ll be leaving soon. But as his eyes meet the General’s, then mine, his expression drops. He scurries to the corner of the room, barely able to move due to the shock.

Disarm Hux. That’s the only thing my mind tells me to do.

I bring my knee up as far as I can, then stomp my foot down onto the toe of the trooper next to me. His grip on me loosens. I free my hand. Then, with the hand not holding the holopad, I send my palm straight into to the slight raise in the left stormtrooper’s helmet, where the nose would be. His head snaps back as I yank the gun from his grip, blasting at the trooper behind me.

He falls to the ground.

I don’t have time to shoot any more.

I corner myself behind the trooper I took the blaster from, using his body as a shield against Hux, who already is pointing his pistol my direction. I readjust the trooper in my grip. My fingers clasp onto the holopad as I hold him in a headlock. He claws at my forearm, trying to pry my arm away from his neck. I squeeze my arm around him tighter.

The trooper on the ground, shot in the chest, is crawling back into the hallway, moaning, screaming. I must force myself to not stare at the sight of a wounded trooper. A trooper wounded by me. I glance to the trooper originally to my right, already recovered from me striking his foot and now pointing his blaster at me. Blaster. The blaster in my hand is heavy. It shouldn’t be fired with just one hand. But as my left arm juggles the action of wrapping around the trooper’s throat and holding the holopad, there isn’t much of an option to use it for support. My wrist shakes, unsteady. I look down the sights, pointing it at the General. His head wavers in and out of the crosshairs. He points his pistol steadily at me, confident. I wonder how good of a shot he has. Probably a better one than mine.
Suddenly, in one quick movement, the General aims his gun at Tuchell’s head.

“Don’t!” I sneer, gripping the trigger. I could shoot him. I could shoot him right now, so quickly. But what if he shoots Tuchell first? Would he be able to tell when I’m about to shoot? Could I make it in one shot? I would have to. I have to get him off guard, I have to get him to lower his defenses. I can do that. I’ve done things like this millions of times before. I can do this. I am an Agent of the First Order.

General Hux swiftly positions himself behind Tuchell, not letting the blaster’s aim leave Tuchell’s temple. Once positioned behind the boy, he press the cool tip of the barrel aggressively into his skull. Tuchell, despite shaking obsessively, stands up tall. He stares me right in the eyes. In the same way I connect my energy to Kylo Ren’s, in the same way I connect my energy to Supreme Leader Snoke’s, I connect with Tuchell. The energy tunnels around me. I feel fear. Mostly confusion. But also trust. He’s waiting for me to reclaim control of the situation. He trusts that I can.

That’s the most painful part.

I wonder if he can feel what I’m projecting. What am I projecting? When answering that question for myself, I can only pray he doesn't see my pitiful helplessness.

Hux glances down at the wounded trooper, crawling away from the scene, back into the hallway, to seek aid, to draw attention. He chuckles at me, rumbling the words, “Now, why did you do that?"

I readjust the trooper in my arms, glancing to the second trooper, still pointing his blaster at me. I assess the situation. One down. General Hux is armed. One stormtrooper is armed. Another is at my disposal. Just get Hux disarmed… The troopers shouldn’t be a problem.

I stall, until I can figure out a solution, “He did nothing wrong.” A solution… is there any solution? Even if I do kill Hux, even if I do free this child, where do I take him? I couldn’t take him anywhere. I’d be a ticking bomb to travel with. The presence of the implant in my head grows.

“This isn’t about him.” The General presses the barrel further into his skull.

Tuchell lets out a small whimper. He winces at the pressure, then attempts to compose himself, only to fall back into the default state of fear. I stare into his brown eyes. Despite the situation, despite his immaturity and ignorance of violence, he still looks at me as if this isn’t going to be the end. There’s still a fire, a small spark in his fearful eyes. As if he hasn’t seen his own parents murdered, as if after everything, he’s still ignorant to what the Order is capable of.

“If the Supreme Leader will not punish you for your sins against the Order,” Hux sneers, “I will.”

Scattering footsteps come into earshot. I glance towards the doorway. The wounded trooper is nearly all the way out. From what I can see into the hallway, I see his arm weakly reach up. I have to do something. He reaches out. I have to act fast. I have to act now.

Impulsively, I point the blaster to my right and fire at the trooper, pointing his blaster at me. The trooper fires back. I aim the stormtrooper’s body in my arm at the blast, shielding me. My aim goes back towards the General, immediately, ready to fire if his finger even barely moves.

Hux laughs manically, crazed, quickly shifting Tuchell’s body in the same way I once shifted the trooper in my arms. Tuchell’s head now resides in the crosshairs of my aim. My finger twitches, stopping myself from the action, from the temptation of taking that risk. The trooper in my arm squirms against me, violently. I try to squeeze at his neck tighter. The blaster shot looked like it would’ve been lethal. It seemed to be heading straight for his heart. Did it not penetrate the trooper’s
armor? The shock from the blast alone could have been enough to knock him out. I don’t look at
where he was hit, too preoccupied with Hux and Tuchell.

“I suppose this is only fair, then,” Hux slowly lowers his weapon.

I don’t lower mine. My mind attempts to access the action

Once the blaster is to his side, he freezes. We lock eyes. I remove my gaze from his blaster to try to
read him. I try to return to that common ground I often find myself in with him. I try to reach out,
mentally, to connect, to sympathize, anything to help me realize what he is about to do.

Suddenly, the pistol, still aimed down, goes off.

Tuchell screams.

I nearly throw up at the sight of Tuchell’s foot obliterated from the blast.

I try to tell my mind to pull the trigger, I try to send the command to my finger, but Hux moves too
quickly. Tuchell’s body is back inbetween the crosshairs, to Hux’s control of the now screaming,
groaning body.
Hux holds him tighter.

The flailing arms of the boy consumes my mind. His legs try to kick up. He tries to strike Hux. But
Hux remains unaffected.

Shell-shocked, I stare, drowning in his screams. He cries so loudly. So passionately.

The blaster is twisted from my hand from a figure to my right. Then, the injured trooper, is ripped out
of my grasp. Stormtroopers quickly grab at my wrists, holding them behind my back as they slam me
into a wall. There’s a thud on the ground as the holopad from my left hand drops. I remain staring at
Tuchell Lau. They push my body further against the wall. My ribs crush against the metal wall,
cheek pressed firmly into the biting frost of it.

“Should we call for back up, sir?” One trooper says over the screams.

“No,” Hux seethes, not letting up on his grip of Tuchell. “Keep her restrained.”

Suddenly, Tuchell is slammed into the same wall as me. As Hux orders his men to place bindings on
Tuchell’s wrists, to keep him from flailing around so aggressively, I only stare at the boy in front of
me.

He grits his teeth at the physical pain, his face so close to mine. His angry, hot breath hits my face.

I blink for the first time in the encounter, tears darting down the expanse of my face. I whisper, voice
too hoarse to project, “I’m so sorry.”

He trembles slightly, uttering his own, weak, “Don’t.”

I shake my head, the only words I’m able to verbalize being, “It’s all my fault.”

The troopers pat me down, making sure I have no weapons on me. I don’t. They check expansively
either way. They reach into the pocket with the map and my comm-link. They pull out the devices,
throwing them to the ground. But I keep my eyes on Tuchell.

Tuchell, somehow, forces himself to laugh, “It’s their fault.”
“I am them.” I choke at the words.

Tuchell grimaces at the handcuffs tightening at his wrists. His eyes glossing over. I don’t know how he hasn’t gone into shock yet. Then, his eyes flicker towards the troopers behind me. “Doesn’t look that way right now.”

“Alright,” The General exhales, clearing his throat, “Agent, you’ve made quite the mess. I would now like for you-” The General lets off of Tuchell, only to slam him to the ground. His spine crashes straight down into the solid floor. Tuchell yelps, writhing on his back, trying to curl up into himself. My eyes stare at the remains of his foot. It’s just a shredded mess of flesh and bone. Blood spreads across the silver expanse of the ground. “-to clean it up.”

Hux reaches past the troopers surrounding me, grabbing the back of my collar, and pulling me off the wall. He pushes me down to my knees, next to Tuchell. I can see the tons of stormtrooper legs surrounding me, feeling the presence of their blasters all pointed at me or Tuchell.

Then, I see the holopad I dropped, lying just a few feet away from Tuchell’s head. The holopad with the recording of Snoke on it. The recording to reveal to Kylo Ren that Snoke’s a liar, a manipulator. My final plan. My last hope.

The screen is shattered.

A piercing hole from a blaster runs through the left corner.

I let out a sob for the first time, exhausted by yet another blow to any defense I had against reality. It all begins to set in. Not slowly, not bit by bit. But all at once.

In the blood-curdling agony of it all, General Hux grabs my arm, placing something into my right hand, the hand without the leather glove. It’s a handle. I grip it as tightly as I can. It’s a dagger. Hux clasps my hand over the weapon, directing it forward, down towards Tuchell’s chest. Tuchell screams piercingly, squirming away.

General Hux barks over the noise, “Hold him still.”

A few troopers scurry around, bringing their feet to his shoulders, pressing him further into the ground. Another trooper holds his feet, keeping him from kicking. Tuchell remains twisting, trying to pry himself free. But it’s no use. He screams again, trying harder. It’s the screams of someone who refuses to die, someone who rejects the notion of their life merely amounting to tragedy.

I try to twist my wrist away from the General’s grip, begging my body to pry myself free. I try to squirm away from his presence, away enough so I can turn against him, so I can send his own dagger into his own flesh. But my knees are too weak to bring me upwards. Despite my body being unwounded, an insufferable pain consumes me. From my toes, to my knees, all the way across my fingertips and to my head. But my chest. That’s the worst part. My chest is concaved on itself. Tuchell’s screams make any muscle I have become useless. It’s useless. I let out another sob, vision nearly completely obscured by tears. All that’s left is a blur of Tuchell’s flailing body. The bloody floor. Then the troopers surrounding me.

Hux sneers into my ear, “Are you going to drag this out longer for the boy?”

I don’t let him get in my head. I try to yank my wrist away again. Hux retaliates, yanking it back and pressing it to Tuchell’s heart.

Tuchell finally stills, knowing that movement is now fatal. His breaths grow short, fast. Hyperventilating.
My teeth clench, holding my hand back, keeping the blade from puncturing skin.

Hux continues pressing downward, forcing me to continue pulling back against his force. Hux leans closer to me, watching his psychotic game, as if it were an arm-wrestling competition. “Agent…” Hux hisses in my ear, “So selfish for stalling. Ren isn’t going to come save you this time, if that’s what you’re waiting for. How naive of you to have protected him, when he's far too preoccupied to protect you.”

I swallow the pain, only for it to arise once again, bubbling out into another cry.

I muster up any strength I have left to yank my hand back. The action is useless, only warranting Hux to shove my hand back downward. Tuchell screams as the very tip blade presses into his chest.

I don’t know what to do. I only know what I can’t do. And I can’t kill him. But it's hopeless. I want to give up, to give in. Yet something inside of me holds on. A part of me I cannot put aside. A part of me I’ve never recognized in myself.

I force myself to blink away the excess of tears to look at Tuchell’s face. He’s trembling, nose and tears wet and oozing. Still, I stare at him as if he’s the one competent enough to give me an answer, to tell me how to get him out of this.

His hand weakly reaches out. Brown, full eyes staring deep into mine. He’s so young.

“It’s okay.” He whimpers.

It’s not. I know he doesn’t believe that. I know he’s only saying that to make me feel better, to die nobly. I want to tell him that he’s allowed to be angry. He’s allowed to be scared. He’s allowed to hate me. A noble death is still a death. It doesn’t make a difference. Not to me.

His hand reaches upwards, struggling to rest against my extended forearm. His hand clasps around my arm. “Thank you,” He whispers, barely audible.

I shake my head, trying to yank my arm away from him, from Hux. I can’t do this.

Suddenly, Hux’s grip let’s up. “Perhaps I am the impatient one.” He uses his opposite hand not holding mine, to dig into his coat. Before I can process it, Hux draws his blaster, firing into Tuchell’s opposite leg.

Tuchell screams at the top of his lungs, body failing back, only contained by the troopers still shoving him down.

I gasp, glancing to his obliterated leg, then back to his blow-off foot. The earsplitting yelps grow to inexplicable, unbelievable intensity.

In a moment of impulsive reaction, I shove the dagger downward, straight into his heart. It’s not until the blade is all the way in his chest that I realize Hux’s grip has retreated from my hand, the pressure of him pushing down contributing nothing my action.

Tuchell’s screams turn into gurgles.

As an instinct stemming from practice, I twist the knife, grabbing a better hold of the blade.

He gasps. His eyes are so wide.

I rip the dagger out of him.
Tuchell falls limp.

I do too.

Without his screams, it's so intensely silent.

I look upwards towards the dead child. Every ounce of passion, of fire, of spark is now replaced with a corpse. A person I took from this galaxy. One of many.

I shuffle away from the body, away from the image of the oozing blood, the expressionless face. I've never seen anything so horrifying. I drop the dagger, still dripping with blood. It clinks loudly to the ground. My arms reach across my bended legs, hugging my body as tightly as I can manage, like a child. I tremble, clenching my eyes shut, trying to find comfort in the darkness.

But there is no darkness. Only my imagination recreating the violence on the canvas of the back of my eyelids. Somehow, it's more petrifying there.

I open my eyes to find the General cleaning off the dagger I dropped, sliding the blade against Tuchell’s prisoner uniform. Hux speaks to the troopers, “I want all of you to report to my office immediately. We can discuss what has happened there. And why this situation is to remain confidential.”

I stare at him, in shock of how he’s so nonchalant, how he’s so careless of the dead body he uses as a rag for the very dagger that killed him. How can someone be so cruel? How could I have been?

Hux looks down at me, smiling, “You can stay here. I’ll send the necessary equipment here to assist you in cleaning this up.”

I bring my hand to my mouth, pressing back what I think is a sob. The saliva in my mouth becomes hot.

My stomach lurches.

Quickly, I turn my head, throwing up whatever my stomach can pull from itself. It's as if I'm choking, my throat contracting, purging myself of whatever I can. The troopers around me scatter, disgusting by the sight of my illness. The bile taste left on my tougne causes my stomach to contract again, this time, mucus, water, salivia, exuding from me.

Hux huffs at the sight of me, on my hands and knees, dry heaving. Then, he exits.

The door closes behind him.

I’m left alone with the body once inhabited by Tuchell Lau. I killed Tuchell Lau. I wipe my face on my sleeve and crawl weakly over to the corpse, past his obliterated lower limbs. I reach for his face, holding it. His head is so heavy now. Skin still wet from tears and mucus.

I lean forward, towards the boy’s shoulder, a blubering mess of crying and repeating “I’m so sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”

Because I killed him.

Not when the dagger pierced his heart.

When I didn’t shoot Hux at the dinner table, in his house.

When I watched the troopers load him and his sisters onto Hux’s transport.
When I didn’t escape the first moment I could with him. When I insisted on waiting for Kylo Ren. When I mistook Tuchell's passion to do something to stop the Order as misguided revenge.

I killed him so many times before today.

“I’m so sorry,” I choke, my forehead pressing further into his shoulder.

I cry in this position for what seems like hours.

I wonder how long it actually was.

When I raise my head, the first thing I see is the shattered holopad. Something I should be more devastated by. The sight of it only makes me numb. Would it have even made a difference? Would Ren have even cared? I wonder. My eyes flicker to the left, to see my comm-link. A shaking hand reaches out to it. I place it in my pocket.

Then, I muster up the strength to stretch towards the small data storage unit. The map. My map.

It lays in the puddle of Tuchell’s blood, left from when he was shot the first time. I fish it out, then wipe it off on my pants. I use my thumb to smear the remaining blood away, uncovering the ancient piece.

I hold it as tightly as I can in my hand. It forms into my skin.

Then, I return to Tuchell’s side. I reach into Tuchell's makeshift pocket from his right sleeve. My unsteady fingers struggle to find the ring within the fabric. But I do.

I hold the ring out in front of me, flipping the switch. The Alliance symbol is unveiled from the metal plating. I stare at it for a moment. Then, I glance back up to the lifeless face of Tuchell Lau.

My head buries itself back into his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

thank you all for reading and commenting, as always. i am endlessly appreciative.

more to come.

playlist.
It Could Be You Pt. 2

Chapter Summary

“You speak of destiny as if it was fixed.”
— Philip Pullman, The Golden Compass

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Twi’Lek man behind the counter does not look very happy to see me.

His jaw flexes, silently staring instead resuming the of polite customer service motion asking me what I would like to drink. His only movement is the repulsed eyes tracing the blood spatter on my uniform.

Repressing a shudder at the reminder of it’s presence, I say, my voice the texture of gravel, “Shesharillian vodka.”

His eyes don’t leave mine as he slowly reaches under the counter. The shot glass clinks against the surface of the counter. The sound is splitting. Solid glass striking solid metal. His body turns towards the assortment of alcoholic bottles behind him, varying in shape and size and color. His head remains facing me. He wants me to be uncomfortable enough to leave. I am unwelcomed.

He pours the vodka into the shot glass, filling it to the brim. The action is effortless, that of habit. Narrowed, yellow eyes don’t leave me the whole duration of the task. He slowly – harshly – slides the shot glass forward, towards me. Solid glass rubbing solid metal. I stare back at him, downing the alcohol in a slow movement. I don’t gulp it down. I sip it slowly. I let the harsh taste reside on my tongue before it slides down my throat. I let it burn. I am careful to consume every last drop. It is more painful as I go. There is no numbness. My lips sting with the contact.

Then, I carefully place the empty glass back in front of the man. The solid glass gently clinks against the solid metal. He fills it again.

But he doesn’t slide it back over. Instead, he says, “Who is your supervisor?”

I reach for the glass myself. Then, I duplicate my previous motion of savoring the chemical nature of the drink. It’s medical. I lightly replace it where it once rested. Then, I answer, saying his name, “General Hux.”

“Anyone more specifically?” He doesn’t refill the drink this time.

I say the other name, “Commander Kylo Ren.”

He lets air puff out of his wide-bridged nose. Full lips purse. He’s too scared to report me straight to them. Naturally. Then, “I really don’t want you in here.”

I don’t tell him that I have nowhere else to go. I’ve already exhausted all of the three options. Either my room, where I would have to see R8, or Kylo Ren’s room, where I would have to see Ben. If he’s even there. He’s probably still with the Knights. I could go to them too. But not looking like
this. Not feeling like this. “I know,” I reassure, “I will not assault anyone this time.”

He eyes the blood on me once again, “Looks like you already got that part of the night out of the way.”

“It was approved by the General.” I snip back. In the words, there’s flash of young brown eyes impossibly opened wide. A shrill scream. Solid metal in soft flesh.

The man inhales deeply. Then, decides to let himself pour another glass full. He still doesn’t slide it over though. He sighs, “Maybe you should take it easy tonight. You really shouldn’t be walking around breaking so many codes. Might get in trouble again.”

Subconsciously, I reach up to my hair, the bun now loose, barely holding itself together. It’s matted. Sweaty. I push the baby hairs behind my ears. “I won’t get in trouble.” Then, I extend my hand, reaching for the glass, “Can I have that?”

He obliges, reluctantly.

I drink quicker this time. Not to avoid the burn in my mouth. But to anticipate the warmth in my stomach.

Two men, lieutenants, settle in a few stools away from me. I suppose it is getting to be the time when most men get away from their duties. I avoid their gaze. The bartender does too, remaining in front of me. I want him to refill my glass. He asks, “You have a way to get back to your quarters tonight?” A smile of pity, trying to add humor into the dynamic, “You really shouldn’t come here alone if you’re planning to get trashed.”

“I’m not planning anything.” I respond, staring at the empty glass. My leg starts to bounce up and down as my foot rests on the barstool.

One of the men a few stools away clears his throat. Impatient bastard.

The bartender’s eyes finally break mine. He looks down at the bottle of vodka in his hand, then back up to me. He sets the bottle on the table. Solid glass on solid metal. Louder, because of the weight, but softer because of the nature of his movement. “This should be more than enough to last you the rest of the night. You want to just take it up to your quarters, so you can have some privacy?”

I eye the bottle. I’m not drunk enough to talk to R8 yet. Even the reminder of him twists at my chest. And Ben… I don’t think I would even know how to answer his questions. I don’t want to talk about anything with him.

“I’m not trying to promote alcoholism,” he chuckles, “But this isn’t the best place for someone like you to be alone.”

The men a few stools from me are staring. I feel it.

“Do you have any friends?” He asks.

“Yes.” I lie.

“Why don’t you invite them over to your quarters to share this? They can cheer you up.”

I glance back down at the bottle. Then back up at him. The men to my left raise their hands, signaling the bartender over.
My hand wraps around the neck of the bottle and I lift it off the counter. “I will.” I offer a smile. My muscles work hard to construct the emotion. I don’t think it quite processes all the way through my face. How odd it must look. “Thank you.”

He nods, “Take care, now.”

I leave.

There’s a cleaning supply closet I found nearby.

It’s loaded with several bottles of fluid, designed to make these floors shine and walls glimmer under the fluorescent lights that blind the hallways. Crammed into the nooks of the shelves and draws lining the walls are parts of maintenance droids, some of which I determined are completely outdated. I wonder why they still keep them here. We have better places to store old parts, surely. I quickly am able to come to the conclusion that we don’t need to resort to picking apart old droids to build new ones. We are the First Order. We can afford to waste. We can leave the scavenging to others, the lesser than us.

Where everything in Starkiller is usually clean and primed to meet a pristine standard, I find it ironic that the actual cleaning supply closet is so dirty. My gloved finger runs a line into the ground, scooping up the grime the shiny black leather collects. I then wipe it on my pant leg, a vertical line down my thigh. It starts off a light grey, then begins to blend into the darker grey of my uniform. I stare at the contrast of the two shades.

Then, I take another drink.

I look around the room again, as if something I didn’t see before would suddenly stand out to me. I’ve already read all the labels on all the cleaning supplies. Toyed with all the droids. Even pieced some apart just to put them back together. But as time went on, my mind gradually began to forfeit the ability to solve things. I glance down at the vodka. Then, scoff to myself at the little amount left. I wonder how many shots I’ve had now. I haven’t been measuring. I wouldn’t even know how much would be too much. Nor do I even remember how much was in the bottle to begin with. I didn’t think I cared to look.

I lean back against the wall and close my eyes.

I see the corpse Tuchell, immediately.

I open my eyes again.

Then, I grab the first cleaning solution I read. This time, I opt to read it out loud, only to distract myself with the sound of my own voice,

“Warning,” I clear my throat. “May cause serious eye irritation. Wash thoroughly after handling.”

I cough into my shoulder again, trying to get my voice to a neutral state. One where I’m not controlling it to be lower, more intimidating. Nor higher, more vulnerable. Unmanipulated. My voice. Me. I try to listen for it,

“First aid – if medical advice is needed, have product label at hand.”
I notice how the syllables seem to mesh into one another, slurring, curving. My voice sounds like a messy version of Ben’s calligraphy. It rises and falls the way he wrote against my skin, all connected, never hesitating. Fluid. I look down at my arm where the alphabet once rested against my flesh. I only find the grey sleeve of my uniform.

I read again, “If swallowed, rinse out of mouth and then drink plenty of water. Get immediate medical help. Do not induce vomiting.”

Vomiting. I still taste it in the back of my throat, still feel the lurch of my stomach. The speaking reminded me how sore my vocal chords were from the crying. Crying can make me feel so sore. I set the cleaning solution down, to grab the vodka, burning away the tender pain to replace it with a sharper one.

I begin to think about Ben again.

My body curls into itself and I push back against the wall.

I find myself wishing he was holding me, closing his arms around my frame. He’s big enough to cover me, his weight easy to succumb to. His voice gentle, low, steady… I wrap my arms around myself, emulating him, fists forming around the fabric of my uniform. I clench my eyes shut, trying to imagine what he looks like.

Once again, I see the corpse of Tuchell.

And immediately, I open my eyes.

I take another drink.

And in the middle of gulping down the fiery fluid, the door opens.

I slam the bottle onto the floor. Solid glass on solid metal. The objects shriek at the contact.

I stare into the figure in the doorway.

“Agent, what on earth are you doing?”

I don’t respond.

“Get up, right now.”

I blink up at the droid. Then, take another drink, staring right into its yellow orbs of eyes. I stand to my feet, waver at first, but soon finding my balance. I focus on keeping it. The room seems to spin. I seem to spin. But I don’t think I’m moving my legs. I ground myself in my hatred towards the droid. Then, I state, “You found me here.”

“Yes, now come back to your room before anyone sees you. Did anyone see you? Oh goodness! Is that blood on your uniform? Agent, did you—”

“Tell me how.” I interrupt. My voice is so calm. I’m surprised at my restraint. I remember the blistering anger I felt when I intoxicated myself the first time. But this, this is so different. It’s numbness. It’s distance. Logical hatred, unemotional despise. It’s exactly what I needed.

“I do not see how that is important, but if you wish to know, I used the surveillance cameras to track where you have been throughout the day. You left me no choice. I tried contacting you via comm-link endlessly.”
I step closer to the droid, a slight stagger in my movements. I use the shelf beside me to aid my walk, accidentally knocking down some spray bottle with my weight of a hand. I ignore it. “Now, why wouldya resort to surveillance tapes? That’s a lotta effort.”

“Because,” The droid stalls. It analyzes me. Trying to configure the correct answer for my current condition. It settles on, “I am worried about you, Agent. I even resorted to asking Ren where you were. He informed me that you were ignoring him too. He, might I add, is immeasurably worried as well. What happened?”

“Worried?” I scoff.

“Yes, Agent, I-” 

“I thought you didn’t feel things?”

The droid begins to back up, wavering at my advancement. “My programming allows for me to comprehend some digital stimulation of emotion, when it concerns you. It allows me to keep you in my best interests.”

“You keep saying that.” An amused smile settles on my lips. “My best interests… But that’s really not what you’re concerned about,” I poke at it’s metal chest plate, “is it?” It’s so cold.

The droid takes a long time to come up with an answer, confused, data scrambled by the response.

I fill in the gap the silence creates, answering for it, “I know you reported me to Snoke. I know about the tracker in my head.”

“Agent…” The droid scolds. It reaches back, closing the closet door behind itself, keeping outsiders from hearing on conversation.

I allow the platform to corner the droid, backing it further and further into the wall until I am seething the threat into its metal makeshift face, “And now, I am very inclined to rip you apart, bolt by bolt. Perhaps rewire your hard drive. I’ll make you feel fear if I have to program the emotion within you myself.”

R8 doesn’t react.

No expressions. No movement. It’s a droid.

I stare at it, not going back on anything I said, even if it doesn’t get me a reaction I wanted. I didn’t say it to get its reaction. I said it because I meant it. “You lied to me. Perhaps you’ve been neglectful of your own best interests.”

“I did what I must. And now, you know about the internal track system.” R8 states, coldly, reverting the subject. “I’m assuming Snoke told you, to motivate you into finding Skywalker.”

I roll my eyes, basking in the sensation of the droid’s assumptions being wrong, “Your immaculate general told me.” I shrug, “Just because he could. Seems like all three of us have a knack for snitching on each other.”

The droid sighs, “Goodness,” and begins updating information in it’s intelligence core. “He should not have done that. But possibly now, you can finally accept your situation. This could be good for you.”

“Finally accept it,” I roll my eyes, eyeing the large mop leaning in the corner. I imagine beating the
droid with it. “As if that has always been a problem of mine.”

The droid glances down to the vodka in my hand.

I take another drink, out of pure spite.

The droid ignores me, stating, “I suspected you were scheming against the Order with the prisoner - out of guilt. And I gave you the chance prove me wrong by going through with the General’s plan. You didn’t.”

“Don’t fucking call him a prisoner, like he was a criminal. He was a child.”

“Of the Resistance.”

“He never chose that life.”

“Warfare has never been about choosing your side.” The droid’s volume raises. “You were fortunate to be here. With the Order. You forget that.”

I back away, grumbling, “How selfish of me.”

The droid remains silent. I stare at it. For a moment, I am brought back to the first night it stayed in my room, when I was thirteen. It was just moments after I completely the initial assembly of the droid. I watched it from my bed as it stood in the corner, powering down for the night. I wondered how other agents could feel so attached to their droids already. I knew it was my babysitter, not my friend. I wish I maintained that mentality. I am not quite sure when I forsaken it. I don’t remember ever changing that mindset. But somewhere down the line, it happened.

The droid speaks, softer, “You are hurt by my actions. I apologize, as it was not my intention. I wish nothing more than for you to thrive in the Order.”

“Is that what I was doing before all this?” I shake my head slightly, crossing my arms. My grip on the neck of the bottle grows stronger, knuckles clenching. “Thriving? In a mission where I’m whored out to a commander, only to keep his temper tantrums in check? That’s what all my years here have led up to? Being a fucking lesson that he shouldn’t care about people?” My arms wave with the inflection of my words, “Being bait Snoke uses to lure Ren closer to him?”

The droid reaches back, pressing the button to open the door. “We should walk and discuss this. It is not good for you to be in such a pitiful location. You are filthy. We must return to your room.”

“I’m one of the best Agents here, fuck anyone who put me on this dumbass mission.” I take another swig of vodka.

“The Supreme Leader assigned you to this mission.”

“Then, fuck him.”

The droid’s eyes light up, incredibly bright and it physically grabs my arm, pulling me out of the closet. Weakened by my shock of the action, I’m forced to follow the droid out. “You should be executed for saying that.”

“I should be killed for a lot of things.” I gurgle. In the words, I see how white Tuchell’s eyes they were as rolled to the back of his head. “Report me. Fucking do it.”

The droid continues forward. I don't think it intends on reporting me this time.
So I focus on walking. Concentrating on walking helps me keep my mind away from darker things, sadder things. Maybe following R8 is good. I want to lay down in a bed. I want to escape to sleep. A state of nonexistence for a few hours. Maybe I’m drunk enough to close my eyes now, to meet true darkness and nothing my imagination can recreate.

The droid says nothing until we enter the elevator.

I look around the vessel.

With a blink, then see Hux standing in front of the panel of buttons. Three guards surround me. Hux looks back to me, smirking. I wonder if I can kill him and get away with it. I wonder where he’s taking me.

In another blink, Hux and his troopers disappear. There’s only R8.

“If you wish to know the truth about your mission here, I discovered it. The Supreme Leader informed me, after your mission on Hoth – when things really got out of hand.” R8’s steady voice quietly explains, “And I believe you have a right to know, now. No more secrets between the two of us.”

Disinterested, still untrusting, I shrug, “No more secrets.”

“Your mission was never about Kylo Ren.” The droid states.

“Everything is always about Kylo Ren.” I mumble.

“Kylo Ren was your cover.”

I’m not buying that at all. I still amuse the droid, curious of the direction of the lie, “Cover for what?”

“The assassination of Eerson Ren. That was it. That was the mission. Anything before was to reduce suspicion with the Commander. Anything after was caused by your complications with the Commander. Complications with Hoth – complications even I contributed to in aiding Ren to find you before the Resistance could kill you.”

That would be a weird lie for the droid to make up. There’d be no motivation behind it, whatsoever. I try to wrap the fog of my mind around such an idea. Still, it doesn’t make sense. Why not tell me from the beginning that I was just supposed to kill Eerson? Why even bother with the whole spying on Kylo Ren angle?

Hoth…

Of course.

I start laughing. Kylo Ren wasn’t just a cover for my true mission. It was a cover for my eventual death. If I believed I still had a job to do, I wouldn’t suspect them of ridding of me after killing Eerson. Of course, they would try to kill me on Hoth. A task such as killing a Knight of Ren would surely spoil an Agent’s worth. And all the things I’ve done before, on top of that? Anything else I’ve done with Ren has been Snoke improvising, so that his precious apprentice remains content, unsuspecting. My laughs grow hysterical. My sides hurt. R8 stares at me.

Everything makes so much sense.

I sigh, my smile turning sore. “Killing Eerson was so fucking easy. That was supposed to be my final mission? All I had to do was make out for a minute and then…” I sigh, gathering my composure,
“He was so lonely. Just like everyone else here.”

R8 drones on. “The Supreme Leader saw him as a weakness. You were to eliminate it.”

“Mission accomplished, then.” I close my eyes, sighing. When I do, I see Eerson Ren reaching out, trying to use the Force to close my throat. It’s no use. The dagger in the back weakened him far too much. The shock blindsided him, unfocused him.

I plunge another dagger into his chest to finish the job.

When I look back up to his face, I don’t see the olive skin, the warm eyes, the wrinkles of age only beginning. I see Tuchell Lau. I twist the knife in his chest.

Then, I remove it.

It’s Eerson Ren again, dead.

Then, I can’t tell if it’s either Tuchell or Eerson. It’s just a blur of a corpse. I focus my vision, Tuchell or Eerson? Perhaps it’s both.

I open my eyes to find a parted elevator door. R8 stands in the doorway, calling for me, “Agent?”

I follow his voice. Using his steps as a guide for my own, I allow my memories to replace my surroundings. Memories of the last time I was drunk. Kylo Ren held me, carrying me throughout the halls like some sort of child. I liked it and I liked to pretend that I didn’t like it. Child. I pretended that I thought the choices I made that night were shameful. I apologized for such poor decisions. I wasn’t sorry. Such a child. I touch the walls with my gloved finger tips, using it to keep me walking in a straight line.

Closing my eyes this time, I’m in the cockpit of his shuttle, before our Korriban arrival. He’s in his mask. I still am unaware of what his face looks like. It could be anything. The worst face in the world, or the best. Or something incredibly average. I wrap the blanket around my shoulders tighter. He calls me immature. I forget why. Oh. Because I don’t want to sleep in his bed. Or at least, I don’t want him to think I mind it. He looks at my leg, where the blaster shot went into my thigh.

I stumble into the wall of the hallway, then bounce back into a straight path.

Suddenly, I’m running through the muddy soil surrounding the factory on the moon of Jabiim. I’m watching him fly away in that same shuttle. Abandoning me. Leaving me to die here, in this abandoned shit-pile of a factory. I run away from the building, glancing back at it just quickly enough to watch it explode.

When the smoke clears, a different factory reappears. Smog surrounds the air. This time, there’s a small house before us, in the foreground. I recognize it. It’s the Lau Household. Hux sinisterly grins back at me before he turns to knock on the door. A little girl in a pink nightgown answers. I watch her mother and father die later. And brother, soon after. I see Tuchell’s corpse.

Then Eerson Ren’s.

“All of this for Eerson Ren to die.” I mumble, stumbling forwards, laughing some more. “Is that right?”

Then, it’s only R8 in front of me. We are back in my room. I don’t remember getting here. But we made it.
R8 nods. “At first,” He continues, “But now, you know something about where to find Skywalker?”

“I’m having Force visions,” I fall against the wall, leaning pathetically, my fingers wiggling with mysticism. I whisper the magical words to the droid, unable to take myself seriously in saying such nonsense. “It’s why I’m not dead yet.”

“I see that.”

“Maybe I’ll get lucky and keep getting new visions, once each is fulfilled.” I look up, “Can you do me that favor, god of Force? Or gods? What the fuck is even the Force?” I start laughing again, retreating to my bed. I fall down on the covers.

“You should begin to drink water.” R8 instructs, “You have a meeting in one hour.”

I sit up. No longer laughing. “Meeting?”

“Yes, it was scheduled on a whim, but your presence is mandatory. There has been a development with finding Skywalker. Which, if you are intending to stay alive, I recommend attending.”

I fall back onto the bed. A meeting. I accidentally drop the bottle to the ground, not realizing the weakness of my grip. Solid glass on solid metal. The crash is brutal. I grimace. I’m not going to any fucking meeting. That’ll be the last thing I do today, I swear it. “Put a movie on the holocron.” I order the droid.

“You should clean up. I will pour you some water. Becoming as sober as possible should be your main priority.”

I glance up to the droid, watching it make its way to my kitchen. It opens the refrigerator door. I laugh, the sound coming from my stomach, low, “Do what I told you or I swear to god I will bash your head into that kitchen counter over there.”

The droid stares at me, blankly.

He doesn’t think I’ll do it.

Begrudgingly, I roll off the bed. I will do it. Frankly, there’s nothing more I’d like to do than completely crush this droid right now.

“Fine,” The droid snips, making its way towards the holocron located on the table at the edge of my bed. “But you need to start getting ready.”

I laugh again, falling back onto the bed. I crawl under the covers, wrapping myself in their warmth.

R8 stops in its steps.

I stare back, ferociously.

Then, instead of advancing towards the holocron, it’s eyes flicker.

“Commander Ren,” The droid says, “Agent 2319 has returned to her dormitory.”

“Fuck you,” I sneer at the droid, jumping up from the bed once again. I don’t have any idea what Ren is responding with. Or how he’s reacting to me going out of my way to make sure I have no connection with him. I try not to care. It doesn’t work.

“She’s refusing to attend the meeting at fifteen-hundred.” The droid states.
I stumble into the kitchen, making my way towards the droid. “R8 end that call right now,” I say, before processing the fact that Ren can hear my words too.

The droid says, before I can advance towards it any more, “She does have her comm-link.”

I freeze in my steps. I nearly trip, the room beginning to spin again. My head pounds. Fuck. I’m too drunk, even if I wanted to attend this meeting.

The droid nods towards my pocket. “Agent, do you mind speaking directly to Commander Ren?”

I do not answer.

“She refuses, sir.”

The droid is silent for a long time. My throat swells as I repress the urge to start crying again.

Then, it says, “Of course.”

The droid’s eyes blink.

“You shouldn’t have done that.” I hiss.

“Get ready.” The droid responds, now ordering me.

I want to hit it. I want to hit something, anything. I want to destroy this whole dormitory, this prison cell. My fists clench hard, as I try to think of how I will do it. But my mind grows foggy. My confusion, just as strong as my anger, my anger just as strong as my exhaustion. I blink, feeling the tears fill up in my eyes. I can’t cry. I’m too tired to start crying again.

R8 repeats, “Go get ready. Take your mind off of it by supplying yourself with other tasks.”

He’s right. Ren’s gonna be here any minute to force me to go to that meeting. I try to anticipate what he’ll do to convince me and what he’ll do when I tell him no. I probably haven’t contributed much to helping his mental state. Will he crying? Or yelling? What will I be doing? Probably either crying or yelling, too.

I strip off the gloves first, throwing as hard as I can into a crumbled mess on the bed. As I walk towards the bathroom, I begin peeling away at the grey blazer, ripping it away from me. It zips up so high, that every time I tilt my chin downwards, the collar digs into my neck, forcing my head upwards. I’ve always hated that about these uniforms.

I finish undressing in the bathroom.

Once I’m done, I let go of any extra anger by throwing a fist into the wall.

R8 yells at me for that.

My knuckles are split open now.

I stand in the shower and turn the water on as hot as possible. It scorches my skin.

There’s a knock at the dormitory door.
R8 must let him in. The door swooshes open, then shut. There’s nothing I want more than to go out to him, to start kissing him until my lips are numb, until everything is numb. Anything to keep us from talking to each other. I close my eyes, tilting my head back so that the searing heat of the water pierces my face. The humidity makes it nearly impossible to breath. But being under the water directly helps. I don’t know why.

“Agent?”

That’s not Kylo Ren.

I step out of the water.

“Lex?” I call out, confused.

“Yeah,” She says, voice lingering, “We have that meaning in fifteen minutes. We should go down there together.”

I sigh, stepping back into the water. My skin takes a moment to get back used to the temperature, flinching at the heat at first. Of course, Ren would send Lex to get me. She’s debatably harder to say no to than him. Not to mention, he most likely doesn’t have time to deal with whatever issues I’m having. Nor, does he want to even talk to me after I’ve been explicitly ignoring him all day. Or after I called him an incredible coward. “I’m not going to that.”

“Why not?” She asks.

I close my eyes again, trying to think of a good enough lie to get her to leave. I settle with, “I’m feeling ill.”

A pause. “Do you need to talk about it?”

“No.”

There’s silence.

Then, “Whatever happened with you and Kylo, it’ll be fine. I’m sure you guys will work it out.”

I amuse myself by rolling my eyes at the assumption. It’s fair, I suppose. Especially since she’s probably been with him all day. I run another hand through my hair. I wonder if he’s been complaining about me. I wonder if he told her about our argument. How much detail would he go into?

“If I know one thing about Master Ren, it’s that he’s dedicated. He’s not going to… um,” The words come painfully unnatural to her as she speaks, “give up whatever you guys have. You know?”

I tilt my head against the shower wall, letting the water hit my shoulder blades. I close my eyes, stabilizing myself. In doing this, I remember just how hard it is to keep my balance with in complete darkness. I open them again, barely, exhaustion keeping my lids heavy.

“Do you want me to come in?” She asks.

I look down at my naked figure. “I’m in the shower.”

“But are you okay?”

“I’m naked.”
“But are you okay? Do you… Do you need help or anything?”

I squint my eyes, now just confused, “I don’t think so?”

I can hear how flustered she’s getting in her tone, “I’m just asking cause there’s a bottle on the floor in here and it’s pretty close to being empty and your speech sounds kind of slurred and-”

“I’m fine.” I snap, harsher than I mean to. Immediately, I curse myself for being so rude to her. She’s far too nice to be dealing with me right now. Ren isn’t. He should’ve came instead. Fucking coward.

“Agent…” She begins. She’s louder now. Yet still gentle. She must be against the door. “Please come out. Kylo needs you to be on this mission. He needs you, just in general. Now more than ever.”

I remain still.

“And I want to help you. But I can’t when you’re in there and I’m out here.” Her tone is so warm, I nearly melt, “Please, let me help you.”

In the sincerity of her words, I tremble. I wonder if I'm crying. I don't know, while I'm in the shower if I cry or not. The tears get lost in the water hitting my face. I lean forward enough to say quietly, “There’s nothing you can do to help me.” I find myself turning the faucet off, just to be able to hear her voice better. To be able to feel her comforting presence more, to focus on it. It lingers in the air. I’m bad at zeroing in on it, but it’s there. And it’s warm. And I crave more of it. I hold onto it, tightly.

The humidity surrounds me. Suffocates me. I lean against the shower’s wall exhausted, focusing on not slipping. The room beings to spin again. I brace myself.

“I promise you,” I can hear the optimistic smile in her voice, “I will do whatever I can to prove you wrong!”

I find my arm fumbling against the hook for a towel. The desperate urge to just be with someone who doesn’t want me dead or suffering surrounds me. My lip begins to tremble. A fist forms around the towel, and I wrap it tightly around me, not even caring to make an effort to dry off. All I bother to do is make sure I’m covered. I stagger across the tile towards the door. Before I can talk myself out of it, I open it.

She’s there, looking back at me. Patiently. Kindly. But concerned too. But not in the way Ben looks at me, when he’s worried. Ben looks so panicked when he’s worried. She’s so much calmer. Her mask is off, under her arm, but she’s in her regular Knight of Ren garb. The black textures and belt of weapons look like a costume on her. Her hair is braided back, away from her face, identical to how I last saw it. Her eyes are so familiar, so big, so full of life. Childish, even. They’re the same color dark, oak-y color as Tuchell’s.

Tuchell.

Then, suddenly, I fall into her, wrapping my arms around her as tightly as I can manage. I know I’m trembling as she doesn’t embrace me back. I don’t let up. I hold her tighter, pathetically begging her to hold me too.

There’s a loud clank. Her mask falling to the ground. Solid metal on solid metal.

Her arms embrace me, so tightly, wrapping firmly around my waist.

I dig my face into her warm shoulder, letting the skin of my face meet the soft bare skin of her neck.
She leans into my ear, shushing me, as her small hand runs up the length of my back. She touches me gently, yet so sure of herself. Not shy, nor hesitant, as I would have assumed her to be. As her bare hands reach to my bare shoulder blades, I sink further into her embrace, exhaling for what feels like the first time in hours.

“I’m so scared.” I utter into her, unsure they are even audible.

“There’s no fear.” She whispers back. “Just the Force…” I can hear the way she recites the way she learned it. I wonder if it’s Ren’s words that she’s repeating. “Do you feel it? Because I do. It’s guiding you. It’s all around you.”

I just feel her. Holding me. I focus on that. Nothing else.

She pulls away slightly. My weak slump lowers me to her height, her holding me up. She smiles warmly, bringing a hand from behind my back to brush a wet strand of hair sticking to my cheek. “Let it in.” Her smile is so kind, so genuine.

“I don’t know how, I don’t want-”

“Shh…” She whispers now, “Close your eyes.”

I do.

There’s still the unbalance that comes with the action. The threat of what my imagination will show me. I don’t know what I’m looking for. The Force doesn’t work with me. I’ve embarrassingly tried moving things with my mind before, just to amuse myself. I’m not a Skywalker. I haven’t been training my life for this. This isn’t any of my concern right now. Tuchell just died because of me and I’m trying to be spiritual?

“Quiet your mind.” She instructs calmly. “It’s beyond your thoughts. Look for it. Reach for it.”

I push my mind outwards, like I do when I try to project things to Snoke, to Leia, to Ben, just to humor Lex. I wonder if she can pick up on the fact I’m just doing this to appease her. I try to project something to her. Not anything in particular. Do I have to be particular with my thoughts? I just focus on her energy. The light, the warmth. A lot like Ben’s. But different. Individually her own.

“Yeah,” Her voice returns, encouraging, “I feel you. Do you feel me?”

There’s a prod at my mind, similar to when Ben tries to enter it. “I do.”

“Go beyond me. Outside of the both of us.”

Beyond her? To what? If I’m not reaching out to someone with the Force, where do I find it? I project my energy similarly outwards, just more generally. Beyond her. Beyond me. Outside of the both of us. There’s nothing. I press harder. Nothing.

What am I even doing? This isn’t me. This isn’t meant for me.


Did it?

I guess it did.

I just so happened to stumble upon the map the two opposing sides of this war are fighting for. That couldn’t have been by chance. I found it because something led me there. It didn’t lead any of the
Knights. Or even Kylo. It led me. It was an energy, alive, moving, pushing me forward. The same thing that led me into the cave on Korriban to comfort Ren. The same thing that pursued me to tell General Organa my plan about the Lau children. Something that’s always been there, growing in some moments to be powerful, all-consuming, and then fading away into something I could easily dismiss or ignore.

But it’s always been there.

I try to reach out to that.

Then… there’s something. Barely.

It doesn’t look like anything. But it’s there and I can perceive it somehow. It’s the energy of everyone on this planet, every last stormtrooper, every officer, Ren, Lex, everyone. So unified, but distinct as I press deeper. I pull back, refocusing the energy. There’s more. It goes beyond people. It’s the energy from outside of this building. The life of the trees, the cold brutal snow that covers the ground. And beneath that, the energy that keeps this planet functioning. It’s as if the planet itself breathes.

And the thing that keeps it breathing is the same thing that keeps me breathing.

I feel it, so clearly.

It’s aware of me, too.

It’s stability.

I open my eyes, stumbling away from Lex, unable to hold back hysterical laughter. The energy retreats the moment I do.

I hold my towel against my form, back pressing against the doorway. The laughter consumes me.

She giggles at my reaction, eyebrows raised, “You felt it?”

I try to push past the absurdity of what I just experienced to answer, “I think I drank too much.”

“You felt it!” She beams, proud of herself, proud of me. The warmth in the room grows.

I run a hand into my hair, making my way back into my bedroom. I cross to my dresser, shaking my head, to realize my whole body is shaking. Inhale. Exhale. Blood pumps viciously throughout my body. “I felt something.”

“It’s the Force surrounds you.” She beams, “I felt something too. That was so weird. It's like our minds were meshed together.”

I nod absentmindedly, taking out a fresh uniform from my dresser while trying desperately to gather my mind.

She goes on, excitement enriching her tone, “Ren was right! You have a part in all of this! You have the key to the Order’s success!”

Right. I scoff at the fact Ren could so confidently speak about my ‘destiny’ to her. “You really buy into the idea that finding Skywalker will be what determines the Order’s success?” I gather the uniform in my arms, pressing it to my chest. My skin dots with goosebumps. All I want to do is dive back into whatever energy I found, to go deeper, to find something new. To let it protect me,
envelope me, from the thoughts I do not want to revisit.

It was the Force. It was the fucking Force. I laugh again, my eyes catching the pants of my old uniform on the ground of the bathroom. I make my way towards it.

Lex elaborates, “I think that Luke Skywalker’s existence creates a disturbance in the Force, for Kylo and the Supreme Leader. Once he is gone, their power can expand.”

“Is that how that works?” I raise an eyebrow.

“I do not question Master Ren or the Supreme Leader.” She states clearly.

I reach down to crumpled up trousers, digging in the pocket with my freehand. “It has nothing to do with the fact Ren hates Luke, personally? Or the Supreme Leader being threatened by Luke?”

She gapes at me, stunned. “Wh-why would you-” a gulp. “The Supreme Leader cannot be frightened. You shouldn’t suggest such a thing.”

I shrug, digging out the map from the pocket. I run my thumb against it. “I probably shouldn’t.” Then, I grab my comm-link

She doesn’t even give the items a glance. She only reaches down to the ground, picking her helmet up from the ground. “You’re going to do some amazing things on this mission. You just have to trust yourself – the Force.”

I look away from the ring, back up to her.

Her eyes scan me up and down, cheeks growing flushed, “I guess I’ll let you – um – get dressed in here. I’ll wait outside?”

I force a smile, “Of course.”

She closes the door, leaving me to myself.

I reassemble my uniform, organizing my thoughts. I’m not ready to conjure up a plan. Or even assess what is happening or what I must do. Getting dressed is my main – my only – goal. Once I am clothed, I stuff the items back into my pocket.

It’s not until I have to slide on the leather gloves that I notice my knuckles are still bleeding. I glance to the part of the wall I stuck; unbothered, solid metal. I rub the broken skin of my knuckles.

Lex walks so lightly down the hallway. I’ve forgotten how unsettling it can be, to walk next to her. Her uniform seems so heavy, yet she moves as if she is air. Even with her mask on, she’s so easy to read, easy to envision. Her and Ben alike, I suppose.

Stars, I don’t want to see him right now.

I dread it the whole way to the debriefing room.

I make Lex walk in the door first.
And when I walk in, I’m met with full table, every one of its occupants directing their gaze on me. Including Ren, who I only keep in my peripherals. My eyes scan for General Hux, first and foremost. He’s not here. Good. All the Knights are here, all masked. A lieutenant. And officer - Officer Hask. He’s a brute of a man, hair brown-grey under his flat officer hat, face covered in a messy 5 o’clock shadow with dark, bushy eyebrows. If he didn’t have such a commendable reputation here, I’m sure he’d get shit on for looking so rough. Perhaps his most identifiable trait is the deep scar starting at the bottom of his chin and running to the middle of his cheek. It travels across the expanse of his skin harshly, snaking against the corner of his mouth, barely missing the crease of his frown. It healed badly. I wonder sometimes if he took bad care of it on purpose, so he could wear the wound around like a badge. I know of certain people here who have done that. Wounds are proof you fought for the Order. Wounds are proof you are willing to bleed for them.

There’s an empty seat at the very end of the table. Then one towards the middle. Lex sits down in the middle one, leaving the one on the end to me. The chair that directly faces Ren.

Fuck.

I settle into it, the silence of the room making my footsteps and the creaking of the chair adjusting to my weight is everyone’s focal point. I avert my eyes towards the table, avoiding Ren’s gaze. Maybe he looked away.

“Officer Hask, I give the responsibility of leading this meeting to you. You may begin when ready.”

I look up. He didn’t look away. The black-silver mask is staring right at me. I look down.

Hask stands from his chair to my right, clearing his throat, surprised by Ren’s request. “Of course, Commander. I’ve been ready,” His sarcasm is so palpable. “Sorry if we rushed you, Agent, do you need more time to settle?”

I glance up to Hask. His cold grey eyes bore into me. He’s been an agent himself before his promotion. That’s where he gets his smugness, I presume. I say coldly, “I am settled.”

“With as much time as you already wasted in your tardiness, I’d hate to waste any more. But I do always request an explanation for any delays.” He snips.

Of course he fucking does. I sigh slowly, my eyes finding themselves on Ren. He’s still staring, silently. Ren wants an explanation much more than Hask, I imagine. I allow whatever part of me is still intoxicated to give me to courage to say, “If you seek an explanation, I suggest going to General Hux.” Not curling up into myself as I say that name is a difficult task. Ren sits up at the sound of it, interest abruptly piqued. The silence in the room forces me to continue, quieter than I intend, “As my primary supervisor, he is authorized to override all other engagements to request my aide.”

Out of the corner of my eye, Hask tilts his head, curious, “Very well.”

But I remain focused on Ren’s complete stillness. I can’t read him. I don’t even try to, afraid of what I may find. There’s a quick probe at my mind. But it retreats, immediately deciding better of itself. He may be afraid too. He crosses his arms, finally looking away once again.

Hask continues, “Forgive my accusation, Agent. It’s been a long day. I should have known that you, of all people, would have a suitable explanation.”

It’s a stretch to use Hux as the only reason for why I’m late. I return my gaze back to the tabletop, sitting up straighter. My balance wavers. Can Ren tell I’m still drunk? Shit. I say as smoothly as I can manage, “I understand, Officer.”
Hask begins to address all at the table, “Commander Ren is assembling a task force to travel to the planet of Pilio. We’ll have Lieutenant Famma on communications, and I will serve as co-head of the team. Agent 2319, you will serve as Commander Ren’s support while the Knights remain here to work on more investigation of the observatories and artifacts. I assume Ren had already detailed your work for you?”

The Knights say, all in unison, “Yessir.”

An image of the planet pops up on the holocron at the middle of the table. I recognize it from a few months back, when he was going through the different kinds of observatories the Emperor possessed in his room. It has the same wispy clouds, red landscape and blue oceans.

Hask continues, droning on, “Thanks to the Order’s connections with Jinata Security, and bounties put out by Ren, we have apprehended a prisoner that is aware of Lor San Tekka’s current location. This prisoner is aboard a former Imperial vessel, now used to serve under the New Republic.” His voice slightly wavers, a specific bitterness beginning to trickle into his tone. I don’t think twice about it. I don’t care enough to. “Commander Ren will interrogate the prisoner, then I request to speak to the prisoner myself. The man was a former member of the Empire, one I worked alongside. He may have information I need for my personal endeavors for the Order, so with your permission, Commander, I—”

“I don’t care.” Ren interrupts, bluntly.

“I do not intend to take him as prisoner.” Hask adds on. “With your authorization.”

Ren looks away from the floor, for the first time giving Hask his full attention. Ren barks, voice jarring, commanding, familiar, “Skin him alive. Torture him to death. Whatever you wish. As long as I get the location of that map, I do not care for your personal interests in the man.”

My skin crawls. I picture a screaming, tortured Tuchell Lau.

“You shall receive that information, Commander.” Hask says, “Thank you.”

There’s another long, awkward silence.

Then, Hask says, “We shall leave in approximately thirty minutes. Agent, that should give you enough time to gather your weapons. Lieutenant, set up the communication networks in this time. This should be a smooth and direct mission. Let’s ensure that.” Another silence. Then, “Commander Ren, I give the floor to you for further comments.”

Ren immediately snaps, “Meeting adjourned.”

No one moves, just staring at him, looking to each other, waiting for someone to be the first to leave.

Hask is, hesitantly stepping behind my chair and exiting the room. Once he leaves, the Lieutenant stands. Then the Knights. They file out quietly, quickly. I don’t move. Neither does Ren.

We remain looking at the top of the table, until the last person, Solaw Ren, exits. Solaw hesitates before he closes the door, presumably waiting to see if Ren or I make an effort to exit. We don’t.

The door hisses shut.

We sit in silence for a long time. He no longer harbors a frantic rush to go find Skywalker, destroying everything in his path until he does. It’s quiet. But mostly heavy. The table separating the two of us stretches so long. I feel like I would have to yell to get him to even hear me. What would I
tell him? What could I? Everything will be shared with Snoke. Do I even care anymore? Does he care anymore? What the hell do I have to lose?

We both look to each other, simultaneously.

We hold the stare.

He breaks the silence, “What did he do?”

I open my mouth to answer, but no words come out. They get caught in my throat, unable to form, let alone project.

“Tell me.” He says quietly, mask tilting upwards. He sits up straighter, trying to presume his superior position over me. “That’s an order.”

He’s back to ordering me now. I can’t help but crack a small, sad smile at the idea of it. “An order…” I repeat back to him softly.

“Yes.” He doesn’t retreat from it.

If it were a few months ago, I would ask him what he’s going to do if I don’t tell him. I would challenge him, try to see if he could make me speak. I would be curious to see if he would pull it from my mind himself. But a few months were a long time ago. Now, I can only admit, “I don’t know.”

He leans forward, arms uncrossing, “Did he hurt you?” He goes on, quieter, “I need to help you. Just…” He pauses, collecting himself, “You have to tell me.”

I want to. I really do. I look away from him, wondering how. What angle should I go about this? Should I go about this at an angle? I just need to be honest. Lex Ren’s voice comes back into my head, promising to help me too. No one can help me. I’m doomed. I always have been. I wish he could just enter my mind, see everything I’ve been hiding. There's a lot. There's too much. I come to a conclusion of what a summary of today's events is, finally speaking up, “General Hux disclosed the information that I am trapped here.” I shudder. “Forever.”

He leans back. “You’re not.”

I nod, exhaling, “I am.”

“I told you to leave if you wanted, I gave you so many chances, and every time you-”

“There’s an implant in my head.” I interrupt before his tone can get too overbearing. I snap back at him, “It’s constantly tracking me. Monitoring me. Making sure I’m where I’m supposed to be and never straying.” I scoff, wrapping my arms around my body, “I’m trapped here and there’s nothing you can do to change that.”

He takes a while to process that.

He never does respond.

I add on, fueled by the sudden urge to binge all the truth I’ve been keeping from him, “Hux had me kill one of the prisoners, from that factory planet today.”

He mumbles, barely audible, “I’m sorry…” He thinks for a moment, then decides on clarifying, needing to remind himself, “One of the children?”
I nod, forcing myself to be as emotionally distant as possible from what I’m admitting to.

“He must have saw your sympathy – your weakness.” Ren reasons. I don’t scorn him for pointing out the obvious, despite the overwhelming urge to. He states, sure that his bluntness is helpful, “Your guilt is pointless.”

I swallow hard, staring silently at the masked creature.

“Children of the Rebellion are not worth your grief.” I wonder if when he says those words, he truly means what he says, or if he’s only saying it because it’s what he knows he should say. It’s what R8 said. But he is no droid, despite his modulated voice and expressionless face. I know who he is.

I remind him of that, my stare narrowing, “None of them are?”

He leans back. I don’t think he has a response to that either. Nor do I have a follow-up. So we just stare at each other for another long duration of time. Until he says, “You’re uninspired. I foresee that the destruction of Skywalker will encourage you to fight harder than you ever have for the Order. You must preserve, until then.”

I scoff. Ridiculous, to even think of that. I don’t know if I can. I don't think I physically can bring myself to do any of it, now.

I must have projected that.

Because he responds, “You don’t have any other choice, do you?”

I set my jaw, repressing the anger threatening to bubble up, through me.

“Perhaps your predicament is prophetic, in a way.” His voice is just barely unsteady as it projects through the modulator. He’s unsure. But he wants to believe it. He wants me to believe it too. “I don’t think the implant is a symbol of entrapment.”

My eyes sting at the sensation of tears trying to form, but not finding the resources to. He sees it as a symbol. A will of the Force. A shiver runs down my spine at such a perverted interpretation. “What is it, then?”

“A reminder.” His voice breaks, for the first time in our conversation. “Of where you truly belong.”

“With the Order.” I whisper, finally accepting what he believes I am to be. I reach up to feel for the scar on the back of my neck. This... this is great for him. This is all he's ever wanted. Someone who would truly never leave him.

“And with me.” The words are blatant, scared. Childish and naïve. Everything I affirming what I know Kylo Ren to be. He stands to his feet. Stepping around the table, he makes his way towards me. When he comes beside my seat, he lowers himself down to one knee. He reaches up to his mask, to the release hatches.

With a hiss, his face is revealed, once again. I expected him to look just as fatigued, just as emotionally stripped as I left him. But he’s nearly glowing. Clean, curled hair brushed smooth, pale skin so much livelier. His brown, passionate eyes filled with ember sparks. He removes his right glove to reach to my face, caressing my jaw. The bare skin of his hand shoots warmth throughout my whole body. I've forgotten how easy it is for him to do that. He looks like royalty. I suppose he is. But kneeling here, in front of me, so sure of his purpose... He's absolutely striking like this.

He whispers, “You were right, the other night. I know I am a coward. And I’m sorry. No more
weakness. No more of that. I know who I need to be.” His thumb runs across my cheekbone. “I know who you need to be, too. You’re Agent 2319. Best the Order has. Remember? Don’t you remember who you are?”

I take a minute to absorb his desperation. I allow myself to fully realize my words as I speak, “I think I’m starting to.”

There’s a slight smile.

He leans forward. I do too. Our lips press into one another’s. I’m reminded of how nice he feels, against me. How much less lonely it makes me, to touch him. We savor each other in the kiss, but do not indulge.

Pulling away he goes on, “The Supreme Leader warned me that you may try to deceive me, that you may be trying to create a rift between us, but I do not think it was intentional. I am aware that you and Snoke do not see eye-to-eye. But I can serve you both, very well. The Force has all brought us together, for a much greater purpose. I’m asking you to try to work with him, with me.” His adam's apple darts up, then down his throat. "I'm asking you to trust me. For the sake of the Order."

I reach up to his hand, pulling it down from my face. I hold it in my lap, running fingertips against the ridges and dips of his bones. My eyes flicker up to his, our gaze locking. As my throat threatens to close in on me, words burning as they come off my tongue, I manage to still sound gentle, sincere, when I exhale out the familiar mantra, “Live for the Order, die for the Order.”

He leans forward again, this time opting to kiss my cheek. His lips linger there.

I lean forward, nuzzling my face into his shoulder. My arms quickly follow, wrapping around him as tightly as I possibly can. He squeezes me back too. I close my eyes, falling back into the presence he omits through the Force. As soon as I open myself up to his mind, I sense an overwhelming amount of relief. There’s a bit of apprehension. But mostly relief. His mind is a nice hideaway from the time being.

When he pulls away, his eyes study me again. He mumbles, “You look so tired.” Soft fingers reach to my face, tracing the sensitive skin under my eye. "Get some rest. I can gather some troopers to provide me with support on this mission.” His hand retreats back to his side as he stands to his feet. “But I wish to seek out Lor San Tekka immediately, when I receive information on his whereabouts.” His smile grows. “I’ll need you there for that.”

“Of course,” I nod.

He grabs his helmet from the table, making his way to the door as he rambles, “If you want any food, I have some left-over roast in my fridge. Best not go on a mission like this on an empty stomach.”

He almost leaves, right then. Before I can do something stupid. Almost. Some part of me, a part of me that still insists to hang on to the last thread of hope calls out, “Ben?” It comes from a part of me that wonders if that side of him could be summoned with that three mere letters. A part of me that is convinced that such a name will bring back the memories of our night together on Naboo. It comes from a part of me that hopes he chooses to indulge in the thought of what Ben Solo means to me. I hope he knows what Ben Solo means to me. Even if he just acknowledges it for a moment. Even if it’s just between us.

He stills. Then, turns back towards me. He’s frowning now. “No more of that, either.” His jaw sets. “I like the way your voice sounds when you say my name, now.”
I swallow any disappointment to correct myself, “Kylo?” My voice cracks at the second syllable. I can’t say that name with any feeling, nor any genuineness. Not any more. I don’t think it’s possible to not feel completely dead inside as the word escapes my mouth.

He responds to it with a half-smile that looks just as artificial. Yet, he still insists, “Thank you.”

I nod, “Be safe.”

“Rest well.” He looks back at me one last time.

We exchange another lingering stare. His gaze softens, eyes filling up with incredible emotion.

He looks at me as if I, myself, am the human embodiment of the map to Luke Skywalker, while he says, "I love you."

It takes every ounce of strength I can find remaining within myself to not break down all over again with that. For the first time, I fully understand that he only admitted to loving me after realizing the true importance of my vision. I wonder if he would have came to that conclusion if such an epiphany did not strike him beforehand. I steadily reply, "I love you, too."

I pity him as he exits, leaving me in the cold debriefing room alone. I pity the way his lineage, his duty, has now completely consumed every last part of his life. I think back to a time where we used each other to escape the reality of our work. He cared for me, because I humored him, because I had a quieter mind than the terrified troopers around me. He thought I was game to play, a ticking time bomb to toy at. He said himself that my humanity refreshed him. My unexplored rebellion excited him.

I wonder if he’ll regret it all.

Because I don't think I'm going to.

Chapter End Notes

it's been a really long time. im so sorry <3 i love writing this and i promise, i'm working really hard to finish it. i want to get everything just right. you guys sticking around means the world. these authors notes are so redundant, but i mean it every single time. thank you so much :)

also, i noticed that the playlist was getting super long and kinda messy, so i went ahead and made an "album-length" one, just so it's not overwhelming. it has the 12 songs that i think are the most suitable for the tone/themes of this story on there, opposed to the 126 songs in the full playlist haha

refined playlist.
full playlist.
“I don't want whatever I want. Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if I just got everything I ever wanted just like that, and it didn't mean anything? What then?” — Neil Gaiman, Coraline

“Again.”

“Are you sure you’re ready this time?” I grin.

“Wait,” Solaw takes a deep breath, making sure his feet are shoulder to the part. He closes his eyes, exhaling steadily. “Count to three.”

“One,” I draw the blaster, aiming it to the target in front of me. Solaw relaxes his extended arm, ungloved fingers curling naturally. He stands perpendicular to my line of fire, a few feet to the left. “Two,” My finger grips the trigger. Exhale. “Three.” Squeeze.

With the sound of the blast, I hear a familiar scream in the back of my mind. I push it away, quickly, distracting myself with the way Solaw humorless squints his eyes, fingertips extending as the blaster shot zips right past him into the target, the board now sporting a clean hole through the bullseye.

“Fuck-ity shitfuck.” Solaw opens his eyes, glancing towards the target, shoulders slumping forward with defeat. He looks down at his hand, as if he were inspecting it for deficiencies. “How the hell does Master do it?”

Master. I still can’t get used to that. I return the pistol to the holster at my side, asking, “Why don’t you just ask him to teach you?”

He begins making his way back towards me, across the shooting range. “Oh, I know what he’ll say,” He brings two cupped hands up to his mouth, mocking the modulating sound of Ren’s low, condescending voice, “I am pleased to hear you harbor goals for yourself. But it is also important to have reason in setting these goals.”

“What Solaw is trying to say is,” Maes cuts in from behind me, lounging against the wall, fiddling with the attachment of her rifle. She’s been screwing it on then off, then back on again for minutes now. “He can’t do anything cool with the Force yet, and Master knows it.”

“I do a lot of cool things with the Force.” He scoffs, jumping over the barrier between us, separating the shooting range from the shooters.

Maes smirks, devilishly, “Catch!” In a swift move, she throws the metal barrel attachment to him, it flying more up in the air than over, towards him.

Solaw nearly dives, the object just barely making contact with his opened palm, which knocks it back, securely into his chest and against his folded arms.
She scoffs, “With the Force, dumbass.”

He rolls the piece off his arm, into his palm, then shoves it back at her, “You didn’t even count to three.”

I find myself smiling at the childish remark, looking away to ensure he’s not encouraged by my amusement. There’s some a guilt that my reaction brings to surface. I form my mouth back into a thin line, allowing my eyes to return to him.

He glances up to me, saying defensively, “Trust me, I can use the Force. I just gotta work on focusing it.”

I nod, “I don’t doubt you.”

Behind him, Maes mouths to me “you should.”

I smile again, letting the expression linger on a bit longer this time. Solaw gives her a dirty look, bushy eyebrows creased and lips downturned.

Maes shrugs with a flick of her long ponytail, the action swinging it from her shoulder to her spine. “Before you try to freeze a blaster shot mid-air, you gotta learn how to restrain people.”

“I can kinda do it!” He turns back to me, optimism returned, “Agent, try to move your right arm.”

“My right or your right?” I ask.

“Mine.”

“Do you need me to count you off?” I raise an eyebrow.

“No, just-” He outstretches his hand, staring viciously at my arm in concentration. A tingling sensation overwhelms my hand. “now!”

Before I try to, I curiously feel out the energy he’s extending to me. It’s shaky. It carries the same sensation of being submerged under water and running out of oxygen. There’s strength, but it cannot hold for long. I tell my arm to bend, fingertips to curl. At first, there’s restriction. But after pushing back against the energy with my own, I manage, my arm breaking free from the invisible restraint.

Solaw curses under his breath, shoulders slumping.

I reassure him, “That was good! It felt like Ren, for a minute there.”

Solaw’s eyes widen, attention completely piqued, “Master has done that to you before?”

In the cave on Korriban. And when I returned from Hoth, refusing to go to the med center. I nod, “The circumstances called for it, I suppose.”

“Does he…” His head tilts, curiously, “Don’t tell him I’m asking this, but does he use the Force a lot when you guys…” A pause. I squint my eyes. He goes on, “You know, have-” A hard swallow. “Sex?”

I nearly choke at the question, stomach flipping, “What?” Blood rushes to my face and I stammer, “That is not the nature of our relationship, he is my superior commander, and I was assigned to-”

“Sleep in his room on Korriban?” Maes joins in, eyes not leaving her rifle as she’s still preoccupied with adjusting it. She says, sounding bored, “I went to your room one night, to see if you wanted to
join our Dejarik tournament but you weren’t there. You weren’t there the night after either.”

Solaw adds on, “Master Ren also is like, constantly making eyes at you.”

“He wears a mask.” I retort.

Maes nods in agreement, “It makes it even worse.”

I cross my arms across my chest, rubbing restless hands against my arms. My face grows hotter. Does it even matter if they know? This has to badly tarnish Ren’s whole persona with his Knights. How often do they talk about us? “I really don’t think we should be discussing this.”

“We should, though.” Solaw continues on, despite my objection. His eyes grow wide with curiosity, words blubbering out, “I have too many questions. Like – does he let you wear the mask? Is he the big or little spoon? Where do you guys go on dates?”

“Maybe that’s what happened to Eerson,” Maes laughs, finally looking away from her rifle to stare right into my eyes, “Master had to take out the competition.”

Hearing his name paralyzes me. There’s no longer the joking ease of the conversation. Only a searing pain that consumes my chest. I can’t speak. I want to tell them how much Ren cared about Eerson, how he would never hurt him, how such a thing is excruciatingly far from the truth. How often do they still wonder about Eerson? My insides twist at the thought. Maes is joking about it. That’s good, perhaps. My eyes look to Solaw, who is now frowning. A nauseous sensation consumes me.

Maes rolls her eyes, glancing back to her gun. She starts trifling with the attachment again. “I was just joking.” She clarifies, to both of us, annoyed neither of us found it funny. She says, words directed to me, “Eerson had a thing for you, if you didn’t know.”

I swallow hard. According to Kylo, so did Solaw and Maes. I have no idea the extent of it. Perhaps Ren was just exaggerating, if he was jealous. I look back and forth between them. “He didn’t even know me.” I say, my tone low and even.

Maes says under her breath, “Guess it doesn’t matter now.”

“Fuck off, Maes,” Solaw comes back in.

Maes sighs, “You’re never gonna get over it if you keep moping about it.”

“And you’re not going to get over it by making it into some fucked up joke.”

They begin bickering more, amongst each other. I’ve come to terms that that is the nature of their relationship. My feet find themselves backing away, hands tingling. I’ve been doing alright. I have been okay. I just have to keep it together. Suddenly, I vividly recall what Eerson’s lips felt like as they pressed into my ear. He was warm. Gentle. He called me beautiful. A ringing sound enters my ears. I drown in it until I find myself at the door, then manage to announce with a tightened voice, “I’m going to head back to my room.”

Maes sighs, running her hand back her hairline, “Hey, I’m sorry, I didn’t.”

“No, it’s fine.” The words spew out quickly, a jumbled mess of a sentence, “Sometimes, joking about stuff helps, sometimes it doesn’t, I get that.”

Before she can respond, I exit the room.
The door to my dormitory swishes open.

“Agent!” The droid beams. “How was target practice?”

I don’t look at it, crossing to my bed. I remove my gloves. Then my boots. Then, my weapon holsters. I place it, along with my belt, on my nightstand. Once I find myself under the covers, I remove the jacket, so I’m only in my trousers and undershirt. I throw the jacket on the ground, with my gloves and boots. I hear the droid approach it. I pull the covers up, over my head. The droid begins to clean the mess I made.

Under the safety of my covers, I find myself reaching in my pocket for my comm-link. I hold it up to my ear, clicking it on. It beeps. Now would be the time it would tell me if I missed any incoming transmissions. No one has tried to contact me. I pull the comm-link away from my ear and rub my thumb along its smooth surface.

It’s been three days since Kylo Ren left for the planet of Pillio. The travel time accounts for a good fraction that, I can imagine. It’s far away. I don’t think he would have gotten into any trouble, with the prisoner. The debriefing meeting made the mission seem simple enough. I was initially supposed to be his only support, so I can imagine no one was expecting any sort of combat.

In the darkness under my covers, the empty space around me in bed, I find myself missing him more. I begin to wonder how I ever could have lived here without him. How did I manage it? I reattach the comm-link to my ear, then pull the covers around my body tighter, letting the warmth envelop me. I close my eyes.

It’s easy to remember why I could not make friends before. I can’t even go to the shooting range with Solaw and Maes without being reminded I killed their best friend. Eerson was probably more like family to them. It’s easier to remember why friendship only worked with Kylo Ren. He never makes me feel guilty for being his friend. I know I lie to him. I know I have manipulated him. I probably should feel guilty.

But when I close my eyes, I see the way he choked Tuchell Lau in that corridor. The Force squeezed at his slender throat, causing him to squirm desperately, to no avail. I see the way he ripped into Iris Nisedge’s mind, breaking her from the inside-out. I see how quickly he accepted Eerson Ren’s death, after it was revealed that I did it – after it was revealed Snoke did it.

Maybe that’s why I don’t feel guilty. We deserve each other. It’s always been that way, it always will be.

The thought leads me into sleep.

Rain.

It comes down the sky like torpedoes, the large droplets plummeting against me. I shiver squinting ahead of me. It’s too foggy. I can’t see what’s in front of me. So, I look up. A purple and teal swirling sky, laced with lightening and rolling, grey clouds. The fog ahead of me is clear, by the time I look ahead once again. It’s the stone hut.

Before I walk towards it, I try looking behind me. Usually, I only find darkness. But this time, I see
several identical huts, the warm glow from their windows and shining through the burlap cloth doors illuminate the darkness of the storm. It’s a village.

I turn back around to the hut I am supposed to go into. The hut I usually go into. I consider exploring, first. But before I can make that decision, my feet are already leading me inside the hut, pushing back the burlap cloth, entering without invitation.

When I do, I see the old man sitting there, identical to the last time I saw him. I mentally go down the checklist. Navy tunic, brown coat, animal-hide belt, holstered knife, ancient neck jewelry. His bright blue eyes look into mine.

Before he can say his line, I ask him, “Are you the one Ren is looking for?”

“Ren…” He laughs lightly, shaking his head. “Is that what you call him?”

I pull the hood from my head. This is the longest the vision has gone? How much longer can I prolong it?

My hand hurriedly goes into the pocket of my jumpsuit.

“ATTENTION-”

The noise blasting in my ear causes me to jolt awake, the vision crumbling around me in an instant. I rip the covers from my body, opening my eyes to the stale atmosphere of my dormitory.

The feminine, robotic voice continues, broadcasting from the comm-link, “Your presence has been requested in the main hanger regarding the arrival of Commander Ren. If you are receiving this message, please report to the main hanger immediately. ATTENTION! Your presence has been requested in the main-”

I rip the comm-link from my ear, scrambling out of bed. I stumble to the dresser around my bed, grabbing at a jacket, belt, and boots. I hurriedly throw the items on me, all the while hearing the faint, distant message still audibly projecting from the comm-link on my pillow. After sliding the leather gloves onto sore hands, I rip my hair out of the bun, only to retie it back the quickest I can manage with it still looking somewhat neat.

“Agent, would you like any food before you leave?”

I grab the comm-link from my pillow, shove it in my pocket, and exit.

Upon opening the door to the hall, I am met with a large mass of people, shuffling towards the elevator. The sound of all their comm-links merge with the voice of mine, echoing an identical message. How many goddamn people does Ren need to welcome him back? I rub the sleep from my eyes, joining the line of officers who I didn’t even knew lived next to me.

Seven of us wait our turn to squeeze into the elevator. We cram together, shoulder to shoulder. I find myself in the middle of them all. Most of them are taller, older than me.

One jokes to the rest of us, trying to lighten the irritated mood that seems to manifest in us all, “Think we’re all getting a raise?”

They chuckle.

One says sarcastically, “Commander Ren must be in a good mood, if he wants to see everyone.”
One man mutters, “Commander Ren in a good mood…”

I steadily exhale through my nose, arms reaching around my body trying to protect myself from rubbing against them as the elevator shoots down.

We pile out of the elevator when it opens. I glance around the hanger to see it full of members of the First Order, all organized by rank. There must be hundreds of people here and they are still filing in from every entry. Are there any other agents here, for me to stand with? I can’t imagine why there would be. I look towards the front of the line, my eyes catching the Knights of Ren all getting into place, masks and uniforms on.

I don’t have a good idea of which Knight corresponds with each mask. Especially the Knights I’ve never really talked to before. I know Solaw is the one with the mask that fans out at the sides. Lex is the one in the lighter robes, with the sleeker, simpler mask. There are no metal lines on her helmet, merely a sleek black surface. She’s also the shortest. I begin making my way down the open aisleway to approach her.

The cluttered chatter makes it hard to hear, but I manage to pick up on a voice calling out, “2319!”

I look over.

A man emerges from the heap of people, smiling brightly at me. My stomach drops.

“I assumed you’d be invited here, if you weren’t already on the mission with Ren.” Lieutenant Leven pushes past the people separating him from I. His appearance takes me completely off guard. He looks so old. I have recreated his face many times in my memories, over the years. I remember him looking old before, but now – he’s actually grown up. His face is still clean shaven, blonde hair still styled back to perfection, just like I remembered it. But his jawline is squarer than I recalled. More wrinkles are gathered around his hazel eyes. His eyebrows are bushier, lips thinner. Fuck, how old is he now? He’d have to be twenty-seven… Kylo Ren’s age. My stomach twists more.

“I did not realize you were stationed on Starkiller,” I keep my voice even, shoulders back, and chin tilted up. Then, I give the biggest lie I’ve ever conjured in my whole career, “If I knew, I certainly would have reached out to you.”

“You can relax,” He laughs, eyes flicking down to my posture, then back up to me, “I’m no longer evaluating you. You’ve earned a little bit of slack.”

“I want to laugh at that. But I don’t. Lieutenant Leven was my main supervisor, when I first began training as an agent. He did not by any means respect people who were ‘relaxed,’ nor did he give any excuses that allowed for slack. I ask him, not letting up on my posture, “I’d love to catch up, but I don’t think now is a-”

“Oh, of course now isn’t the ideal time for our proper reunion.” He grins wide, showcasing his painfully perfect teeth. He gestures me to the side, out of the aisle Kylo Ren will soon be walking down. “Come, stand by me.”

I would really rather not. But I find myself not seeing the option of declining the invitation. I follow him through a few rows of people, until we come across an empty spot. I look down the line. There’re a dozen young agents, all staring straight ahead, much like droids do before they’re summoned. None look a day over fifteen.

He continues on, leaning towards me to speak, “I received the alert from Commander Ren during the middle of a training session. I figured it couldn’t hurt to bring them along to see such a formal event
for themselves.” Leven speaks up, his familiar, authoritative tone causing my muscles to tense, my jaw to tighten, “Agents, I have someone for you all to meet.” He nods towards me, “Ten years ago, Agent 2319 was placed in my designated group of trainees. She now is one of the highest regarded agents of the First Order. She’s traveled across the galaxy, worked directly under the Supreme Leader and General Hux, and has contributed to some of the most reputable missions the First Order conducted. Now, she’s assigned to assist Commander Ren himself. But she once was just like you. She once stood where all you stand.”

None of them have any reaction to the information. They look at Leven while he talks, not at me. There’s boy on the end who glances towards me for a split second, but once his eyes meet mine, they dart away, in fear. I don’t know if he’s afraid of me, or afraid what will happen if he breaks his attention on Leven. He's probably afraid of both. I would have been.

Leven goes on, “Perhaps, if you work hard enough, you could be her one day too.”

I smile lightly to them, trying not to clench my teeth at the dread in what he’s saying.

“Any words of wisdom for them, 2319?” Leven asks me.

Run before they shove a tracker in your head, is the only thing that comes to mind. I let my shoulders relax, then smile back to Leven, allowing the words I know he feeds off of to escape with ease and charm, “My best advice is to listen to this guy. He knows what he’s doing.”

Leven basks in the ego boost I supplied him with, “See? She’s a smart one.”

I turn away from the young agents, settling on the other side of Leven. He knew my history. He’s been keeping tabs. I look out to the open hanger, watching for any sign of Ren’s ship. I mumble to Leven, for just us to hear, “Sounds like you did your homework on me.”

“Of course, I like to keep updated.” He replies, “You were, perhaps, my finest work.”

I look up to him, “You think so?”

“I know so.” He straightens his collar, buffing out his chest.

I turn my head back, facing the front, once again.

Soon enough, Kylo Ren’s ship enters the hanger. I was expecting to stand here until my feet get sore, but surprisingly enough, he’s on time. I stand up a bit straighter and the chatter in the room diminishes. People who once were lounging around hurriedly jog over to their place. I can practically feel that fear that Kylo Ren’s presence brings bouncing off of everyone around me. I wonder if Leven is afraid of Ren. I let my eyes glance down the line of young agents. I wonder if they are.

The pyramid-shaped ship folds into itself as it lands at the forefront of the hanger, perfectly positioned in the middle of the aisle created. Stormtroopers and officers alike all salute with a snap. I slowly raise a flat hand to my forehead, mimicking the men around me. Fuck, this is ridiculous. The door to his shuttle opens with a hiss, fog spilling outwards.

First march out the troopers, all merging into the lines already established on either side of them. Then, Kylo Ren emerges. His hood is on, cowl flowing with his heavy steps. As he walks, I watch the tense men he passes, completely frozen in fear. The Knights of Ren follow after him, in a clean formation as he passes.
I find the situation rather awkward. My hand grows tired of saluting. I don’t know if I should be looking at him, or straight ahead. Suddenly, there’s a pull at my mind.

I look to him, still several yards away from me. He’s staring right at me. I lower my salute and can’t stop a small smile from pulling at my lips.

He steps to the side during his walk and nods to the space he created beside him.

I slide past the men in front of me. It’s a struggle to not look back at Leven’s reaction as I join Ren’s side. We march, equally to one another. I purse my lips, then keep my head up. I push into his own mind, trying to project to him how much I’ve missed him. But I immediately pull back, afraid of other thoughts being let loose. Thoughts about how I think his whole hunt for Skywalker is ridiculous. Thoughts about how I wish he’d get his shit together and realize what a piece of shit Snoke is.

There’s a sort of power I bask in, as I think such things, marching down files of First Order members. I hate Supreme Leader Snoke. I hate General Hux. I hate my former advisor, Lieutenant Leven. I’m in love with Ben Solo. Yet, I march down the men of the First Order and they salute to me. Where are we marching to?

I look down the aisle, then up the staircase leading to a deck. I inhale sharply at the sight of General Hux. I clench my jaw tightly, fists forming behind my back. I imagine how easy it would be to throw him off the edge of the balcony he stands on. He doesn’t look at me as my eyes so obviously lock on him. I know I’m projecting. Ren must feel it. I don’t care.

Captain Phasma stands beside him, along with a few other officers and generals. All incredibly high ranking. Most of which, I’ve worked with in the past. It’s almost as if every single ghost of mine has gathered for this one moment. Each and every one of their presence is overwhelming, bringing back long repressed memories all at once. My unstable legs barely make it up the stairs. I scan for my place to stand. There’s a gap between Hux and the Knights.

I guess I have to find my place there.

Ren positions himself in front of us all, then commands the crowd effortlessly, “At ease.” The crowd lowers their salute, then pivot to face him, roaring the drilled command of a ‘yessir.’ Ren’s voice booms into the crowd, the modulator utilized to its full extent, “I have gathered you all here today because each and every one of you will be involved in a mission of utmost importance to the First Order.” Ren doesn’t stand straight as he addresses the crowd. He leans forward, hands grasping at the rails, peering over the people like a hawk stalking its prey. “This is perhaps be the most important mission any of you have ever participated in.”

Hux huffs from beside me. I try not to react. I close my eyes, trying to reach out to that same Force that once gave me comfort, cradling me gently. I can’t seem to find it as easily as I did before, with Lex. But there’s something else, inside myself. Powerful. Hot. I inhale. Fiery energy courses through my veins. Behind closed eyelids, I replace the haunting images of Tuchell dying with what Hux would look like. The fear in his eyes. How his screams I could feel his cut-off screams with my hands around his throat.

I glance to him.

He doesn’t return the gaze.

I focus back on Ren.
He goes on, “Upon my return to Pillio, I have recovered information on the location of Lor San Tekka. To many of you, this name means nothing. But this man is a vital enemy of the First Order.” Ren pauses. Then, “The last Jedi is still alive. Lor San Tekka knows where Luke Skywalker went, and I intend to retrieve the intel—no matter the cost.”

There’s a few people in the distance muttering at the revelation Ren revealed. To them, all the Jedi have been executed. To me, I don’t see how it makes a difference.


Hux steps forward. Emotionally dead. But when I look down to his fists, I see that they are clenched shut. Stars, I hope it’s because of me. Hux speaks to the masses, “The target is located on the planet of Bayora. This is a small planet located in Republic territory, so the responsibility of locating of Lor San Tekka will fall to,” a hard swallow, “Agent 2319.”

I stare holes through the back of his head, through his ridiculously combed red hair.

“Once Agent 2319 has located and detained the man, we will make our attack. First priority will be to secure Lor San Tekka as a prisoner. Before Lor San Tekka is in our hands, every ship leaving Bayora must be discreetly tracked and then searched. Upon his capture, we will draw the Resistance and Republic out, to fight. Eliminating as many forces as we can will be the second priority. We will drain them of their men, leaving them exhausted before we truly begin the war. We will overtake that planet— with civilian compliance, or not.”

I turn to Ren, who now stands beside me, where Hux once stood. Ren lightly places a hand on my lower back, as if to tell me it’s okay. As if to tell me invading a whole planet to find his wizard uncle is justified. A whole planet’s worth of civilians. People who did nothing to us. Decent people. Families. My body stiffens. Ren’s touch falters.

Hux goes through logistics of the mission. Explains each division’s role and where everyone’s debriefing meeting is located. Apparently, everyone’s going to be on standby while I am locating Lor San Tekka. I’m going in blind. Alone. I lean into Ren, mumbling as Hux continues on, “The tactics sound familiar.”

His helmet turns to me, confused.

I elaborate, “Hoth?”

He quietly responds, “This is completely different.”

I scoff, “I’m sure.”

His hand returns to my back, gently and discreetly rubbing up, then down my spine.

I try to ease into his touch, but the sensation of being watched consumes me, I glance down the line of Knights to see one’s helmet staring at Ren and I. I stare back, unsure of which one it could be. Perhaps the one from the fighting ring – Tiru. Or maybe the older twi’lek – Trant.

Ren steps forward, beckoning me to step with him. Confused, I follow his lead. Hux, now apparently finished with speaking, steps back when his eyes finally meet mine. I wonder if I’m matching the cutthroat hatred his stare harbors. The way his jaw is clenched, painfully tight. The way he looks ten years older than he is, with such an impassioned, dark emotion.

Ren says, practically pulling me forward with him and away from Hux, “I expect nothing less than perfection for this mission,”
I try my best to remain unaltered by the fact no one stands me between the massive army below. There’s nothing to hide me from them. Nothing to hide them from me. My eyes search for Lieutenant Leven in the crowd. I find him, able to make out his expression of blankness. Then, he gives me the smallest of nods.

Ren continues on, “That is why I am appointing Agent 2319 as primary supervisor of the operation.”

What the fuck. Agents don’t lead missions. I’m not trained to do that. I turn to him, unable to keep my conformity, uttering, “Commander—”

He ignores my interruption, going on, head tilted as he proudly proclaims, “And upon successful completion of this mission, Agent 2319 will be appointed to the position of Admiral of the First Order.”

I try not to break into hysterical laughter right there. Admiral of the First Order. I’m not qualified for that. I don’t have enough experience. I showed zero interest in even wanting a position like that. Less than zero – a significantly negative amount of interest.

Ren concludes strongly, as if what he said wasn’t complete ludicrousness, “She is now superior to all of you. I expect you to treat her as such.” He barks, “Dismissed.”

I find myself frozen. My face feels on fire with embarrassment. If people didn’t know I was fucking him before, they surely have that idea in their mind now. The masses scatter, going to report to their designated locations. I look behind me, to find the Knights, captains and generals also begin to make their way down the stairs, hurrying in preparation. Ren’s mask blankly stares at me, waiting for a response.

I sneer at him, “What the actual hell?”

“I’ll finalize your promotion after the mission. Aren’t you excited?”

I remain unmoved, “Admiral of the First Order?”

He nods.

Dumbfounded, I begin, “Snoke would never allow such a thing.”

“He encouraged the idea, actually.” I can hear his excited smile in his voice, even through the modulator, “It’s everything you wanted. You don’t have to be an agent anymore. You can finally lead your people, get the respect you’ve always deserved.”

I open my mouth to speak, but immediately close it again. I don’t know if it’s shock at how much Ren is out of touch, or shock at Supreme Leader Snoke appointing me to a higher position – let alone, an admiral – after our last encounter.

He’s bribing me. Snoke is fucking bribing me. Just like he coaxes Ren with the useless title of ‘Commander.’ Snoke thinks that dangling this opportunity in front of me will guarantee my contribution to finding Skywalker. They both are so desperate, it’s pathetic.

I merely nod to Ren, exhaling, “Awesome.”

He gives a nervous laugh, mere static through his mask, “What?”

“It’s just…” I blink up to him, trying to find the right way to respond, “It’s a lot to process.”
“I know,” He responds, softer. “Let’s talk more, on the way to Bayora.”

My face falls flat.

It must be obvious, because he responds, “Hey, you deserve this. Be happy for yourself… I know these last few days must have been hard, between the execution of that prisoner and—”

“Don’t.” I raise my hand to him, preventing him from going on. “As primary supervisor, I prefer we go prepare for Bayora.” I say it with the least amount of spite in my voice as humanly possible. Which is still a lot of spite. But there was a bit of an effort.

There’s a scoff, then a defiant, “I’ll still—”

He cuts himself off upon my eyebrows raising, happily encouraging him to go on.

He says, tone toughened, trying to confiscate for previously backing down, “I’ll still remain your superior.” He glances towards the Order members gathered in the hanger below us.

My voice is completely empty with the lazy response, “Of course, my Lord, I could never forget it.” I walk around him, to follow everyone else down the stairs, not entertaining the conversation any further.

I stare at the table of weapons that lie before me. I guess if I’m going to be navigating throughout villages, searching for some old man, I shouldn’t be carrying a rifle. Even two blasters, like I usually have, would be too much. I swing the civilian-styled satchel onto the table, from over my shoulder. There’s a concealed pocket in the lining big enough for one pistol. Maybe a knife, too. I stuff one of my pistols in the pocket, along with a small blade. Throw some food portions in. I rip the comm-link from my ear, tossing it in as well. Then, I grab the bundle of clothing set out for me to change into. I examine the material of the clothing, making note that it’s all rain resistant. There’s a jacket with a large hood, layers of grey undercoats and cargo pants, then a dark red thermal jumpsuit to wear underneath it all. I pull the number out, examining its structure. It’s the same layout as my tactical uniform, but it seems more fitted. I run my fingers across the stretchy, scale-like material that will soon be a substitute for armor. My fingers go to the inside hem of the sleeve. Like always, there’s that capsule of poison sewn into the fabric, just in case.

“2319,”

I glance up to the doorway.

My eyes are meant with an eager Lieutenant Leven, lounging against the doorframe. He says to the man out of my sight, behind him, “Did you know I was her training supervisor?”

General Hux walks from around the back of Leven, standing stiffly in the doorway. We hold a stare. He says, bitterly, “I most likely came across the information at some point.”

Leven steps into the room, sauntering over to me. I hate him. He’s so casual. He’s acting like he didn’t spend years practically tormenting me, with the pressures of perfection, personally stripping me of every last shred of dignity I had. “I suppose I’ll have to start calling you Admiral, now?” He nudges me playfully with his elbow.

I rub away his touch, unable to bring myself to laugh at his joke, or whatever the hell that was.
General Hux, still in the doorway, says coldly, “Admiral-what?”

I redirect my attention to him.

He stalks in, slower than Leven, approaching me with a roll of his heel. The clicking of his boots is familiar. Same boots that walked around the Lau family table, behind me, putting him at a position where he could grab at my neck. As I salivate, the taste of wine returns. He continues on, smoothly speaking, “Have you picked out a real name yet?”

I stare into the ice-blue eyes blankly. “I haven’t sorted out the logistics of being an admiral.”

“Ren can help you choose one, perhaps. He has some experience in creating counterfeit identities.” Hux offers, the snark in his tone undeniable. He continues forward, closing in on my location. With Leven to my left, and Hux in front of me, I am quite literally trapped between the men. I push back into the table of weapons behind me, trying to create more space, but only restricting myself more.

I can’t help but imagine how easy it would be to grab the kukri knife that sits in its case behind me, slicing both of their necks cleanly open with one effortless, swift movement. There’s that dark energy I find within me, once again. Fueling me. Encouraging me. It’s powerful enough to control me, if I just give in a little bit.

“I still can’t believe you’ve been assigned to Ren for so long and you haven’t been killed.” Leven chuckles, resting a hand on the table, leaning. “It’s unheard of.” He curiously waits for an explanation.

“The Commander appreciates those with a backbone.” I say, simply, “I’m not afraid to speak against him. He respects me for that.”

“Speaking against a superior?” Leven muses, “I do not remember teaching you that.”

I squeeze the folded clothes in my hands, then force myself to look him in the eye. They’re so grey. The mere sight of them is enough to bring back a rush of memories. Of feelings. I swallow them all down, giving none of it acknowledgement, “I adapt to my situations. Did you not teach me that?”

His pupils dilate at the question.

Then, “Ren is a fool.” Hux interjects, inspecting the cuff of his sleeve. “Allowing himself to be talked back to by his inferior? He should put you in your place.” He shrugs nonchalantly, “I would, if you ever opposed me.”

I want to kill him. Fuck. I can. I can kill them both. I should. I should kill them both, then not care what happens with me. As long as their dead. I won’t have to figure out how to save this planet from a First Order invasion. I won’t have to deal with being the person “destined” to find Skywalker. They’d be dead. Finally. I could end everything now.

“Anyways,” Leven speaks up, “The General and I were discussing where our battle operations should take place during the invasion on Bayora. Bayora’s pathetically small population mostly is comprised in its capital. There’s plenty of land for us to take advantage of. If we set up base planet, we’ll have a better connection for our communications, considering the severe weather conditions the planet is prone to. But, if we set up base in a ship outside of the atmosphere, we’ll be more secure.”

I ask, “Is this my decision?”

“Ren referred us to you.” Hux snips.
I pause, to think about it. Worse communications or more vulnerable security? I respond, “How many men will be stationed in the base during our attacks?”

“All generals and officers assigned to the battle will be stationed in the base to control their troops, as usual. I can get you exact numbers. I’ll also personally be on base to help oversee operations.” Leven responds.

I glance back and forth Leven to Hux. Then, I order in the best admiral-voice I can emulate, “Put the base on the planet. I trust that you can ensure our location remains discrete and impenetrable. Security won’t be an issue, if we all do our part.”

Lex Ren nearly tackles me once she sees me in Ren’s ship. Her arms wrap around me tightly, ecstatically, as she squeals with excitement. As I reciprocate the hug, her feet effortlessly lift off the ground. My muscles relax with her embrace. After dealing with so many intolerable people all day, seeing her is beyond refreshing. It’s so silly, to see her do such expressive things in her blank mask. I look down the ramp of Ren’s ship, noticing the still congested hanger. Quickly, I pull her into Ren’s room, away from anyone’s view.

I reach to the release hatches on her mask, laughing, “What’s that for?”

Her long, tightly braided hair spills from her helmet as I lift it up, off of her. She’s absolutely beaming as she exclaims, grabbing at my forearms, “You’re gonna be an admiral!”

I click my tongue, “I suppose so.”

“I’m sure you’re setting a record for being the youngest!” She goes on, words flying out of her mouth at a speed unmatched, “I mean, Snoke couldn’t have chosen anyone better either, you’re going to do the greatest job of anyone, and-” she pauses. Examines my face. “You don’t look excited.”

I feel a small smile form on my lips as I say, “You do. Maybe you should be an admiral, instead.”

She shakes her head, nose crinkling, “No, no, the Supreme Leader chose you for a reason. I mean, you care so much about people. And you’re so strong. And you’re a fresh perspective, you know what it’s like to be raised in this war, you understand-”

“You’re right,” I say, appeasing her, “I guess I should be more optimistic.” I hand her back her mask then back away, allowing myself to lean against the wall.

Her eyebrow creases slightly. Smile falls.

I’ve never seen that reaction from her. I probe, “What?”

She shrugs, “I don’t know, nevermind.”

I swallow, focusing on keeping my voice soothing, reassuring, “You can trust me.”

She looks down. Blinks. Then looks back up, face relaxed. “Can I?”

Shit. Honestly, she can’t. I try to think of the right way to respond to that. The right way would be ‘of course.’ But I have to know why she thinks I’m untrustworthy. Was she in my mind? Does she
sense something? I ask, unable to refrain, “Why wouldn’t you?”

She pauses, thinking. She’s always been thoughtful before she speaks. Just not so cautious. Then, “I just thought that you’d want to help change the Order.”

“Lex…” I whisper. My stomach sinks within me. I test, “Why would you want to change anything about the Order?”

Her eyes plead with me, to read her mind. To understand the things she can’t say out loud. Maybe I do understand. She only says, “I would change nothing about the Order. I just thought there’d be some things you would want to…” Her voice trails off.

“I don’t think even the highest esteemed admiral can change anything about the Order.” I smile, sadly. “Especially when the Order’s leading Commander can’t.”

She rips her gaze away from me, offended by the statement. “Don’t underestimate Master Ren’s influence, it’s disrespectful,” she mumbles, before replacing her mask back onto her head. The impassive mass of darkness stares back at me, all the while a youthful, sweet voice says from underneath it, “Congratulations, again.”

I call out to her, "Lex,"

She glances back.

"I know you're stationed on medical during this mission. But I want you to watch over him for me. Just make sure he's doing alright. I'll be a bit busier with other things, and I'm sure he'll have a lot on his mind." I say, as nonchalantly as I possibly can.

She nods, "Of course, Agent! I always do."

"Thank you, for that."

She exits the ship.

I find myself lounging in Commander Ren’s co-captain chair. 5D-R8 is here. I haven’t spoken to it, despite it running through several of it’s procedural conversation-starting dialogues. The day has been spent with answering questions from officers, attending meetings and overall bullshitting everything I’m doing. I lean back in the chair, sighing. I suppose it’s good I’ve kept busy. It keeps my mind away from other things.

But I’ve learned that sometimes, spending a whole day with repressed thoughts makes the nights to come more violent. I pull the comm-link from my pocket, setting it on the console in front of me. I stare at it. Then, I reach out to the Force, trying to find some type of energy that surrounds that comm-link, some way to manipulate it, to get it to move.

I reach out further. It’s not the comm-link, but it’s something…

I smell rain.

There’s a distant roaring of thunder.

Then, a door opens behind me.
I snatch the comm-link from the console, replacing it in my pocket.

Ren asks, “You ready to go?”

“Youp,” I respond, staring at the lever to start the ship.

“You sure? Is there anything you forgot? You have enough food and all the weapons and-”

I remain focused on the lever. “I said I’m ready.”

His gloved hand finally takes it’s place on the object, pulling forward. The ship purrs to life. He’s quiet as he presses the correct combinations of buttons that lift us up, off of the hanger’s floor and out the wide opening of the base. Ren prepares the ship for lightspeed. I turn to him for the first time since he’s entered, noticing the roll of his shoulders. He’s tense.

R8 says from behind us, “I will notify Starkiller Base of your departure.”

Ren responds when he realizes that I won’t, “Good.”

Silence overtakes the cockpit.

The ship slowly charges up, each second leading us closer to hyperspace. I take the moment to glance around the hanger of Starkiller Base one last time. There’s no nostalgia. No feeling of goodbye. It’s just emptiness. The same emptiness of leaving any other mission. No home.

Ren reaches out to me, placing his free hand on my knee.

My body remains still, not reacting to the weight of his leather hand.

The ship zaps into hyperspace.

Ritualistically, I attempt to comprise a role I must play. I could pretend to be the relative of this Lor San Tekka guy, desperately searching for my long-lost family. It’ll have to be convincing, considering the public bounty the Order placed on the man. First step is making up my name. Then backstory. Add some tragic part of it in, just in case I need to rack up empathy points.

I look down to Ren’s hand on my knee, unmoving.

How much will he hate me after all this? Could he ever understand my point of view?

I look out to the stars, all flying past me at an immeasurable rate.

Could anyone ever understand what I’ve done and what I’m about to do?

Loneliness suddenly consumes me. The galaxy that once seemed so stable seems to be closing in on me, from all sides. The ship rocks from the pressure, violently.

I picture a life where I find Skywalker. I help lead the most brutal, cutthroat attack on the planet of Bayora. Kylo Ren loves me. I am Admiral of the First Order. Everything I could’ve ever dreamed of… Lieutenant Leven is proud of me. I am an equal to General Hux. I am not alone. I am not alone. I feel so alone.

I stop thinking about that, afraid that it will be the thing to push out the tears that threaten to form in my eyes. I speak up, “I’m going to go to your quarters.”
He responds, as I am walking away, “I’ll join you once I get the ship in auto-pilot.”

I don’t look at R8 as I pass it. I focus on exiting the room, then crossing straight into Ren’s. The bed is made, neat silk sheets spread evenly on the mattress. I lower myself down to it’s edge, bringing trembling hands to my face.

In an effort to keep the sadness at bay, I retreat back into the Force. The first thing I find is that anger of which I’ve grown so familiar with. So much energy from within me, with nowhere to place it. I exhale slowly, squeezing my fingers into fists. It’s power. It’s so much stronger than the loneliness, so much safer than the sadness.

It reminds me I’m alive.

My blood quickens, heart racing. I don’t know how to release it, what to do with it. I lay down on the bed, curling my body, facing the wall.

The door opens not too soon after. Ren walks in, removing his mask and setting it on the pedestal in the corner of the room. I keep my head in my bent arm, not taking the opportunity to see his unmasked face.

He ends up kneeling in front of me, forcing my attention on him. I open my eyes to see him looking up at me. He speaks softly, “I don’t…” He swallows, “I don’t know what I’m doing wrong.”

I shake my head, reaching out to him. “Don’t blame yourself for me feeling shitty,” My gloved hand slides against the length of his long face, skin still flushed from being trapped in the helmet. I attempt to caress him, but where such a touch once would bring comfort, it now only brings guilt.

“Talk to me…” He reaches to my fallen hand, pressing my palm back on his cheek.

I slowly trace the soft lines of his face with my thumb. Forcing my touch to remain gentle is a task in of itself. Everything within me is begging my movements to be fast, forceful, tight. Nothing like what Ren wants from me now. But I give him part of what he wants – an easy answer. “There’s nothing to talk about. Really. Just the pressure of this admiral thing. And how stupid I was, to get close to that prisoner.”

He turns his head into my hand, kissing the leather of my palm, “No, no, you shouldn’t feel pressure. I should have talked with you about the promotion first. I thought it would make you happy, that it would get you more excited about this mission. I was too excited, I didn’t empathize to how you might feel. As for the prisoner…” He pauses, thinking of a good response, “What’s done is done. I could speak to the General about what he made you endure, if you wish. Hux doing that was unfair and uncalled for.”

I shake my head, “Don’t worry about it.” My throat goes tighter, “I will handle it, myself.”

Ren reaches his hand out, brushing gentle fingers against my shoulder, then down my silhouette. Through the thick fabric of my uniform, I can barely feel him. “If you wish.” He observes the curve of my body on my side, spending the most time particularly at the dip in my waist. His fingers come back upwards, all the way to the side of my face. He brushes back my hair, tapping against my temple gently, “You’re loud, right now.”

I dive back into the same energy I found myself lost in before. Thudding rage, power, control… I show it to him. My voice is strained as I ask, “How do I stop it?”

He shudders, ripping his hand away, as if the act of me projecting to him is a certain form of violence. I didn’t mean to hurt him. His eyes narrow at me, examining the whatever I’ve unleashed
to him. It looks as if it’s physically painful for him to do so. He exhales sharply, “I ask myself that often as well.” He wills his hand back up to my face, the gentle touch no longer out of fear for hurting me. Now, he touches me with the fear of doing so may hurt him. “Your best bet is meditation. I could enter your mind, to help you. Or you could talk to Lex, next time you see her. She’s very skilled, in that department.”

Meditation is the last thing I want to do right now. It's been rather exhausting, trying to keep myself out of my mind. Merely acknowledging that struggle makes the number one question I’ve been repressing all day finally surface:

Is this my final night with him?

I shiver at what I know has to be the answer.

“Hey,” He clears his throat, reaching down to my boots, “Why are you still in these?” He slides my feet off the edge of the bed, willing me to sit up. He sets my feet on either side of him, beginning to unlace the boots. “Our arrival time is quite far away. You know, we still have plenty of time to relax.”

I nod, looking away.

He slides my feet from the boots, placing them a few feet behind him. His hands then run up the sides of my legs, to my thighs. He lets a steady stream of air release through his lips as his fingers try to span across as much of me as he can. His voice is low when he says, “We have plenty of time to do anything you desire.”

I glance back down at him, kneeling before me, eagerly waiting for a cue. I can suddenly recall every single person who once sat in his place. All so unaware of the betrayal I would provide them. Ren was, after all, only supposed be a mission. Maybe everything would be hurting less if I regained that mindset.

So I reach my gloved hand down to his face once again, this time raising his chin, allowing him to meet my gaze straight on. My thumb runs across his bottom lip, examining the way the leather catches at the flushed skin. His eyes spark in excitement. In submission. I ask him what I asked the others, in the same tone I used with him when we first met, “And what do you desire?”

I already know his answer. His eyes glance down the expanse of my body, then back up to my gaze.

“Say it,” My whisper is soft, but firm.

“You,” He swallows hard, hands slightly trembling as they run up and down my thighs, “all of you.”

I decide that for tonight, we can both pretend that everything is only about us. Just one last time.

Chapter End Notes

so ive been writing a lot and this is the first time im updating in a month and i just feel the need to apologize? idk, originally, this chapter was supposed to end with Agent landing on Bayora, which I know would have had a lot more pay off, but it was just getting way too long and I was already editing out so much "set-up" beforehand. idk, i know this one is kinda boring, but I hope I can make up for it next time. the next chapter
is already almost done, and i have an extra on the way ( spoiler alert - it's kylo ren Hoth pov), so i'll been updating a lot quicker and more frequent. thanks <3

EDIT: if you started reading this update about 30 minutes after I uploaded, there was a continuity mistake I went back and fixed. i didnt realize i forgot to edit it out. <3

playlist is here!!!
and here's the pinterest board
Departure

Chapter Summary

"It doesn't take much to see that the problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Someday you'll understand that." - Michael Curtiz, Casablanca

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I remain unaffected, nodding toward the door, “Turn off R8.”

All while never leaving my eyes, he reaches his hand back, summoning the Force. There’s a crash from the outside room, metal falling violently to the ground. “He’s off,” He reassures, hand returning to my thigh.

With the dim, cool lights shining down from above, the shadows of his face are pronounced. The darkness of his hair, amplified. There was so much unspoken pressure, the first time we had sex – the first time I had sex. There should be even more, considering this may be the last time. But I can’t deal with that reality right now. I don’t think anything could ever prepare me. I remove a hand from his chin, to run it into his scalp, lightly scratching at the softly brushed roots. He slightly rolls his head into my touch.

I hum, pleased at his reaction, scooting a bit off of the bed, closer to him.

He takes the advancement as an invitation, leaning upwards to press his lips onto mine.

I sit up straight, tugging at his hair, disallowing the action. I say smoothly, head tilted to one side, “You brought up the whole chain-of-command thing today. That was kind of a low blow.”

“Well,” He frustratedly complies to my touch, hands stilling on my thighs to allow himself to grip at the skin. “It’s true. I am still your superior. I have to remain a figure of authority, on missions.”

I lean in closer, allowing him to feel the breath of my words on his lips, “And you’re just gonna let me treat you like this?”

He smirks, “If I wanted to stop you, I could.”

“You wouldn’t.”

He whispers back, acting as if it’s obvious, “I wouldn’t want to hurt you, no.”

I reach my hand down through his hair, to his neck, inquiring, “Not at all?”
“What?” His voice raises, taken out of the moment, “No, I-”

“Because I want you to.” I say simply, hand going to the cowl around his shoulders. I pull it off of him.

“What?” He remains oblivious, but his breath grows unsteady.

I set the cowl on the floor, next to my boots. “Hurt me.”

He sits up, completely level with me now. He mumbles a concerned, “Agent…”

I close the distance between us, pressing my body against his, legs wrapping slightly around his form. I inhale sharply when I feel him against me, through his robs, already growing hard. I run my hands up his chest slowly, recalling a word that nearly broke him the last time we were intimate. I say it softly, with pleading eyes, “Please.”

He shudders. For a moment, I am sure he is about to grab me and push me into the bed right then and there. But instead, he takes the moment to hesitate longer. Configuring how to go about it. He’s calculating how to do this, without actually doing this. He exhales a defeated, “I couldn’t bring myself to do that to you.”

I pull myself away from him, that dark energy inside of me growing impatient, “Oh, come on. How many people have we both been responsible for killing? And you want to fucking hold hands? Is that who we are? We aren’t Naboo anymore. I’m an agent, you’re the Commander, we live on a machine designed to blow up planets. And you’re scared of hurting me?” I look away, teeth clenched.

He is stunned, unable to respond at first. He stands to his feet, stepping away, gathering himself enough to raise his voice, matching my intensity, “I’m not going to continually entertain your misplaced guilt.” His voice comes with an impulsive energy, “Don’t use me to satisfy your self-destructive urges.”

I push it further, “You are too soft…” I lean back on my palms, “But not soft enough to be a Skywalker or Solo. Honestly, you’re just…” I decide on the word I’ve heard Snoke use to describe him far too many times. I wonder if Ren knows of the significance, “unbalanced.”

He does. He looks like he could kill me right then and there with that.

I stare back.

He mumbles, “Stop me if I go too far.”

I nod.

“Promise.”

I roll my eyes, “Yeah,”

“Say it.” He orders.

“I promise.” I comply, finally meeting his eyes again.

He crosses to the bed in two long strides.

Immediately he climbs over top of me, wasting no time to grab my wrists and pin them above my head. He glances down at my extended body, studying the way it stretches with the compromising position. With a stifled exhale, the calculating face disappears into my shoulder. His body digs
downwards, into mine, grinding at me to relieve the growing ache within him.

I close my eyes, meditating on the sound of his relentless breaths in my ear, the sensation of his large body enveloping and crushing into me. His gloved fingers squeeze forcefully at my wrists. With a steady inhale, I can smell the familiar, fresh shampoo of his hair. I tilt my head upwards, further exposing my neck to him and escaping from the memories his smell brings. He doesn’t kiss me there, opting to rather run his face against the skin, lips dragging, but never settling, nipping impulsively, as he moves. He readjusts my arms, so that only one hand spans across my wrist, allowing to un-clip the belt around his waist. He tosses it to the floor, unraveling the long robe around him. He doesn’t bother with that for now, too preoccupied. Now, his hand reaches to my face, brushing my hair back. Already, his brown eyes grow softer, movements growing more sensual rather than selfish.

I tease, “Now what, Ren?”

His expression turns back into defiance. Greedy hands feel up my body, starting at my hip, palming at my breast, then running up my neck. Two fingers find themselves pushing past my lips, immediately into my mouth and against my tongue. Leather consumes my taste buds, my throat instinctually contracting to the intrusion. I force it to relax. The action was partially used to get me to shut up. But with his darkened eyes, and the quickened pace of his digging hips, I can only assume it’s to also amuse his imagination. It’s a move I’ve noticed he likes to do. Just significantly less forceful in the past. He pulls his fingers out, only to push them in deeper. He separates his middle and index fingers slightly, feeling at my mouth, widening the span of his fingers.

I tilt my head up, forcing more of their length inside of me, humming. I push my tongue up, constricting his fingers in me. My eyes stay locked on his. He’s practically spellbound above me. He grinds into me harder, desperate to satisfy himself. When he pulls his fingers away, my teeth catch at the tip of his glove. I bite down. He pulls his hand back, allowing for the glove to slide off of him. He growls, using his freshly exposed skin to feel me up, once again.

I use the opportunity to grab his wrists, pushing him off, flipping him underneath me. I loom above him, ordering, “Take the robes off.”

He looks annoyed with my tone but obliges either way. I release his wrists to allow the action. He sits up, pulling his arms out of the garments and letting them fall behind his body. Then, he pulls off his other glove and reaches out to me, once again, but I avoid his touch, swinging a leg off of him to sit on the other side of the bed.

“The tunic, too.” I specify.

He unzips the item of clothing, throwing it on top of his belt. It leaves him in the long-pleated sleeves and black undershirt.

I decide, “Might as well do away with those, while you’re at it.”

“And what about you?” He grumbles, unfastening the straps that hold up the sleeves.

I swing my leg back over his, finding my place between his legs. I can’t help but admire at the obvious bulge pushing against the fabric of his pants. My hands run up his legs, fingers digging harshly against his trousers, “I’m preoccupied.”

As my hands reach his hips, I notice him slightly buck forward. I lower my hands down, back towards his knees, denying him of subconscious request. He lies back, throwing the sleeves to the side. His arms are exposed, pale and roped in tensed muscles. He reaches towards me, but I pull back, once again.
“You’re not done.” I glare at his undershirt.

He curses me under his breath, undoing the suspenders that keep his trousers up, allowing for him to pull the thin black tee shirt off. With his bare chest exposed, I notice how heavy he’s breathing. He snips, “Is that better?”

I smirk up at him, running my hands back up his hips, to his now bare torso. I can tell he’s warm, even though my gloves. The muscles on his abdomen contract under my touch, then relax as I run them up and down the skin evenly. I let them travel up his broad chest, to his collarbone. I crawl over-top of him, pressing a sweet kiss to his cheek, “I would say so.”

I turn his head to the side, exposing his jawline and ear. As I continue the teasing kisses along the border of his face, his hands reach for my hips, desperate for me to lower my weight onto him. I push his arms back down, biting at his earlobe. He lets out a puff of air, irritated by my resistance.

I begin moving the kisses down his neck, sliding my body down simultaneously. I kiss at his chest, running my hands where my lips aren’t, making sure not an inch of his skin is left neglected. His hand reaches for my hair, pulling at the hairband and letting it loose around my shoulders. He pushes it back with an eager hand, keeping it out of my face as I continue kissing down his abdomen.

I do not deny the urge to pull at his skin with my teeth, leaving marks as I go, devouring him. I wonder if these bruises will outlive me. I stop wondering about that, just as quickly as I start. My lips reach the hem of his pants. I continue rubbing his thighs, massaging the skin tenderly under my gloved fingers.

“Can you…” He starts, then his voice trails off.

I begin kissing at his hip, then downward, the skin covered by the thin leather material of his pants. My eyes flicker up to him during the action, “Can I?”

He reaches down to me, pushing my hair back from my face. He sits forward, putting his weight on an elbow to get a better look at me. Once he settles, his hips hitch upwards again, trying to push against any part of me that he can.

I repeat, running a hand down his stomach, then dangerously close to his groin, “Tell me what you want.”

“You know exactly what I want.” He responds, low.

I can’t help but smirk at his resilience. I pull my body back upwards, hovering over him, hand returned to his chest. I whisper down at him, “Then I don’t know why you aren’t making me do it.”

He snatches my hand from his chest, pulling it down to his erection. As he presses my palm down on him, I keep my eyes on his. I notice the faintest tremble of his lip at the contact, then a sigh of relief. He holds my hand against him firmly as he presses his hips upward, into my touch. My hand can’t manage to cover all of him, so he moves it across himself, stroking. My fingers curl around his shape, the rest of me nearly melting at the needy gaze he’s giving me. Brown eyes dilated, cheeks pink, lips reddened. I can’t help but to lean forward, giving him a rewarding kiss on the cheek once again before I move back down his body.

I palm at him, feeling his shape from through his pants. He already feels completely hard. Although he’s proportionate to the rest of himself, I often neglect to remember how large he actually is, until I’m in the moment. I stroke up and down his length generously before I reach for the zipper on the side of his pants, pulling down, slowly. I make sure to keep my head level with his groin, looming
over him, while peeking up at his impatient glare down at me.

Once his zipper is all the way down, he pulls his pants downward, hurriedly trying to free his legs from the contraption. I sit at the edge of the bed, waiting for him to kick the trousers to the floor. When he does, he grabs my hand once again, replacing it back onto his erection.

Now, with only the black undergarments in the way, he’s much more distinct in my hand. I can fully wrap my fingers around the shaft, pulling my hand upwards gently, then back down. Curious fingers run across the tip, searching for any place that gives me a big reaction. As my finger drags across the ridge of the head, he twitches, biting back a moan. I lower my head down, his warmth radiating onto the skin of my face. I glance up to him as I slowly drag my bottom lip against it’s shape, the fabric of his undergarments soft against my mouth.

He exhales steadily, a tremor overcoming his body.

I leave a polite kiss at the tip, moving back downwards, this time my tongue firmly tracing down. My hands find the hem of his undergarments, fingers digging underneath.

Just when I’m about to pull them down, his hand encapsulates my wrist, stopping me, “Wait,”

I freeze, raising my head.

“You don’t…” Ren hesitates, regaining his held breath, trying to think of the right way to phrase the words, “Are you sure you want to do this?”

I return my hands from his undergarments, back down to his legs as I sit upwards, “Why would I not want to do this?”

He falls back, head turning to the side, “I don’t know, if you think it’s gross or you think I’m pressuring you, or… I don’t know.”

“Kylo,” I say firmly, “look at me.”

He does, letting his weight go back to being supported by his palm, meeting my eye level. He seems embarrassed. Insecure. Unsure. I never want him to feel any of those things when he’s with me. Especially not tonight.

I reach out to his face, caressing him gently, “Tonight, I am completely yours.” I drag my finger against his cheekbone. I mummer, looking into his eyes, “You never pressure me to do anything and I,” My chest begins to hurt. “I just want to make you feel as good as I possibly can.”

He grabs my hand, reassuring, “You always do.” He leans forward to kiss my lips, but I avoid it, pulling back before he can reach me. I lower him back down onto the bed, opting to kiss at his neck again, nuzzled into his skin. Before I can get too consumed by his warmth, I sit up, allowing for him to pull off his undergarments.

I assist in sliding them down his legs, then discarding them to the side. He lays before me, completely exposed. I sit in between his legs, still clothed in every article of clothing I began the day with. It should make me feel more in control. I shouldn’t feel so vulnerable right now. But I do.

I lower myself down, running my hands up and down his thighs a few more times. I examine his member laying against his stomach, pre-cum glistening from the tip. He’s so human. So gorgeous, like this. Nothing you’d expect when looking at masked Commander Ren. I gather saliva into my mouth, then lean forward, slowly dragging it in a line across his shaft. In my peripheral vision, I see his fists grab at the sheets of the bed. My bottom lip drags the fluid across his length, then up to the
tip. Once I make contact with that part of him, he twitches, biting down hard on his lip. Carefully, I
trace my tongue across the ridge of the head.

“Agent…” He hisses.

I leave a gentle kiss at the tip, glancing up to him.

He rolls his neck back, knuckles growing white.

Slowly, I move back downwards, this time leisurely licking up the length of the shaft, gently parting
my lips to bring the tip into my mouth. I keep it still for a minute, dipping my tongue to the slit to
gather the bead of pre-cum. I reach a hand to the base, tilting him upwards, allowing me to lower my
head, taking more of him in my mouth.

He’s unable to conceal a pleased, low moan, releasing the sheet from one fist to replace his grip with
my hair. Unsteady hands push my hair back, away from my eyes, then tenderly cup the back of my
head. Hungry for more reactions from him, I descend upon him further, relaxing my throat to take
him deeper, holding still for a moment. His fingers dig into my hair, mouth hanging open, almost as
if it’s agonizing.

I ascend slowly, tongue dragging upwards to gather the musk and salt taste he provides. He pops out
of my mouth, allowing me to ask, “Keep going?”

“Please,” He pants out.

Warmth shoots up my body from my core at the word. I wrap a hand tightly around his cock,
pumping up and then down, using my thumb to rub circles at the skin at the underside of the tip. I
wrap lips back around him, starting to slowly work into a rhythm with my mouth and hand. But I’m
sure not to go too fast, taking my time to get to know his skin, his shape. Teasing, hopefully to bring
back out the cockier, more commander-side of him.

To my surprise, he just lays backwards, relaxing into it. He doesn’t push me to go faster, he doesn’t
buck his hips in impatience, like many men tend to do. Instead, he continues combing through my
hair with a weak hand, careful to keep it out of my face. Every now and then, he lets out a soft moan.
Or he shivers at the stimulation. But there’s not the greediness that I gave him the permission to exert
on me. Just pure adoration… Love. It’s oddly blissful to do this with him.

Guilt twists at my insides, my pace slowing. I pull him out of my mouth, kissing down the shaft, then
lap at the balls, sucking and pulling with my mouth. Anything to draw any impatience of him out.

He merely hums in a trance, continually combing through my hair. “Dammit,” he mumbles. I peek
up at him, making sure the cocky smirk is clear in my eyes. I kiss back up his shaft again, finally
convinced that I broke his patience. But he merely praises, “You’re so beautiful.”

Before I can let the sentiment sink in, before I can think of how similarly those same words sounded
coming from Eerson, I return to Ren’s cock, sliding it back in my mouth and down my throat. I begin
a quicker pace, bobbing up and down, swirling my tongue with the movements. He exhales
smoothly, as if he needs to compose himself. I don’t want him tocompose himself. I reach back into
the hand that’s in my hair, placing my fingers over his, then pushing downwards. He gets the
message, forming a fist into my hair. I stop my movements, waiting for him to take over, relieving me
from freedom.

He pushes down on my head, then pulls back up gingerly, at first. I encourage a rougher pace by
reaching out to his hips, pulling at his skin with the leather tips of my gloves. He responds to the pain
by winding his fist in my hair, tilting his hips upward, ever so slightly. I moan around his cock,
rewarding him. The sound alone, makes him hitch his hips upwards, into me again, then back downwards. Satisfied with the sensation, he begins working himself deeper in my mouth, quicker with each thrust. He presses into the back of my throat, then pulls back to relieve himself, more and more aggressively each time.

I dig my fingers even deeper into his hips. He grunts, holding me downwards as he forces himself all the way into me, then holds me there. My eyes are watering, blood rushing across my body, saliva releasing from the corners of my mouth. I focus on exhaling through my nose, the tip of my nose brushing the dark curls of his pubic hair.

Finally, just when the slightest bit of panic begins to set in, he pulls my head back upwards, away from him. He inhales sharply catching his breath, “Is that too much?”

I take the opportunity to catch my breath too, wiping away the saliva dripping down my chin. “That’s all you got?” I answer, with just the right amount of snark. “I thought you said you could hurt me.”

His eyes light up, challenged. Then, he nods towards the ground, ordering with a lethal tone, “Get on your knees.”

The command takes me off guard. I look down towards the ground, then back to him.

Ren scoffs, sitting upwards and placing a hand around himself. “Should I repeat myself, Agent?”

I don’t answer, keeping my glare on him as I slowly slide off the mattress and onto the floor. He adjusts himself, sitting so that each leg is on either side of me. I settle on my knees, watching as he strokes himself. I notice how large his hand is compared to mine, how his thumb runs over his tip tenderly. He seems to know exactly how to please himself. The image of him pleasing himself, to the thought of me, in this same room during lonely nights of missions crosses my mind. Suddenly, the urge to satisfy myself grows, my core aching for something to touch me. I merely wipe my sweaty palms on my thighs, straightening my back, my face meeting his member once again.

Just when I reach out to him, he pushes my hand away, grabbing at the collar of my uniform. He roughly pulls at the zipper, opening the jacket, exposing my undershirt. Not bothering to take the first layer off, he grabs at the middle of the piece with both hands, tearing it in two. I inhale sharply, and he grabs at my exposed breasts, tugging at my nipple, pulling me forward.

I catch myself before I fall into him, looking up. The pain of the action immediately shoots warmth through my body. I bite back any sound of pleasure.

He coos down at me, “Is that what you prefer?” His hand leaves my breast, going back into my hair. I smile slyly while I give him a nod.

With his alternate hand, he tilts his cock downwards, towards my face. Going on, he smoothly speaks, “Show me how much you want this.”

I don’t respond verbally, opting to open my mouth, trying to take him back inside of me.

He pulls himself away, yanking at my hair. “I’m not convinced.”

I snip, “As if you don’t want this.”

He sighs, disappointed, “I do. I’m not afraid to admit that,” He pulls harder at my hair, leaning down to my face, “But you?” His eyes race across my body, before settling back into my gaze, “You’ve
always been far too arrogant to beg, too officious to follow my orders, too indifferent to ever want. Yet, here you are… You’re quite the mess of contradictions, aren’t you?”

He’s not wrong. My eyes study the way he’s gripping his member. I look back up at him, weighing my options. I do, really want him. I’ve never enjoyed fellatio, but with him, it’s quite desirable. And the sooner I progress things, the sooner I can find my own release. I look down mumbling, “Please?”

“That was weak,” He sighs, attention shifting to stoking himself again. His hand falls from my hair, suddenly disinterested.

I grab his wrist, stopping him from abandoning the notion of touching me. I glare into his eyes fiercely, voice hardened as I clearly say, “Please?”

He chuckles softly, resuming the motion of stroking my hair, “Your tone could be a bit politer, can’t it?”

The soft sensation of him caressing my hair distracts me from thinking of any snarkier comment. I let myself remember is how much I want to touch him. How much time I’m wasting being stubborn. I don’t have time to waste. I grip at his arm, tighter, “Please…” I can’t help but blush at the concept of being so weak, so submissive, for the idea of satisfying him. Yet, I reiterate, “Please, Ren.”

His expression immediately softens. “Open your mouth,” He gently encourages.

I obey.

With a low grunt, he slides himself past my swollen lips, pushing my head down on him, then pulling me back upward. I place my hands back on his thighs, relishing in his warmth. I try to memorize every part of him with my tongue as he moves me up and down his cock, sucking inward to hallow my cheeks. He orders, “Eyes up here.”

I force my gaze upwards, suddenly feeling a whole new level of embarrassment by the action. I can’t look up defiantly, proud of myself for having him under my control. Now, he’s completely in charge. We’re moving at his pace. He’s literally above me. I’m taking his orders. He has all agency here. This is exactly what I needed, tonight.

This is what fucking him would have been like when we first met.

Some part of me cranes at the twisted fantasy I spent so long denying myself of. Hating him was fun. Hating him didn’t have implications or consequences. Hating him never hurt me. It never hurt him. I moan into his thrusts, my eyes watering again at his quickening pace. My throat makes some involuntary animalistic noise as he presses into me. He groans at the sensation the vibration creates for him.

His eyelids close halfway, jaw clenched, hand pulling at my scalp harsher than ever, the pressure engulfing me reaching it’s maximum. I ask myself if he’s going to cum, just like this, without touching me at all. I don’t want him to cum yet. If he does, I decide that I’m going to be fairly pissed off. I project that, admittedly not by accident.

“What?” He yanks himself out of me, catching his breath. Spit comes dripping down my face sloppily before he smears it away with his thumb. “Are you feeling impatient?”

I narrow my eyes. “I was merely under the assumption that tonight wouldn’t amount to just a blowjob.”

He smirks, proudly, “Such an eager thing…”
I fight to not roll my eyes at that.

He leans forward, a curious gaze drawn to my breasts. His hand reaches down, running around the shape absentmindedly. I focus on not submitting to the touch, not reacting to the pleasure that shoots throughout me as the path of his fingers reach my nipples. He says, thoughtfully, “You haven’t been touched at all yet… You must be feeling so neglected.”

An untameable tremble consumes me as his thumb comes upwards, pressing down into my right nipple.

His smirk returns at either the physical reaction to his touch, or my obvious shame that came afterwards.

I challenge, trying to make up for the embarrassing reaction with a sharp tone, “Are you going to do anything about that?”

His hand reaches down my stomach, to the hem of my pants. His fingers curl at the waistband and he tugs, willing me to stand. I follow his lead. “Well, of course.” He unsnaps the button, then unzips the zipper, now parallel to his face. I try to seem slow and patient in supporting him remove the garment, but he swats my hands away, snipping, “I do not require your assistance, thank you.”

A puff of air is released throughout my nostrils in irritation. I look down at him as he pulls my trousers downwards, eyes scanning the newly revealed skin. They drop to the ground and I lift each leg up, allowing for him to remove my socks. He’s being agonizingly slow about every little movement. His callused hands move back up the whole length of my body, from shins to ribs. His hands go under my torn undershirt and unzipped jacket, sliding them off my shoulders. As they fall to the ground, I finally pull my gloves off. Pain shoots across my hands as the cloth inside of the glove catches at the scabs forming on my knuckles, tearing at the new skin struggling to form. I fold my hands behind my back, hiding the injury.

Ren leans forward, placing a delicate kiss on my stomach while large hands find their place at my hips. I flinch at his tenderness.

He peers up to me, “How would you like to cum?”

I freeze at the question, taken aback by the bluntness.

Impatient, he pulls away, leaning back on his palms, “Well?”

“I…” Any way he wants, is my honest answer. Any way that doesn’t involve us lovingly gazing into each other eyes as we both whisper sweet-nothings into each other’s ears. I cross my arms across my chest, trying to figure out how to phrase that in a sexy way.

“Answer me.”

His irritated tone makes me snap back, “However you are capable of making me.”

There’s a flash of rage in his expression at my doubt. He reaches out, a hand coming around my bicep as he stands and pulls me to the bed. “Get down.” He orders, to which I oblige. He sorts me into a position on my knees before he pushes down my back, forcing me down to my elbows. My forearms dig into the plush mattress, supporting the weight he shoves down on me. As his hand moves down my spine, he climbs onto the bed as well, behind me.

His hand slides downwards, to my ass, rubbing at the cloth of my undergarments. His hands are not graceful, groping and sliding to my thighs. Suddenly, without warning, his fingers run up the middle
of my legs, my back arching into his touch. I didn’t realize how wet I am. I hiss sharply, hating that I
couldn’t enjoy his touch, as I was too surprised by it.

He drags the dampened fingers up my back, almost mockingly, as if to brag about his effect on me.

I push back with my hips, impatiently trying to find him. He must retreat from my touch, now only
hooking fingers under the elastic of my undergarments. He yanks downward, exposing me and
leaving them stretched at my thighs.

As I am bent forward, unable to see any of his actions, I can’t help but become consumed by how
fast my heart is racing, anticipating. He doesn’t do anything for a moment. He’s silent, unmoving. I
don’t know what he’s doing. I impulsively taunt, “Are you waiting for permission?”

He huffs, “You are impatient.”

“You’re not getting on with it.” I hiss.

“Give me a-”

“I’m not impatient, you’re insufferable.”

Suddenly, he pushes against me, rubbing his hard erection against my opening. He supports himself
over me, one hand grabbing at my hip, the other going into my hair. I didn’t realize how sore my
scalp was until he started pulling again. He grinds himself against me, fingers in my hair working
their way through the strands to expose my ear. He pushes forward, eliciting a whimper from me,
saying into my ear with a dark voice, “Do you ever stop complaining?”

I push it further, “Maybe, if you weren’t so pitiful, you’d be able to make me.”

His hand that rested on my head grabs a fist full of hair, pulling up, so my ear is pressed against his
lips. “Who are you to talk to me like that? You’re just some conditioned agent, experiencing errors in
your code. You amount to a malfunctioning droid, an outlier of the system.”

Again, he’s not wrong. That is what I am. He knows that I know that. I counter, “Because of you.
Everything you touch falls apart.”

Teasing, he brushes lips against my ear, purring against me, “I destroyed you.”

I whisper back, challenging, “I don’t feel destroyed.”

In a split second, he pushes me back down, towards the mattress. His hands leave my hair and are at
my entrance, penetrating me. I bite back a gasp, as he curves his fingers up abruptly, remembering
exactly how to touch me. But this time, his fingers jerk inside me. He’s forceful, not taking the time
to examine, study nor appreciate. He touches me like he owns me. He pulls his fingers out, only to
slide them up and down my slit, gathering my wetness with two fingers.

The hand he touched me with moves back over my body, wrist resting against my left shoulder. I
turn my head, looking over at his glistening fingers. With the movement, he pushes the fingers into
my mouth, forcing me to taste myself. I suck against the digits, with no choice but to consume the
metallic fluid.

He growls at the sight, grinding back against me roughly, before removing his fingers from my
mouth. He sits back on his knees, both hands now grabbing at my bottom. He spreads me open,
removing one hand from my backside to stoke down from my entrance, then around my clitoris. I
shiver, yearning for his touch, some pressure, anything.
He shoves two fingers back inside of me, thrusting in and out, all while his freehand landscapes the skin of my thighs. My eyes clench shut, mind fuzzy with the pleasure finally being provided. His fingers are so long, able to stimulate me to full extent. His thumb pushes upwards slowly circling around my clit.

I jerk at the sensation, to which he rewards with a squeeze of my ass. He continues the circles, changing the size of his thumb’s path, alternating directions, adjusting the pressure he applies. I shudder, I try to ease into his touch, to anticipate what he’ll do next, but I can’t think ahead of him.

He removes his fingers from inside of me, also removing his thumb from my clit. I grab at the sheets, so desperate for him to continue touching me. I am impatient. I pant out, trying to encourage, “That felt good.”

“I am aware.” He bluntly replies.

Initially, I react with a humored laugh. The response is cut off, however, by something wet sliding up my folds, parting the skin, before it retreats.

I lurch at the feeling, gasping, “Ren,”

The sensation returns, his tongue dipping into my lips. He hums against me, waiting for elaboration of me calling his name. I don’t elaborate. I don’t think I can. The vibration of his voice seems to shoot up my whole body, then settling back deep into my stomach. I only whimper gently. He spreads the skin apart with wide hands, allowing for him to dive his tongue deeper, into my entrance.

Desperate heat consumes me, his face fully pressed into me as his tongue scoops at my wetness, eagerly devouring it all. He licks at me, sucking at certain parts of me, pulling with his teeth at others. Everything inciting pure pleasure under his touch. He growls into me, the noise muffled by my sex. Fuck, everything is so warm.

Then, his head dips down deeper, tongue briefly brushing against my clit. My back arches, craning for the sensation to return. He allows it, moaning into me as his tongue traces it again. His hands move up to my hips, pulling me back against his mouth. I happily obliges, pushing back against him. He kisses my clit sensually, alternating between flicking at it with a stiff tongue, lapping at me, and sucking the nub gently. He pulls me against him tighter, mouth turning relentless at my clit, while he tilts his head to allow fingers to return to my entrance, pumping in and out perfectly.

All of the neglect from before seems to raise the intensity of how he feels against me now. The relief of him is quicker, stronger.

Suddenly, I’m afraid that I’m going to cum soon too. Not that that would matter. It would just be embarrassing. Do I even care? The angle he has me at is so exposing, leaving me vulnerable to him, unable to pull him away or squirm out of his grasp. I probably seem so inexperienced, so weak. I usually don’t enjoy this part of intercourse either. Not many people I’ve been with have been good at it, nor enthusiastic. Either that, or I just haven’t cared enough to take notice. But Ren… He presses his face into me further. I can’t help but moan his name, “Ren…”

He doesn’t let up. He goes faster. Tongue stiffer. Fingers deeper. The tension within me builds to it’s height, right when he focuses on the perfect spot.

“I-” I gasp, pushing back on his mouth, “Ren, I’m close.”

“Already?” He asks, pulling his face away from me, keeping his fingers pumping. “Are you that
“Easy to please?”

“Fuck off.” I snip.

He retreats his fingers immediately, “Very well.”

I look back, over my shoulder, “No, don’t –” I notice him returning to stroking himself, still completely hard, using the hand wet from touching me to lubricate himself. My eyes reach his face, noticing his glistening chin. “Don’t actually fuck off.” All the built-up warmth within me slowly deteriorating, my release slipping away from me.

He sneers, “Touch yourself, if you’re going to be so ill-mannered.”

“I want you.” I argue.

Fire flashes in his eyes. “Say it again,” He demands. “Louder.”

I know he would react that way. Kylo Ren being told that he’s wanted is his greatest pleasure, as is his greatness weakness. I swallow hard, reiterating, “I want you.”

He leans forwards, positioning himself against my entrance. He strokes the head of his cock up and down my flesh. I flinch when the tip brushes my clit, to which he merely massages his hands into my skin deeper. Just as soon as I try to recover, he begins pushing into me.

There’s no resistance this time. Only heat. He pushes in further, breath hitching with every inch. Once he’s completely inside of me, body pressed behind mine, we both let out a relieved moan. He slowly pulls himself out, completely, taking time to observe the way he opened me up before he pushes back in, all at once.

I gasp, forcing myself to remain steady on all fours. He pulls out, halfway, pushing back in, quickly beginning a rhythm. His hands grab at my ass, spreading and pulling with his thrusts. I try to stabilize myself on my forearms, but he reaches up to my shoulder blades, pushing my chest down onto the mattress.

The new angle forces him deeper into me, more directly in me. He growls, continuing his pace, holding me down as he rolls his hips with each thrust. I exhale evenly, succumbing to his assertive movements, completely at his disposal. He moves against me unpredictably. There’s no way for me to go his speed, as his speed is not in any sense steady. He does whatever he feels inclined to – whether that’s slowly dragging himself against my walls, or quickly pounding against me, skin slapping violently on skin.

Which is what he eventually reverts to – slamming himself deep into me, relentlessly. Ravenous noises escape his mouth, ravenously consuming my body with his heat, with his hands, with everything. I dig my face into the mattress closing my eyes, drowning into the pleasure of it all. For a moment, I tap into his projection of the Force, only to find raw lust. Years of pent up sexual frustration and repression, all released on me.

He leans over me, still inside of me, forcing my knees to give out to his weight. My stomach crashes against the mattress and his legs are replaced over my own. He places his weight to my back, continuing the movements even faster, harder. He presses his mouth to shoulder blade, sucking, biting and kissing at his leisure.

I whimper an indiscernible noise into the sheets, trying to grind back against him. I like the speed he’s going at now. And, I like this position. I can completely feel him. But I don’t have to look at him. It’s sexual, raw. But not as intimate. I remove a hand from under the pillow above me in an
effort to try to grab his hip.

He struggles to reach an arm below my abdomen, holding me even closer, enfolding his arm around stomach. The action makes his thrusts even more present within me, every inch of my walls squeezing around him desperately. He groans louder, breath shorter than ever. His arm feels me up, across my breasts, to my neck. His fingers wrap around my throat, not wasting any time to begin choking me with an unapologetic amount of force. My eyes water, mouth opened, gasping for oxygen.

"Fuck..." He rasps against my face, "A-Agent, fuck..." He grunts again.

Tears blur my vision. My right-hand clenches back at his hip, until my fingernails are embedded into his skin. My left-hand reaches upwards, grabbing at the headboard of the bed, needing to find something to cling onto. His hand squeezes at my throat as he pulls himself nearly completely out and thrusts back in, hips crashing into mine, as deep inside of me as it’s humanely possible for him to be.

Suddenly, a sharp pain shoots up my body, as if I’ve been punched in the gut.

It’s shattering.

A cry gets stuck in my throat, trapped by his enclosed hand. My body squirms underneath him, knuckles violently splitting further open from my painfully clenched fists.

He holds me tighter, trying to keep me still so that he can thrust in again.

Another sharp jolt of pain strikes as he drives himself within me. All of the pain from my mind somehow merges with the physical pain, it all transforms into one explosive entity, overtaking everything. Images flash in my mind – killing Tuchell and Eerson, Lex sobbing, a young Ben Solo being baited by Snoke, the bitter cold of Hoth, Hux and Lieutenant Leven cornering me. People I don’t even remember killing resurfacing in my mind. Men I have completely forgotten lying with, suddenly inside me, where Ben is, now. Panic overwhelms me, and I utter out through a closing throat, “s-,” my hands frantically tap against the mattress as if this were a sparring match and I am accepting my defeat. I gasp, trying the word again, barely able to croak out, “stop,”

Immediately, he releases his hand from my throat and unwrapping his arm from around me. He quickly pulls himself out of me, nearly jumping off of me and sitting to my side. He stammers, terrified, “What’s wrong?”

I curl up on my side, holding my legs close to my chest. Pain courses up my body, where it was once a staggering shock, now a dull ache that echoes from somewhere deep within me. I bury my face into the pillow in shame, tears beginning to soak the sheet. I want to tell him I’m fine and we can continue. But only a small sob comes out when I try. I muffle it into the pillow. I don’t think it’s the pain. More embarrassment, than anything. Disappointment. I can’t let this be how our last night ends. How could I be so sensitive? How could I be so weak? I could’ve kept going, I should have. Every part of my body shivers violently. Will this be how he remembers me… us?

Suddenly, I can’t breathe.

Ben reaches out, ghosting a trembling hand over my arm. “What happened?” his voice breaks, the pressure of fear in his chest evident in his tone alone.

I swallow another cry, trying to gather myself. I can’t. I end up fully sobbing into the pillow. It is as if he’s still choking me, my throat closed off, oxygen unable to enter my body. The panic of the pain
returns. The panic of wasting time. I’m wasting our final time together. I grab at the blankets, clenching, blood spilling from my knuckles onto the back of my hands. I ruined it all. I ruined our last night.

Ben’s hand moves away from my arm. When it returns, he places a blanket over my naked, trembling figure, covering me. He says, voice strained, obviously trying to hold back his own emotions, “Can I enter your mind, to see what’s wrong?”

I shake my head furiously, panic multiplying at the implication.

“Okay, that’s okay.” He reassures, hands ghosting over me but never making a connection.

I gasp, trying to let air inside of me, but only met with the sensation of drowning. The mattress is unsteady beneath me, my head spinning. My mind is flooded with the past. The dark presence of death, destruction, power… it is as if the Supreme Leader is still lurking in my mind, himself. I’m going to pass out. I am about to pass out.

Ben asks, “Am I allowed to touch you?”

All I can manage is a nod.

Immediately, he joins me under the blanket and lies behind me. He wraps his arms around me as tightly as he can manage. I feel his lips pressed to my shoulder as he shushes me smoothly, running his hands up and down my forearms. My shaking hands grab at his, holding him as close as I can.

He asks into my shoulder, “Can you feel me breathing?”

I focus on his chest moving against my bare back. He exaggerates the sounds of his breaths. I nod again.

“Match me,” He instructs.

At first, it’s impossible. My breaths are far too short, too quick. I can’t change their pace. I can’t control my body. He keeps his breaths steady, patiently waiting for me to follow him. I concentrate on it as hard as I possibly can, matching his inhale… then exhale… I force myself to continue. Inhale. Exhale.

Whatever was once spinning around me piece by piece formulates back into equilibrium. His arms provide a security in reality – something that has become quite rare.

I use the opportunity of regained control to whimper, “I’m so sorry.”

He shakes his head against me, “Don’t ever be sorry. It’s okay.” His face is presses to the back of my neck. He shudders there, my skin able to detect the moisture from his own tears.

I sniff, wiping at my face, “Why are you crying?”

He laughs, immaturely arguing, “I’m not crying… you’re crying.”

A noise escapes from me that is somewhere between a laugh and a sob. I turn my body to face him. Hurriedly he reaches up to his face, wiping away at his tears, trying to hide his reaction from me. His eyes are red, bottom lip fighting hard to not tremble. I pull his hand away, so that I can push back his tears myself, caressing his soft jawline. When I do, I notice my hand dripping with blood, knuckles split with gaping crevasses. I lower it back down, to which Ben grabs it, carefully holding it into his palm, between us.
He asks quietly, examining the split knuckles, “What did you punch?”

I sniff, “I don’t know, just stuff.”

“Any…” He tries to ask it lightly, “People?”

I shake my head, unable to not grin, “Not this time.”

He says, voice as soft as his grasp on my hand, “I know what it’s like to be angry. You don’t have to keep it all to yourself.”

I don’t comment on that. I just redirect the subject, trying to make light of whatever came over me, “I don’t know why I freaked out like that.”

“I should have been…” He stops himself, before his voice wavers too much. He takes a breath, then starts again, “I should have been more careful.”

He bites down hard on his lip, looking away. His chest shakes.

“Come here,” I mumble, pulling him into me.

His head falls into the nook of my shoulder and neck, arms latching around me. He shakes with his silent cries. I cloak my arms around him, holding him in the tightest embrace I can manage. I find that I start crying again too.

We hold each other like that for a while, all of our emotions we have been repressing to one another suddenly overflowing for both for us to see. There’re no boundaries to it. We don’t even think to hide it. No longer is there the veil of our identities to shield our feelings. Just us.

“Did you mean what you said?” He mumbles into me, trying to get through his question without his voice transforming into more cries, “Do you think I destroy everything I touch?”

The question causes pain to settle in my abdomen, guilt multiplying in my mind at an unstoppable rate. “Of course not, I was just trying to instigate you.” My fingers pet through his hair, craving to give him ease, “If anything, I destroy everything I touch.”

He responds, “That’s far from the truth.”

It’s not. That’s how I was raised. That’s my one purpose. Even on this mission, when I revolt against everything and everyone I’ve come to know, destruction is my plan of action. It’s my only means of getting things done. Kylo Ren never destroyed me. Will this destroy him? Is that arrogant of me to think? Or empathetic?

Am I giving up on him, by going through with this?

I already asked him his opinion of leaving the Order. He laughed at the idea. I physically can’t even leave the Order. I’d be a walking target everywhere I went, with this tracker in my head.

I have thought about an alternative to my plan for nights on end, with no avail. I have no other options. I have no happy ending with him. No happy ending at all.

But the people of Bayora might.

And one day, Ben may have one too.

I might be able to help secure that.
Maybe, if I can accomplish that, my ending might be happy after all. I was too late to secure Tuchell’s fate. I can’t be late for anyone else. Not anymore.

There’s something that swells within me. A power, radiating throughout my chest that extends into the energy around me. It’s a bright energy. But full of peace. It is reassurance that I have to do this. No matter how much it may hurt to do so.

For a moment, I dive into the energy Ben projects. It’s full of unstable tension. There’s a myriad of guilt. Sorrow. Confusion.

I pull him away, allowing for us to look into each other’s puffy eyes. I urge, holding his face, “Do you realize how much you’ve done for me?” I can’t withhold the smile as the realization sets within myself.

He doesn’t respond to that, probably going through a million ways to refute it. I focus on the softness found in his watery, golden-brown eyes. Suddenly, I’m brought back to the night on Naboo. The nights spent, staying up late on Korriban. As I succumb to the nostalgia, I realize that I do not want our last night to be fake, pretending to be people we used to be, or people we could never become. I want tonight to be the realest one yet.

My voice is solid as I say, “You’ve given me so much. You showed me compassion, when I didn’t even understand what compassion was. You taught me all I could ever ask for.” I focus down at him, the familiar tears beginning to well up in my eyes all over again, “You were my chance to live an actual life. You gave me that. So, don’t ever believe that you destroyed anything for me. Please.”

He places his hands over my forearms, the contact giving him stability. His fingers lightly shake, overcome with emotion. “You should have never had your life taken from you, in the first place. I know you hate them for that. I do not blame you, despite my best attempts to act otherwise.” He squeezes my skin, “I just hope that one day, I can make it up to you.”

“You don’t have to make it up to me.” I run a finger against another tear traveling down his face. “No matter what happened, or what will happen, we’ll always have this moment, at the very least. Nothing can change that.” I shrug, sniffing, “That’s really enough for me.”

He finally smiles back down at me, “That’s enough for me too.”

It will have to be. This is all I have left to give him. My voice breaks as I ask, “Do you mean that?”

“Absolutely.” He sighs, tender eyes settling further into my gaze, watching me with pure adoration as I exchange the same look back to him. “Can I tell you something?”

I nod.

He continues, succumbing to the mesmerizing sensation the recollection brings him, “Ever since we first spent the night together on Korriban, I’ve been having these dreams about you – about us. But in them, we are a few years older than we are now. I don’t even know what planet we were on, I didn’t recognize it. I think my mind just made it up. But there were golden fields. A lot of hills and valleys in the distance. It was so beautiful. The sky was so warm and so full of the light from three of the nearby suns. It was better than Naboo, better than Chandrila. And there was this small cabin – our house – there, in the middle of it all.

“Please, don’t think this is weird, but there were kids there too, and I think they might have been our children. There was a little girl, who looked so much like you. Probably exactly how you looked, when you were younger. And a smaller boy, who looked like us. And it all seemed so normal... So
arbitrary. We were in normal clothes, we would have normal conversations, I imagined we had normal jobs. It was as if the war was never even started to begin with. Everything was so perfect, I sometimes try to convince myself that it wasn’t a dream and it was some kind of vision, instead.” He laughs, turning his head away from my grasp in embarrassment. “It’s silly, I know.”

I’m quiet for a moment. My bloody hands fall to the space between us. I respond, “I don’t think it’s silly. I like it.”

“Really?” He attempts to soften his tone, trying to dial down his optimism.

“Yeah. I’m surprised that you liked it though,” My words go softer, mumbling the words out of fear of offending him. “It doesn’t sound like a life for the heir of Darth Vader.”

“I know,” He replies. “It’s not about that, with you.”

I reach up to his face, pulling his gaze back down to me, careful to not get any of my blood on him. “I…” I take a deep breath, “I had a dream like that too, one time.”

“You did?” He perks up. “What was yours like?”

I smile, thinking back to the first time I saw the map, displayed in that dusty observatory on Jakku. It shined with a blue radiance of importance, of promise for a better tomorrow. It was hope. I confess to him, “It was perfect.”

“Do you think it could have been a vision?” He beams, optimistic.

“Even if it wasn’t,” I run my hand past his hair, combing through, thumb settling on his cheek, “I’m tremendously grateful to have dreamt it.”

We stare at each other for a singular second, just taking in the bliss of each other’s presence. Simultaneously, we lean into each other and for the first time that night, our lips meet. When they touch, the softness he brings envelopes me as if it were warm water, sweeping over the expanse of my body. In the kiss, there is no bitterness towards a ticking clock. There’s not even a goodbye.

The kiss is comprised of pure gratitude.

Ben and I ended up taking a shower together.

In the shower, he held my hands under the running water, the blood pouring in between us and down the drain. I watched him as he positioned himself in front of the showerhead, the warm water spraying off of his back. He kept his concentration down to my knuckles as he called out to the Force, willing the broken skin back together. It hurt. But more than it hurt, it was mesmerizing. When he healed my back after Korriban, I couldn’t watch the skin form together. This time, I had a full view of the mysticism. It looked as if time itself was moving backwards. He kept his eyes closed, breath steady.

When he opened his eyes, my knuckles turned pink and scarred, obviously fused together by something, as the skin raised with the area it was once split. I tried flexing my fingers to find the skin sore, but tough, able to withstand my movements.
He inspected my knuckles with skeptical eyes, evaluating his work.

I smiled up at him in awe, exhaling, “You’re incredible.”

Whether by accident or not, he projected that he thought the same thing about me.

We kissed for a long time in the shower, letting the water run over us and between us. Every time we made any attempt to bathe each other, it led into a few more minutes of making out. We took turns with our backs pressed against the shower’s slick walls, the soap of the shower turning into suds with the movement of our hands, our wet hair sticking intrusively to one another’s face, our bodies slick against each other.

Somehow, we ended back up on the bed, not bothering to dry ourselves. We didn’t even turn off the shower. Ben reached back with his hand back, in the middle of a kiss, using the Force to turn the shower valve. We settled into each other, him over top of me, only pull away to look at each other in the eyes once again.

After what seemed like eternity of being lost in each other’s projections, he glanced downward to my body completely bare, covered in droplets of water, before him. He looked me back in the eyes as he said, “We don’t have to go any further tonight.” A pause. “This is pretty great.”

“I want to.” I asked, “Do you?”

He swallowed the lump in his throat, then nodded.

I smiled, reassuring, “We can take it slow.”

He gently ran his hand down the length of my body – from my collarbone, down to the curve of my breast, my ribs, then to my hip bone. His hand came back up the path it traveled, the back of his hand sliding tenderly against my cheek.

I leaned upwards, placing an innocent kiss on his jaw, then rested my head back down.

He rewarded the action with feather-light kisses across my face. My eyebrows, cheeks, hairline. Then, lips, once again.

He worked his way back down my body with extreme patience. He took his time, making sure every single inch of me gave him some sort of a shiver or skip of breath. The whole duration of his venture downwards left me aching for him, more and more with each second.

He praised softly against my sternum, “I like you like this…” He kissed a particularly sensitive place above my stomach, leading back up to my breasts, before returning to massage and kiss me there, once again.

I swallowed hard, feeling myself clench at the rumble of his low voice. “I like you like this, too.”

He smiled against my breast, peppering more kisses upwards. His mouth traveled back across my throat, his lips appreciating the dips and curves of my collarbones. Whereas I left red splotches on him, from aggressively biting and sucking, he left similar marks, but with a slow tenderness. I found myself pushing his head downward, unable to refrain from trying to guide him in between my legs.

He complied, but at his own pace. He kissed back down my stomach and pushed his weight away from me, allowing him to settle with his body in between my legs. I gathered his wet hair into my hands, pushing it away from his face. His face moved against my stomach further and further down, until his lips met my public bone.
Before he could ask, I granted him permission, “Keep going.”

He grinned, acknowledging my premeditations, fingers reaching up my thighs and to my center, running them up and down my slit.

I sighed, body melting into the sheets, closing my eyes in pure bliss.

His hand moved from my center, back over my hips, then all the way down to my thigh. His thumb began to circle the scar from the blaster shot, the pink crater still prevalent in my skin. I never did treat the scarring, I suppose.

He said, rubbing the pad of his thumb against it, “I’m really glad you didn’t die that night.”

“Yeah?” I chuckled, “Me too.”

He laughed to himself, leaning forward to sweetly kiss at the inside of my thigh. My legs writhed in anticipation.

His lips dragged closer and closer to my center, until they finally found the source of my warmth. He pulled away, massaging my slit with his hand again, before using two fingers to part me open. His tongue ran up and down the flesh sensually.

Ben glanced up to me, bathing in whatever the hell I must have been projecting. His amber eyes flickered in excitement, delving his tongue deep into my entrance, to revel in my taste. My head went back into the pillow, fingers struggling to keep a grip on his hair.

He kissed back up my folds, sucking at the skin and entrapping it with gentle pulls of his lips. My body craned as he moves further and further upwards until finally,

I gasped, “Oh,”

His mouth sealed around my clit, sucking as his tongue swirled enthusiastically around the bundle of nerves. My vision nearly immediately tunneled, pleasure rushing throughout every vein in my body.

I panted above him, holding his hair back with a hand, unable to resist pressing him into me further.

He obliged, licking and suckling around me, as if he’s dying of thirst, desperate to please me, to please himself. His arms hooked under my legs, pulling me ever closer onto his face.

My head thrashed to the side when the pleasure within me reached a boiling point, unable to be contained by a tightened chest. I stifled a moan into the pillow.

But my head was forced away from the pillow with an invisible hand. The pull was gentle, but so easy to surrender to. I was forced to moan out audibly, into the air above me. Ben made a muffled noise into me as he flicked his tongue against my clit with more pressure.

He pulled away, urging, “Don’t hold back from me,” His eyes locked onto mine, saying rigidly, consumed by his desire, “I want to feel you finish.”

I let out a shaky breath, “Okay.”

His tongue returned to my center, long and flat, eagerly taking in every bit of wetness dripping out of me. My whole body arched with the slow movements, my ankles crossing at his back. With each gasp and writhe, he carefully adjusted his speed and trajectory, perfectly playing into my body.

His voice once again moaned low against me, returning to sucking at my clit. My heart was thudding
in my ear, my mouth hung open in mid-gasp, vision turning blurring. Everything within me was moving towards a peak, my desire multiplying by a minute.

Ben went faster.

I gasped, “I-”

Ben’s hands grabbed at the skin of my hips, forcing me to stay still against the overwhelming stimulation. He buried himself in-between my legs, fully pressing his face into me. Suddenly, his fingers were inside of me, curling upwards, all while his teeth grazed at my most sensitive spot, tongue pressing down hard.

Everything within me crashed together, pleasure completely consuming me. It started in my toes, my feet curling, then shot up the rest of my body. My hips worked against his face, hand woven into his hair to hold him against me.

My legs shook viciously though the orgasm, my core clenching around his fingers. Every bit of bundled energy inside of me finally released as I cried out in ecstasy. He kept his face firmly against me, slowly working his fingers in and out of me. He moved away from my clit, down to my entrance, then removed his fingers to allow himself to lap at me steadily. Every time I felt as if my release had ended, another spasm would control my body.

My arms fell to my sides, my legs relaxing on either side of him. An incredible force of fatigue washed over me, unable to not flinch at Ben’s slow and grateful movements. He removed himself from me, sitting up. My hazy vision locked on to the sight of him, his chin, lips and nose glistening.

His wet hand slid up my hip, my stomach, then went to my cheek as he positioned himself over me. He kissed me sweetly with copper lips, praising, “Good,” his tone is reminiscent to what he would use when instructing a Knight. Not quite as dry, but definitely similar. “You’re so good, for me.”

I melted into the sheets, trembling hands needing to pull him down to kiss me again. I caught my breath in between the kiss, giving me the ability to plead, “I don’t want to be done yet.”

“We don’t have to be.” He glanced back towards my, examining me as he pondered how to go about this. He asked, “Do you have any preference? For uh…” He awkwardly paused, inwardly cringing at himself. “The… position?”

I shook my head, “Not really, I just want to be able to-” Blood rushed to my face, “I want to be able to see you.”

He beamed at that.

I found myself sitting on his lap, as he sat with his back against the headboard. The position allowed us to work together, our hips moving, our hands free to touch one another freely, our lips close enough to encapsulate each other’s mouths, neck and shoulders.

We were able to look down at the connection of our bodies, watching the way we fit into each other. When we didn’t do that, we were looking into each other’s eyes. When I stared at him, I was unable to feel anything else in the whole entire galaxy. It was all him. It was the wet friction his length created inside of me, the way I stretched around him. There was the pained throbbing between my legs only relieved by him rocking into me, returning as soon as we pulled away from one another.

It went on for a long time. Every time I felt as if he were close, I prolonged it even more by slowing our thrusts, pushing him back. I didn’t want it to end. I knew what would happen when it did.
But eventually, I knew he couldn’t hold back any longer. He reached down between us, thumb working in-between my legs as his thrusts became frantic. He pleaded in my ear, his breath growing so short and so quick. I couldn’t hold back any longer either.

Our bodies grasped around each other desperately, holding on to one another as if we were falling. It brought me back to Hoth, the fear of death, destruction and chaos being the very thing that forced us together. His fingernails dug into my back as mine went into his hair. Just when he twitched within me, releasing himself, I clenched around him, our bodies forming into one unit.

It wasn’t just our bodies. The projection that hung in the air turned bright, melded together. I saw his mind. He saw mine. Not any specific thoughts. But the overall projections of energy. The space between us became greyer, something undecipherable as him or me.

I remember crying out his name. I didn’t realize I was saying the one thing he forbidden me to say until I said it. But he didn’t flinch at the sound. If anything, after hearing it, he somehow managed to grab onto me tighter.

As we both came down from it all, tears formed back into my eyes. I held onto him securely, unable to allow myself to let him go. I told him, “I love you.”

That is the only time I have ever said it first.

He paused for a moment. Still. But the next time he moved, it was to kiss my shoulder, saying into my warm skin, “I love you, too.”

And now, I run through it all again for millionth time in my head.

I try to memorize all I can of it, every single detail. But with each time I go over it, it feels further and further away. More like some sort of dream than an actual event I experienced.

I look upwards towards his long, dark hair as his back is to me, his presence consumed by sleep. My hand runs up his bare back, tracing gently against his spine. I reach down to the blanket we share, the hem of it at his hips. I pull it up, covering up to his shoulders. My arm returns around his waist as my body fits back into his form.

I close my eyes.

I try to remember this, too.

But I barely have enough time to start.

A flashing light appears from above. Three quick, intrusive beeps overwhelm the ship.

Ben stirs against me, groaning roughly. He mumbles an irritated, “Already?”

I think the same thing to myself, holding onto him tighter.

He relaxes back into my embrace as we try to ignore the occasional beeping and bright flashing lights.

I manage to completely block it out, but Ben is the one to give in, removing my arm from his waist and sitting up. He slides off the mattress, reaching down to the articles of clothing on the floor. He separates his pieces from mine in different piles on the mattress.

As he goes to fold my trousers, the data storage unit and Tuchell’s ring fall onto the floor with a
small clink.

Quickly, I scoot to the edge of the bed, reaching down to grab the ring, then –

“What’s this?”

I glance up to him holding the map of the Unknown Regions in his hand.

I steadily reply, securing my hand around the ring before he can see it. “It’s for my holopad. It has a map of the planet.”

He narrows his eyes, twisting it between his fingers, “It looks old.” His thumb runs against the red, crystal grooves, “Who gave you it?”

I shrug, “R8.”

“Weird.” He hands it back to me, not giving it further thought.

I try not to make it obvious how relieved I am to close my hand securely around it.

“You should probably make sure he’s functioning, before you leave.” He winces, remembering his earlier actions.

I glance to the jumpsuit and rain gear on the dresser. “Probably.”

I sit on the floor of the loading dock with the droid, taking my time to screw the bolts back into place from R8’s chest plate. Ben has used many methods when turning R8 off. This time, he reverting to overriding the circuits within him, requiring for a manual start-up. It’s the same thing he did the first time he turned off R8. Just less... aggressively.

I screw the bolts back into place and notice R8’s eyes flicker. I twist my wrist hard, making sure the screws are secure. The droid’s fingers start twitching. I readjust it’s head and straighten it’s neck.

The bulbs of light slowly overtake R8’s eyes. It looks up to me, unsurprised. Nevertheless, it says, “You repaired me.”

“Wouldn’t it be a little suspicious if I didn’t?” I mumble to it.

R8 responds, “I am aware of why Ren disables me when he does. There’s nothing suspicious about it.”

I narrow my eyes at the droid, removing my hands from it’s cold, metal face. I return to my feet, not saying a thing. I begin making my way back towards the pilot’s cabin, back to Ben.

The droid speaks up, “Agent.”

I turn to it.

The droid doesn’t say whatever it was going to say immediately. It stares at me for a while. Then, it settles on, “You look like a true agent.”
I glance downward at the fitted jumpsuit that encapsulates my body. I subconsciously stand up a bit straighter, studying the black ensemble, layered with tight burgundy webbing. My fingers feel at the fabric, against its waterproof, scale-like texture. The piece is woven in panels, almost creating an armor-like pattern across my body. I say to the droid, “It rains a lot on Bayora. There’re several flooded areas of the land. I understand this uniform’s function.”

“Do you have your comm-link, to contact me about any questions you have about the terrain? Or your target?”

I answer, “I won’t have questions, I’ve studied for this intensively.”

“I do not doubt you, Agent. But do you have your comm-link, just in case?”

I roll my eyes, “Yes.” Even though I know it’s on me, I unzip the right-hip pocket of my jumpsuit, feeling for the comm-link, ring and data storage unit.

“Good.” The droid chirps.

I reach up to my hair, making sure the bun is secure at the nape of my neck. Then, I begin placing the additional clothing items on – the pieces that will help me blend in. The civilian styled cargo pants, grey jackets, and large charcoal rain coat.

I start making my way towards the pilot’s cabin once again, only to be interrupted by the droid’s voice.

“When you become an admiral, I will not be assigned to you, necessarily. Unless you choose to make it an order that I will continue to serve you.”

I stare back blankly, uninterested in the statement.

The droid continues, asking optimistically, “Will you? Will you request my continued assistance?”

I sneer, “Why do you care?”

The robotic voice turns more human, as it offers the sentiment, “I do not want to leave you, with the conclusion that I failed you.”

“Then maybe, you should not have failed me.” I turn my back, finally reaching for the button to open the pilot’s cabin.

“I am sorry, Agent.”

My fingers freeze against the button.

The droid begins, “My actions and cognition have always seemed very mathematical to me. I assumed that I was perfectly attuned to serve you, because I assumed my calculations were continually perfect. But now.” It pauses, recomputing. “Now, I wonder if there was any algorithm of actions I could have produced that would not have led me to hurting you. If there was, I wish I could have used those methods, instead.”

I turn back to the droid, stating with a quiet hiss, “You don’t regret things, droid. Don’t try to fool me. Or yourself.”

The droid simply responds, “You’re right. I should not be saying such things.”

We don’t speak of it any further.
I stand inbetween the escape shuttle and Ben. He holds his helmet at his side, fully dressed in his uniform, as I'm fully dressed in mine. He holds onto my hand, our gloved fingers interlocked.

He runs through information to me frantically for awhile, but I don't listen too intently. I focus on his face. Memorizing, just as frantically.

"And if you have any questions about Lor San Tekka, you call me. Remember, I knew the man, long ago. I already told you everything I recall, but perhaps you asking specific questions could reveal more information, to the both of us. Also, do you have all of your food in your bag? And your weapons?"

I nod.

He exhales, telling himself more so than telling me, "We have no reason to be nervous. It's been prophesied that you will complete this mission. This could be your easiest mission, yet."

I nod again.

He bites down on his lip hard, trying to think of any other advice to give me. He settles on, "Just take it one step at a time. We'll deal with the invasion after Lor San Tekka is in custody. That's all that really matters. Thinking ahead is good. But also, don't think too much." He rubs at the back of his neck, "You know?"

I give him a small smile, "I know."

He smiles nervously back. "Then I guess you should be going then. No time to waste."

He leans forward, briefly pressing his lips to mine. Too briefly. I frown when he pulls away. He begins to back up, his hand leaving my grasp, but I don't let go of him. Not yet. I don't think I can, yet.

Ben frowns too, "What's wrong?"

"I..." I struggle to find the way to tell him without telling him too much. My chest aches at the pain. I don't want to lie to him. Not anymore. So, I don't. I say, willing my voice strong, "I'll miss you."

He looks confused by the sentiment. But endeared, nevertheless. He responds, "I'll miss you too. I always do."

He presses his lips into the top of my head with a great tenderness. Then, he is the one to pull away. My arms are emptied of him, returning back to my sides along with the emptiness of what it is to be alone.
Ben begins walking back towards the front of the ship, reassuring, "You're ready. You can do this."

I catch one last glimpse of his face before his back is turned to me.

And I turn my back to him, entering the escape pod. My hands tremble as I sit down in the small claustrophobic cell, strapping myself into the chair. I close the door to the pod, sealing me off from Ben’s shuttle. Then, I close my eyes. I pull Ben's voice of reassurance back into my mind.

_You're ready. You can do this._

I force myself to believe him.

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**Chapter End Notes**

happy 2/3/19 day! sorry my subconscious named agent after a monsters inc meme <3

hope u all liked it. im going to be working really hard to get these right. the chapters have been taking a month a piece, b/c the new semester just started and its been a lot. plus i wanna make sure they are as good as i can get them! nevertheless, seriously, thank you all for reading. i really hope i can give you something you can enjoy, while i still can. lots of action to come. <3

(im going to hell for doing a title drop in a sex scene oops)

also, an extra note: i was reading over the fic, for future chapter purposes, and there has always been this one part that really annoyed me in chapter 11 that i ended up editing. none of the plot changed, just dialouge exchanged between Eerson and Agent. if that interests you, i recommend checking it out! i just had to change it because i couldnt stand how cringey it was before lol sorry!

[playlist]
[pinterest board]
A boy sat in the muddy dug out trench, legs curled up to his chest, blaster shaking in his small hands. The air of Geonosis was incredibly dry and hot. But he shivered, rubbing his hands against his arms, as if he were freezing to death.

Trainee 2319 couldn’t help but stare blankly at him. He wouldn’t notice the judgmental gaze. He was too trapped inside of his mind to notice – let alone care. His eyes were frozen orbs, wide and doll-like. 2319 readjusted her rifle in her hands, leaning back against the dirt wall of the trench. She exhaled smoothly. And for just a moment, she closed her own eyes. She tried to picture herself back in the classrooms on Starkiller, going over the correct procedure of advancing positions. Or in the shooting range with her classmates, picking off each target, one-by-one.

But those places weren’t so damn loud.

Her earbuds rattled at the whistling of bombs traveling across the battlefield, then their thunderous impact on the too-near ground. She tried to get used to it, to tune it out. Maybe if it were one continuously loud boom. But the explosions were sporadic – just barely inconsistent. There was a girl down a few feet to her right, Trainee 3100. 2319 knows 3100 has been in warfare before, yet 3100 still jumps at nearly every explosion. They only seemed to get louder, with time.

The only sound more jarring than the explosions was –

beep

The bodies that were still breathing shuffled, turning to face the battlefield. Those closest to the metal ladders grabbed a rung, placing their foot up one step. 2319 was about three people away from a ladder. Climbing up the ladders, out of the trenches, were a feat in itself. The soldiers and in-training agents pushed and shoved. Although no one was eager to enter the unforgiving terrain leading to the Republic’s front lines, everyone was just as antsy to force themselves out of the ground. Perhaps to prove a point to any observing generals. Or to prove something to themselves. Maybe, they just did it because they were made to.

Trainee 2319 didn’t know.

There was another beep of warning. This time higher pitch, in a pair of two chirps.

She looked back down to the boy, still frozen on the ground.

He’s not going to move any time soon. And anyone left in the trenches would be immediately eliminated from training, if the troops successfully advanced. 2319 wondered if he would be killed as
soon as a trainer found him, or if there would be a trial. A trial would be quite the waste of resources. Putting the trainees in the trenches was meant to weed out the weak. If anything, they’d just recycle him back to the front lines to live his last moments as a buffer between the enemy and the real members of the Order. That’s what 2319 would do with him, if she were in charge.

Trainee 3100 pushed her way through crowd of troopers, now standing beside 2319. 3100’s face was smudged with the orange rock of the planet’s surface. It contrasted greatly to her blue, freckled skin. The in-training agents wore black armor, a bit less bulky than the stormtroopers’. But each one had a different band on their arm, displaying their numbers. 2319 glanced down at the numbers on the boy’s armband -

2242.

3100 yelled harshly at the boy, “Get up!”

He still sat frozen, not registering her commands at all.

3100 grabbed him by the collar, forcing him to his feet. She yelled in his face, “We’re about to advance!”

There was still no acknowledgement from the nearly limp body, frozen in terror.

3100 slammed him into the wall, dirt and dust falling atop of his head. “We can get out of here alive, I’ll help you.” Her touch became less aggressive. She placed her hands on his shoulders, steadying him. “Will you help me?”

Finally, he gave her a nod, but just barely. Still stuck somewhere in his own mind.

A continuous beep echoed in the comm-link. It was high-pitched, seemingly eternal. But it ignited something in 2319, in everyone around her too.

They all rose from the trenches in a great mass.

2319 pushed her way towards the ladder. Suddenly, all she could think about was making it to the other side. And the relief that would come when she finally did. She craved it.

She found herself sprinting across the strip of land with all she had, zig-zagging, avoiding any corpses on the ground, strategizing where bodies would fall to make her own path. She was running faster than the last advance. She didn’t think she’s ever ran that fast before, in her entire life. Maybe it was because, she knew that this time, she was closer to the enemy. She knew that it had to be almost over. It had to be. They’ve been advancing for nearly three weeks now, if she counted the days correctly.

Surely, this was the end.

It took tremendous effort from her legs, running up and down the incredible craters and hallows the bombings created in the soil. Rocks and clumps of debris bounced off of her helmet and plummeted beside her. As debris rained down, she blocked her core with her limbs. The bruises on her arms grew more tender each second. But she didn’t focus on that. She pictured it like a race – a game. One she needed to win, one she needed to escape. She had to escape. She tried to outrun not only the other trainees, but the troopers. Everyone.

She thought for a moment, she did.

But suddenly, a blast pushed her back, sending her plunging in the hallow of the nearest crater. Her
head slammed against the solid ground, pain shooting across her body. She ignored it, rolling to her stomach. A moment to catch her breath. She needed to get a grip on her surroundings. Fast. Are the generals watching? Is Lieutenant Leven? The battlefield began to spin around her as she crawled towards the edge of the crater. She glanced above her to see the exchanging red and blue fire blasts back and forth. Around her, she was surpassed by handfuls of her peers. Her heart sunk low as each one leapt forward, gaining more and more ground while she couldn’t even manage to stand.

She screamed at her body to get up, to run, but it would not listen.

Limbs began raining from the sky, from nearby explosions. The screams distorted. Some cut off abruptly, others lingered, surviving to become groans.

The masses of troopers cleared out to reveal Trainee 3100 pulling 2242 along, unable to keep up with the troopers. 3100 attempted to fire her blaster with her free hand, but 2319 knew she was too weak to give off a reliable shot with only one arm, especially while running, and especially while pulling dead weight behind her.

3100 and 2242 stumbled into the crater, next to 2319. They ended up sitting against it’s edge, 3100 carefully going through breathing techniques to catch her breath, just as 2319 had. 2242 was hyperventilating. 2319 brought herself to her knees, allowing for her to peak above the crater’s edge. Fire power is exchanged from either side rigorously, bombs hailing from the ships above. It wasn’t wise to be clustered with two other people. Let alone, these trainees. 2319 was losing time. She decided that it was absolutely vital to take the next opening that presented itself to her.

“I can’t…” 2242 cried in-between gasps, “I can’t do it.”

2319 tried to tune him out, scanning the battlefield for any opportunity, any pathway. Dust flew into her face. She ducked back into the crater, rubbing it away from her eyes.

“You can do it.” 3100 tried to reassure.

“No, all of this…” 2242 said, voice gaining a strength it once was lacking, “I can’t do it. I don’t want to die here. I don’t want to die for them.”

2319 turned her head back towards the boy, the words sending a new kind of alertness throughout her veins.

3100’s voice softened, “You don’t mean that. Come on, the worst is almost through.” She frantically turned to 2319 as she sensed her presence to reassure, “He doesn’t mean that.”

2242 hissed back to her, “I do mean it.” He looked to his left, searching. What was he looking for? 2319 scanned his expression. He was contemplating. Debating if he could flee the battle. Desert the Order. “We’re all damned.”

The bombs towards the right grew quiet for a moment. 2319 found her opening. She left the crater. But before she did, she glanced back down at the boy.

Something within her churned, at the way his eyes were frozen in shock. She knew that if she looked too long, she herself would succumb to the same frozen, pain. There’s been times where she’s had to fight it off, nightmares where it would overtake her completely. She was far too ashamed to share those moments with her fellow trainees. Usually too prideful to admit she had them, herself.

This was not weakness, she told herself. This was being a leader. Protecting trainees of the Order,
met protecting the Order itself. She wasn’t doing this for them. For the Order. Only the Order.

She said, voice unsure, but loud enough for the boy and the girl holding him to hear, “I’ll cover you.”

Then, she began running again, into the thunder of the bombings.

She wasn’t sure if they were following.

But something within her hoped they did.

Lightening crackles in the distance.

I glance out the window of the hotel room, watching the rain slide off of the glass that wraps around the cylindrical curve of the wall. The building is so high up. All the buildings are, in the capitol of Bayora. The whole entire capitol is built on stilts, keeping each rickety infrastructure free from the flooding waters underneath. As the hotel is on the edge of the city, I have a clear view of those waters, tonight.

The water is stories beneath me. But with the rate of the rain, my mind is playing the trick of the water levels rising closer and closer at an unstoppable rate. I wonder if the water ever completely swallows the city whole. I wonder if the sidewalks and the lake merges as one, the streets filled with people nonchalantly swimming as if they were fish. I picture a civilization like that for a moment, humored in such a thought. The city would be so incredibly easy to destroy.

My hand clasps around the warm cup of tea, as I scan the holocron on my lap before me. I scroll through the records a bit more, looking for anything reading “Lor,” “San,” or “Tekka.”

A voice says in my ear, low and close, “It could be possible that he doesn’t live in the capitol.”

“That was my fear…” I respond, still focused on searching. “Or he could be using an alias.”

“Why would the old man use an alias?” Lieutenant Leven responds. There’s another crash of lightening.

I adjust the comm-link in my ear, allowing me to hear him better, “Having a bounty under your name is a good reason to change it.”

“I highly doubt anyone in Bayora keeps tabs on bounties set out by the First Order. I’m just hoping you find him, before some bounty hunter from central-galaxy can scare him off to heavens knows where.” He grumbles, obviously trying to instigate a discussion based around complaining about Kylo Ren, “If it were me, I would have never sent out that bounty in the first place.”

I challenge, “If Ren never sent out that bounty, we wouldn’t have captured Del Meeko. We’d have no idea where Tekka’s located.”

“True, I suppose…” Leven admits, begrudgingly. “There has to be a better way to go about this than sending you in, completely blind. You must agree with that.”

“I do, Sir.” I glance upwards at the sky, the purple clouds rolling with a definite movement across the sky. They pillow and swirl, lightening leaking through in quick bursts, thunder following, making the slick metal floor vibrate under my toes. I know Bayora is where Lor San Tekka is. Or, at least, I know this is the place from my dreams. The sky alone is a dead giveaway. The rain, the
merciless storm, but mostly how purple everything is. I’ve been here before, in my sleep. It’s somehow just as vivid there, as it is here.

But as I recall the old man’s hut, I can’t place the location anywhere in this capitol. It was on ground. In a village, much less advanced than the one I am in right now. The village was swallowed by the mountains surrounding it. The capitol is clustered and crowded. Not a village, in any sense of the word.

I sigh, telling Leven, “Get some probe droids scouting the mountain range. I didn’t find anything out there after I landed initially, but perhaps they’ll be more successful. I couldn’t cover much ground. Visibility is low here.” I take a sip of the tea. It burns my throat as I swallow. “They should be looking for a village of huts. The huts are carved from large stone. It’s like they’re shells.”

“How do you know that?”

“Some research I did, at the capitol’s library.” I lie. I really don’t feel like telling the Lieutenant about my spiritual ventures and recent Force visions.

“I’ll send out the droids immediately.”

“Just make sure they’re very discreet.”

“I taught you the importance of discreetness, don’t you remember?” He playfully muses.

I try to brush off the invitation for a trip down memory lane, opting to say a quick, “I know, sorry, force of habit.” I change the subject, “Have you set up base in the southern mountains, yet?”

“We landed base this morning. General Hux and Commander Ren have just arrived to begin preparations for the invasion.”

“Don’t forget to send me those coordinates as soon as you can.” I order. As soon as I do, I cringe at myself. I really didn’t mean to give him another order.

He’s quiet.

My heart skips a beat, wondering what consequence his quietness will bring. I hate the fear. I hate it so much, that it morphs into pure anger and bitterness. It all surges within me, restless after being pushed down for the duration of our conversation. I stare at the storm. Hands clench around the cup.

I force myself to apologize, to keep up a face, “I’m so sorry, Sir. I didn’t mean-”

“No,” Leven reassures, “You can rightfully order me, now. You have earned that. It’s what all instructors live to see.”

“Okay…” I narrow my eyes. “Thanks.”

He continues on, supplying me with the catch I was so sure existed, “Despite any title that you obtain, any rank you achieve, I think there is an unspoken level of superiority a teacher will always have over a student. Especially for the two of us.”

I don’t respond.

He chuckles, “Your voice is the same as it was, when you were a child. As I imagine you, in this moment, I only see a little girl – scared… so scared of admitting she’s scared. It was quite comical, from my point of view.”
A shiver darts down the length of my spine.

I distract myself by staring at the rolling clouds before me, building and building off of each other, forming a huge wall. I wonder how grand the storm can get before it just swallows this city whole. I wonder if the storm will beat the Order, in burning this place to the ground. I wonder if the storm will beat me, in burning the Order to the ground.

I only respond quietly, “I’ve grown, since.”

“I would hope so.” A pause. “I’ll have those coordinates for you immediately. And you can count on those probe droids being sent out. In the meantime, why don’t you see what information you can find? I’m sure there’s a nice boutique somewhere close where you can buy something pretty, then go chat some local up. I bet the rain makes for a rather…” He pauses, searching for the word, “amorous scenery.”

“I’ll do that.” I try to not sound too over-enthusiastic, in pretending to be not completely opposed to the idea.

“Great!” He beams, “I’ll be waiting, 2319.”

“Yessir.”

I sigh, ripping the comm-link out of my ear and ending the connection. I throw it on the coffee table.

I give myself the pleasure of grumbling out loud to the inanimate object, “Dick.”

I glance down at my clothing; the same tactical jackets and cargo pants I came here with. I’d imagine this is how the Bayora’s fishermen dress. There’s a lot of fishing here. People with poles just sitting at the edge of the capitol, with buckets beside them to collect what they manage. This morning, before the lightening started, there were boats, gliding across the lake’s surface. But now, I’d think most of these fishermen would be inside. Probably in some warm bar or tavern. I’d imagine it’d be too dangerous for fishing, now. It was a pain in the ass to get to the capitol, using a fishing boat I stole from ashore.

Quickly, I swig down what is left of the tea. I stand, grabbing my bag from the bed, sheets still made-up from room service.

I exit the room, walk down the metal halls, and then down the stairwell. My boots clink against the tin floor with each step.

In the lobby, I adjust the bag on my shoulder, making my way towards the receptionist boy at the counter. He’s younger, probably a teenager, still working through his education. He has scruffy dark hair and pale skin. He glances up to me. Green, hooded eyes. Hooked nose.

I smile. “Hello,” I clear my throat, “Do you know if there are any nearby taverns?”

He nods enthusiastically, “If you walk down the main strip, ringing around the city, there’s a good one to the north. It’s called Mira’s. Just a few blocks away!”

I reach into my pocket, fishing out a credit. I set it on the counter for the kid, nodding, “Thanks.” I pull the hood of my jacket over my head.

It’s not until I exit the building that the weight of his life settles on my shoulders.

I carry it as I exit into the storming streets.
The march back from battle was quiet.

They hiked up the mountain side with their blasters on their backs. 2319 looked at the fellow trainees that surrounded her. There must have been a hundred that went out to the trenches. But now, there were barely twenty.

It seemed like some kind of game.

She was told that beginning her training as an agent meant that she was special. She thought being plucked out of her stormtrooper division meant that she was especially skilled, along with the other trainees chosen. How could they just let all their best, most promising agents into a battlefield with such a mortality rate? Where skill was barely a factor, when compared to luck?

Immediately, she cursed herself.

An agent’s training is designed with expertise, much more complicated than she can comprehend. She shouldn’t doubt it.

Among the survivors were two familiar faces – 3100 and 2242.

2242.

The boy who was debating on running away. Who admitted to not wanting to die for the Order, barely a month in. What kind of example would be made of the boy if he were to say such things in front of any trooper, any real agent, let alone an instructor…? He made his fate perfectly clear. He should’ve died today.

And she disrupted the process.

2319 tried to force her skin to crawl with the memories of his words, of his cowardice. She pushed away any empathy she had towards the traitor, replacing it with thoughts of disgust. Agents shouldn’t need help. They shouldn’t necessarily give it either, during training. This was survival of the fittest. Helping one another cheat is just a disruption of the process. It wasn’t fair to the trainees who actually deserved to be here. She knew that.

Did she help him cheat?

The Lieutenant leading her group slowed his pace as he reached the peak of the mountain. The trainees all joined him, climbing up to his level. There was his signature, silver ship landed with it’s ramp lowered, awaiting him. It looked almost like a missile, cylindrical and sleek. 2319 also noticed a large, grey tent set up. A station for water. Water.

The trainees nearly drooled at the sight. Their water supply in the trenches were limited. And it was warm, cluttered with dirt. But the large, metal tank glistened before them in condensation. For a moment, the Lieutenant just looked down at the trainees – all too bashful to beg, but too thirsty to refuse staring at the tank in yearning.

He granted them the privilege, “Be quick.”

Nearly everyone rushed towards the water. 2319 trailed behind them. 2242 and 3100 trailed behind her.

The Lieutenant exclaimed, “When you’re finished, go to your assigned cot in the tent. I trust you all
will be well-rested for evaluations tomorrow."

Evaluations. How closely were they watching?

Paranoia flooded her mind. She wanted to feel like whatever hell she was in, ended. But here, it felt just as dangerous as it did in the trenches. She found herself unable to move from the fear, the line to water forming in front of her, unconcerned with her surroundings. She was so sure she was ready. Is she not?

A light touch on her shoulder brought her back to reality.

2319 flinched, to find 3100 standing behind her, guiding her into the line. She said, “I appreciate clearing the way back there. We don’t know what we would’ve done without you.” Her blue skin still dirtied by the orange dirt. But here, 2319 could take in the girl’s glossy, silver eyes. She’s not very familiar with her species. Perhaps she would learn more, once her cultural studies in the academy began.

2319 glanced back to the Lieutenant, facing the other way. He stood at the edge of the mountain, looking at the horizon before him. He was a broad man, but not particularly tall. Whatever he lacked in height, he made up for in presence, in posture.

2319 deemed it safe to respond to the girl with a quick, “It wasn’t a big deal.” She stepped forward in the line, distancing herself from the girl, hoping she would get the hint.

She didn’t. She continued, her voice far too loud considering the subject matter, “You really fought well out there. I was taking notes from you. You’re quick on your feet.”

3100 was adequate, as well. Especially considering she also dealt with a leech like 2242. She glanced back at the boy, behind her. He looks in shape, like he’s supposed to be strong. But his expression is dragged downward, pale skin faded grey. It’s easier to see, now that he holds his helmet under his arm. Ash brown hair shaved in a buzz-cut, slightly outgrown. One look at him and you wonder how the hell he could’ve made it out. He won’t be fooling anyone. She gave the girl a brisk, “Thanks.”

Then, in that moment, her eyes caught the Lieutenant. He was turned around now, facing her, yet yards away. His presence consumed her, gaze lethal. Younger than she expected but face still worn with experience and knowledge she could not understand. His chin was square and dimpled. His eyes looked completely black, with the shadow of his protruding browbone. His blonde hair is stiff the in the wind, gelled in place.

3100 continues on, “2242 is a great strategist. He’ll make a good agent, but you know how it is. Hopefully we’re done with the trench warfare segment of our training.”

2319 whipped her head around to the girl, snipping back at her while only feeling her gaze, “You should hope so, for his sake.”

2319 now was at the front of the line. She filled a tin cup with water and took it away from 3100 and 2242. Her eyes caught Leven’s again, but only for a brief moment. She made sure to sip the water slowly, patiently. She was trying to convince him she had no inclination to chug it all and then run into the tent to hold her legs up to her chest as she cried in an odd mix of relief and increasing paranoia.

She wasn’t like 2242.

The air was much colder on the top of the mountain, wind blowing at them with a certain
The lights in the tavern are warm.

Nothing like the blueish tones of the city streets, damp and cool. I quickly close the heavy, wooden door behind me to keep out any rain. The tavern isn’t crowded, but it’s very much alive. Circular tables scatter the large room, people sitting and standing around each one. My eyes travel to the corner of the room, to see a bundle of rough-looking men with stringed instruments. They play joyful music, upbeat and messy. Smiles peak out of their straggly breads as they glance to each other, signaling musical cues.

I keep my head down as I make it to the stools lining the bar. I hoist myself up to one of the tall wooden stools. It’s uneven, wobbling with the shift of my weight. The bar is nearly completely filled with men. Mostly human. Some are Nautolan, which makes sense given their aquatic background. Their black, glossy eyes pick up the warmth of the candlelit chandeliers with a particular sheen. I glance around at the candles, lining the walls. An odd choice of lighting source in a place where people get intoxicated.

I just need to kill time until Leven’s droid locates the village. If it were for the tracker, I doubt I’d even be here. Hopefully, no one will try to entertain me with conversation.

“Hey, hun!” A woman’s voice says.

I glance up, across the counter. She’s older, hair grey and pulled into a messy bun sagging downwards with its weight. Skinny, yet capable. She smiles, showcasing crooked teeth. But not ugly teeth. It’s somewhat charming, the way she smiles.

“You’ve been here before?”

I shake my head.

“I didn’t think I recognized you,” She reaches under the counter, feeling for a menu. It has a layer of dust on it, but I don’t think she notices. She lays the paper in front of me.

The menu looks hand-written, listing various drinks and seafood items. I’m completely unaware of what any of them are, until I skim the description beneath it.

She continues, “You’re not from ‘round here?”

Curious, I glance up to ask, “Why do you assume that?”

She laughs, nodding to the rest of the bar, “Because we’d know if you were.”

Suddenly, I hear a low voice to my right, “We got a tourist, Nel?”

I glance over to the man sitting a few stools down. He twists his body towards mine, eyeing me with curiosity. His long face is covered in leathery green-grey skin. He’s a Nautolan with tentacles extending from his head, all the way down to his waist, decorated in leather and burlap ties. The men standing in the circle around him are all his age, or just a few years younger, some human with long, grey beards. They all wear dark blue jumpsuits, colors in their clothing faded at the knees and elbows. Some holes stitched and re-stitched, other holes patched.

I decide to nod, putting no energy into the lie.
He laughs nervously, “I was just pulling one on ya.” His eyes narrow, suspicious, “We don’t get tourists.”

“Yeah,” I cover myself, “I was playing along.”

“Right…” He responds.

I turn back to the woman behind the counter, sliding the menu forward, “I’ll have whatever you would recommend to tourists, if tourists were a thing here.”

The man chuckles deeply at this, the others behind him join in, fixating their attention on me.

The old woman, Nel, smiles at me, “Right away, ‘mam.”

While she does that, the old man asks, “Do you have a name, at least?”

I scoff at the question. My mind runs through countless fabrications I could settle on, but I only manage to say a nonchalant, “Nope.”

The group of men laugh again. This time, one of the bearded men behind him joins in the conversation, “You’re too young to have secrets.”

“Perhaps,” I smile warmly at his condolences before being handed a mug of foaming ale. I take a small sip, testing the taste against my tongue. It’s definitely not as piercing, nor plain, as the alcohol offered at the cantina on Starkiller. It tastes wooden, crisp.

Just as I do the music dies down, to be replaced with applause from the small crowd surrounding the “stage,” which is merely a wide, flat crate, the two musicians sit upon. The group of men speaking with me join in applauding. I wasn’t listening too intently, but I suppose it sounded nice. I mimic the applauding, lighting clapping my hands together.

The lead singer smiles at the crowd, nodding his head in gratitude. I think we catch eyes for a moment. But his gaze does not linger. He glances back down to his stringed instrument, adjusted knobs sticking out of the end of its long, wooden neck. He lays it flat on his lap, pressing fingertips to the strings, then strumming to begin another tune. A couple of people seem excited about the familiar number. They stand to their feet, beginning to swing each other around in pairs. Looking intently into each other’s eyes. Laughing in joy, with each other’s presence.

I subconsciously feel in my jacket’s pocket, for my comm-link. My fingers brush against the ring, and the map, on the way to the device I intended to remind myself I had.

My chest begins to ache.

“I firmly believe a man’s identity is his own business and should only be shared when he damn wants it to be,” The old man says, sliding in the stool closer to me. His friends now seem more preoccupied on second servings of their drinks being served, and a conversation with Nel. He continues, “That being said, my name is Rahl.”

I respond, “It’s a pleasure, Rahl.”

He nods, leaning his back against the counter and swirling his half-drunken ale in the mug, “You’re about the same age as my granddaughter. If you’ve been here for a few months, maybe you know her?”

I shake my head, “This is only my second day here.”
“Ah,” He nods, not pressing the issue further. “Probably not, then.”

“What…” I begin. He glances up. I decide to continue, my curiosity of family dynamics taking the best of me, “What’s your granddaughter like?”

He chuckles at the thought, “She’s a firecracker. Loud. Stubborn. Way too smart for her own good.”

I smile at the admiration in his eyes.

“She’s like my own. Her parents are unfortunately not with us anymore, so since she was around three, she’s been with me.”

I frown, “Those are unfortunate circumstances. I’m sorry to hear that.”

He shakes his head, his crooked nose crinkling. His sagged skin tightens with the expression. “We make do with what we got. They probably would have done a better job, but hey,” he takes another swig, “What can you do?”

I reassure, “She’s lucky to have someone.” Before he can switch the conversation back to me, I change the topic, “What’s she up to nowadays?”

Rahl responds, “What all those kids are doing. Fighting. I swear they are all out of their damn minds. Thinking they can end something they didn’t even start. They can barely even change it.”

I say quietly, “Someone has to try, I suppose.”

He smiles down at me, showcasing pointed yellow teeth. “There’s that Resistance optimism all of you kids have.”

A smile of my own pulls at my lips, “Your granddaughter is brave.”

He shrugs, “Sure is. Childish, though. I was lucky enough to get out alive after my serving in the war. But after a few decades, you realize that wars with no end aren’t worth fighting. It sounds pessimistic, but more often than not, the best way to protect yourself is to do nothing. No matter what you feel.”

I take another swig of my drink.

2319’s mouth was still dry despite the refreshment from a few hours prior. The inability to sleep made her feel even more quenched.

As her fellow trainees laid soundless in cots around 2319, she wondered if they too have died. They were as quiet as the dead. Possessed by exhaustion. Was she really the only one awake? Why couldn’t she sleep? Why the hell wouldn’t her body allow her to sleep?

She felt that same terror from in the depths of crater, of not being able to move, unable to control her body, her mind disconnected from her person. Merciless gravity pulled her to the ground, as if a metal plate descended from the sky, slowly pressing into her chest and stomach.

Suddenly, she was shaking. She cursed herself to stop. She squeezed her eyes shut, even tighter, but despite her efforts, her vision was clouded by image of pillowing dust, bright sparks of light igniting, then dying down to reveal corpses on fire. Her hands felt on fire, fingers curling into fists. She pleaded herself to stop.
A rustle.

She caught her breath, eyes snapping open, towards the noise.

A figure shifted in a cot a few rows away from her own. 2242’s cot.

She watched as he rose carefully. His back was to her. He glanced to his left. To his right, then around his shoulder.

Quickly, she closed her eyes.

Counted to five seconds.

She opened her eyes again.

His back was to her, once again. She watched as he carefully put some items into his satchel. She could barely hear his movements. He was that quiet. He put shoes on his feet before he completely arose. Then, he began to tip toe out of the large tent. Quickly, quite obviously afraid that if he took a second too long, someone would awake to see him. No one did.

No one else, at the least.

2319 quickly rolled out of her bed, not bothering to dig around in her own satchel, not bothering to put anything over her sleeping pants and tee. She didn’t even put on her shoes. She started following him out the door, feet nimble and silent. The hard calluses on her feet kept her safe from the roughness of the dirt atop the chilled ground.

As she peeked out from the tent, she could already see him begin to descend down the mountain with a limp. He was doing it. He was running away.

Where even to? Was there a destination? Would he just off himself somewhere safe? Or was he trying make it to some type of civilization?

2319 watched as his figure got smaller and smaller, further and further away, into the pitch-black darkness of the night. Starlight shined from above, the only thing left to illuminate him. He began sprinting. There was a freedom in his stride. She opened her mouth, to call out to him.

But she closed it.

She glanced back towards her cot, the other trainees sleeping soundly. She then glanced towards the Lieutenant’s ship, completely idle. She could alert him. She imagined his praise for her honesty, for her loyalty.

But an underlying fear paralyzed her. She should be numb to it, now more than ever. Fear for what would happen to the boy. For seeing what could happen to her if she were ever to... She shook away the thought. She didn’t want to know what happened to traitors. She didn’t care to. It didn’t matter.

Her feet led her back to the cot.

She lowered herself down and laid in the bed, pulling the covers over her head, returning to the memories of the day prior. It distracted her from the boy running away, that she should be stopping. The harshness of her memories helped maintain indifference. He’d die either way, either by the hands of the Order, or by the hands of nature. She didn’t have to be any part of it.

She found a certain peace in doing nothing, a peace in convincing herself that there’s nothing else she could have done.
But it would not last.

Very few minutes passed until she heard an incredibly sharp hiss. The Lieutenant’s ship. She was shaking all over again. Her eyes clenched shut. She brought herself back to the war she saw earlier that day. More violence, to block out the fear. She heard the sound of a speeder rev up. Just as quickly as it started, it zipped off, into the direction 2242 left.

How did they know? Were they watching? Did they see her ignore him? Stars, she was going to be executed too. Are they watching right now? What if this was all some kind of test? If so, she pitifully failed. She opened her eyes, glancing around frantically. Every trainee was still fast asleep. Only a few stirred at the sound of the speeder, only to immediately succumb back into slumber. She hysterically looked for cameras, for surveillance droids, for anything to indicate they could see her. Maybe there was just a patrol that stopped the boy halfway down the mountain. She had no idea how they knew. An inexplicable omniscience surrounded it all.

She waited in a horrible silence for the Lieutenant to return.

He did.

And he made his arrival known.

With a billowing voice he yelled into the tent, “Get up!”

2319 jolted at the sound of his voice. She heard multiple gasps across the room. 2319, and all the other trainees scurried out of their beds, shuffling to slip on shoes, and then fumbling half-asleep out the tent. 2319 pretends to rub the sleep out of her eyes. Some trainees kick others asleep. 2319 doesn’t concern herself with anyone else.

She immediately heard the sobbing.

Out of the tent, 2242 is held upwards, by his wrist. He’s on his knees, crying. 2319’s chest tightened at the sight. Did the Lieutenant know she saved the boy, now more than once? She worked on building up a barrier between her and the sight of his crumpled body, his ear-splitting sounds. She forced herself to stare, unmoved. She forced herself to acknowledge the fact that he deserved the emotionally stricken pain.

The Lieutenant spoke, his voice incredibly potent, “One of your fellow trainees decided to try to run off tonight. Very unfortunate for him,” He squeezes the boy’s bicep harder, the boy curling in pain. “But fortunate for you all! We can have a bit of a lesson!”

2319 looked into the Lieutenant’s eyes, to find a glint of excitement. He was enjoying every bit of this. She tried to mimic it, in herself. 2242 deserved justice. She liked justice.

He dropped the kid to the ground. 2242’s knees hit the dirt hard, and he forced his head upwards, staring in a shameful anticipation at the Lieutenant.

Leven went on, addressing the trainees, “Here, we have a child who has trained with you, survived your trials, and decided he was better than the Order. Better than you. It’s quite disgusting, if you think about it. How one person could be so selfish – so cowardly.” He tilted his chin downward, to stare the boy right in the eyes. “As much as I’d love to personally beat you until each and every organ within you flattens, I do think that’d be a waste. You may be good for one thing least one thing.”
2319 and the other trainees stiffened at the image placed in their minds. They all imagined it. Vividly, too.

Leven went on, “You did go through training. I’d imagine you somewhat know how to fight. Whatever adrenaline you used to run away could be recycled. It’s a wonderful tool our bodies give us – yet another indication that we all were born to fight.” Leven redirected his attention back towards the trainees, “It’s not in every combat training session that you actually are able to practice killing someone.”

2242 squirmed against Lieutenants arm, to no avail. The Lieutenant was far too strong.

Leven said simply, “Now, now, I may be stern, but I am just. What kind of fight would that be, if you know you will die whether you win or lose? Where are the stakes in that? You wouldn’t try at all.” He pursed his lips, pretending to think. But he has already pulled this trick several times before. He always says the same thing, as it’s ingrained in his mind perfectly. He goes on, after the dramatic pause he created, “If you are able to win, I’ll let you run.”

2242 stopped resisting. He sniffed. Then whimpered, “You’d let me go?”

Leven smiled wickedly, “Of course,” It was a lie. But rarely would the trainees who ran win. And in the circumstances they did win, Leven could just as easily track them where ever they ran off to, to swiftly plant a blaster shot in their head.


Leven loved to answer this question. “The same way you win, in any battle. You survive. And your opponent dies.”

2319 felt her breath catch. Any façade of enjoying Leven’s powerful spiel disappeared in her own mind. Are they really that expendable? He’d let a trainee die in a fight, a fight not even against the Republic? She didn’t accomplish anything. She was still nothing. She was just as worthless as when she begun.

That truth sets into all the trainees.

Leven continued to the boy, “And I’ll even let you choose your own opponent.”

2242 swallowed hard. He hated the chaos of the trenches. The violence floods his mind all over again – the disfigured corpses, the mangled screams. The shock of a blaster shot skimming his leg. How painful it was to continue walking on, how slow the limp made him. He could hear the wound sizzle. He wasn’t sure if it was his flesh he smelt burning or the burning bodies around him. He never wanted to be a part of anything with such horror again. That’s what he told himself, right before he decided to run off.

It’s not over. Not yet. But after killing another trainee, it could be.

The thought made him shiver. He had only grown sentimentally close to one of them – 3100. But the others, he’s barely held eye contact with, most he’s never even spoken to. They should be nothing to him. Yet, the time they all shared training… he knew all of them deeply.

His eyes glanced across the group of his fellow trainees. Some tried to stare back at him, ferociously, trying to intimidate. Others had a different approach. Although not fully adopting a complete expression, there was a certain pleading nature to their eyes, as if to ask him to keep them out of it. 3100 kept her eyes down. She couldn’t watch. He understood.
His eyes met the girl from the trenches, who led the way for 3100 and him. She stared back at him with dead eyes. No pleading, no fury. She glanced over at Leven, the back at 2242. 2242 glanced at her armband. 2-3-1-9. She was skilled, sure. But she did fall into that crater. She’s surely sore. She couldn’t get up for minutes, after it happened. Plus, he’s larger than her. She’s a mere girl. He recalls her cold glare at him, at 3100, while in the trenches. Her snippy, smug voice when she said to 3100, “you should hope so, for his sake.” She would surely go on to be a mindless agent, serving the Order at their will, and dying for them, at their will.

Telling himself that helped his guilt subside.

“Make your choice.” Leven pushed.

He rose from the ground, onto wobbly legs. His arm outstretched to her, hand forming to point at her,

“2319.”

“Me?”

“Yes!” The girl waves from across the dance floor. She is a human girl. Hair in a long, ash brown braid. Her face is full of sharp angles – eyes slanted, chin pointed, cheek bones prominent, bushy eyebrows arched and cupid’s bow sharp. Her green eyes pierce into mine as she stumbles out of the hoard of people dancing, to where I’m sitting.

She jokingly winces at the old men to my right, “You really want to hang around these old geezers all night?”

The men laugh at her joke. Rahl jabs back, “This is the grown-up table, you go back with your own kind.”

She rolls her eyes, beaming back to me, “Come out and dance!”

My eyes widen. I quite enjoyed merely sitting around, amusing these men by listening to their stories of the sea for hours, upon hours. They seemed happy to have someone new to tell them too. And I was sure happy to be immersed in their lives, rather than my own, for the moment. I reject the invitation, “I don’t dance.”

Her eyes narrow, her bright smile settling into something more sly, “Then you haven’t had enough ale, huh?”

I chuckle, reassuring, “Trust me, I’ve had enough.” I can’t risk getting intoxicated. Not tonight, of all nights.

“I don’t believe you.” She tests, “You’ll have to try to prove me wrong.” She backs into the dance floor, her eyes still locked onto mine.

I find myself amused by it all. It must be what I look like, before I try to lure information out of men, or kill them. But I doubt she wants information, or my blood. So, when she does it… It’s a lot more lighthearted. Charming.

My feet carry myself upwards slowly, making my way towards the girl.

When I face her, I realize she’s my height.
I raise an eyebrow, “Alright,"

“Alright?” She mirrors my expression playfully.

“I don’t know the dancing customs of Bayora.” I glance to the people around us, spinning each other around with quick feet. They bounce with their step, nothing too elegant, like ballroom dancing. Yet nothing too intimate, like club dancing. It’s a lot more childish than that. They jump around in circles, swinging each other around in-between laughter at the upbeat stringed melodies.

“It’s not complicated,” She grabs my hands, beginning to lace her slender fingers into mine, but stopping, nearly appalled. “Gloves?” She begins ripping them off my hands.

I respond, “Where I come from, we wear gloves regularly.”

She smirks, putting the gloves to the table beside us. “And where I come from, we don’t mind getting our hands dirty.”

I can’t help but laugh at that, watching as her fingers mesh with mine. Despite her big talk, her hands are soft. Not callused, like Ben’s or mine. I let out a small sigh, before she leads me into the dance.

It starts as an awkward sway. She rocks us back and forth to the rhythm. She’s a bit more energetic than I. I think she senses that and quickly spins me around. When I return, I’m closer to her. My hand naturally falls on the small of her back, her’s on mine.

She smiles at me, “That works,”

I feel myself smile back. We begin moving in circles to the upbeat tune playing in the background behind us. While we’re this close, I notice the light brown freckles that dot across her nose, onto her cheeks.

She asks, “Why did you come here?”

I glance over her shoulder, watching her long braid sway back and forth, like a pendulum to the rhythm. I begin to tell her some version of the truth, the words forming in my mouth, but I stop myself. She is charming. Young. In shape. What if the Order sent a second agent here, to assure that I’d be doing my job? What if they are suspicious?

My thumb curiously traces back over the palm of her hand, feeling for any indication of weapon training. My eyes scan her exposed arms for battle scars.

She responds before I can come to a conclusion, “It’s okay. I don’t need to know.”

“Thanks,” I mumble gratefully, “It’s nothing against you.”

She nods, understanding. “We just don’t get any new faces around here. I feel like I haven’t seen another person in years. Seeing you…” Her green eyes meet mine. There’s a vulnerability that becomes apparent. She tries to combat it with an indifferent shrug, “I guess it was refreshing. You got me curious.”

The song ends.

The music gets slower, more somber. Our movements grow slower, too.

I hold the girl closer to me, my arms going to her waist. Her hands go to my neck. Her thumb rests against where I envision the tracker in my neck.
I ask into her ear, “What brought you here?”

“I’ve always been here.” She answers. There’s a boredom in her voice.

“And you like it here?”

She scoffs, “Not for twenty-two consecutive years.”

“Why don’t you leave?”

“I…” She ponders it. “I just don’t know where I could go.”

“Go wherever you want.”

She mumbles, “I’ve always wanted to see Coruscant. I heard that the lights from the city look like stars, at night. And from space, the whole planet is so bright, it could pass as a sun.”

I tell her, “It’s true.”

“You’ve been?”

“I have.”

“Maybe you can take me.” She jokes.

I find my head turning to fit on the warmth of her shoulder. I keep it there for a moment, still. “I would if I had enough time... Honestly.” I raise my head, realizing how that was probably out of line, an absurd overstepping of boundaries.

“Hey,” She meets my gaze once again, with gratitude, “It’s the thought that counts, right?”

Her hands run to either side of my neck, thumbs reaching up to trace my jawline for the briefest of moments. Suddenly, all I can picture is Ben. I cannot unsee him, after that. She notices me stiffen at the gentle sensation, blinking long eyelashes. Her hands retreat back down to my shoulders, softly placing her palms against their curve.

*His hands squeezed at her frame incredibly hard.*

2242 tried to bring his knee upwards, in between her legs, but he was not quick enough. With her arms trapped, legs too sluggish, she threw her head back, sending it crashing into his. There was a vicious clunk. The trainees watching winced.

2242’s hands fell from her shoulders as he stumbled back. The plane around him spun. He was desperate to recover. On the contrary, the action didn’t phase 2319. Or at least, it did not look like it did. She stalked towards him viciously, wiping away blood from her nostril.

*The fight has been going on for twenty minutes.*

Leven observed every moment. It was not only entertaining to him. It was educational. He didn’t know the trainees too well, at this point. This was a chance to get a feel for at least one of them. In this case, he could get a feel for 2319. There must have been a reason 2242 picked her, to fight. Perhaps reviewing the footage from the trenches could show him that answer. Everything about the girl screamed in potential. He could tell, from the way she pushed herself both in the trenches, and in this battle, there’s a fiery passion she has for following orders. She wants to be here. She wants to
prove herself. The best thing for a trainee to be is indebted and obedient. 

She was both. The guilt of letting him survive the trenches, then letting him run off ate at her. Any other agent would have done the right thing. Any other agent wouldn't be kept up all night by nightmares and fear. She belonged here, too. She had to prove that. 

When she was within range of 2242, she kicked hard at his chest. Her heel went right into the space right below his ribs, perfectly into the centerline of his body. Precise. Leven smiled. 2242 gasped, hunching over. 2319 punched up with a tight fist, into his stomach, up into his chest. He wheezed for air. 

2319 decided she liked the sound. 

2242 was a coward. A coward who deserved to die a long time ago. She told herself that she didn’t mind fighting him, now. She was honored to have been the one to bring justice. Adrenaline coursed through her veins. And… something else. It felt a lot like adrenaline. But it wasn’t physical. It was deeper than that. 

She knew her victory was imminent. He put up a great fight, at the start. Mostly evading, trying to drain her of energy. But she couldn’t get tired. Not now. She had too much to fight for. If the Lieutenant didn’t believe she deserved to be here now… She glanced over to him. 

Her eyes were filled with power. She did not blink, despite the swelling of her right eye. Her eye contact did not even waver as she grabbed the boy by the back of his collar and slammed him into the ground, belly first. She made sure it was right in front of the Lieutenant, to give him the best view of the end of it. 

2242 knew he had been defeated when he felt her weight on his back. Her knees trapped his arms to the ground. He still couldn’t breathe. He barely managed to wheeze out, “I yield,” 

2319 grabbed the back of his head by his oily hair. She lifted his head up, as far as his neck could bend. 

He managed to scream, “Please!” 

2319 used every single ounce of strength within her to slam his head forward, flat into the rock-solid ground. 

He could not speak no more. Perhaps he was unconscious. 2319 was unsure. 

She craned is head back again, throwing it back into the ground. There was a crunch. 

She lifted it up again. Leven stared at the smashed face of the boy. Then at the enraged face of the girl above him. 

She slammed him into the ground once more. 

This time she held it there. She was suffocating the boy, using her palms to push on the back of his skull, shoving his face into the ground. His nose was completely shattered, it felt like pressing a flat surface into another flat surface. Blood leaked from either side of his face. His body spasmed from underneath her. It took nearly a minute for the spasms to stop. 

Her blood boiled from within. 

He went limp. She knew it was finished.
Her whole body began shaking from the spare adrenaline with no where to go. Everything was so incredibly quiet, except for 2319’s heavy breathing. She sounded like some sort of animal – predator.

Leven was the first to speak. He said, “Dismissed.”

The trainees scattered back to the tent quickly. 2319 swore she heard the sound of one vomiting. It was 3100, hiding behind the side of the tent. 3100 kept her crying as quiet as she could, swallowing her sobs. Surely, Leven would rebuke her. But he was preoccupied. 2319 looked up to him as she arose from the body beneath her. More blood ran down her nose. She wiped at it again. He stared back at her. She began walking to the tent, the pain of her injuries finally setting in. Every bone felt split, every muscle torn, all her skin bruised. Her eye throbbed.

He stopped her, “Not you.”

She stilled, standing before him.

His stare morphed. His lips formed into a thin grin.

It ignited something within her. He was impressed. Her chest turned warm.

He reached within his pocket, grabbing a handkerchief. He patted it against the blood pouring from her nose. Some of the blood was dry. Some fresh. Some smeared from her constant rubbing.

She kept her head still, trying to resist the urge to cry out in the pain that threatened to overwhelm her body and the incredible fear that overwhelmed her by being so close to Leven. Her lip trembled.

Leven removed the cloth from her face. His hand went down to her chin, tilting it upward, “Isn’t it beautiful?” There was a twinkle in his eye, “To watch failure die.”

She nodded. It was. To have eliminated a traitor. To have proved her power. She succeeded. She never experienced anything that wonderful before. It shielded her from the pain. There was that energy again. Incredibly dark... But powerful. And power was beauty, as the Lieutenant suggested.

“Dispose of the body.” He ordered.

She looked down at the corpse, then off in the distance to the cliff. She verified, “Throw it over?”

He nodded, “We don’t want it to smell up our campsite.”

Dead weight was incredibly heavy. 2319 knew that. She rolled the body over. Shattered teeth fell out of its mouth. To avoid the embarrassment of struggling with it flung over her shoulder, she opted to hook her hands under its arms and drag it to the edge. In doing so, she could see its face. Completely covered in blood, nose shattered, lips split. It was an odd sensation for her, to feel powerful. Maybe she did have control. She stared at the destruction life, destruction she was responsible for, one last time before she reached the edge of the cliff.

She peered down, the ground below lost in the darkness of the night. When she pushed his body over, it fell in an incredibly inhuman way. Like some sort of doll, with limbs made of cotton, bending whichever way the wind wished. She couldn’t see it impact the ground. But her imagination filled in the gaps.

“You know, you had me worried before,” Leven said from behind her. “I didn't think you'd be one to make it too far.”
She glanced back, desperate to hear an elaboration. The anxiety she believed she had freed herself from was back, all at once.

He was lying, of course. She didn't worry him. He didn't even notice her, to be frank. But he let her stand there, with her paralyzing fear. Fear he was responsible for. She may have felt powerful crushing that boy's face into the ground. She should feel powerful after such a deed. But she should always remember who really is in control, no matter how many lives she takes. He relieved her with the words, "But today, you showed potential. Perhaps with my help, you could amount to something."

"Yessir," Her chest swelled with hope.

"Get some rest, now. You deserve that much." He faintly smiled, nodding towards the tent.

She turned from the cliff’s edge and limped forward, making her way back inside the tent.

For the first time in her life, she was told she deserved something.

She did as he said. She sank into the cot. One final smile took over her expression right before she felt body give into sweet slumber.

My lips hurt from the constant grin.

The music has shifted back to an upbeat nature, the girl and I swinging each other around the way-too-small dance floor. We laugh each time we spin, trying desperately to maintain our balance and not run into the other dancers. Everyone’s much drunker than before. It comes with the time of night, I suppose.

I love getting lost in the movement of it all.

When it ends, we wobble, grabbing onto each other’s arms to force ourselves stable. Our dizzy heads bonk against one another’s, pain shooting across my forehead. We both erupt into more laughter. I bring a hand to my head, rubbing away the ache the impact caused.

“Shit,” She giggles, “I’m so sorry,”

“No, it’s my bad,” I laugh back, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, you?”

I nod.

We start laughing again, the sound unable to be stopped from within our stomachs. I notice her nose crinkle. The small gap in her white teeth. Her pink lips.

She recovers first. She says, out of breath, “I think you’re beeping.”

“Beeping?”

She nods to my jacket pocket

I stop laughing, listening for it.

Eventually I hear the familiar noise. I shove my hand into my pocket, grabbing the device and
securing it around my ear. “I have to take this,” I tell the girl, stepping off to the side. As soon as I reach the quiet, empty corner of the tavern, I press the button.

“Agent, the droids located a few nearby villages.” Leven’s voice fills my ear. “I have sent the locations to your map.”

“Very well,” I say, “Did you find any with the stone huts?”

He pauses, then, “The droids did not differentiate between which villages had stone huts and which ones did not.”

So he didn’t program them to. Great. I roll my eyes, “That’s fine. Get those droids out of here before anyone can find them. I’ll check the villages out.”

“Very well,” He quips.

Before he can start up again, I hang up.

I glance up to the fishermen still gathering around the bar stools. Grabbing the holopad from the satchel around my shoulder, I remove it to pull up the map Leven sent. It’s lined in bright blue, particularly detailed with red dots outlining each village marked by the droids. I make my way towards the men, holding to holopad out for them to see, “Do you know anything about these villages?”

They stare at me, taken off guard by the question. The girl from the dance floor steps to my side, peeking over my shoulder.

“Depends what you’re looking for.” Rahl says.

I rephrase my question, “Have you been to any of them? What’s the overall atmosphere of each?”

“Yeah, we deliver fish to them every month.” One of the fishermen with the white beard explains, “They all are pretty alike. They like to live off the lands, fend for themselves. Old fashioned folks.” He points to the one in the east, “These guys like to hunt, in the forests,” then, he points to the one in the west, “This one is basically just a huge family, everyone’s related to each other there in some way. We trade crops with them every now and then,” he points to the one in the north, “We don’t really talk with these guys. They don’t eat fish. Too busy being all up in arms about their religion. Nice folks, but I just can’t justify not eating meat because of it’s energy or whatever the hell-”

I zoom into the location. It’s located on a mountain. “That’s it.” I exhale, relief coursing through me.

“Is that why you came here?” The girl to my left sarcastically remarks, “You want to find god?”

“That’s one way to put it,” I mumble, putting the holopad away. I ask the fishermen, “Just out of curiosity, how many boats are in the capitol?”

Rahl answers, “We must have over 50 larger fishing boats. A bunch of people own private ones too. If you need a ride-”

“How many people does a large fishing boat hold?” I interrupt.

He thinks about it for a moment, “I don’t know, about fifty people?”

The population of the capital is about 3,500 people. With some owning personal vessels, plus the fishing boats, evacuating the capital is completely possible. I stare at the map of Bayora, the large
I turn back to the girl, “Where were we?”

She pulls me back out on the dance floor.

The bar closed not too long after.

We sit in the front of her speeder. She offered to give me a ride back to the hotel, so I could avoid walking in the horrendous rain. Upon arrival, we both sit silently, the sensation of inevitable departure lingering over us.

She says, quietly, somewhat apprehensive of the subject, “If you don’t want to go back to your hotel room, you could always…”

I frown, “I’m sorry, I really can’t.”

She nods, “Yeah, sorry I asked, I just didn’t know-”

“I know.” I sigh. I glance up at the sky. The clouds roll, purple and fueled by lightning trapped within. The glass of the windshield is pebbled with rain droplets. I watch as they drip downwards, out of my view. “My circumstances are just…” I settle on the word, “Weird.”

“How so?”

I say plainly, “I have a boyfriend.”

“Oh.” She her body language shifts away from me, giving me more space. She uncomfortably asks, “How is that going?”

I cross my arms across my chest, “We are going to break up soon.”

She asks, “Does he know that?”

“Nope.” My mouth pops with the noise the word creates. “He’s great though, I love him a lot. I guess it just wasn’t meant to be, or whatever the hell people say to justify stuff like this.” I cringe.

“You don’t need to justify it. Sometimes it doesn't work out. Other times it does. And sometimes, it doesn't need to work out to make it worth while.” There’s warmth that returns in her tone. She turns back towards me with a slight chuckle, “I just realized that I don’t even know your name.”

“I don’t know yours.” I argue.

“Do you wanna keep it that way?” She asks.

I shake my head.

She outstretches her arm, holding open a hand, “My name’s Liv.”

My hand wraps around hers. I shake it, “It’s nice to meet you.”
“Yours?” She asks.

Agents never ask agents about names. If she were undercover, it wouldn't make any sense for her to probe me with such a question. She can't be working for the Order. I decide to tell her, “2319.”

“What kind of a name is that?” She lets go of my hand, intrigued.

“A stupid one.” I reply underneath a smile.

She tries to come up with explanations in her head. But she keeps her assumptions to herself, “Change it, if you don’t like it,”

“I don’t really need a name, now.”

She scoffs at the statement, “Yes, you do.” A smile, “I need something to call you by, when I remember you.”

I shrug, “Call me whatever you want.”

Her smile grows wider, “Okay.”

“You thought of something?”

She nods.

“What is it?”

She opens her mouth to say it. But quickly closes it again. She decides, “That’s something for me to know,” She pokes at my shoulder, “and you to try and answer for yourself, someday.”

I trudge forward, through the mud.

It engulfs my legs as I walk, splashing up onto the outside of the cargo pants. My boots luckily keep good traction, allowing for the hike up the mountain to be smoother than it could be in such vigorous conditions. Wind slaps at me from all directions, water spraying in my face. I look behind me, at how much ground I have covered. The lake is out of sight, but I can still hear its waves in the distance. Fallen and burnt trees separate me from the black-sand beach. I keep moving, stepping over the fallen logs, stray limbs, and weathered rocks, towards the top of the mountain. I glance upwards. Rain pours downward, slapping against my face. The sky is possessed by grey clouds, seemingly swirling. A teal and purple atmosphere barely shines through the bleak weather.

All that exists is what’s ahead.

I continually tell myself that. Despite the cramping of my legs, my breath growing short and shallow, my arms burdened by reaching out to the stability of nearby trees to assist in my trek upward. I keep moving forward.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped needing to look at the map of my holopad for reassurance of where I am. A sensation within me takes over. The Force pulls me forward, guiding me. Surrounding me. The same thing Lex showed me, Ben introduced to me to, it leads me completely. Moving upwards becomes much easier.
Hours pass.

I am met with a solid rock wall, stretching upwards several stories. I cannot tell what is on the towards the top of the wall, due to the fog. But I know what the mountain leads to, nonetheless. I remove the gloves from my satchel, securing them to my hands.

I stretch out my fingers, examining the porous rock. Plenty of nooks and cracks to grab onto. Rain coats the rock, making it incredibly slick. I test the grip I have, with the gloves.

It might work. It has to work.

I begin to scale the wall. Fingers hook into the small crevasses, my feet soon replacing them. As my foot arches, slipping at the rock beneath me, it catches the small teeth lining the toe of my boot. My body stretches, arms reaching out to each raise or indentation my hands can grip onto. I don’t look down. I don’t torture myself with the idea, even.

I continue up, making great time. The wall serves me greatly, providing a new place for my hand to go, higher and higher each time. Until suddenly, there’s nothing.

Nothing for another five feet over, to my upper right. There’s a large crack in the rock.

“Fuck.” I mumble.

I look down, realizing in whatever adrenaline rush I just experienced, I managed to scale upwards of fifty feet.

I look up, the rain mocking me as it slaps my face.

Deep breath. My hands brace themselves.

I spring myself upwards, toward the crevasses.

Three of my fingers manage to grab hold. The rest of my body swings from the momentum below me.

With a grunt, I reach up with my other hand, securing it into the crevasse. My feet scramble for anything to help me support my weight.

I glance up for my next move, realizing that the wall begins to jut outwards overhead.

“Dammit,” I exhale. I hook my right hand into the next crack, then the one after that. My feet are forced to leave the security of the rock, my arms now the only thing to support me as I climb back, towards the face of the jutting out rock. My legs swing below me, helpless to the wind. I look down at them. Then I look down where the ground once was. Now, all there is, is fog, darkness. A drop that would end me.

My fingers grip tighter at the rocks. I can do this. I know I can do this.

I continue climbing, reaching the outward face of the rock. Unable to tell what lies above it’s top, I secure my fingers to it’s flat ledge. Fuck. It's flat. My fingers begin slipping from the rain gathered. In a moment of impulsivity, I swing my leg upwards, onto the top, hoping there’s enough room for my body. There is.

I roll forwards, my weight now completely on the ledge.

I didn’t even realize my eyes were squinted shut, until I open them. I expect to see more wall to
climb, but there isn’t. Just ground. A village.

I burst into a relieved hysterical laughter. It’s the village.

I look back over the edge, down to the bottom one last time before I arise to my feet. I made it.

My feet then are led straight to the village center. I walk around each stone hut, carved hallow for its residence. The village is quiet, nothing louder than the rain and distant crackling of lightening. Warm light glows from beyond the burlap of each door I pass. I am not running. But I am moving far too quickly to be walking.

Until, I see it.

The door.

A brown, burlap cloth shielding me and the man I already know resides inside it. It’s nearly identical to all the other homes. But I know it’s this one. My chest swells. I just know.

I remove a glove, then reach out, feeling it with my hands. For a moment, I wonder if this is all just another vision. Maybe, last night when I slept, I never really woke, and my mind is just playing another trick. It feels just as real as it did, then. The cloth just as rough, as wet, under my fingers as it did in my dreams.

I push it aside.

“Hello?” I call out, before entering. I remove the hood covering my head.

He’s there.

The elderly man sits on his wooden stool. I go through the checklist of things I can remember. He has his leather knife holster across his chest. A wool brown, striped coat. The ancient jewelry of wooden beads and crystals snaking around his neck. Short white hair. Thin, short beard. Pale blue eyes.

Before he can speak, I dig into my pocket for the ring.

I pull it out, flipping the switch, showcasing the Alliance symbol. I hold it out to him.

Swallowing hard, I say with the boldest voice I can muster, “I need your help.”

His once alarmed eyes soften into that of understanding. "Please, have a seat," He brushes off the empty bench next to him, "You're welcome to join me."

Chapter End Notes

it's great to be back! hopefully updating again in the next month. thank you all for sticking around, as always <3 lots of jumping around in this one! hopefully it's not confusing or weird or anything, idk its different!

also, rise of skywalker!!! im so excited!!! <3 the teaser made me cry real tears, its fine :'}
playlist
pinterest board
Lightning crackles in the distance.

Kylo Ren stands outside the opened doorway to the First Order’s base, rain spraying up against the visor of his helmet, blurring his vision with droplets of water. The terrain surrounding the base is pure mountain, the base laying tightly into the valley it was laid a few days ago. The mountains are covered in a layer of trees that merely look like thorns from so far away, no leaves cover their protruding branches. Just thick wood shooting from its trunks, jagged and unpredictable. It’s as if the branches are merely shadows to the lightning popping in and out of the sky above.

He looks downward and twists his ankle, his boot smearing the oil-black mud, creating a crater for yet another puddle. Ren is surprised the base isn’t flooded by now. It’s been raining ever since his arrival. He looks back up, to the roaring purple sky, above the mountain range. The rain shows no sign of stopping anytime soon. He wonders if it ever stops on this planet. He looks back at the base. Then, asks himself how quickly his troopers could man flight stations and take off, if flooding became an issue. For a moment, he imagines the rectangular, metal box of an irregularity being swallowed whole by the rain, reclaimed by nature. Suddenly, he’s the smallest thing that’s ever existed, no power, no Force, no control of anything. A child in an inconvenient mask, intimidated by a thunderstorm.

He turns his back on the scenery, retreating into base. He wills the Force to close the door behind him.

Commander Ren strolls down the long corridor, his boots slightly squeaky from the way it’s wet tread rolls against the metal ground. With each trooper he passes, his stride much quicker than theirs, they turn to salute him. Ren doesn’t respond, not even with a small glance. He keeps his vision forward, towards the end of the hall. Their projections of intimidation pop in and out of his mind, thudding throughout his skull like sporadic migraines. Ren turns right, down another hall, even longer than the previous. He exhales smoothly.

When he reaches the end of that one, he meets the main control room through a wide door, sliding it’s metal plates open upon his approach. The room reveals men and women sitting in rows across control boards and monitors. They watch their screens, tapping at their keyboards. Most with blank expressions, no rush to their movements. Some are most likely only pretending to be busy. He does not blame them.

Ren walks down the aisleway to the main holocron, projecting the charted map of Bayora. It shines with blue luminescence, reflecting off of the shiny black surfaces of the paneled walls surrounding the back of the room. General Hux sits in a chair around the holocron. His jaw is tight, his distracted stare fixated on his gloved hand. Next to him, the Lieutenant lounges, leaning against the holocron’s surface as he taps away mindlessly on his holopad. Ren doesn’t recall the man’s name. He’s never worked with him before, not closely.

The Lieutenant perks up to the shadow being cast before him. He quickly shoves his holopad down, in order to stand at attention, shoulders broad, chin up. He’s a shorter man. Dirty blonde hair, full of gel, combed through and through. His earlobes hang low, his jawline wide and boxy. Skin tan and weathered from sun, but not scarred from battles. He greets crisply, voice forced low and loud, “Sir.”
Ren glances down at the General, who is not responding to his presence whatsoever. Hux remains staring off blankly. Ren is relieved he doesn’t have to associate with him, at the moment. He opts to ask the Lieutenant, trying to seem nonchalant, “Any reports?”

The Lieutenant relaxes, “Not since we made contact last night, sir.”

Great. That means it’s been nearly a full day since they’ve heard from her. Why wouldn’t she update in the morning on her plans for the day? Is that procedure for an agent? Or are they really just given the liberty to do whatever? What if she has been compromised? Ren’s tone is undeniably impatient, “Well, have you tried to contact her again?”

“It’s not necessary.” A voice says from behind him.

The distinguishable voice immediately clicks in Kylo Ren’s mind. Ren turns around to 5D-R8, snipping, “Why not?”

R8 steps towards the three men, projecting for only them – mainly Kylo – to hear, “She’s been on the mountain of the northern village for a few hours now.” R8’s programming remotely zooms in on the map, the terrain fuzzy from whatever surveillance droids picked up earlier. The view is barely clear, with the unforgiving rain blurring the shot, but Ren can make out the outline of a mountain on the holocron, blurry spots of lights indicating windows and doors for huts in the distance. Stone huts. The ones he saw in her mind. She’s there, now?

Ren asks, “How do you know?”

R8 blankly looks at Ren. The Lieutenant asks, in a tone that’s quiet enough for just the four of them to hear, “Has the Commander not been made aware of our tracking technology installed in her division of agents?”

“I am aware…” Ren says smoothly. Right. Tracking technology. An uncomfortable lump forms in his throat.

R8 continues on, “Agent 2319 most likely found the target and is speaking with him at this very moment. I have been careful to keep her whereabouts monitored.”

“I wouldn’t doubt her, Commander.” The Lieutenant interjects with confidence.

Ren turns to looks at the man. He glances down to the name tag across his breast, under his pins signally rank. Leven. Although Ren has been in passing with the man for a few days, he just now is bothered to learn his name.

Leven boasts, “I know you and 2319 have been working together for awhile now, so I’m sure you’ve been aware of her reliability. But if it does calm any nerves of yours, I can personally assure you that she will get her job done and do it well. She is one of the best of her kind.”

Kylo Ren briskly responds, “I don’t doubt her.” And he doesn’t.

To doubt her would be to doubt the Force. Finding Lor San Tekka is her destiny. He knows this. Snoke reassured him this. The Force chose her. And Kylo Ren knows there is no better to choose. Kylo Ren chose her, as well.

Sure, there has been a few bumps in the road, regarding her loyalty to the Order. Kylo does not deny that.

But he recalls the way she felt in his arms nights ago, their bare skin against each other, fully
exposed, minds opened for one another to seep in and out of. That was the most honest moment he’s ever experienced. The vulnerability of crying in her arms, all while she was crying in his… it’s incredible to recall that he felt the safest he’s ever felt, in a moment that may seem quite pathetic logistically. She’s a truth he knows he can rely on. He hasn’t had many of those before. He trusts her. She trusts him. She will retrieve that map for him. He knows it. He knows it. He reassures himself it over and over, as if he didn’t know it. But he does. He knows it.

“Good.” Leven praises. There’s a smug pride radiating from his presence. Ren wonders why that is. As if Leven was the one in Kylo’s mind, he brags, answering the unspoken question, “You know, I was actually one of her supervisors, throughout her training.”

Kylo Ren stiffens. Agent rarely talks about her training. But in the rare moments she does, she doesn’t recall the memories fondly. The memories are those of fear, abuse, torture… It’s mysterious to Kylo, as each time she looks back on her time in the Academy, or in training, a completely solid wall is put up through her mental projection. Kylo doesn’t take it personally. He assumes it’s there block herself out from the memories, more so than him.

Kylo Ren eyes the man. “Interesting.” He responds briskly. How many supervisors did she have? Was this one of the awful ones? Surely, Agent would tell him if he were an issue. Would she? Is that another reason for her recent stress?

Ren sets his jaw.

Unaware of Ren’s mind assessing hundreds of questions and possible answers, Leven goes on, “I always knew she would be a good one.” He leans back against the holocron, suddenly returned to his more casual state, “You know, you can always tell how good an agent will be at their job by how many questions they ask.”

Ren is pulled from his mind. He forces his composure to stay uncompromised, asking stiffly, an attempt to make his curiosity seem nonchalant, “She asked a lot of questions?”

Leven smirks, “She didn’t ask any.”

Suddenly, a scoff submerges from Hux. The first indication that he was even listening. Hux stands to his feet, walking away from the men, not blatant in showing that he’s had enough of the conversation. Leven glances over at the General, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly. And somehow, Ren makes the choice that it would be wiser to follow Hux than to stay with Leven. He’s not sure how long he could refrain from not throwing the Lieutenant across the room. Or ripping into his mind, to see what role he had in Agent’s training. Ren has already determined that he personally hates him. Now, he just needs to determine if Agent has any reason at all to hate him too.

Hux walks into the room towards the back of the main control center, punching the keypad with the correct code. Kylo wills the Force to keep the door open for him to follow in afterwards.

The room is reserved for only the highest in command in the Order. Generals, admirals, commanders, and the occasional squadron leaders. It is a room that Kylo does not enter often but is always provided on base locations. Kylo does not find its commodities helpful, let alone necessary. Yet, the room is always included, always fully stocked. Right now, it’s just Ren and Hux by themselves, occupying the room together. Hux doesn’t respond to Ren’s presence, making his way down the long table, adorned with expensive fruits and meats, decorated to a perfected formal presentation. The table itself is black, displaying Ren’s masked reflection as he glances down to its surface. Ren wonders how much of the food goes to waste. It must be impossible for such a small handful of people to eat so much. He can’t help but internally gripe that the credits could be put to better uses for the Order. But if he were to ever dare think of getting rid of this damned luxury, his
comrades would only despise him more.

Hux reaches into one of the cabinets hanging overhead, it’s crystal clear glass revealing what he’s reaching for before his gloved hand even encloses around it – a tall, silvery bottle of wine. Then, a wine glass in the cabinet over. Hux pops the cap open, pouring the blood-red liquid into the glass. He fills it up to the brim, it nearly overflowing.

Without warning, Hux speaks, still facing away from Ren, “When 2319 was intoxicated, she stressed to me how dealing with intolerable men was such a large portion of her job.”

Ren doesn’t respond, not knowing what to do with the information.

Hux turns, wine in hand. He nods to the door, leading back to the Lieutenant, “I find myself thinking the same thing, more often than not.” He takes a swig.

Ren still doesn’t respond. He hasn’t been in a room alone with the General recently. There’s many things Ren wants to say to the General. Some of those things, threats. But questions, as well. A lot of questions.

Ren takes a breath, beginning smugly, “She was referring to you, though, as the intolerable man?”

“Yes, me. And you.” Hux quips back, taking another swig.

Ren chuckles a bit at her boldness. She would say that.

Hux walks forward. His walk isn’t as formal as usual. There’s a tiresome energy in his lazy stride. Ren has no clue why the General seems so exhausted. All Ren can really think about is why he, himself, is spent. The entire base has been waiting around for Agent to finish her duties so they can begin their invasion. But Ren’s anxiousness stems deeper than just the adrenaline before a battle. Too much is on the line, for surface level anxiety.

Kylo recalls the last time he saw Luke Skywalker, standing in the rubble of that god forbidden Jedi temple, as he flew the transport ship away. Kylo loved watching that place burn. He found power in the roaring flames surrounding the old Jedi master, so close to swallowing the man alive. He found profound comradeship in the fellow Jedi padawans who helped him burn it all down, when they discovered what Luke had done. Kylo Ren has always felt powerful. But that was the first time he felt powerful without feeling the fear that coincided with it.

He wished he could have killed Luke that day. It would have made things a lot easier, now. The Supreme Leader would have been incredibly impressed, upon meeting Kylo in the flesh. But the idea of Luke Skywalker running away, withering as a lonely old man for so many years, is also quite satisfying to Ren. He wonders if when he does hunt down Skywalker, Luke will wish that Kylo would have just killed him that night, too. He hopes that is Luke Skywalker’s final thought as he lays hopeless on the ground, staring up into his former padawans eyes, bathed in the red light of Ren’s saber, right as Ren raises his sword and slashes downward. Just as Luke once saw himself doing to Ben.

Luke Skywalker tried to kill Ben Solo, because of his intimidation of Ben’s power.

But Kylo Ren will kill Luke Skywalker, because it is justice.

Hux takes another gulp of his wine. Then, sighs deeply, chuckling to himself at his own thoughts. “It’s so funny, isn’t it?” The General mumbles, “She makes it seem so harmless – endearing, even…”
Ren does not respond. There’s a point the General is trying to make. Ren wishes he would get on with it. He does not have the patience for the dramatic circles the General speaks in.

“That’s why you fancy her so much. Her trivial rebellions are your theatre.” Hux tests the waters of such bold words. “And we know your relationship with Rebels.”

Ren doesn’t really care for the instigation. He fully understands the nature of his relationship with Agent. Hux attempting to psychoanalyze it himself is rather boring. Kylo turns to leave the room, probably to go return to his quarters until further notice. Or check on his Knights. Yes. He should go do that.

Yet, Hux’s voice returns, “But now, she’s an admiral.”

Ren stops in his tracks. He turns back towards Hux, taunting at the man, “Perhaps if you were as skilled as you are envious, you would be an admiral as well.”

“I don’t think it takes skill. Apparently, you just have to seduce the right person.” Hux takes another sip of his wine.

Ren takes a deep breath. The General can’t take this moment away from him – he’s about to find and kill Luke Skywalker and the woman he loves is going to help him do it. Ren is unbothered for once, defending her, “I would argue that it takes a great amount of skill, too.”

Hux huffs, frustrated in Ren’s lack of understanding. He begins picking at the seams of his gloves, a certain energy within him bubbling up. With each word he speaks, another is concealed, “She will go on to be the first ever Admiral of the Order who visits Resistance prisoners, out of sympathy.”

Ren immediately backfires, “An issue that would have never occurred, if you did not psychologically manipulate such a response out of her.”

“Is that what I did?” Hux looks up again, eyes now laser focused onto Ren’s visor. His tactics have changed, but goal remains the same. He starts, bolder, louder, “Sure, I wanted threaten her a bit. But truly, I did not assume I would have to do so little, to do so. And I most definitely did not anticipate her going on to console the offspring of Resistance spies.”

“She said you orchestrated the slaughter of a mother and father in front of their children.” Ren seethes, “Kill any man and woman of the Resistance, that is fine. But needless torture is not within my priorities, nor is it in hers.”

“No?” Hux argues again, setting down the glass of wine – already half-empty – and stepping closer to Ren. “You should spend more time with the Lieutenant. He has been telling us all many stories of the needless violence Agent 2319 has engaged in.”

“I would not be so quick to believe everything that Lieutenant says.” Ren tries to change the subject, “Why is he assigned to this mission anyways?”

Hux ignores the question, “According to Leven, there was one time he ordered 2319 to bring him the head of a fugitive of the Order. She hunted the man down, then quite literally brought back Leven it’s head. She walked around with a severed head for miles, carrying it by the scalp.”

Ren grows quiet. It’s just an outrageous story. He couldn’t possibly imagine Agent doing something like that.

Hux continues, “I don’t know about you, but I have never engaged in anything that grotesque. There are more stories too. I’ve been hearing them all week. One time, she posed as a homeless child,
begging a Resistance family for a place to sleep at the night. Once the family fell asleep, she killed them all. Apparently, she was so quiet, none of them even woke up. And another time, she built a relationship with a man for months to get intel on Rebellion politics before she suffocated him while-

“Enough.” Ren doesn’t want to hear more. He’s looked through her files before. He is aware she has done things for the Order most would consider cruel. Kylo himself has, too. Maybe not as calculated as her, perhaps not as psychologically engaged… but still. It doesn’t matter. He assures himself, and the General, “If anything, these actions prove her dedication to the Order.”

“Not her dedication to the Order. I completely doubt that, in her. These stories, if anything, prove her ability to be cruel. And that is what I believe you doubt.”

Kylo Ren is reminded why he despises speaking to the General. “You’re wrong. She’s loyal to the Order.” And to me, he internally adds on. “Her cruelty serves us well. I’m leaving now. Alert me immediately when she contacts the base.”

Ren turns to exit. He just wants to get out of there, at this point. And he nearly does.

But right when he is about to press the button to open the door back out to the main control room, Hux adds on, “When the boy died, she puked.”

Kylo Ren pauses.

“She sobbed. She clung to the corpse, muttering into it’s chest as if it could hear her. A pathetic mess of a sight.”

Kylo tries not to picture it. But he does. It’s too easy for him to picture, as if Hux is projecting the sight right into Kylo’s mind. He can hear the way she cries so easily. He feels the way her chest contracts with the sobs in his own body. Kylo steps towards Hux, willing the Force to pierce into the man’s mind. Not for him to invade. Just for Hux to double over at the painful sensation. Ren ponders the most threatening thing to say to the man, the man who put Agent through so much needless, undeserved pain. Ren should have protected her. He should have never let her go on that mission to Bonadan with Hux. He knew it was a bad idea. Why did she go? She didn’t have to. He’s always wondered.

Hux squeezes the words out through his pain, grabbing his head, “What will she do after we invade a whole planet? Obliterate an entire solar system?” He winces, willing himself to look up and into Ren’s eyes, “Could she allow us to do such a thing?”

Ren rips the violent energy away from Hux’s presence. Hux gasps in relief, trying to downplay his former anguish by brushing off his clothing. Ren says calmly, “I’ve already spoken to her about the issue. She holds no remorse.” It’s… a bit of a lie. She’s full of guilt, if Ren is being honest. But it will get better. He can help her. He will. “She has to serve the Order. Now that she’s aware of the tracker, there’s no other choice.”

“She has a choice.” Hux says, still out of breath, “Serve us, or die.”

Kylo’s gut drops. No. She wouldn’t…

“Agents geared from childhood defect all the time. Our agent training system is flawed and I – I am trying to fix it.” Hux sounds the most human Ren’s ever heard him sound. He’s almost pleading, words no longer calculated and processed before speaking. “If failed agents are unaware of the tracker, they try to run. If they are aware, they’ll off themselves, or go out in some rash blaze of
“Then why the hell did you tell her about the tracker?!”

Hux breaks eye contact. He gathers some courage – his own mask returning. Then shrugs, wiping away sweat from his brow. He says casually, “I quite literally despise the girl, now. I knew revealing that information would put her in distress, so I revealed it. Unfortunately, I was not in the correct state of mind to consider the consequences.”

Kylo clenches his fists. He might kill him. He actually might kill him this time.

Hux hurriedly explains, forcing himself to look back into Kylo’s faceless, lethal gaze, “All I know is agents from Project Resurrection are not trained to be long term. They are disposable. And you interfered when it was her time to be disposed. Now, we have an expired agent who is about to be an admiral, all while having a personal vendetta against the Order. To have that title, without the motivation to fight for us, is dangerous. She has nothing to lose.”

“She doesn’t have nothing!” Kylo snaps back, incredibly defensive.

Hux stills.

Kylo, just realizing what he said, turns back around. He should have never followed the General in here. He would’ve been better off staying with that pompous Lieutenant. Or standing outside in the rain, by himself. He knows nothing good ever comes from speaking with Hux. Leave. He needs to leave.

Hux’s brow furrows, then he slightly shakes his head. All he can do is laugh sadly. And respond, “I hope it’s enough.” Hux eyes the creature of a man in front of him. Kylo Ren… a kid, who wears a mask thinking it makes him an icon, has a family dynasty thinking it ensures his greatness, and now believes true love can make a failed agent a successful admiral. Hux has never been so glad he doesn’t waste his time with such fallacies. “I honestly do. For the sake of the Order.”

Kylo Ren doesn’t have to hope it is enough. He *knows* it is. *He knows. He knows.*

He was never enough for anyone. But he is enough for her. *He knows it. He knows it.*

Hux is now the one who wishes to leave. He’s had enough of such ridiculousness. He begins walking towards the door, around Ren.

But this time, Ren is the one to interrupt, with the question he finally has so little pride to ask, “Why did she go to that factory on Bonadan with you?”

Hux raises an eyebrow. Agent made such a big deal about telling Snoke about Hux’s assassination plan. Why wouldn’t she have already told Ren? Surely, it would be another way to make Hux’s life more difficult. Did she actually consider his offer at a time? Hux is not sure. Why wouldn’t Snoke have told Ren? Does the Supreme Leader honestly not care to warn him? Hux asks, “She never told you?”

Ren shakes his head.

Hux says, right before he finally exits, “Then it seems that the girl you trust so greatly is deliberately withholding information from you.”

Kylo Ren is left alone with the luxurious food and wine sitting idly behind him. He stands in the silence, facing the closed door before him, telling himself over and over again: *he knows, he knows,*
Kylo Ren didn’t return to his Knights. He should have. It would have been wiser than going to his quarters alone, wallowing in his anxieties. He hasn’t even sat in his bed, opting to pace back and forth, unmasked. Questions run through his mind in hyper speed. Not in a stream, one leading to the next. All popping in and out, sporadically, uncontrollably.

Does Leia know that Lor San Tekka saw Luke’s compass? Would she warn him that the First Order is coming? They could’ve sent Agent right into a trap. Will Lor San Tekka be able to sense that Agent is… an agent? Does Agent care enough to try to complete her mission? Of course she does. Kylo hates himself for thinking otherwise. What will Agent do once the invasion occurs? He pictures her crying again, crumpled up in bed, the projection she sends from the Force, splintered shards of memories and trauma. Is this too much for her? Is this too much for him? Fuck, they’re about to invade an entire planet. A small planet, one so inconsequential. For what? Just a statement of the Order’s power? Anyone could invade this planet, Bayora has no means of defense. The Order isn’t proving their power, they aren’t proving anything, they’re just invading a planet.

Shit. Kylo can’t think like that. He can’t.

His mind gives him a different question to torment him:

Why did Agent go on that mission with Hux to Bonadan? She always answered Hux’s calls. Even when they were just about to be intimate for the first time, a moment Kylo has ran over and over in his mind, planning meticulously what he would say, what he would do… As Kylo first placed his hands on the soft, bare skin of her stomach, her ribs, he was hypnotized by her, unaware of anything else in the entire galaxy. He couldn’t imagine she was just as wrapped up in the moment. His anxieties were only confirmed with how easily she was pulled out of it all to stare at her blinking comm-link. She answered it, and it was Hux. What did he want? Kylo can’t remember what she said to Hux. Why did he need her on Bonadan? What did Agent do to Hux to make him think he had the right to torture her in such a way, back on Starkiller? Kylo would usually assume that it would be to get to him, himself. Maybe it is. Maybe, he’s the reason she’s going through so much pain and misery. It would be an easy answer, one that makes a whole lot of sense.

But is it the right answer?

He doesn’t know.

Fuck, he needs to calm down. He’s a nervous wreck. It’s just another reason for him to want Agent back, so she can just sit next to him, or near to him, or something, anything to give him some sense of stability. Fuck. He wants to contact her. He should, she’s been gone too long. She could be in trouble, it shouldn’t take this long.

There’s a knock at his door.

He immediately strides to it, forgetting his helmet isn’t even on. He opens it.

Lex Ren stands in the doorway. He’s unmasked, she notices. So is she. Her black ensemble of the long robe is tied around her waist, hanging loosely from her small frame. Her lengthy hair is woven into her usual braids, starting in rows at her scalp and cascading down, to swing behind her with each graceful turn of her head. She says, voice thick with concern, “Are you alright?”
Kylo doesn’t answer, “Any updates?”

Lex shakes her head, “N-no. I just wanted to see if you were okay. I could sense your distress from down the hall.”

Kylo grinds his teeth. He steps aside, allowing Lex to come in, then he closes the door behind her. He presses, “Do you think she’s been gone for too long?”

Lex answers, hesitantly, “I don’t think I’m the right person to ask.” Lex pushes a few braids lying at the edge of her face behind her ear. “Try to separate yourself from your compassion towards her. Looking at things from an objective point of view always helps. Would you still be worried if it were a different agent, on this mission?”

“I wouldn’t send any other person on this mission.” Kylo restlessly explains. “And the fact that it’s her… She’s just going through a lot right now, and I don’t know if she even wants to be here and I-”

Lex interrupts, “Why wouldn’t she want to be here?”

Kylo sighs, searching to find the right way to say it, without having to say it. He can’t tell her about Agent’s tracker. Or about what Hux did to her. Lex doesn’t know much about what the Order is capable of, the lengths they have recently gone to, to secure their power. Kylo never has had the strength to speak of it to her, or any of the other Knights. Does that make him ashamed of the Order? He’s not. He’s proud. The Knights are just… They aren’t ready to know. He settles on, “There’s some violent things the Order has been doing. Necessary, but violent.”

“The invasion of Bayora?”

Kylo nods. Sure.

“Do you think it’s justified?” Lex asks, eyes wide. He can feel the anxiety radiating off of her. Her own unsureness, begging him for an answer. For guidance.

Kylo delivers the lie with confidence, “I do.”

“Good.” She believes him. She doesn’t even feel the need to question it. A sigh of relief, “That’s good.” She asks, “Does Agent believe it’s justified?”

Kylo lies yet again, “She does. But she still feels the guilt.” Kylo tries to divert the subject, “It’s normal. It’s human.”

Lex furrows her brow, “Then why are you worried?”

“I don’t know. Her role in the Order has always been very up close and personal to…” he decides, “central conflicts, and I just think it’s getting to her.”

Lex frowns, crossing her arms. “Oh,” she begins, “Well, she will be okay. I think she’s depressed, right now. A bit more cynical than usual. But she has you. She loves you, and she knows you’re there for her. And I – I’ll be there for her too.” Lex elaborates, “I’ll try really hard to understand her. I will. I just struggle with understanding why she’s dissatisfied with the Order. Everything seems as though it’s the best it could be, right now. I was worried about the… um… ethics of this invasion. But if these people truly are our enemies and contributing to the evil of the Rebellion, they deserve to be eliminated. Especially if they’re housing an ally of Luke Skywalker.”

Kylo looks down, “Yeah.”
Lex approaches him, looking up to him with bright, considerate eyes. The brown of her eyes is almost black, yet somehow remains so radiant. She’s much shorter than him, eyeline barely even meeting his chest. Her voice drops, so much more serious, “I think I know what this is about.”

Kylo stutters, “Y-you… you do?”

“I do.” Lex says with conviction, “You just have to remember – she’s not him.”

Kylo shivers. She is not Han Solo. She won’t abandon him. She cares for the good of the galaxy. She wants a life with him.

“Sheerson may have ran off, but she won’t.” Lex goes on. Right. Eerson. “You need to forgive yourself. We all do. You’re not alone, in struggling with that loss. Me, Solaw, Maes… We all share that guilt.”

Kylo just nods. The loss of Eerson has been repressible. Mostly because of the lies that surround it, the truth of it he chooses not to face. He should feel more pain. But being so preoccupied with Agent has taken that away. He hasn’t consoled the Knights much about it, because of the fact. “I’m sorry… How has everyone been? Dealing with that?”

“I think we’re all finally moving past it. It’s been rough, but we’ll be okay.” She reassures, reaching out to him. She lays a friendly hand on his arm. Kylo glances down. She’d usually be too shy to do so. She’d usually project loudly, flustered by the idea of touching him. Kylo wishes Lex did not harbor any feelings of romanticism towards him, but he cannot deny that it is nice to feel desired by someone – even if it’s someone whom he cannot return the favor to. Lex is the first one who had that desire for him, at least, since he’s left the Jedi Temple. Feeling someone project such thoughts towards him made him feel like something other than a creature – a faceless weapon. But now, for once, he doesn’t find that desire in her that he’s so used to seeing. Her mind is clear. She strongly looks him in the eyes and says, “We’re the last thing you should worry about.”

“Okay.”

Lex continues, “And don’t worry about Agent either. She’s been with the Order long enough to see it for what it is. She’s very strong.” Lex removes her gloved hand from Kylo’s arm. “I know it sounds insane, but I have this feeling about her. And when I was in her mind,” She crinkles her nose, trying to describe the feeling, “There was something oddly profound.”

Kylo’s gut drops. “She let you enter her mind?” Does she know why she went to Bondoan? What Agent did to Hux?

Lex elaborates, “I didn’t see her memories or thoughts or anything. We were just in each other’s energy. I could feel the Force within her, and I felt the Force grow stronger in me. She said she could feel it too. It was just… right. I don’t know.” She struggles to put it to words, “I’ve never really experienced anything like it before.”

Kylo frowns. Lex never has described her ventures with Kylo into the Force in such a way. Kylo hasn’t even been in Agent’s mind like that. Not intentionally. The closest thing he can recall to that is the other night, amidst having sex. But that was just a vulnerability thing. She’s never just willingly opened her mind to him, for him to concentrate on. Sure, she’s shown him bits and pieces. Her Force vision of Lor San Tekka. But not quite what Lex was describing. Maybe Lex is just bad at describing it. Overexaggerating.

Lex sporadically adds on, remembering, “She also might just be annoyed she has to work with that Lieutenant again.”
Kylo perks up, “Leven?” He narrows his eyes, “Does she not like him?”

Lex shuts her mouth, eyes alarmed, as if she said something she should not have. Then, she manages, rubbing the back of her neck, “She hasn’t talked to you about him before?”

Kylo shakes his head.

She shrugs, “One night on Korriban, we got to talking, just about childhood stuff. She mentioned his name. Maybe you should ask her about him. I’m surprised he hasn’t been demoted or fired, or something. She didn’t go into details, but the way she talked about him…” She shivers, remembering the projections of hatred, of fear, Agent gave off when just speaking his name. “He just sounded like a bad person – manipulative. Obnoxiously cruel. A liar.” A pause. Then, “If only she could have had a teacher like you, Master.”

Silence fills his quarters.

Then, there’s a beep.

Kylo lunges at his helmet, shoving it onto his face. The metal bill smashes into his nose with the clumsy movement, but he ignores the pain it causes him.

He presses the button underneath the mask’s rim, lining his jaw, “Commander Ren.”

“Commander,” It’s R8. “We are currently receiving an incoming transmission-”

Kylo immediately exits his room, giving no explanation to Lex. She knows full well why he’s in a hurry. He doesn’t necessarily listen to R8 either as he flies out of his room, back through the seemingly endless corridors of the base.

He is nearly running. He actively has to focus to not be running.

And when finally reaches the doors to the main control room, R8’s voice finishing whatever it was saying, he takes his first breath since before the droid contacted him. The metal doors slide open.

And he sees her.

Kind of.

It’s a projection of her, from the waist up, displayed in the front of the main control center. She’s wearing the tactical rain jacket, her hair pulled back in her standard bun. Behind her is a stone wall.

Stone… Is she inside one of huts of the village, perhaps? Her patient eyes meet his, beaming when she sees him. She says so professionally, “Ah, Commander. It’s good to see you made it to the base safely.”

Kylo walks down the rows of people at their workstations, all quickly glancing to him, then returning their gaze to her image. He finds his place in front of the large holoterminal, in-between Hux and Leven. He stares up at her in relief. She looks good. Not injured, that is. Good, too. In other ways. Kylo clears his throat, “Everything is running smoothly on our end. Do you have updates for us?”

Agent sighs, glancing to something across the room. “I do…” She ponders her words. Then says cautiously, “You want the good news, or bad news first?”

“I…” Kylo starts. Shit.

Agent decides for him, “I’ll actually start with the bad news. So…” She focuses on him intently, her
eyes nearly pleading with him to remain calm.


She blurts out with confidence, “Lor San Tekka is dead.”

Oh.

Kylo remains silent. He’s dead. The person who knows where Luke Skywalker went, and has the means to get there, is now dead.

Agent picks up her holopad, turning it’s camera to project the image of crumpled-up corpse on the ground of the hut. The corpse lays in front of a wide chest, next to a cot. Kylo sees the white of his hair, the thin beard, the profile of the old man’s face. Then, the beads that lay around his neck. The Chains of Wisdom. Ben recalls the stories Tekka told him about the beads threaded into the chains. Tekka explained that they were made from stone found in the caves of Alderaan, where many Force worshipers would meet from around the galaxy to share teachings and stories. After the planet was destroyed by the Death Star, Tekka said that wisdom from those caves still exists in the beads to this day. Ben did remember feeling an energy surrounding the jewelry. He remembers focusing on it, trying to figure out what his mother’s old home was like. She always described it as beautiful. Kylo forces his thoughts to refocus on Tekka.

The corpse is, indeed, him. It’s been such a long time. Last time Ben saw the man, he was in the Jedi temple to visit Luke. Because Luke allowed visitors if those visitors were just visiting Luke. The man was always kind to Ben, but now Kylo recalls it all as condescending. He remembers overhearing Luke and Tekka talk about Ben’s training. He couldn’t quite make out what they said. He only heard his name. But that’s not what bothered him – it was the jarring projections of anxiety from the men. He wonders if Tekka discussed Luke’s planned murder on Ben. He wonders if Tekka feels righteous in Ben’s turn to the dark side, if he takes credit in foreseeing it. Did Tekka ever want him to succeed in his Jedi training, truly?

Kylo thinks about that as he stares at old man now dead on the floor.

Until Agent turns the holopad back around to it’s original position, back onto her, “Would you like me to get you a clear shot of his face, so you can identify him?”

“No, unnecessary. That’s him.” Kylo says dully. Shit. He’s dead. Out of all the scenarios of things going wrong Kylo has imagined, he did not imagine this one. Shit.

Agent explains, “The Resistance must have found out about the bounty set on the man, then warned him about the information we were after. Our conversation was going great, until I mentioned the Unknown Regions. Then, he pulled out his blaster. I managed to disarm him, then impair him, but then his body went into sudden cardiac arrest. Despite every attempt to revive him, he was gone.”

Kylo notices Leven shift his weight. Leven clenches his jaw tightly, arms crossed, staring daggers into her. In a sudden burst, Leven projects a large amount of disdain towards the girl. It’s piercing to Kylo. He tries to ignore it. He also tries to ignore the urge to take the man outside the room and simply murder him in cold blood. Agent also ignores Leven, keeping her gaze on Kylo.

“And the good news?” Kylo asks, forcing disappointment away from his tone.

“The old man tried to distract me while he was getting to his blaster by showing me nothing other than…” Agent smirks holding up reflective memory card, “The map of the Unknown Regions.” She twirls the square disc in her fingers. Kylo recognizes the data card’s design. It’s universal for
Rebellion issued ships. Kylo grins from underneath his helmet. She goes on, “His overconfidence was the death of him. And it will be the death of Luke Skywalker. I’ve seen the map, Commander. I can assure you it’s what we’re looking for.”

Kylo is bathed in relief. He exhales all at once. Suddenly, his once heavy mind is floating with ease. She did it. Agent did it. Stars. He loves her. Now she just needs to get back to base. He cannot wait until she gets back to base. He notices Leven, still looking at her tensely. Kylo beams, “Then, we did not need the old man alive anyways.” Kylo can chart the map. He’s seen and studied Luke’s compass. Once he see’s it, he’ll be able to chart the destination of the temple Luke ran off to. Holy shit. This is great. “Well done, Agent. Would you like for us to send a shuttle?”

Agent bites her lip, then, “We can’t afford alerting the villagers. When we proceed with the invasion, it is imperative that it happens all at once, across the planet. I’ll inform you more on my battle strategy upon my return.”

“Splendid. Once you’ve made enough distance between you and the village, contact us and we’ll send a shuttle discreetly.”

“Perfect, Commander.” She smiles. Gods, he can’t wait to see her. “Shall I be on my way?”

Should she? He ponders it. His mind recalls the image of the old man crumpled lifeless on the floor. Is that really just the end of Lor San Tekka? Explorer of the galaxy, collector of ancient Force relics? Kylo remembers the wooden chest sitting next to the corpse. His curiosity gnaws at him and he has to ask, “Did you by any chance search the premise? Did you go through his belongings?”

Agent looks over to the chest, then shakes her head, a slight hesitation “No, sir.”

Kylo feels goosebumps dot across his back at the sound of her calling him ‘sir.’ Shit. Focus. “You should open that chest. Show me what’s inside.”

“Actually,” She explains, “I was thinking of having you and the Knights focus on raiding this village, in our attack. The village has many people who have ties with the Force. There could be tons of useful stuff. And you will have the means to transport it all back to the Order efficiently.”

Kylo nods, “Excellent.” It is a good idea. There had to be a reason why Tekka went to Bayora in the first place. Who knows what Ren could find? Nonetheless, he still wants to see what Lor San Tekka has, now. He tries not to sound impatient, “Can you just show me the contents of the chest? If anything is extraordinarily valuable, I’d feel better with you taking it now.”

Agent says smoothly, “Of course, Sir.”

Kylo licks his dry lips.

Agent grabs the holopad, turning it to face the chest. She walks with it in her hand, then kneels down to the wooden, oblong box. It’s not protected with a lock. Just a metal hatch that Agent easily slides upwards and open. Agent narrates, tilting the holopad in a way that it’s attached visual recording lens can scan the contents, “There’s a lot of journals. Some literature.” Agent digs through the leather-bound diaries and extra clothing items, only to reveal more underneath. Then, some holocrons. Various scrolls. All things Kylo will collect and study with his Knights. Then, there’s a glimmer unveiled from underneath a book Agent slides over.

Kylo instructs, “What’s that? On the right?”

Agent’s hand goes to it, knowing exactly what his attention was drawn to. She digs it out of the piles of items surrounding it, unveiling a metal box. The box’s exterior is simple, meant for storing a
variety of knick-knacks. But when Agent opens it, there’s only one thing inside.

The hilt of an obsidian lightsaber, wound with black leather down the shaft for grip and tied in a knot towards the curved end, providing a hooked guard, adorned with an inscription in a language Kylo is unfamiliar with. Definitely not designed to fit the aesthetics of the Jedi. Perhaps Sith. Either way, it will be a joy to investigate.

Kylo tries to hide his excitement in the find, “Take that with you. And any of those holocrons or journals you can carry.”

“Will do,” Agent responds. She turns the holopad to herself again. “Anything else?”

“That will be all.” Kylo smiles.

“Disconnecting.” Agent reports, giving Kylo one last unashamed glance as she reaches towards her device, tapping it off. The static projection buzzes away, into nothingness. Kylo sighs.

He looks over at Hux, looking distractedly to the ground, unmoved from when Kylo first entered the room. Then to Leven, finally relaxed once again, arms returned to his sides.

Kylo states to the men, and the other members of the Order around him, “Prepare for her arrival.”

He basks in the glory of finally being right about something.

And the fact that it is her he is right about.

“You can get up now.”

Lor San Tekka sits upwards from the ground, brushing himself off and releasing any held in breathes. He seems relieved. I’m not quite there, yet. I shove the holopad back into my satchel, turning behind me to reach for Tekka’s personal holoterminal. I set it down, at the upright wooden crate where it once rested.

“You’re actually going to give him that stuff?”

I exhale, redirecting my attention over to the old man, who is now pulling himself to sit up on the stool above me. I look him dead in the eyes as I shove the lightsaber box into my satchel. “Buy a new one.”

He frowns at me, reaching over to his terminal. His wrinkly long fingers begin typing the code into the device.

I say, words quick and straight-forward, “You should pick out some holocrons that wouldn’t be too painful to part with. I still have room in my bag for some things. I don’t want him to have any reason to be suspicious.”

Tekka completes the pressing of buttons onto his terminal and switches positions with me. He digs in his crate, painfully trying to choose what items to give over, while I sit on the wooden crate in front of the terminal, impatiently listening to the low buzz of the device activating. My leg bounces rapidly. I try to stop it, but find that it’s too much effort to maintain stillness.

The device turns on.
Blue static is appearing a few feet above the device, projecting. The image of a silhouette is barely apparent, pixels popping in and out, lines of light shifting. The signal just as weak, as when we first connected. But I suppose Bayora is in Rebellion territory. And we are on the top of a mountain.

Suddenly, the image is clear. General Organa. She’s looking down, pressing at some panel of buttons. Her voice doesn’t quiet sync up with the movement of her mouth when she speaks to someone out of frame, words not quite eligible with the connection.

She glances up. “Oh,” She asks, “Did they buy it?”

I nod, crossing my arms across my chest, rubbing at my arms, “Kylo did, at least.”

She sighs in relief, “Good, good.”

I ask, trying to move things along, “Does Dameron have that fleet organized yet?”

Leia looks behind her, at something the camera is not picking up, “Poe!” She yells back, “Status of the fleet?”

Poe walks into the camera’s view, now wearing the classic, tacky-orange uniform of a pilot. He says, that slight passive-aggressive disdain for me still in his voice, “We are on schedule as long as you still plan on making shit hit the fan at twenty-eight-hundred tonight.”

I confirm, “I do. It’s imperative that your X-wings stay out of the Order’s radar until then. You’re dead if they call for reinforcements. And these citizens will be, too.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Poe rolls his eyes, “This isn’t my first time taking out some Order ships.”

I squint at him, “I’m well aware.”

Leia attempts to diffuse the animosity by changing the subject, “And my evacuation team is all set. We’ll fly in once Poe takes out those ships, then get all those citizens out of there, just as we discussed.”

“I’ll try to buy you as much time as I can.” I say standing to my feet. I look to Tekka, “You got the map?”

He stands back to his feet, away from the wooden chest and grabs a small leather pouch from his coat’s pocket. Waving it at me, he smiles, a sparkle in his eye. “Of course.”

I can’t help but look at the pouch and frown. The map was like another limb for me for so long. Without having the object now… It’s odd. I don’t know. I hug at my body with my crossed arms a bit tighter. Then order, “When you’re charting that out, go somewhere safe. Nowhere affiliated with the war. That bounty for you is going to get a lot higher after tonight.”

He reassures, blue eyes warm, “I know a place.”

I exhale smoothly. Tekka hands me my satchel, now full of various items to distract Kylo with. I slide the blank Resistance disc in there as well – the faux map to Skywalker. Then, swing the bag over my shoulder, saying, “I better be on my way then.”

I turn before I can second guess it anymore.

“Wait,” Organa interrupts, “How many men should I send in to attack the base?”

I turn back around. Attack on the base? “What?”
Organa chuckles, “You planning on taking down that whole base by yourself?”

“No,” I look back towards the burlap door, feeling time slipping further and further away. “Just proceed with the plan exactly how we discussed. Nothing more, nothing less.”

Poe asks, his suspicion blatantly obvious, “Yeah, you never did tell us what you’re gonna do once you escape the base. How do you even plan getting off of this planet? Where are you going to go?”

I don’t have time for this. The Order is probably all staring collectively at my stagnant tracking location right now. “I’ll improvise that part, when the time comes.” I throw my hood over my head.

Leia goes on, not allowing me to leave as she brainstorm, “We could send a ship for you. Or use one of the evacuation ships. Really, if you fulfill your part of the plan, it should be no problem sending my men in to attack. We might even get a surrender.”

My leg starts bouncing faster.

“Ooo!” Poe beams, excited, “A surrender! God, that would feel good.”

I snap, “I’m not leaving the base.”

Poe’s smile fades. Leia freezes.

“I can’t.” I stare, my gaze that of ferocious daggers. I don’t feel like providing them with any explanation to that. I don’t want to even think about, let alone explain the situation verbatim.

Leia leans forward, voice suddenly tender, “Yes, you can. We’re not leaving you behind.”

I hate that she said that. “I can’t,” My nails dig into the fabric of my sleeves. They’re not going to take no for an answer without an explanation. I give them the quickest version I can muster, “They put a tracking device in my head. Once they know I’ve betrayed them, people will die every location this tracker places me.” I try to end the conversation, “That is why if I spend too much time here, they’re going to get suspicious. Which is also why I need to leave – now.”

Leia processes the information with a frown. Then, “You know, the Rebellion has some of the most impressive med-centers in the galaxy. I’m sure we could try to do something. Maybe disable it with some sort of frequency, or surgically remove it, or-”

“No.” I dispute, interrupting before she can even begin to get any seed of hope planted within me. “Did you not hear what I just said? Anywhere I go, the Order will follow. I don’t want any more people to die on my behalf.” After I say it, I can think of two exceptions. But I don’t let my mind get consumed in that. Not yet. I know that I need to save those thoughts for later.

She gives me the most heartbreaking expression. So much concern in her eyes. Demeanor so soft. Like how mothers look at their children in the holomovies I have seen. How I’ve tried to imagine what my mother would look at me like. I remember Leia reaching out to me, placing her hand over mine. What if Ben would’ve left the Order, to return to her, and if I didn’t have this tracker to go with him? Would she have treated me as her own? She insists, “There has to be a way to-”

“Stop.” I coldly interject. I try to make my voice harsh, but it only comes out as pathetic, “It’s over for me. I’ve come to terms with that.” I don’t think about that, after I say it. I can’t. I focus on the simple phrase that comes next, “But the people of Bayora still have a chance.”

In her, there’s still doubt. Still ideas trying to formulate on how to save me. I’ve already thought of them all. I’ve already dismissed them all. I don’t want to watch someone else try.
I beg, “Please. This is… If this doesn’t work, if I can’t protect these people, everything I’ve ever
gone through would have been for nothing.” I sigh, shakily reeling back my fear, “Everything that
I’ve ever done outside of the Order has failed on every level. But this…” Deep breath. “This the only
way I could ever have a purpose.”

There’s recognition in her eyes, so evident despite the fuzzy projected image. Yet, her stubbornness
prevails, “We aren’t going to just give up on you.”

I sigh, at the foolishness, then double check for the capsule of poison lining my sleeve, once again.
Sure enough, the small tubular object is there. Untouched. Unbothered. I begin thinking of the
quickest ways to pull it out, when the moment comes. Digging my fingers into the fabric, tearing at
the seams then shoving it down my throat, fast and without second thought. I begin wondering what
that moment will be like, who it will be with, and what the last thing I will see will be. “You’ll never
defeat the First Order if you waste all your energy saving one singular person who is already gone.”

She is silent.

I reach for the terminal. My words come out weak, “Thank you, for all your help.” I look back up
into her eyes one last time.

She looks into mine. “Thank you, for yours.”

I click the terminal off before we can speak any further.

Tekka is frowning at me, when I look back up to him. He reaches out, laying a hand onto my arm, to
which I flinch by instinct. He says softly, weathered voice rich with compassion, “You don’t deserve
this.”

I can’t help but think of how wrong he is. He doesn’t know me. He shouldn’t even pretend to. I
don’t tell him that, though. I just say, gesturing to the leather pouch in his hand, “It’s dangerous to
have that map all in one data storage unit. You might want to split it into multiple pieces, sending
another section to a secure location. That way, if they do track you down somehow…” I decide to
leave it at that. “You know.”

He pursues his lips softly, hand falling from my arm, “Good idea.”

My eyes stay glued onto the leather bag for a moment too long. “I really do have to leave now,” I
say, backing up towards the door. My eyes catch the bowl of porridge the man offered me when I
first entered. It’s now empty. It was surprisingly good porridge. We ate over the fire, waiting to
contact General Organa for a bit. He asked about Ben. I answered his questions. I asked some of my
own. He answered mine. I wish we had a bit more time. But we don’t. I say, finally exiting, “Thank
you for the meal.”

“Hey,” He stops me one last time.

I look over my shoulder, just as my hand parts the burlap of the door.

“May the Force be with you.”

I don’t really know what to respond to that with. Awkward words fill the time while I can think of a
proper response, “Yeah, sure, thanks…” Until I can manage a, “You too.”

He smiles, charmed by my reply.

And that is the last I see of the man.
I exit back into the raging weather of Bayora. The once muffled noises of distant thunder rumble violently against my ears now. The familiar purple sky, always more and more vivid and bright than I can recall from the last time. I knew a while ago that there was no going back on what I’m about to do. But something about leaving that hut truly makes that truth rattle within me. It’s an unsettling sensation. I wrap my arms around my body, holding my twisting stomach.

Tired legs manage to make me venture across the mountainscape, further and further away from the village. I wonder if I should feel like I fulfilled some destiny, today. I wonder if I actually did. My eyes drift to the village behind me, as I look back. Huts lit warmly, each holding their own person or family. I am not sure who all lives there, other than Tekka. It doesn't matter to me. My eyes are diverted back down the mountain, across the forests, and towards the city on stilts, lifted above the roaring water of the lake below. I do not find myself caring about destiny as much as I do the people that will be on Resistance evacuation ships tonight.

They better not fuck this up.

I better not fuck this up.

In the overwhelming anxiety of it all, I stop walking to let the rain spray against my face as I look upwards. It’s quiet for a few moments. I relish these moments while they last. I tell myself that I will be still until the next strike of lightning. It may allow me to rest for two seconds or it could be ten minutes. I am not sure. But I give myself the time, either way.

I wonder if in this time, I will somehow be able to feel okay with everything that I am about to do. If the guilt will subside and a great peace will wash over to replace it. I wait for it… I wait for certainty. I plead with the Force to give it to me.

Lightning crackles in the distance.

And I continue forward, a bit more certain than I was before.

Chapter End Notes

ok - here's *TAP TAP* the motherfucking *TAP TAP* tea: this chapter was supposed to be published ... awhile ago. but ... my laptop broke and i did not have a recovery file because i'm dumb and i think i'm going to live forever! plus it took me forever to buy a new laptop because im moving and that's more expensive than i couldve ever imagined! have any of u guys had to apply for visas before? because it feels like the most stressful and complicated thing i have ever endured! someone please tell me that u applied for a visa and it worked out perfectly (even if its a lie, i'll take it at this point).

Anyways. Next chapter. Second (or third idk yet it depends) to last chapter. The hype. It's coming soon. Way sooner than the last one. Sorry if everyone has "ending fatigue" by now. I still wanna finish this like... soon. I still am trying very hard! I promise!

playlist is here!!!
and here's the pinterest board
There are thirty hours in a day on the planet of Bayora. Agent 2319 arrives on base at hour twenty-four.

She walks through the base’s halls with a presence that consumes the corridors.

Her strength and prestige floods through and through each room. Soldiers that line the halls saluting her, salute her with pride. They already respect her. Some of them she has worked with before, Kylo imagines. Others have probably heard the stories. Stories of her successfully invading the Resistance Base on Hoth all by herself. Stories of her impressive training life that Leven has been pepper ing in and out of his conversations. Kylo can imagine others have stories of their own. Someone as young as her becoming admiral warrants stories to be told.

But Kylo doesn’t really know. He doesn’t speak with them.

All he knows is their projections of intrigue, as she marches through. Her march is regal, that of royalty. Yet, precise, deadly – her gaze to match. Kylo cannot find a way to tear his eyes away from the way she progresses, closer and closer to him. The white lines of hypnotized troopers down the hall seem to blur and it’s only her and him. She’s shed the disguise of the rain jacket and cargo pants that helped her fit in with the civilians of Bayora, now only bearing the attire of an undeniable agent. She’s wearing the dark red jumpsuit, the black webbed leather of the piece glimmering with rainwater from outside. Her hair is tightly, classically pulled back into it’s usual low bun, her facial features strongly on display. As she gets closer he can notice the wet glimmer of her skin. He finds himself flexing his fingers at the sight, craning back the urge to reach out to her. She unfolds her hands from behind her back as she nears just steps away from Kylo.

A confident grin forms on her lips as she holds out her hand to him –

A hand holding the metallic disc. The map to Skywalker.

“I believe this belongs to you, Commander.”

Kylo stares down at it for a moment. Then, back up to her. He tries not to seem too dramatic, for the sake of the soldiers watching the exchange. But also, he can’t help but shudder at the sensation of his blood rushing, adrenaline booming from within, as he reaches out and closes his gloved hand around it. She lets go. He looks at the reflective disc, the silver of his mask creating harsh reflections of light as he turns disc, inspecting.

He sighs as subtly as he can.

He’s actually going to find Luke.

He’s going to do it…

With the abrupt reality of it all, he’s petrified. He finds himself paralyzed in his bed, bright green blaring into his eyes, but not blinding him quite enough to hide the horrifying face of his uncle on the other side of the saber.

Kylo speaks up, thankful his modulated voice does not give away the quiet, frightened nature of his
“It does.”

Agent returns her hands behind her back, speaking up to him with her chin held high, “The disc is not compatible to view in First Order issued ships, but we have many stolen Resistance vessels back on Starkiller that will suffice. I would recommend keeping the map on your person, Commander, for safe keeping. We shall view it first thing, upon our return.”

Kylo nods. He can’t possibly imagine parting with the map now. Or ever. He strains his eyes staring at the object. He feels as if he cannot ever look away from it, in fear that it will disappear the minute he takes it out of his sight.

Leven’s voice interjects, “Well done, Agent,”

Kylo looks away from the map.

Agent’s face holds no sign of disdain as she makes eye contact with Leven, who is slowly stalking towards her. Her expression remains relaxed, not even reacting in the slightest. Kylo is relieved.

Leven stepping next to Kylo says, “I believe you are due for a formal tour of the base. We assembled it with your every request in mind.”

She smiles kindly, “A tour would greatly be appreciated, Sir.” Then, she turns to the troops, ordering, “You may all stand at ease.” They do as she says, relaxing. She speaks loudly to them all, “Your assigned squadron leaders should be reaching out to you before the night falls on your specific assignments for the invasion tomorrow. In order for this to be as successful as I know you all are capable of achieving, I need everyone to be well rested. Anyone with questions on their assignments may come directly to my personal droid 5D-R8. If further inquiry is required, the droid will direct you to me.”

R8’s eyes blink to life, head focusing towards her. This is the first time Agent has directly acknowledged him in a while. The droid stands up a bit straighter.

Agent gazes towards the troopers surrounding her, voice absolutely powerful, booming, “I want you all to rest tonight knowing that tomorrow will be a glorious day. And you all will help to see that through. Tomorrow is the day we finally see a glimpse into a future to come. A rebirth.” She begins back down the hall, turning her head to each of them, giving them the illusion that she is intimately speaking to every last one, “I have lived outside military bases and training camps while away on covert operations. I know what it’s like beyond our homes – beyond Starkiller, the Supremacy, the Finalizer. I hear how the people of the Rebellion laugh at us. I see them take and take and take, all while they deserve nothing. They ruined our Empire.” Her jaw clenches. “But they cannot ruin us. Tomorrow, we will show them that.

“And after we show them the artistry of how easily their pathetic planets are raided, we will show them how swiftly their heroes die.” Agent glances back to Kylo giving him a lethal smile, “Luke Skywalker will beg for our mercy. Everyone will.” She stops in her tracks, saying with finality, back at the troopers, “Here, we have made an oath to live and die for our Order. But tomorrow, we will not be the ones meeting death. And although they do not deserve the privilege to die for us, we will be gracious in gifting them the opportunity.”

There’s a pause. Kylo hasn’t taken a breath since she started. He still cannot, now.

Then, all at once, the troopers raise their right fists in the air, saluting her.

Kylo feels their adrenaline pumping fasting, their acceptance for her and desire to serve her so loud.
Kylo has never experienced such a reaction before.

Agent turns on her heel, yelling out the order, “Dismissed.” She strides back towards Ren, Leven and Hux.

Agent ignores Hux, though. Her eyes fixate on Kylo. He tries to read her. To understand if she meant any of that, or if this is an attempt to fit the role he assigned to her. He hopes to the stars she meant it. Just a little.

Abruptly, Leven reaches outwards, the palm of his hand making contact with Agent’s back. Kylo is swallowed whole by the sight of the gesture. For once, Kylo Ren’s actual face is more intimidating than his mask. Leven guides her forward, in front of Ren, so that the two of them lead the way.

Kylo huffs, just a rumbling noise being picked up by the modulator. He makes sure to perform the sound close to Agent’s ear, so she can hear his dissatisfaction in the situation. He understands it’s juvenile. But that doesn’t stop him.

Leven begins speaking, explaining which room is which, gesturing smoothly to each doorway they pass. Still keeping his hand on her back. It’s not long until Agent subtly looks over her shoulder. Her sly eyes connect with Kylo’s and she quickly rolls them for him to see, then returns facing forward, humming Leven with a nod of her head and subtle, “uh-huh.”

Kylo’s expression relaxes.

Kylo then glances to his right, to see Hux sulking behind. The General stares at his feet while he walks. Every time Agent speaks Hux twitches a bit, uncomfortable by the sound of her voice. Hux, in his own world, doesn’t think anyone will notice, nor care. Kylo notices and cares.

“And this…” Leven explains, walking into the command center, “Is our main control room. Where you will spend most of the duration of the invasion.” Leven guides her in, as if she’s blind and could not walk through a doorway by herself. Leven says, “We will have people stationed here, connecting back to Starkiller, need be.”

Agent glances at the monitors lined across the long rows of tables. Officers, still settling in from her arrival turn to glance at her, confused whether or not they should be at attention or continue working. She raises her hand to them, “I do not mean to intrude.” She turns back to Leven, “You and General Hux said that a benefit to setting up base on land would be improved communications. Have you had any issues, thus far?”

Leven answers, “Not yet. We report twice a day back to Starkiller, to send status. No problems there.”

Agent bites the inside of her cheek, “I was having some issues with my commlink on the field. There were times I attempted to call in but did not receive a signal. Especially in the lower valleys.”

Leven frowns, “Oh.”

Agent leans forward, onto the desk next to her, glancing at the monitor. She asks the woman sitting in the chair corresponding, “Can you pull up the stats for the power source running our comm systems.”

“Of course, Sir.” The woman response. Her quick fingers tap across the keypad, within seconds displaying the numbers across the screen.

Agent reads the numbers, leaning one hand onto the desk. She hums in thought, then concludes,
“The numbers all look correct. We should be using enough energy to get signals out to anywhere on this planet. And Starkiller has been receiving our messages without issue?”

Leven responds, “Every time.”

Agent ponders it. Kylo imagines what calculations are racing through her brain. Her concentrated expression, that slight crease in her brow… He enjoys to look at her like this. She’s in her element – doing what she does best. She shrugs, stepping back from the table, “The only thing I can think of is maybe the energy source is being exhausted on breaking through the planet’s atmosphere to report back to Starkiller. Our communications are too busy trying to send, they are blocking themselves off from receiving.”

The woman nods, “It’s very likely that is the case. Hard to tell, with such little data we have on this planet. I apologize for no definitive solution.”

Agent shakes her head, “No need for apologies,” she stands up straight again, “Send out a short message to Starkiller letting them know of the situation. Tell them we will not contact again, until the first phase of the invasion is complete, in two day’s time. We cannot afford to have unstable connections between us and our men during our initial invasion.”

“Yes, Sir.” The woman immediately begins working on that.

Agent turns to Leven, “Where is the base’s power source located?”

Leven explains, “Just down the hall, I’ll be sure to point it out.”

She nods, "I'll be sure to double check that, as well." She walks forward to the center of the large room, fingers brushing against the large holoterminal, then glances back, towards the locked door behind her. Kylo wonders how familiar she is with what is behind that door. Agents are not high enough in rank to be invited into the banquet quarters.

She asks, clueless, “This room?”

Leven smirks, “You’ll enjoy this.” He hurries forward, opening the door with the code. The door opens. She walks inside. Kylo follows in awkwardly behind the two of them. He notices Hux has stopped following, finding his seat back at the holoterminal in the main room. Kylo stares at the distant man while the door to the banquet room closes, separating him from the group. Kylo shifts his stare to Agent.

She is examining the table, full of delicious luxuries. Empty seats surround her, too many seats for the number of people with access in the room.

Leven grins down at her, “One of the benefits to your promotion, yes?” He reaches downward, picking a purple berry from the fruit platter closest to him. “I am sure that you will find relaxation in here while your men deal with the invasion. You’ve worked hard, you deserve a place to rest.” He pops the berry into his mouth. “Plus, it’s the most secure location on base. We’ll be untouchable here.”

She glances back down to the table, scanning the variety of food options. “I’ve always wondered what the mysterious locked room in the center of bases held. I’ve heard rumors” Then her attention returns up to Leven, to ask with a charming smile, a sweet nostalgia present in her tone, “Is this where you and the other higher-ups would always disappear off to during our missions?”

He smiles back, the chemistry exchanged between them incredibly present. Kylo narrows his eyes. Leven chuckles, “Can you blame me?”
Agent 2319’s fingers drag across the top of the plush chairs, woven with thick expensive fabric. Then, the tips of her fingers dip downwards to the table’s surface, her eyes scanning each food item carefully. They have a culinary droid ensure the food is fresh every hour or so. It’s all decorated with swirls of syrup lining the plates, fruits cut into odd shapes and spirals. She takes a deep breath, inhaling the aroma of the fresh food laid out before her. She turns from the Lieutenant, her eyes closing. A deep exhale. To the Lieutenant, it only seems as if she is looking down the other side of the table. But Kylo has a better view. He can see that when she opens her eyes they are completely void of the kindness she once held in her tone. Kylo Ren suddenly hears Hux’s voice in the back of his head – you doubt her cruelty.

Agent turns back towards the Lieutenant, her smile returned, the darkness cloaked, “I most certainly cannot.”

“Come,” He summons her, “Let’s show you the rest of the base.”

She follows. Kylo does too, a few feet behind.

On her way out, she stops near Hux at the terminal. Takes a deep breath, then asks the General, “Do you care to oversee the command center until tomorrow morning?”

Hux doesn’t even look at her when he nods.

She says, kindly, “Thank you.”

Hux stares at her once she passes him, brow furrowed.

Leven shows her the remainder of the building, making small talk with her as they go. Kylo cannot help but feel a bit silly, trailing behind. He’s used to being the one leading. Commanding. Not that he’s quite as diplomatic as Agent, or even the Lieutenant… but he usually has a bit more of a presence than anyone else in the room.

Usually. There’s something about the way Agent speaks with each trooper, with each officer, that is incredibly commanding without even trying. Her uniform helps a bit – the webbed blood-red of her jumpsuit highlights her in a crowd of people wearing black and grey. And her professional stature makes her seem as if she’s even towering above Kylo. But it’s also, how she treats the people around her. She treats them fairly, her words polite, but tone firm. She asks them questions, listens to their concerns, then offers them advice. Where most leadership of the First Order seems to be fighting to prove their worthy of their rank, she acts as though it is her duty to earn it.

He’s brought back to the moments when he was on the Resistance base as a child, watching his mother speak with war heroes and politicians all day. Diplomacy was her greatest weapon.

“I was thinking we could use timed explosives to destroy the beams supporting the capitol, after the raid.” Agent explains to masked heavy-trooper. They stand inside the armory, striding down the long hall of stocked shelves. “That way, we could program a definite time for them to go off, to assure our men are safely back ashore.”

The trooper leads her down the aisleway of ammunition and weapons, trunks full of devices and tech, until they reach one long metal bin. The man types in a code on the panel locking it, then opens it for her, displaying the inside, “We have just what you need. It should be an especially easy task if the base is made from wood, like you reported.”
Agent reaches into the trunk, taking one of the ball-shaped explosives and holding it in her palm. She examines it thoroughly before inquiring, “Are these sticky?”

The trooper answers, “We have a tub of waterproof adhesive to apply to the bombs when we place them onto the beams. But they also are magnetic, if we could find any metal surfaces to apply them to.”

“Good.” She replaces the explosive back into the trunk. She eyes the supply, calculating something in her head, “And how powerful are these?”

“A singular one can blast and burn everything around it in a fifteen-foot radius. That’s not even considering what harm it will do to surrounding areas affected by debris and fire. I can assure you that these will definitely do the trick, Agent.”

“They will.” She closes the trunk, smiling up to the trooper before turning back around.

Kylo approaches Agent before Leven can slither in, to usher her in circles. For the first time during the whole tour, Ren speaks up, “There’s one final area to show you.” Kylo doesn’t touch Agent’s back, like Leven did. He doesn’t need to, for her to stay at his side. He glares at Leven, as he now leads the way beside Agent.

They walk through the halls, whatever admiration and curiosity projecting from onlookers shifting back into fear with Ren at the forefront.

Kylo tries to think of something to say to her. Something to express how he’s literally ached for her return since she’s left, that he longs to bathe in her presence, allowing himself to be consumed by the sound of her voice, the rhythm of her breathing... He wants to ask her about her endeavors in the Capitol. He wants to hear her rave about things she found on the planet that she enjoyed, or rant about things that she did not. He turns his head, voice low so only she can hear, and settles on a quiet, “I’m glad you’re back.”

Agent, master of manipulation and disguise, can’t even hide her blush. Kylo grins at her, proud at himself for getting such an innocent reaction. She doesn’t verbally respond, opting to purse her lips, keeping her facial expression fixed.

They walk to the wide doors leading to the very end of the furthest hall. The flat metal doors open upon their approach, revealing a hanger, stories high, full of ships. Most ships are transports. Kylo Ren’s personal vessel is in the far left corner. Leven’s in the far right. And Hux’s, in the nearest right. There’s a few combative ships, just in case of emergency. But not many.

Leven assures her, “Our transports have room to carry over five thousand prisoners. Which is more than enough, for the planet’s population.” Leven jokes, “They may even have some leg room.”

Agent laughs.

Kylo is surprised at how convincing it sounds, knowing she would never find such a thing remotely amusing.

“Do you mind if I check out the interiors?” She asks, gesturing towards the nearest transport. “I’ve never been inside a transport designed specifically for prisoners before.”

“Be my guest,” Leven approaches her again, as if he’s going to guide her.

Kylo steps in front of the man, eyeing him up and down. He doesn’t say anything at first, waiting until Leven uncomfortably swallows hard, forcing himself to look up to Kylo’s eyes. Kylo allows the
tension to hang there, while an unaware Agent enters the transport. Then Kylo says, voice flat, “Agent 2319 sent out many requests tonight. Go see to those requests being fulfilled.”

Leven blinks. Then responds, trying to sound smooth despite the awkward lump in his throat, “2319’s droid is in charge of overseeing the progress of her requests.”

“Ah,” A subtle nod. Then, “Then report to the droid and see if you could be of aid there. You’re quite useless here.”

Leven stills completely. Kylo senses the sudden fear from the man, rippling into the energy around him, not unlike any other spineless troopers or officers. But Kylo doesn’t mind feeling Leven’s fear. He enjoys it, if he’s being honest with himself. Leven glances to the transport Agent entered. Then back to Kylo. The fear subsides for something else… Intrigue.

Leven does not act on these new feelings of curiosity, opting to obey orders, “Right away, Sir…”

Kylo then turns, entering the transport ship where Agent entered.

When he enters, he walks past the open area, with shackles hanging from the ceiling for hands, binders emerging from the floor for feet. Kylo has not been in one of these transports either. He forces himself to not let his gaze linger on the rows and rows of restraints. He makes his way to the front of the ship where Agent stands, facing the control panel's display screen, reviewing some numbers. Kylo peers over her shoulder to find the screen is displaying the stats on the ship’s resting armor proficiency.

She clicks away, letting air out from her nose as she turns around. She says, face no longer masked with the confidence of before, “Sorry, I just want to double check everything.”

Kylo, relieved he’s finally in a room alone with her, reaches out. He takes her frame into his arms, holding her tightly against his chest. It’s pure relief. He’s always amazed by it. She’s surprised at first, but soon relaxes. Her arms wrap around him, grip not nearly as tight as Kylo’s. Kylo holds her head against his chest, wishing his hands weren’t gloved so he could feel the softness of her hair, scratch at her scalp. He merely just rests his hand there, afraid that his leather gloves might pull. He softly praises, “You’re quite thorough.”

She doesn’t respond. She just nuzzles her head against his chest a bit more.

And the two remain for a moment.

She is the one to depart from him.

Removing the satchel from her shoulder, she says, “This is for you.”

Kylo is quite disinterested in the bag’s contents now that he’s finally with her. He says, lowering himself into the pilot’s chair, grabbing onto her hand, “It can wait.” Giving into the temptation of the idea, he pulls off his glove, then begins to pull off hers.

Agent leans back slightly, craning her head out the door, “Is the Lieutenant in here?”

“I dismissed him.” Kylo says bluntly, pulling her hand back in and completing the removal of her glove. He takes in the sensation the skin of her worn hands with his bare fingers, dragging his touch up and down the length of her palm, entwining her fingers into his, then releasing his grip to allow his thumb to rub against her knuckles.

Yet, she’s inattentive, looking away.
Just as Kylo is about to say her name, to beg for her attention, she drops his hand back to his lap. He tries to make his sigh not obnoxious. She hands the satchel back to him, “You should go look over these items with the Knights, back in your quarters. I have a few more things to finish up, then I’ll meet you there.”

He scrunches his nose at the idea, “This stuff can wait, I was hoping I could spend what is left of tonight with you.” He grabs her hand, yet again, humiliated by his neediness. He’s bothering her, surely. Shit. Yet he can’t help but go on, “You did your job, already. Everything is going to go great, tomorrow.” He doesn’t mention to her that he needs to get answers to questions. About what Hux said to him, earlier that day. About why she went to Bonodan. About the Lieutenant.

She sighs, considering, then, “I just want to be the best admiral I can be. I don’t want anyone to think I’m here because…” Her voice trails off, fragile vulnerability oozing through her expression.

“Are you kidding me?” He nearly laughs, having to hold it back in fear of giving her the wrong idea. He scoots forward, putting his legs on either side of her. “They love you. They’re inspired by you – you earned this. Everyone can tell. You are–”

“I need to prove it to myself, too, Kylo.” She interrupts.

He is silenced. Oh.

Her lip slightly trembles, but she swallows the emotion building within her. Closes her eyes. And then, “If we are going to have a life together in the Order, I need to prove to myself that such a thing is possible for me. I’m trying to adjust. But after learning about…” A fearful pause, she crosses her arms, “After what Hux told me, after all he did, I need to prove to myself that the Order is more than him. And more than you, too. I want to be here for me.”

Kylo should be broken by the confession. But he isn’t. He’s relieved that finally, she’s being honest with him. And he understands the feeling of needing to prove yourself to yourself all too well. It’s so easy for Kylo to empathize with, he doesn’t think twice before saying, “You’re right…” Yet, he can’t help taunt himself with her subtle rejection. He apologizes, “I don’t mean to be selfish with your time.”

“I know…” She reassures, words soft, “I know you don’t, Kylo.”

Kylo places his glove back on, then arises to his feet. Now, he doesn’t mind the idea of being alone. Not because he does not wish to be with her anymore – because he would still much prefer that. But isolating himself will do.

She exits the pilot’s cabin nearly immediately, sliding her own glove back on. Kylo can’t help but lightly press into the energy she gives off, through the Force, trying to find any sign of anything. There’s no emotion, in her projection. It’s how she always was when they first met, how she rarely is now.

He follows her out of the ship, down the halls of restraints. He notices her gaze linger on each set. Just as his eyes did, when he walked in.

“Agent,” Kylo stops walking.

She glances back at him.

Kylo looks over at the shackles, then back to her. “The citizens of Bayora are going to be safer here than they would be in Republic territory during the war.”
She blinks. “Yes.”

“It’s…” He pauses, trying to think of the right way to calm her, to help her push aside any guilt, “It’s not like we’re just going to go in, killing a bunch of innocent people today.”

She nods, reassuring, “I know.”

And as she walks out of the transport, Kylo can’t help but realize his own subtle lie. They won’t kill a bunch of innocent people. But they will kill the noncompliant ones. And the ones they don’t kill will become First Order laborers. Some may make a good life for themselves in the Order. But most will probably hate it here. Kylo is disgusted, just to think about it, all the while he knows there’s nothing he can do to stop it. He shouldn’t even want to stop it. That disgusts him, too. Does he not trust Snoke? Stars, why can’t he just fucking trust people? Especially the only two people who have ever fought to earn his trust.

“Is that why Leven came here?” Her sudden words pull him away from his thoughts.

He doesn’t know what she’s referring to. “What?”

She elaborates, tilting her chin upwards, “To find more young recruits.” She blinks, “Project Resurrection.”

Kylo glances back to the restraints. “I…” It would make sense. Frankly, Kylo hasn’t been told. But he lies, as if he were talking to Lex – as if Agent doesn’t know better, “It’s unlikely. Project Resurrection is a dying initiative, now that so many people willingly join us.”

Agent looks to the shackles where Kylo is staring. Then, back at him. She hums, not having anything further to add, “Hm.”

He wonders if during the raid on Takodana, years ago, Agent 2319’s parents were given a choice. He wonders how genetic stubbornness is.

Then, he reaches for the map secured to his belt. The map she secured for him – the map she was destined to find. As his hand finds it, he is reminded of how the lives they came from do not matter. He is much more interested in the life they are building now, together. Suddenly, the map he has wanted so much for so long becomes more than he could have ever imagined. It’s not just about Luke now.

The map is everything.

There are thirty hours in a day on the planet of Bayora. This is hour twenty-seven-and-a-quarter. Which is one quarter of an hour away from hour twenty-eight.

Everyone is in their place.

Kylo Ren is in his quarters, waiting for me. The Knights of Ren in their quarters too, falling asleep. I made sure to check on them. Mainly on Solaw and Maes. And mainly on Lex. I assigned patrol men around the outer edge of the base’s interior, who were told to make sure no threat can get in from the outside. They are the only ones armed.

Well, the only ones armed other than me. And Hux. Perhaps Leven. Does Leven even carry
weapons now? Probably, to wear them as accessories, to convince people that he can and does fight. It shouldn’t be an issue, either way. Hux is at the terminal, monitoring everything in the main control center.

It is vital that Hux stays where he is.

If anyone is going to fuck this up, it will be him. Or R8. But I made sure to keep R8 busy, in the section of the base where officers and troopers rest, answering questions and explaining mission plans to squadron leaders. Mission plans I wrote in the hotel back in the capitol, mission plans that will never see fruition. Pity, they are good battle strategies. If I were assigned to the mission, as a lower rank, I would appreciate them.

I attach the disc-shaped explosive to the underside of the power core, out of sight. The object is a large beam hanging form the ceiling, glowing with blue pulses of energy wired down the cylindrical sides. With an exhale, I click the button in the middle of the explosive. It lights up red for a moment. Then, the light flickers out. I stand away from the power core, making sure that I cannot see any of the explosives from eye-level. I check the time again. A minute has passed. Then, I exit the room.

As I walk quickly through the empty halls, I pass the hanger again. All the explosives are already secured in there. I pass the weapons room. Explosives secured in there, too. And of course, explosives secured in the base’s power core. All timed to go off exactly at the time I discussed with Leia. In less than a quarter-of-an-hour. Sweat forms at the back of my neck. A lot could happen in a quarter-of-an-hour. Did I give myself too much time? Or not enough?

I suppose it won’t be long until I find out.

I find myself triple-checking the inside lining of my sleeve. The poison capsule is still there. The escape route. I don’t imagine what the Order would do to me, if I didn’t have it. Such a thought would be useless. I have it, and that’s all that matters. Everything is in it’s place.

Including Lieutenant Leven.

I exhale steadily as I walk to his location, transforming my quick, anxious walk to slow into a stride of confidence. My fingers reach out from my sides, grazing the wall beside me. I cannot help but imagine what the wall will look like as it burns. A sight I have imagined quite often. My toes curl at the thought that if I live long enough, I won’t have to imagine it. I will see it. Smell it. Feel the unforgiving heat radiating off the melting metal. I return my hands to fold them behind my back.

What I was mistaking for nervousness is excitement.

I enter the main control room.

General Hux is there, just as instructed. Good. Sitting at the terminal, arms crossed, leaning back. He glances over at the sound of my entrance, then once realizing it’s me, turns away.

I ignore him as I approach the banquet room.

“Leven is in there.” Hux speaks up. I nearly jump, the noise intruding. This is the first time I’ve heard him speak all day. I’m surprised his first words I hear are to me.

I respond coolly, trying my hardest not to look as rushed as I feel, “And?”

“I assumed I’d be doing you a favor, by warning you.” Barely a coherent statement, more of a mumble.
I raise an eyebrow, “You doing me a favor?”

He huffs. “Nevermind.”

I continue into the banquet room, opening the door.

And when I unintentionally look back at Hux, he’s already looking at me. Confusion mingled into his suspicious glare. He glances down to the holsters around my thighs, where my daggers are secured.

When we lock eyes again, his confusion is cured with a flat expression. Unreadable. Much like how I make mine, back at him.

The door closes, separating us.

“There you are!”

I turn around. Leven stands, leaning against the table as if he’s posed himself. He wears the same thing he’s always worn – dark grey jacked with the high collar, cinched at the waist with an obnoxiously wide belt. Matching dark grey pants that puff outwards at the thighs. Shiny boots that go up his calves. He seems smaller now. Probably because I have grown. But I like to imagine him smaller.

I float over to him, “Everything seems to be in place.”

He pulls out the chair closest to where he stands, “Good.” A motion for me to sit, his hand waving downwards, “I personally did my best to ensure things would run smoothly, upon your return. I hope my efforts have been apparent.”

“They have, Sir, thank you.” I sit down, settling in.

His hand rests against the chair’s head, behind my neck. I try not to be hyper aware of it. I try not to envision grabbing my dagger, slamming the blade down onto his pudgy fingers, to watch them drop behind me. Not yet. I dig into my satchel, digging around Tekka’s old stuff for my holopad. I place it onto the table’s surface, explaining, “Although I intend on giving you my full attention while we catch up, I do want to be aware if anyone contacts me.” Clicking the holopad on, I glance at the time is displayed. Hour twenty-seven, with ninety minutes down. There’s a hundred hours in a minute on the planet of Bayora. There is ten minutes until hour twenty-eight.

“Let me take your bag for you,” He offers, grabbing it from me before I can hand it to him.

I have remembered that lesson from Leven: On a battlefield, you must remove any barriers between you and the enemy before you can attack with full capacity, much like when you speak with others, you must remove all barriers – physical or emotional – to have them fully vulnerable to your control.

He shoves the bag into a drawer across the room, then returns to my side, but closer to me now.

He says, a light smile, “So, here we are,” His grey eyes are that of stone, piercing into mine with immense intent. His pupils incredibly small. Every single hair, wrinkle and freckle of his skin exposed by the harshness of the lights around us, “Finally catching up.”

I sigh. I want to check the clock again. But I refrain. It’s too soon. I ask politely, “How have you been, Sir?”

He sighs, “I’m just as good as always. I love my job. Many luxuries. Great benefits. Amazing
lifestyle.” Leven reaches to his side, to grab one of the purple berries he ate earlier. He pops another in his mouth, saying before he is completed with chewing, “I’ve more recently become the head supervisor of our agent division. Despite being younger than everyone else, I’ve maintained my position the longest. You should see the looks on those old men’s faces when I override their lessons agendas with my own.”

I stare at him. He is the head of the training program, sure. But he hasn’t really been promoted. Not in rank. A Lieutenant… for ten years. He’s stagnant. But, content. Which is all the Order needs him to be. “That’s impressive, Sir. Personally, I couldn’t imagine where I would be, without you as my trainer.”

“Statistically?” His eyes get wide, “Dead!” He begins to laugh.

I laugh politely, prettily. As if I am not aware that every agent of the First Order is a statistical corpse. And when he settles back down, he sighs, then, “You…” He eyes me up and down. I cannot find it within me to subside all my fear for the gaze.

He goes on, voice low, “And what about you?”

I blink. And although I hate the fear within me that swells as I stare back at him, I use it. I allow it to consume me, just as it threatens to. His eyes are so locked on mine, looming from above me, nothing separating him from swooping down to me, a bird diving into it’s prey. The weight of his presence holds me down. Lieutenant Leven scares me. He always has. But what a lovely thought to know that the fear that possessed me for so long is now being used on my terms – for something I want. I ask, allowing my natural frail voice to fall through, “What about me?”

“Much more has changed for you, than it has for me, it seems. How has that been?” He stares down at my lap. I discreetly readjust my hands, so they are folded neatly, not anywhere near my holsters.

“Well,”

Leven reaches back, grabbing another berry. He pops it into his mouth, eyes locked back onto mine.

I go on, “Not much has changed for me, either. It doesn’t feel like much has changed, at least. I feel wiser now, as I mentioned. But that is from experience. Other than that, I’m going on standard missions, with standard targets. It’s what I know. What I’m good at.” I glance to my holopad. I need to check the time. Fuck how much time has passed?

“You consider Commander Ren a standard target?” He smirks. Square lips spread thin.

I explain, fingers craning to tap the holopad ever so slightly, “Commander Ren? He’s not a target.”

“Oh, come on,” Leven’s smile dissipates into a thin line before continuing, “I taught you to lie better than that. Snoke wanted you to keep an eye on him because the man is reckless, did he not? I’m surprised you weren’t supposed to kill him, to be frank.”

“I was assigned to assist Ren.”

“I’m sure you do.” He snickers.

I don’t respond. I make every effort to push my hatred down, into my fingertips, letting it tingle there instead of release into chaos. Not yet...
Leven leans forward. “I know…” He thinks of his wording to the statement, amused by his own thoughts, “I know Commander Ren fancies you. He doesn’t make it subtle.”

“What?” I try to act oblivious. It’s not a great act. But, it doesn’t need to be.

“I imagine you’ve seen him without his mask?”

I begin, “I-I don’t-”

“You have!” He proclaims, excited. He slides closer, now entirely in front of me, between my body and the table.

My body is already leaned all the way backwards. I can’t go any further away from him. What time is it? Is it close enough? Should I risk it? I don’t know how long it’s been. It seems as though it’s been an hour since I entered the room. But I know that’s unreasonable. What if it’s only been a few seconds? I don’t know.

Leven goes on, speaking so obnoxiously loud about the matter, now mocking me, “Tell me what he looks like, 2319, I beg of you! I have heard so many rumors!”

“I…” I look up at him, trying to configure the words, “I don’t think I can share that-”

“You’re about to be admiral, do whatever you want – or whatever I want you to! Either way.” He leans forward, shadow blanketing over me.

“He looks normal.” I settle on.

“Oh,” He pouts, “You know better than to be so vague.”

I force my voice hard, then describe, “He’s a twenty-seven-year-old human male of fair complexion, brown eyes, dark hair that reaches his shoulders, elongated nose, and a few facial discrepancies such as beauty-marks. Normal. Nothing extraordinary.”

Leven asks, “Do you find him attractive?”

“What?” The question infuriates me, “Not really, no.”

“You have always had a thing for your superiors…”

My body freezes.

And then, the hatred turns to pure scorching fire within me.

I am going to kill him.

Suddenly, I hear the beep of my commlink, shoved somewhere in my pocket. My holopad lights up. Someone is trying to contact me. But that’s not what I care about. The time is displayed on the screen. We are six minutes away from hour twenty-eight. It’s close enough.

I swallow the hatred. Take a deep breath. Lower my head in every ounce of humiliation he sheds upon me. Then mumble, “What exactly are you referring to, Sir?”

He shrugs, “Do you not recall? I just remember you being one to always want to please your superiors. That’s all.”

I look upwards, finally. Then fight to say, “Mostly just you, Sir.” I immediately glance back down.
He leans closer – another thing he taught me. In a battle, when defenses are at their weakest, that’s when you push your hardest. Don’t let up or get comfortable or even maintain force. That is the point where you annihilate your opponent with unprecedented violence. In a conversation, the same tactics are applicable. He coos, “You flatter me, 2319.”

I allow him to get off to whatever pride it makes him feel when I respond, my voice nearly a whisper, “I’m sorry.” That was always his favorite thing to hear.

“Shh...” A gloved hand outstretches. I wonder if the gloves are the same as the ones the struck my face when I underperformed in a shooting range. I wonder if they’re the same that clenches around my wrists, dragging me into The Supremacy’s vacant corridors to scold me. They feel the same. He tilts my chin upwards with one finger pressing up. “Tell me, what were your intentions in inviting me here, tonight? At such a late hour.”

I open my mouth to respond.

But he doesn’t give me the chance, “Is this a date, for you? Did you ask me on a date?” He chuckles, removing his finger from my chin. “So bold, now that you’re an admiral-to-be.”

“Sir, I-”

“You’re incredibly inappropriate,” He says, voice amused. He leans in closer.

I glance up, our eyes connecting. And I let him see it – how the memories of him, of everything I have ever done and gone through in the name of the First Order, completely paralyzes me. I harness it. I show him that my defenses are at their weakest, there are no barriers. I let him see how utterly weak the Order has always made me.

I tell him that it’s his perfect time to strike.

He submits, his mouth is against mine.

It’s odd, to feel someone’s lips that aren’t Ben’s. I hate it, just for that reason alone. These lips are thinner. Much quicker, violent. His breath reeking of those putrid berries. But the fact that these lips belong to Leven himself is the repulsing part. Vomit inducing, to be frank. A blood curdling scream forms at the back of my throat. Yet, I allow him to continue, his leather hands holding my shoulders downwards to keep my body from moving. Not that he needs to do that. I already am incapacitated by his touch.

But I refuse to be incapacitated by him any longer.

I use every single ounce of strength within me to will my right hand to come to life. I move it down my thigh. Unlock the holster at my side. Trembling fingers find their place around my right dagger.

And the way my glove grips at the dagger changes everything.

The situation is now familiar, but so much better than it has ever been. Every other time I have been in this position, I have done it because it was a mission given to me by others, a way to promote an ideology I did not understand, nor believe. But I understand this. I believe in this. And I am the one who brought us here. I kiss him back, my body finally finding control over itself.

He competes with my kiss, grunting. Fighting to regain any agency I found within myself.

I unsheathe the dagger. Pull it out.
He slips his smarmy tongue into my mouth, body hovering over me, in the perfect position I need it to be. Heart floating in his chest right above the empty space between us.

I move my hand holding the dagger from under the table, to that very space.

Spin the dagger in my hand.

My fists close tightly.

Then

A door.

I flip the dagger back, shoving it downwards, back into my holster. Leven jumps off me, startled.

A door.

I look back at it.

Hux saunters forward, saying briskly, “Thought I would join you.”

Fuck.

I stare at Hux as he smoothly walks in, his former self-important stride and meddlesome demeanor completely revived. It suffocates me.

Hux explains, tilting his head in faux confusion, “I tried to contact you, 2319, but I did not receive a response.”

I use the opportunity to reach to the holopad. My trembling fingers tap at the screen. The time: Hour twenty-seven and ninety-six minutes. Four minutes until hour twenty-eight.

Four minutes.

I have four minutes.

Get Hux out and kill Leven, and then somehow still manage to kill Hux by surprise in the command room.

If I can’t get Hux back in his designated area, could I take both Hux and Leven out in a fight, in here?

I look back and forth between the men. I don’t know. Fuck, I don’t know. Maybe, if Leven is out of practice. And I can take out Hux first, quickly. But Hux is already suspicious. And probably armed. Fuck. Does he have a blaster? My blaster is shoved in the bottom of my bag, in that cabinet. But I have my shield. Maybe if I-

“Agent?”

“Oh,” I say, quickly, “What did you need?”

Hux shrugs, walking to the seat directly next to me. He pulls out the chair and sits. “I just wanted to check in.”

“No need. I was hoping you would stay at the command center, that way.”
It’s awfully boring.” Hux leans forward, resting his chin onto his fist.

“Go back to the command center, General.” I lean forward too, only left with the option to order him.

“I’d prefer to be in the company of the two of you.” He rejects, staring back.

God fucking dammit, I don’t have time for this. I raise myself from the chair, slamming my hands violently onto the table’s top. My voice booms, “I’m in charge of this mission and I command you to return to your assigned station.”

Hux opens his mouth to respond.

But another sound cuts him off. Leven is chuckling.

I slowly turn to him. The man who was so close to death, just a moment ago. Who never could have seen it coming. Who would’ve died so cowardly. So pathetically, without the hint of a fight. He wipes his lips with the back of his hand, as if he were explaining to Hux exactly what he walked in on – and brag about it. Leven contains his laughter to say casually, “I’ve never heard her speak such a way, I apologize.” He recollects himself, “It’s just comical, that is all.”

Hux doesn’t respond. Instead, Hux looks to me, analyzing. Heat is radiating off my face. Every one of my muscles clenched.

Leven continues, walking around to the other side of the banquet table. On his way, he picks up another berry, shoving it into his mouth, maintaining eye contact with me all the while. “Don’t be such an exclusionist, 2319. The General is free to join us if he likes.” He settles into the chair, across from Hux. He scoots it back, swinging his feet upwards to the table’s surface. Both Hux and I glare at the bottom of his boots, so close to the food that surrounds it. “Why don’t you pour us all a glass of wine? I know Hux is a wine guy, right?”

Hux doesn’t answer.

I make my way towards the cabinets behind them. Then use the opportunity of my back turned to Leven to lean against the countertop, taking the first breath I have had in minutes. Fuck. Should I just wait until the bombs go off, and then attack? That was originally supposed to be my plan in taking out Hux – getting him while he’s amidst the shock of that. But in the original scenario, Leven would already be dead. Hux wouldn’t have expected it. I would’ve had my blaster on me. Fuck. Can I just turn around and stab Leven, right now? Hux would see, immediately, drawing his gun to shoot me.

I glance back at Hux. He’s staring directly at me.

I turn back to open the cabinet, grabbing three wine glasses. Fuck. Tears begin to well in my eyes. Fuck. I push it down. Push it down.

Leven begins again, “Does she always speak to you with such authority, General?”

General Hux says simply, the feeling of his gaze still looming from behind me, “No, never. It’s been a stressful week, I understand.”

Leven chuckles, “Well, stress or not, she really should keep her emotions in check. I do apologize on her behalf.”

My teeth grind. Tears that I once pushed down threatening to build back up. I reach above to the cabinet over, containing the wine bottles. Various assortments available.
“She’ll apologize, too.”

I still.

Hux begins, “There’s really no need-“

Leven orders, the nature of his voice bringing back a flood of memories, “2319,”

I close my eyes. Exhale. Then, I turn back to him, expression as flat as I can manage.

“Apologize to General Hux. Remember, you’re not an admiral yet. And you’ll certainly never be a good one if you cannot calm yourself down.”

I look to Hux. And there’s something in his eyes that resemble sympathy. Suddenly, I remember how it felt to reach out to him, after my conversation with Snoke. I imagined a life where he could be forgiven for his sins. How much it would look like mine. Then, I remember how quickly I was proved wrong. I mainly remember how cruelly Tuchell died. The piercing sound of his screams so carefully conducted by Hux himself.

Hux speaks up, “Really, I did disobey her order, she had every right to-“

“No,” I interrupt. My voice is sweet, “I am so sorry, General. I will not speak to you with such a tone again.” When I turn back around, my hand moves past the bottle of white wine to the red.

Leven begins speaking again, “Have the two of you worked together before?”

I twist the cap off of the bottle. “Yes, Sir.”

“We have been well acquainted.” Hux assures.

I begin pouring the red wine into each glass. The stream of wine is smooth, focused. My free hand stabilizes me, pressing into the counter’s surface. The blood-red liquid cascading downwards crystal-clear glass into hypnotizes me. The smell so familiar.

I glance back at the holopad. I come to terms with the fact that I do not know how much time is left. And I also accept that whatever time that is left is escaping.

Leven says, “Well, I would love to hear about some of your endeavors.”

I glance back down at the wine, the middle glass half full. I stop pouring. The liquid stills, flat as a sheet of glass. I glance back to Hux.

Hux’s attention is focused on Leven as he explains, “There’s not really any stories worth telling.”

It could be down to seconds.

Leven urges, “Oh, come on.”

Fuck it.

Hux begins, explaining to Leven, “Well, we worked together to reestablish security to The Finalizer during an attack from the Resistance. Along with Commander Ren...”

I dig into the sleeve of my jumpsuit, turning my back a bit more to Hux. Without thinking twice, I remove the capsule from the seam of my sleeve just as quickly as I rehearsed. I use my thumb to slide off the cap, pouring the clear drops of liquid into the middle glass. I slide the empty capsule back up
my sleeve. Then, I grab the bottle of wine once more, pouring the final glass.

I would rather be tortured every single day for the next thousand years than give Lieutenant Leven a chance to live to see another day.

I screw the cap back onto the wine.

I grab the glass on the left and the glass in the middle. Carefully, I set the middle glass directly beside Leven. The two glasses look identical. Good. I hand Hux the glass from the left. I’ll deal with him when I initially intended.

Hux stares wine within at the glass, assessing the situation. A polite, “Thank you.”

I turn back around, grabbing my own glass. I seat myself at the head of the table, between the two men.

When I take a sip of my drink, the bitter wine not quite as repulsive as it was in the Lau Residence. I remember it being hard to swallow. But here, it slides down my throat, smooth.

I stare at Leven. Then at his drink. He doesn’t touch it, as if he’s unbothered by it’s existence. Look back to the holopad. I speak up, “Is the wine choice okay for you, General?” I tilt my head, focusing on Leven, “And you, Lieutenant?”

Hux responds first, staring at the selection. He turns the glass slightly, examining. Eyes pull away from the choice to look back up to me. He says a quiet, skeptical, “This will do…”

I pull my gaze away from Hux, returning it to the Lieutenant. Leven picks up his glass in his hand. Swirls it around. Even smells it. Then, “You have excellent taste, 2319.” He brings it to his lips. A wink. “I wonder who instilled that within you.”

And he takes a sip.

I exhale out of my nose. My whole body bathed in relief. How long does it take? Is it a lethal enough dosage, for just a few sips? What time is it?

He smacks his tongue to the roof of his mouth, savoring it.

He looks downwards at his shoe, twisting his ankle. He frowns at the sight. “These boots scuff so easily. Do you see that, 2319?” He repositions his foot on the table so that it rests in front of me, in the place left empty for a plate. Just barely, I notice a scuff at the toe of his boot.

Hux speaks up, “It’s a bit rude to have your feet on the-”

“Would you be so kind to assist me?” Leven insists at me.

I glance down at the scuff again. Then reach forward, grabbing the napkin laid to my right.

He pulls his ankle back. “You’re not going to be of much help with that. Why don’t you put that mouth of yours to use?”

I stare at him. Picturing how easy it would be to take the wine and shove it down his throat, glass and all.

General Hux scolds, “Whatever you think you’re proving by making her do this is not-”

“Yessir,” I interrupt. I lean forward, opening my mouth, then bring my tongue to the rounded leather
of his boot’s toe. I don’t focus on the taste. Or the humiliation. I merely focus on completing the task, when sliding Leven’s glass closer to him, encouraging him to take a drink. I glance up to him, my eyes connecting with his.

He can’t resist to lean back, grabbing his expensive wine, sipping at it all the while I lick his boot. Of course he couldn’t resist doing such a thing.

When I pull my mouth away, he waits for me to look away in shame. But I don’t. I grab my own wine from in front of me, taking a sip to wash away the disgusting taste. The sight encourages him to take another drink. I wipe his boot dry with the napkin.

Hux says, enthusiastically, “I think we should invite Commander Ren to our little celebration feast, shall we?” An odd thing for Hux to say. Almost as if he were trying to protect me. But I know that could not be the case. I don’t feel like trying to decode Hux’s ulterior motives now, though.

“I would have to disagree,” Leven argues, trying to add a lightness to his words, “I don’t think Ren enjoys my company very much.”

Hux snorts, “Oh, I’m sure he would love you, don’t you think so, Agent?”

I haven’t ripped my eyes away from Leven, saying with a low voice, “Who wouldn’t?”

Leven avoids my gaze, shifting in his chair. Despite the discomfort, he still looks so smug when he says, “I cannot imagine the Commander ever engaging in such a social matter. Surely, one of us would end up with our limbs dismembered from a lightsaber if we said the wrong thing.” Leven chuckles at his own joke and takes another drink of wine. A bigger one, this time. The sight delights me.

Leven clears his throat.

It provokes me to speak up, “There’s no need to be fearful of our Commander, Lieutenant.”

Lieutenant Leven’s head snaps towards me, his eyes locking onto a target. “Fearful?” He laughs obnoxiously, treating my statement as if I had worded it wrongly, just another silly mistake of mine, “You dare claim that I fear Commander Ren?”

I remain stagnant. Holding my wine lightly, a barrier between us, taking another sip. It’s never tasted better. Then, “Your skills of comprehension have always been impeccable.”

His jaw clenches. Incredible rage overtaking his expression. For a moment, I think he may just jump across the table to strangle me, right now, right here. But he must suppress the urge. He carefully picks his next words, “Oh, and I can’t imagine you harbor any fear for him. You know he wouldn’t hurt you. No child would want harm to come to their toy.”

He coughs lightly, turning his head to do so. His eyes are watering when he recovers to glare back at me.

I tilt my head, unaffected by his words, too mesmerized by the sight of his glossy, weakening eyes. “I only wished to personally assure you that Kylo Ren will never lay a finger on you.” I take another sip of my drink. “No disrespect was intended, Sir.”

Leven rolls his eyes, looking back to Hux, "Should I be flattered by her consideration or offended by it?"

Hux shrugs.
Leven coughs again, reaching for his own glass. A slightly trembling hand closes around the stem, shoving it towards his face. He begins gulping it down.

And I stifle a laugh.

Leven struggles to stand from the table, uttering in a splintered voice, “Excuse me,”

Hurriedly, I rise to my feet, pushing down on his shoulders to seat the two of us back down. He attempts to shove me off him, but it’s quite pitiful. Leven hacks down at his lap, suffocated by the violent coughs emerging again and again and again from his chest.

My trembling, excited hands reach up to his face, holding it steady. I force his bloodshot eyes to mine. Tears stream down his cheeks rapidly, the entirety of his skin red, veins rising from his forehead. I promise, “I won’t let Kylo Ren hurt you.”

Hux slides his wine glass, still full, a bit further away from him.

“What…” He gasps. “You…” The coughs turn into pitiful wheezes.

I wipe at his tears with my thumb, caressing him as a lover would. My mouth turning into a smile beyond my control, as I assure, "I'm far too selfish.”

And I watch him die.

Choking. Whimpering. Wonderful things to hear, from him. He squeaks some inhuman noise, fingers gripping at my arms, trying to pull me down, to hurt me. It's impossible - all of his power transformed into sheer desperation. His mind spiraling into catastrophe before me – because of me.

He falls to the floor, his body beginning to convulse. He grabs at his throat, clawing at it rigorously as if he was prying away a hand choking him. His face distorts over and over, eyebrows stretching, forehead creasing, eyes clamping shut then snapping open, trying to undo the trap that has captured him from within. Pathetic efforts, for no results. I sit back, watching as I grab my glass of wine once more. Take a drink. The fruit of the drink tastes purely like life itself, rich and filling. Then, remind him, “It’s a beautiful thing, to watch failure die. Right?”

He crawls away, dragging his dead-weight body with feeble arms, trying to make his way towards Hux. Grasping towards him, begging. Hux does nothing, opting to just watch.

And as Lieutenant Leven becomes so weak that he can no longer beg, he begins seizing. As if he’s possessed. He cannot control his movements. He will never be able to control anything ever again. He lies on his back, foaming at his mouth, blood red eyes wide, staring straight upwards. The wheezing and coughing has stopped. Now, he looks as if he is screaming. But no sound comes from his mouth. The only noise he exudes is the thudding of his limbs thrashing against the hard metal floors.

I've seen this before... No. I've felt this before.

The thought is brutal. My eyes burn - tears, making their final return. I've felt this for years. So helpless, so silent in my cries, a slave to a poison forced upon me. My lips part, watching emotions I've never been able to understand, emotions I've shoved into the depths of my body, suddenly materialize before me in Leven's thrashing anatomy. It bewitches me. My stomach sinks from within and for the first time since his death begun, I beg myself to look away from the horror of it's reality. I want to run back to Ben. I want to find a way out, with him. I want to believe that I still have the map and it will take me to a place where I'd never have to face this. Those lies were much more comforting, safer and warmer than this.
But I don’t look away. Amidst horror of Leven’s suffering, there is something else that surfaces. A beautiful release. The violent confrontation giving me no choice but to finally understand, finally see, my pain for what it is. I’ve always longed for the Order and I to be one. My whole life was dedicated to fitting their mold. But now? Now, we truly understand each other. In looking at the Lieutenant below me, drowning on air itself, I receive the fellowship I have desired for so long. Is that what revenge is? I always imagined it being much more violent. This is not senseless violence, nor is it justice served. This is pure empathy. I am captivated.

I tilt my chin upwards, boldly watching him from above. I’d imagine that he’s wondering what death actually feels like for the first time in his life. Not just wondering – grappling with the sensation of preparing for it. There’s a large difference. I can’t imagine a supervisor who hides in banquet halls would understand. Until now, at least.

I say, the words blunt and clear so he can hear perfectly, as if I’m giving the order myself, “You’re going to rot in hell, Leven.”

That’s the last thing he hears before he dies. And I hope to the stars that the last thing that he ever did was believe me, even just a bit.

His corpse lays lifeless behind my chair and my mind is washed with something I have never experienced before. Not quite happiness. But completion. A victory. And it may be the best thing I have ever felt in my life. It’s intoxication, if it made one’s body feel light. A certain freedom I never have known, nor could possibly imagine. My smile remains, a somewhat crazed laugh emerging from me.

Perhaps it is happiness. A dreadful kind.

I will my breath to return. Wipe at my tears. Glance back to the holopad.

“I don’t mind that you did that.” Hux speaks up for the first time.

I beam at him, now adjusting to a new target, “You reminded me of him.”

Hux frowns. He sounds as if I hurt his feelings, “Did I, truly?”

I glance back at the corpse. Then at Hux – the perfectly pressed uniform. The gelled hair. Skin so pale, it’s nearly grey.

Hux pauses. Considers. Then, “I never intended to torture you. I only wished to push you to the point where you would kill Ren. I… I knew, if someone were to do it, it had to be you.” He swallows, continuing, voice growing in strength, “Leven uses the Order to gain power. I use my power to better the Order. All I ever do is for the best of the Order, I swear it.”

I narrow my eyes, leaning forward in amusement, “You did not intend to torture me when you forced me to kill a child?”

"Actually," he corrects, "That time, yes. But you provoked me. Leading up to the events before you confronted Snoke, it was not personal."

Doubtful. "You don't get any joy from the power-trips?"

Hux glances down at Leven’s corpse behind me, “Don’t you?”

My smile fades. And I realize how fucking ridiculous it is that he would compare such a thing. How disgusting it is that every time he kills a person of the Rebellion, he feels equally as justified as I do
when I kill the man who has spent years personally torturing, abusing, and humiliating me and god knows how many other agents. He may think that committing atrocities in the name of a political ideology makes him better than someone who commits atrocities for personal gain. But I cannot see much of a difference, now.

Hux grabs his wine, swirling it around. “Is this poisoned as well?”

I shake my head, putting my left hand on my lap and under the table. My right hand on my own glass, “There was only one capsule.”

“I’d feel better if you would switch me,” Hux admits, nodding towards my glass.

I allow it.

My left hand unclips the dagger from my holster during the exchange.

Hux grabs my glass holding it up. He asks, “Do you feel better now? Or would you like to kill me too?”

I raise his glass, “I think I can hold off, for now.” I unsheathe the dagger. My eyes careful to watch his free hand, to make sure it does not go into his overcoat.

“You could have a good life here, you know. Especially if you actually do care for Ren. Hopefully we will stay out of each other's way, in further endeavors.” Hux casually says.

I flip the dagger in my hand, the blade in between my index finger and thumb. "I hope so."

He points out, "Leven lacked the manners for a proper toast."

I add, “We’re well-mannered people.” I look to Hux’s head, picturing the blade planting itself right intbetween his eyes.

“Toast to…?”

I suggest, “Eliminating our enemies?”

Hux huffs, remembering. He repeats after a moment of appreciation, “Eliminating our enemies.”

Our glasses clink together, a cheerful noise. Solid glass on solid glass.

We both take a swig. I lean back in the chair. Exhale. We sit in silence for a few seconds as I wait, much more patient than I was before.

It is good wine, I decide.

Suddenly, a low rumble in the distance.

Hux assumes it’s thunder, merely looking up towards the ceiling as if he were looking at the sky. But I know better than that.

An earsplitting boom. The entirety of the base quakes.

And I know that it is now hour twenty-eight.
one or two more chapters. if it's one, it will be (very) long. if it's two, the very last one will be epilogue-esque. i will be sure to update the chapter count asap, if need be.

i am beyond excited/anxious/ready to share the conclusion. i may take some time, because i want to be sure that i am proud of it, and i want to give you guys an ending you deserve. this story has grown to mean a lot to me and i'm so glad i can share it with such kind people. this will probably be my final informal authors note. my last author's note will only be an acknowledgement page, i don't want to say too much after it ends (except for responding to comments lol), but i do want to give shoutouts to many of you, for your kind words and art and support. <3 deep breaths.... okay, here we go! see you all soon!

playlist

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