The discovery of a new unknown Duchess of the House of Kenobi brings new life to the Rebellion Court. Having lost their old Queen Leia, Rey and Han are forced into a deeply unconventional but quietly happy marriage. Having never had a family of her own, Rey sees Han as the father figure she always longed for.

So when the disgraced Prince returns to court to make amends with his aging King, how will he take to the girl who is now effectively his stepmother?

Medieval/Tudor Reylo.

Tumblr account: https://waterlilyrose.tumblr.com/

Notes

I have tried so hard to keep this plot bunny under control but Daisy Ridley's stills as Ophelia proved too much.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Prologue

Chapter Notes

Tumblr: https://waterlilyrose.tumblr.com/

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The candlelight made Theed Cathedral look warm and almost welcoming. The statues of long dead saints and penitent sinners threw shadows along the floor and over the alter. The tune of Masses being sung for the soul of she who had just passed from this wretched Earth to God’s good grace echoed around the cavernous and glorious stone walls.

His Majesty, King Han, had never cared for such pageantry. The songs for the soul had all been somewhat lost upon him and he always shivered in this great place. Showmanship may have been
his style and he had possessed something of a flare for it in his younger days, but it had grown more muted now with age, hard lessons and grief. Pageantry was Leia’s department. She loved the old rituals, the ceremony that life as an anointed Queen had commanded and all the head pieces you could imagine. She wore French and English jewelled hoods with some grace she was envy of the entire kingdom.

Her best look was with her hair free or braid to one side as she came to bed in just her shift.

As joint monarchs in both their own right, she had always been the best prepared. She’d been raised a Princess in a foreign court and had all the poise and polish of one. But all the spirit and grit of a warrior. They’d joined forces to beat the evil Usurper Lord Vader (no-one would give him the title of King now) and when it came to light that Leia had been his natural daughter and Luke had made his intentions to join the church clear, a marriage and joint leadership seemed a good way to go.

Many had argued of course. He was a lowly Sir and had only been knighted for his services in the first battle. Leia herself had knighted him and her brother (though they had not known that they shared blood at that time) and no-one knew where else Han had come from. The nobility hated him. The people loved him. And a queen had never ruled alone and in her own right before. The fact that she was Vader’s natural daughter only made matters worse. Did her loyalty even truly lie with this new Republic House of England? Or was she biding her time?

In the end, crowning a rogue and a princess seemed the only option. They would share rule equally. Both would hold the same power. It wasn’t perfect but unless they wanted civil war, what choice did Parliament have?

It had worked. Peace had been maintained. They had done an altogether good job. And they had an heir. A male heir. Only one child but at least he was a boy.

Han found himself wondering what did it matter? Leia didn’t need him to be a good ruler. She knew all the tricks of the trade and could lead without his guidance. Many times, he came to her. He had never understood politics. And doubted he ever would.

Han stepped up onto the altar and looked up at the stained glass windows.

“This isn’t right. You weren’t meant to leave me.”

He lowered his gaze with difficulty. Down to the dais where his wife lay motionless and regal in
her best gown and with her silvering hair perfectly styled and covered with jewelled gable hood. In death, she looked at peace. Rested. Calm. Something she rarely was in life. Yet as she was lying in state here in this magnificent chapel, Han felt the true power of fear.

“I’m meant to go first.” He said quietly so none of the monks could overhear. People might be listening… they were always listening. “I’m older. I’ve made enemies. I’ve done bad tricks. I’m meant to go first. Not this.”

He took her hand. So small like the rest of her. So cold. She hated to be cold.

Han felt his calm slipping. Grief was bubbling. He never showed weakness. That was one truly King like aspect of him: he was either angry or happy. Never sad. Never holding back tears. Never caught weeping or lamenting. And he couldn’t afford to now.

But God forgive him… it hurt. It made his windpipe seize up. It made his head spin.

Leia… dead. This was wrong. This was so wrong.

“Don’t leave me. Don’t go. One more fight. One more insult. Just give me something and I will pray on my knees everyday until it is my time to join you again.”

There’s no reply. The Requiem Mass was the only chorus to his plea.

He had to rule alone now. He would be isolated among his sea of advisors who all had their own ambitions. He didn’t know if he was ready or capable.

And Ben would be no help or comfort to him now. His own son and heir was currently housed within the Tower of London for treachery against the crown. If Han and Leia had been blessed with anymore children, he would have been executed for sure. But as the heir apparent to the throne, he couldn’t risk it. And he didn’t have the heart or stomach for it. He was half of Leia. Leia’s boy. Their boy. Their creation. If he had strayed away from the righteous path then surely they were the ones to blame for not keeping him on it.

Lord Snoke had seen where Leia and himself had failed and stepped in to twist his mind. The coup had been a failure and the usurpation unsuccessful. The people didn’t want Snoke to replace Vader even with the heir under his wing. They saw Anakin of the Skywalker house become more monster
than man. Ben may never have held Leia’s popularity but they cared enough for him to refuse to follow him on a lost cause. Lord Snoke was beheaded as a traitor and, while there were members of the court whom Han suspected of being sympathetic of the First Order Army, there was still hope of bringing Ben back to court in time. He would be under a cloud of suspicion and disgrace but…

Leia wanted him home. He must bring him home.

Leaning over, he kissed his love on the forehead and let two tears escape his eyes. They fell from his face into the silver hair exposed just above her forehead. He wanted to rip off the damned hood; see her beautiful hair loose and flowing again.

“Wait for me. Like you waited before. Now I know why you hated to see me leave.”

Then with a wipe of his face, he walked down the knave. Back to court. Back to his kingdom. Back to his duty.

He didn’t look back. She wouldn’t have approved at him looking back.

Chapter End Notes

https://waterlilyrose.tumblr.com/post/161172221203/buiana-so-the-inheritance-of-the-resistance-by
http://buiana.tumblr.com/post/161240748335/king-han-for-waterlilyrose-i-have-a-bad-feeling

Enormous thank you to buiana for creating such beautiful manips. They can be found at the links above. She is so talented!
I

Chapter Notes

Massive thanks to my beta reader Poet Hrotsvitha for her help here. She's an incredible writer too. Check out her stuff if you love Reylo.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a sunny day for once. The rains had stopped and Rey stood on tiptoes to peek out at the sky above. It was a gentle blue; the sign of a good spring and hopefully a good harvest. The bread would be cheaper to buy and the quality would be sufficient in keeping her strength up. Lately, Unkar Plutt, the Earl of Jakku, had been getting it as cheaply as he could and Rey had been forced to eat with a gritted resolve not to starve. And she would not starve in this place.

The light did not do much to improve her surroundings. The room that she had lived in all her young life only had one small window that was barred and often cast their shadows upon the stone floor. Plutt said this was for her safety but Rey knew better: it was so she could not escape.

But she would escape. Escape from her uncomfortable bed, her prie-dieu and her prayer books. From the walls that held the crucifix for her to pray to and no other decoration other than the marks she carved to scratch off another lonely day. From the nunnery that had been her prison all her life. She would escape.

Today, she was going to court.

She had turned nine and ten only a week ago. She knew this was old for a lady of some prospects to marry but she did not know she was a lady of any prospects until recently. The Civil War that threatened to rip the country in two had meant that Plutt had been forced to keep her hidden for longer than he would have liked. Now that calm had been restored and good Queen Leia had died, it was time to move forward with his secret weapon: Rey.

Rey had always wondered, could not help but wonder, why she was kept so safe and so sheltered from the world. Now she understood. Locked away in a nunnery, she had been under his eye the entire time and he could dictate who talked to her every day. The nuns had been little comfort only teaching her how to read and write because it was their instruction and giving her no love to soften the lessons. Plutt made sure she was clothed and fed but that was it. And for that, he expected reward. For he had kept the last Duchess of the honourable Kenobi house alive. Their last living descendant.
It still shook the foundations of her world. Rey now held a title beyond even Plutt and had her whole life. And yet she had nearly worn her knees away praying that it was not so. For if she truly was the last of the Kenobi house that meant that her family… they were never coming back.

She’d wept for them. For the mother she never knew. For the father she could not remember. She’d been handed over into God’s hands as a place of safe keeping and the nunnery of Jakku had probably seemed as good a place as any. Her father had died fighting for his King and Queen and the daughter his wife had born had been presumed to have died in the cradle. It was not an unusual fate for a child and no-one questioned who the skinny youth living under Plutt’s protection was.

Now the truth was revealed. The crown had kept her inheritance as was the way when a great family died but Queen Leia had not allowed it used.

No offspring of General Kenobi would leave this treacherous Earth quietly, she’d mused almost knowingly.

She’d been dead nearly three months but the court was still undergoing a period of mourning. His Majesty, King Han still wore black to showcase his loss and so they must lead by example. Her clothes for the journey were laid out on her chest that was all packed. A finer gown than she had ever possessed that was to showcase her grief for a woman she’d never met. And a gable hood to match. It made her head look like a box and was heavy and cumbersome on her temples. Plutt would force it on her if she made any complaints. She was to look pure and fertile; all the better to get her a grand marriage. She was to be bargained for like a prize nerf; it made her cold.

A gentle meow drew her attention away from her dark thoughts. The orange and white cat jumped off the bed and wound itself around her skirts. Almost as though comforting her for the day to come.

BB8 always caused her to smile and she picked up her pet, nuzzling his fur.

“At least we will be away from this place.” She mused gently. “Free at last. Or as free as we can be.”

There was a sudden approach of feet on the stone floor outside and the loud sound of her door being unlocked. The hinges of the door needed oiling as they squeaked terribly as they revealed two nuns entering.
They did not speak to Rey as they wordlessly got her ready. She was not sorry; she had nothing to say to them and would not miss them.

The smock and the petticoat that she was dressed in was of good quality but plain. The kirtle that would make her waist even smaller and constrict her breasts was unfamiliar to her as she had normally worn wool spun yarn gowns and a simple coif and veil to hide her hair. Yet she was forced into it all the same. It made her look so slight that she looked even more underfed than she really was.

The gown was stepped into and laced up at the back. Her freckled and tanned skin from hours of walking in the gardens under the watchful eyes of the nuns looked almost pallid under the layers of dark damask. This would be good no doubt; fashion preferred ladies’ pale so she’d heard.

Her hair was left in their simple three buns as the hood was placed on her head. The hair was hidden and that was all that mattered. Then a crucifix was placed around her neck by one of the nuns. Rey would have been touched had it not been for the fact that she was sure it was only so she had some jewellery to show at court.

A nun held a small mirror for her to look at herself.

Rey did. But she did not look at the hood or the gown; she looked at her face. There had been little access to mirrors in the nunnery. That was the sin of pride. So she drank in all she could. She looked pale thanks to all the black she was draped in but still her tanned skin was obvious. Her face had a decoration of freckles; that would go against her in the fashions of the Court. Yet she was pleased with the reflection. She liked the dusting of freckles over her little nose. Her hazel eyes were big and her mouth sweet.

She then wondered grimly if that would be used as a bargaining tool by Plutt too.

The Earl of Jakku came lumbering into the room not long after. He was a repulsive looking man; with a flat nose and enormously overweight that would not have mattered if he had been the slightest bit inclined towards kindness. But he was as mean as he was gross.

He looked her up and down. “She looks even thinner. Men want childbearing hips!” He crowed at a nun as though she could help change Rey’s shape. Rey had to suppress a smile; she did not want this to be an easy endeavour for Plutt as it would not be for her.
A hissing sound came behind her. Plutt glared at her pet. He’d never liked BB8; cats were good at keeping away vermin but little else he said. Yet Rey would not give up her pet. She had defied Plutt in this by keeping the cat always in her eye of sight. Soon Plutt had given in. Let her keep the damn fur-ball as long as she gave him no trouble.

BB8’s name was something of a joke that had stuck. Blackbirds often crowed in the vegetable patches of the nunnery and pecked up the planted seeds before they had time to take root. It caused the nuns much consternation. Until the orange and white tabby cat started to make a game of scaring them off.

“The Black Bird Eater is about!” Plutt had jested, not very funnily one day.

Soon Black Bird Eater became BB8. And it’s loyalty to his mistress was absolute.

He would come to London and remain her only friend.

Stepping forward, she took one last look at the room that had been her home and her prison. At the marks on the wall that had ticked off to mark the passage of several years.

She wanted to spit on the floor but did not. She was a Duchess now and that was not how Duchesses acted.

Han looked out over the water that surrounded Naboo Palace. From his window he could see the barges and tugboats going up the river, bring nobles to court and men to and from their work. Life just seemed to go on as before. Documents still needed to be signed. Negotiations with courts abroad still needed to be discussed. And the jostle for power was still ongoing.

He looked away from the river and down the direction of the Tower of London. It was not visible from this place but everyone knew which direction it was. It was the worst fate that the people could imagine; it’s presence was always at the forefront of many minds. And it was where his son sat right now. Though not in a fashion that people would have expected. He was housed in the royal apartments as befitting his status and had servants to help dress, pray and eat. He was also allowed walks on the parapet and Maz had visited him with some previsions. Ben couldn’t leave but he certainly wouldn’t be treated like a prisoner. But then no man or woman of rank ever was. Until they were led to the block.
Han sighed. Ben would be kept for a time out of the way until Han was sure it was safe for him to return. He had written letters to his son and had been humbled by the reply. While he was still surly and obstinate with himself, the news of his mother’s death had affected him deeply. He had even had reports that his son had been heard weeping when he thought he was alone or the others were asleep. Han had wanted to go to his son right then. He’d wanted to barge into his gilded prison and hold his boy. Wanted to look at the face that had caused him such grief and despair and search for traces of Leia.

But he was a King first and a father second. Or so the council saw it. So they must grieve separately.

Now he must greet his Privy Council.

He entered into the long wooden room and all the members down the long table stood. There was a single chair at the end of the table where previously there had been two.

There was too much room for just one person. He sat down all the same.

He still had some loyal advisors. Sir Chewbacca, his loyal lieutenant and admiral of the fleet, was still at his side and was still as youthful looking, hairy and incoherent as possible. But he was loyal and true friend. That meant more to him now he was getting older and less cocky. There was also Lando Calrissian – they had clashed many a time but had ultimately always ended up on the same side. He was probably his highest born supporter. The rest… well, he made do.

There was Mitaka, a perpetually shaking man who seemed to have ruined his nerves in the company of the court, and Armitage Hux, the Earl of Starkiller Base. Han did not trust this man one inch but chose to keep him close. If there was one thing that Han learnt as a Captain of an army, it was to never turn your back on the enemy. He will bet his last Sovereign that Hux was involved in the First Order in some way but he had covered his tracks well and Ben wasn’t telling him anything. Ben probably believed he was guaranteed a loyal supporter when he came to power. So be it. But Hux would know his place while Han remained on the throne.

Admiral Akbar was away at sea (he would be deeply grieved at the news of the Queen’s death) so they proceeded.

“Well gentleman, what news do you have for me today?”
“A matter of some importance.” Mitaka managed without shaking too much.

“Well?” Han prompted.

“Unkar Plutt, the Earl of Jakku has come to court with the lost Duchess, Lady Rey.”

“Ah yes. That was something of a surprise.” Han lamented. He had felt some lost happiness return to him at this news. He’d never been polite to Duke Kenobi, who had been a loyal General before himself and Leia had even been suggested for the crown. He regretted it deeply now and had even named their heir after him. But still, he would show the lady all courtesy.

“There is much discussion regarding a possible marriage alliance.” Calrissian managed as though he did not wish to discuss it. That got Han’s attention. Half the time, Calrissian didn’t shut up.

“Well who has she been suggested for?”

“There had been some talk of her being a prospective bride for his grace, the Prince of Alderaan. But due to his… current situation,” Hux sniffed as though it were distasteful to him, “other candidates must be put forward. She is of an ancient family and still has much love in the kingdom. We must secure her for a match to our cause.”

“Quite. So who is to be suggested?” Han asked.

There was silence. An awkward one hung over the table. Furtive eyes looked about as though egging one another to say the words. Chewbacca looked straight ahead as though he was a martyr to this conversation.

It took almost thirty seconds for Han to understand.

“You can’t be serious?” He said this almost as a whisper. For his voice had utterly failed him.

“It would be a political master-stroke, Your Grace.” Hux said as though it was obvious. “And she is the most eligible lady in the land—”
“My wife has not been dead these last four months and already you badger me to take another wife?” Han barked finding his voice again.

“Your Grace...” Calrissian managed, “this is no disrespect or slander to the late Queen. No-one can replace her amongst you or us. But... it makes sense.”

“The girl will be married off whether it’s to you or not,” Hux said rather impatiently, “her fortune will either go to a rival courtier, or maybe even to supporters of the First Order.”

Han felt his skin begin to creep. He’d just set them down and got his son back. But he knew that some supporters were still out there.

“Surely we could betroth her to my son? They will be closer in age-”

“The Prince of Alderaan... is too much of a liability. If he turns against us again, she will be duty bound as a wife to follow him. And her supporters too. It is a risk we cannot take.” Calrissian said heavily as though he would rather march Ben up the altar himself than see his friend forced into this.

Han shook his head in disbelief. “How old is she?”

Another pause. More tense now. “She is just entered her nineteenth year.” Mitaka managed rather bravely.

“Jesu.” Han cursed. He was old enough to be her grand-sire!

“Your Grace, will you not meet the girl? Decide upon meeting whether she would suit you? You may find her pleasing. It is said she is pretty.” Mitaka coaxed, with a hint of tremor.

“And fertile.” Hux cut in brusquely. “You may yet have more heirs yet.”

“Heirs?” Han managed as though he’d never heard of having his own kin before.
“The prospect of a future prince may cause the Prince of Alderaan to tow the line.”

Or make him worse than ever, Han thought darkly, he was never rational at the best of times.

Han thought hard. If he said yes, he was betraying Leia. If he said no, she’d be married to the enemy.

“I’ll meet her. But nothing more than that.”

The Privy Council nodded. It was probably more than they expected.

Rey waited in the ante chamber nervously. She tried not to show this nervousness in front of Plutt. He was pacing and was clearly determined to make a deal done today.

She had only learned five minutes ago who exactly she was being proposed to.

Her legs shook and she wished desperately to have BB8 at her side. But the cat had been left in her chambers and she was left alone with only a woman as a chaperone in the corner of the room. She was a tiny little thing and wore spectacles that nearly covered her face. Rey had never seen spectacles before; she knew only the nobility to could afford such a luxury. The woman wore a gown of plain colour of green but clearly fine quality and a gable hood like Rey’s. Yet there was a watchfulness to her. A shrewdness in terms of Plutt. And a kindness in her eyes for Rey.

Plutt strode back and forth for the hundredth time.

“How much longer Miss Kanata?” Plutt demanded.

“However long the King takes, Your Grace. And it’s Lady Kanata. Just encase you’ve forgotten.” There was a calmness and authority to her voice. As though she had seen all this before and would see it again. She did seem very old indeed.
Plutt flushed at this rebuke but thought better than to insult a Lady of the King’s Service.

Rey tried to ease her breathing. They wanted her to be the wife of King. A king who was well into his sixtieth year. Who had only just lost his wife. What sort of man could look to the future so quickly?

She’d heard reports that in his youth, King Han had been a very handsome rogue. Along with his Queen, they had made a beautiful couple. She had spotted fine paintings of the couple at their coronation on her way through the Great Hall to the King’s Privy Chambers. He’d been a tall man with a rather self-satisfied look on his face and brown hair. His wife had been radiant in her power and the love between them was evident even in the work of canvas.

That had been nearly thirty years ago. What would be left?

Would he be gouty? Ill? Ugly? No woman of position married for love these days but she had thought until recently to spend her life in prayer and virtue. How would she be a wife? How would she be a Queen?

The doors opened by two guards and a man came in. Lady Kanata curtseyed easily and Plutt folded himself into an awkward bow. Rey managed to follow suit. She had been practising the art of curtseying in her room at night. She sank down in deference.

“Your Grace, it is honour to be granted such an audience...” Plutt managed sycophantically as Rey stopped listening. Her head was bowed and she was still curtseying deeply. She wondered idly how long she must do this for. No one had told her that. She really should have asked that detail. She wanted to look up. She wanted to see the King. She’d sprung down so quickly that she hadn’t gotten to look at him properly. Still he had walked in without pause. So no gout. Good, that was one thing.

Her legs were beginning to ache. When could she get back up again?

Two boots came into her line of sight. They weren’t Plutt’s feet.

“Would you like to stand Madame? I know that it plays havoc with the legs after a while.” The tone was slightly gruff but not harsh. Almost perpetually sarcastic. Slowly she rose back up and raised her head.
She had to blink several times. The man before her was getting old certainly but seemed to be in good health. His grey hair and weathered face showed the passage of time that his life had endured but beneath his face there was evidence of the man in the painting. His face was still quite handsome and his figure in remarkable condition considering his advancing years. The man was not in his dotage yet. His doublet and clothing was that of darkest black and it made him appear washed out as it did to her. Or was that grief? There was an undoubted sadness in his eyes.

He examined her likewise as though intrigued. Then he shook his head. “Jesu, you look your age.”

Rey blinked in incomprehension. She’d certainly been called worse and she was only a young lady but surely she wasn’t so old being married off?

Plutt rushed to sell his purchase the best he could. “She looks younger than her years but it will wear well on her in later life-”

“Thank you Plutt.” The King cut off without looking at him. “You can go.”

Rey wasn’t prepared for that either. Plutt stammered.

“It… I cannot allow… Your Grace, it is not proper to leave-”

“Lady Kanata is by the door and shall remain there to ensure I don’t take any liberties.” The King said bluntly. “Take a glass of wine in the Great Hall. You look like you like your wine.”

Rey tried to stifle her chuckle by bowing her head. She didn’t see Plutt leave but heard the door being opened by the Yeoman of the Guard.

A new fear rose up. What do you say to a King?

She looked cautiously at the man before her. He now had his back to her and was instructing Lady Kanata to bring them some wine. She watched as he walked to the fireside and sat down heavily in the chair to the right of it. For a moment, Rey saw the man that he was: tired.

He looked at the flames a minute and then back to where Rey stood.
“Come. Sit down.” He motioned to the chair opposite him. Rey looked at it nervously. “Madame, must I beg? Please.”

Slowly, Rey walked to the fireside and sat down before him. She looked at him cautiously.

“So you are the elusive Kenobi heiress. How do you like being a wealthy woman?”

Rey wondered if she should answer honestly: that she had not a clue how to act or what to do.

“It is quite unexpected, Your Grace. I hardly know how to-”

“Oh speak honestly. You haven’t been to court your whole life and I am surrounded by courtiers. Tell me plainly – it was a bloody shock, wasn’t it?”

Rey blinked and then smiled genuinely for the first time.

“Yes, yes, it was a shock.”

“And if I know Plutt he will have kept you on a tight leash until he got the best price for you. As his ward, he would be paid greatly if you married well.”

“Yes, your Grace.” Rey said quietly.

“Have you been well cared for?” He asked gently. “Has he ever shown you an inch of kindness?”

“He hasn’t let me starve, my Lord.”

“Only just. You’re as thin as a street urchin. And I’ll wager those nuns weren’t much comfort either.”
"I didn’t need comfort, My Lord. I can survive with only my own company. If nothing, I learnt piety and the power of silent contemplation."

"Contemplating when you can escape no doubt."

Rey didn’t reply.

Han leant forward. "You know why you’ve been bought here."

Rey nodded silently.

"They want me to take a new bride. A new Queen. Possibly to further my line. Bring security to a crown that is fractured." Han smiled grimly. "I cannot do it again, Rey. One love like that… it’s enough. And as sweet as you undoubtedly are, you are not her."

Rey swallowed. "Your Queen, Your Grace?"

"Leia."

Rey’s throat stung but not from rejection of herself as a marriage prospect. No she felt sympathy for this man. Her previous ideas of him moving on too fast seemed much too harsh now. He was clearly still hurting. Still grieving.

"Did you love her a great deal, Your Grace?" She asked softly.

"Oh yes. But the Lord knows I failed her many times. I was not the best monarch. I was not the best husband. And I was not the best father."

He leant forward as though to take her in confidence. How long had it been since he could take anyone into that place?

"Many thought us mad to marry. Even for the sake of the kingdom, we argued constantly. Even the night of our coronation, we ended up with her throwing the orb at my head." Rey let out a
scandalised laugh. Han smiled in turn. “Sounds awful, doesn’t it? But I loved it. She made me alive. She kept me on my toes. I loved how clever she was. How fierce. And she didn’t need me yet wanted me anyway. Somehow… that was intoxicating. And the balm to my ego.”

“I am sure you were a very good husband.” Rey reassured.

“I wasn’t. I was always on campaign. I flirted outrageously with the ladies of the court to get a rise out of her. I never touched them I promise you. I had not led a chaste life before I met her and they were more than willing to be recognised as a mistress. But even as foolish as I was, I would not go that far. I knew if I did she would never forgive me. So I left them alone and faced her wrath. And was all the better for it.”

“Did you want more children?” She asked timidly.

“She did. I didn’t. I could hardly handle the one we had.” He looked down at the mention of his son. Rey had passed the Tower on the way to the palace of Naboo. He was said to be a man of violent temper and great ambition. “But we were required to keep trying. Yet all the children she bore never lasted more than a few hours. It grieved us so. If the Prince was not strong I think we may have faced civil unrest again. Then he left us and Leia was a broken woman. She pushed me away for several years and I fled to sea like a coward. It was only recently that we came back together. But too late… too late.”

The King looked up at her with a wistful air.

“You know she always wanted a daughter. A young princess to pamper and make pretty.” He looked down. “Alas.”

Rey smiled sadly. “Do not trouble yourself, Your Grace. I understand you do not want to enter into another marriage.”

“But if I don’t, you may be sent back to that awful place. Married to the enemy. Or worst Plutt may decide your fortune may be something he wants for himself.”

Rey blanched and nearly sway in her seat. Stupidly, that was not something she had dreamt of. But now it was said it sounded all too familiar to Plutt’s way of thinking. And she was not blind; she had seen the way he looked at her at times. As though her small hips were of little consequence as long as he put them to good use.
Rey clutched the sides of the chair and tried to breathe deep.

“Maz! Bring that wine! Quickly now!”

The little lady came forward with a goblet and a decanter of wine. She filled the goblet and put it in Rey’s hands. “Drink, Child.”

Rey took a deep swig. It burned her throat but made the shaking less fierce.

The King was stood at her side. “Forgive me, I did not wish to distress you.”

“No,” Rey said in a voice that sounded less scared than she was, “no, I had just not thought of such an outcome.”

The King patted her. “It will not come to that. I will block such a match.”

“Thank you.” She breathed. She drank in silence for a few seconds before she noticed the King was pacing as though in thought. She remembered herself enough to stand abruptly but he waved her back down and instructed her to drink more wine. She sat slowly and watched him. He seemed to be contemplating a riddle. Finally he nodded to himself.

He sat down opposite her once again.

“I have a proposition. That could benefit us both.”

Rey waited.

“We can marry but live not as husband and wife. More companions. Father and a daughter relationship.”

Rey’s heartbeat sped up. “In what way, Sire?”
“You would be my wife in the face of God and act the part as Queen for the people but when it is just the two of us… we revert back to this. Talking as equals. Me teaching you things. And maybe to nurse me when I am not well. I would ask no more of you than to act the part in public.”

Rey knew how rare this was. To have such an opportunity and none of the obligations of the bedroom was unheard of.

“Sire, may I ask why? I am just a simple girl.”

“You have not been bought up in court. You know nothing of intrigue and politics. And for that, I respect. I have spent my life with politicians. And I have destroyed my chance of raising my son right. I left that to tutors and matrons and am reaping the rewards. I don’t need another wife or more children but I do want peace and I will never get it until my advisors marry me to either you or another princess. At least this way, we mutually gain. And with no romantic notions on your side, I can’t possibly disappoint you.”

“And I would not be married to some faceless courtier.” Rey finished.

“Not to mention that when I die, you can live in luxury and without needing to remarry. But I think we have some time before that.” The King smiled grimly.

Rey swallowed. Took a deep breath. “We do not know one another.”

“Oh we won’t marry tomorrow.” Han dismissed. “We will go through a show of courtship if you can call it that. If you find me not to your liking, we will put an end to it. If I find you not to mine, I will do the same.”

Rey knew already she was unlikely to do that. She had never expected it but she liked this man. He was rough around the edges and much older than her but he was presenting a chance; not just to be a wife but to gain a father figure. And she’d wanted a father for so long. She had wept so hard over it. It had been her one dream.

“I would be honoured, Your Grace.”
The fire flickered and spat between them as a dynastic alliance was born.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for your feedback so far. It's been fantastic.

For anyone sceptical about such a big age gap, back in medieval/tudor times, this was seen as unimportant. Edward I of England remarried Queen Margeret of France after his wife died with a massive forty years age gap. They were said to be very happy together. But even if they weren't, it was for political gain and love didn't come into it. So this was an incredible deal for Rey.

Kudos and comments are worth 60 portions.
Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for your fantastic feedback. I’m always so excited to see a review or a kudos. I’m updating quite quickly because I’ve been bitten by the writing bug (which I love).

I know some people find the Han and Rey arrangement a little bit strange but political marriages were ten a penny back in Tudor times. Also I think that it will soon be clear that it's very much for convenience and a father/daughter relationship.

The royal apartments within the Tower were grand enough to be appropriate for a member of the gentry. The rooms held the least amount of damp, they offered favourable views of the grounds and the furnishings were very fine. It was the room where royalty stayed before their coronation.

It did not look much like a royal apartment after Ben had been given the news that his father and master, the King, was to marry again. The drapes had been ripped off the bedposts, his books thrown across the room and the messenger, Sir Mitaka, had been thrown from the room, shaking so badly he had been in need of strong wine and counsel with a Tower’s chaplain.

The current heir to the throne, the Prince of Alderaan, sat in the midst of the devastation. His anger hadn’t abated but he had run out of things to throw and he refused to destroy any holy doctrine.

How could he? How could…

Ben felt his grief betray him as his moisture began to rain from his eyes. He wiped at them furiously but the downpour kept coming.

Mother…

The last few months had been horrific for him. Not only had his liberty been taken away but he had lost his mother. They had never had an easy relationship and many times as a youth he had complained of her influence. She had been staunch that he was to be given an education that would prepare him to rule. Indeed all the hopes of the dynasty rested upon this sullen, black-haired boy’s shoulders. Many brothers and sisters had been born. All had died in the cradle. He never even got to meet many of them. Though sometimes he would come to his mother’s rooms (on his occasional
visits to court) to show her a piece of Latin that his tutors had praised only to stop outside her door. Weeping could be heard within. Solitary weeping.

Ben would raise his hand to knock. To offer his dear Mama some comfort. For it frightened him so to hear her that broken. She was always so strong. To go to her, to hug her, embrace her.

He lowered his hand every time and walked back down the passage.

As Lord Snoke would later tell him, what was a child’s condolence in such a matter of grief?

Lord Snoke… the memory of him still left the Prince more confused and conflicted than any other person, alive or dead. His head had been mounted on Tower Bridge as all traitors were.

Lord Snoke had been one of his guardians at his little court as a child. His lady mother, the late Queen, had never liked Snoke but had been gracious to him for lack of evidence to justify such intense dislike. Maybe if he had knocked upon the door when he had a chance he could have provided her with just cause to put him to death years sooner. Ben was still not sure even now if he would go back and knock.

The old man had been a great nobleman and had been the first man to show the Prince any sort of regard except preaching to him of his duties or beguiling him as the future of the Organa dynasty. He had been coaxing, kind on occasion and stern at others. But it was that changeableness that had been so very intriguing to the young boy. Soon, Ben grew to trust his council and would come to him with any queries or problems he had.

At first no-one saw any problem with this: the aged nobleman was one of the peers of the realm and was teaching the prince good lessons. He dissuaded him from engaging in any romances lest he find himself with a bastard child and scolded him for sharing a few kisses with a serving girl. But soon the whispers of advice in Ben’s ear became more insistent; about how he was being wronged, how power should have been given to him by now, how his parents did not respect him for the gifted boy he was.

By the time he was a young man, he was devoted to the decrepit but clever and manipulative man. Yes, Ben could see now that he had been manipulated. But he did not see it without pain and even now Ben made his excuses for him if only to himself.

The rebellion was not masterminded by the Prince but he was the figurehead of it. The chance of a
future that the current monarchs were standing in the way of.

Civil War had been imminent and he had fought the good fight. He had lost. He had been captured. He had been imprisoned. And had watched from his window as the man who had been the only guidance in his lonely life lay his head upon the block and had it smitten off.

Ben could not help but to grieve. And yet he felt oddly free. Freer than he had been when he had been at liberty to ride the fields on his horse. Not even the Tower walls could make him feel trapped.

Snoke’s death was soon overshadowed by the biggest blow since he had endured a strike to the ribs in battle: his mother…

It had happened suddenly and without warning. He had received a letter from her only the day before; entreat him to see what Snoke had done to him since he was a mere boy, to know that she loved him not just as a ruler loves their heir but as a mother loves a son and that she would have him back in a heartbeat.

He had been in the process of writing a reply when the herald had come to him dressed in black and with his hat removed.

The three months that followed were more painful than Ben had ever endured. His servants learnt to be silent unless spoken to and he spent hours in desperate fervent prayer. He dressed in black and his mood matched his clothing. He shed tears when he was sure no one could report it and he had lost weight.

His confinement meant he was not able to attend the funeral.

And yet… these past few months… his father and him had made more progress than he had ever thought possible. His father seemed as winded and as lost to her death as Ben seemed to be. For once they were united in their emotions. His father, never one for letter writing, had sent him nearly a dozen. They always seemed to say the same thing – why? Why? Why?

Ben had no answer to that question but it was a comfort to know he was not alone in his suffering.

Knowing that he had never made amends or said all he had to say… it would haunt him. Always.
Ben had began to feel like he may soon be welcomed back to court. Han had made it clear that he wished to see his son and it was evident that he would not be killed. He was the only heir and not even high treason could change that. And his father seemed to be improving the conditions of his rooms if anything.

But now…

The Prince roared with anger.

Four months. She had been gone four months. And already…

He had at first believed it a jest. When Sir Mitaka had come to his rooms to announce that, after a short courtship, His Grace would be joined in matrimony to the Duchess Kenobi.

The guards had been forced to pull the terrified knight from the Prince of Alderaan’s hands. His father would marry another girl.

“What girl?!" He demanded without Mitaka being able to answer as the Prince was gripping his throat.

He’d learned nothing else of the marriage. The staff remained as far from his chambers as possible and guards kept him locked within.

Light began to move across the room as the sun began to sink in the sky. Ben was not sure how long he had sat amongst the devastation when the door opened again. He expected to see some guards with his food on a tray.

Instead, Maz Katana, his mother’s former Mistress of the Robes and the wife of Sir Chewbacca, stood in the door.

For such a small woman she had an authority that made even Ben sit straighter.
“I see you have heard the news then.” She announced calmly, taking in the devastation of the rooms.

“Don’t you mock me.” He whispered.

“Oh I don’t. For once, I understand. Truly.”

Ben looked up at her from where he sat on the ground. “So you don’t support it then?”

Maz smiled almost sadly. “I loved your mother. But I do not condemn this match. I cannot.”

The Prince stood abruptly and strode to the window which was as far from her as possible. He had hoped, for once glorious moment, that he had one ally. For surely, he was not alone in his disbelief?

“She has not been gone half a year!” He cried out as though railing against the world.

“She has not.” Maz agreed. “But I do not think, for one moment, that your father, the King, is doing this with any other intentions but honourable ones.”

“Honourable?!?” Ben laughed almost madly. How can this be honourable?

“He is the King. He is still in fairly good health. And she is of a good and very noble family. Politically it makes great sense.”

“Don’t talk to me of politics.” Ben snarled.

“But I must. For it is the only reason this was suggested to your father in the first place.”

Ben was too angry in that moment to utter another word. Instead, he stood glaring out of the window as he heard Maz put the room to rights once again. When he turned around again, the glass had been swept away and the broken furniture discreetly put to one side.
Maz held out a glass of wine for him to take which he did without a word.

“When will it be?” He asked bitterly.

“In a week’s time in the Queen’s Closet. It will be a quiet ceremony.”

*God’s blood, so soon?*

“She’s rich I take it?”

“One of the most eligible heiress in the country.” Maz replied.

“How old?” There was a silence. Ben looked at Maz. She seemed to be bracing herself. “How *old* Maz?”

“She’s in her nineteenth year.”

Ben dropped the goblet causing the wine to splash on the floor. Maz did not even jump at the clatter. She clearly had anticipated such an event.

“Nineteen!!” He hissed. “But… that means she is ten years younger than me!”

“It is the way of political marriages, Your Grace. If she had been eight-seven with a hair lip and only one leg, your lord father would still have been pressed to do his duty.”

“No doubt it is easier this way though.” He hissed. “Nineteen and a chance to bare him sons.” Another slight to his mother. She had tried so hard. “And I am to call this chit of a girl my ‘stepmother’?!”

“She is no chit. I have met her. She is a strong but kind girl.” Maz said determinedly.
“And you were my mother’s closest friend.” He spat in disgust.

“As I hope to be when we are united in Heaven. But I will not speak ill of this girl when it is not warranted. She is gracious and clever and the people will love her. As they loved her grandfather.”

Ben would have thrown something but had broken all which could be hurled at the wall.

“They will never love her like my mother.” He snarled. “She will be a mere Consort. Queen in name only.”

“I do not think that is of importance to the lady.”

“Oh enough!” He roared. “Why have you come Maz?”

“I come from your father. He knew that you would not take kindly to the news. And he begs that you remember that he has a duty to his kingdom. As do you.”

Ben looked away in disgust.

“Do you have any reply?” Maz pressed.

The sun was now nearly set in the sky. Candles would soon need to be lit to give him light.

“Tell His Grace… that I hope he has a very pleasant wedding night.” Ben spat.

Maz said nothing but curtseyed and made her way out of the door again. Ben was left alone in the darkness.

His father remarrying a girl young enough to have been a baby sister. And his mother not even gone half a year. This was an indignity. To the devil with politics – surely he can’t have forgotten the woman he loved for thirty years?
But one thing was clear to Ben: he must get out of this place.

He must get back to court and take his place back at the right side of his father. He must bide his time. He must make new allies. And he must see with his own eyes this woman who would take his mother’s crown.

He looked down at his clothing. At his doublet, breeches and boots with the cloak wrapped around him. All were black as he had never been one for bright colours.

The world would forget his mother in time but he would not. He would wear black for the rest of his existence.

Rey’s heart thumped in her throat as a comb was dragged through her hair. She was before a mirror, much bigger than what was at the nunnery, and dressed only in her shift. One of her new ladies-in-waiting was styling her hair out of their usual buns and her hand seemed more steady than was decent.

Her wedding night was upon her.

The courtship with the King had been sombre and discreet. He called her to his apartments most nights and they sat together before the fire. With Maz always in the corner for decency’s sake, Rey came to know the man who had proposed her salvation. And with every encounter came to like him more.

He was adventurous, sarcastic, rather caustic in his world-view and at times a little conceited. But there was more to him than that. He was also secretly sorrowful, thoughtful, wise and kind though he would never admit to it. When they were not together, Rey woke every morning to a new gift. The finest linen for dresses, more books for her to improve her learning and a promise for a tour of his navy ships. Rey had never had one present let alone all of these.

She liked to see he found her own company pleasant too. Whenever she came to his rooms, he would wave away her attempts to be polite and ask her to speak truthfully. He wanted to talk to a real person. There were times when she revealed a knowledge of something that impressed him (albeit grudgingly) and sometimes he even smiled wryly.
Within two weeks, they were both in agreement: this could work.

Their impending marriage was announced to the court and noblemen bowed to her while others jostled to be noticed by her.

Unkar Plutt was given a handsome settlement for keeping her safe by the King and a curt request to go back to his lands. Han later whispered to Rey that he was planning a surprise investigation of the nunnery that Plutt was a patron of and where she had spent so many miserable years. They would soon see how virtuous the Earl of Jakku kept his house of God.

Most amazingly, she was given a household of her own. She was given three ladies to wait upon her. The chief lady was Maz Kanata, the lady who had seen enough to make her suspicious of the intentions of this unlikely couple, but whom had always been very tender to Rey. There was also Miss Jessika Dameron, a noble lady who was married to one of Han’s most respected captains. She was a pretty girl with shining brown hair and a genuine smile. Her husband was away at that moment but she assured Rey that he would meet her soon. The third lady was the quietest. Lady Rose Tico was a newcomer to the court and seemed as unsure how to act as Rey did herself. She was as pretty as Jessika and smiled whenever Rey caught her eye. Rey had a feeling that she was a little shy and unaware how to proceed. Hopefully, when she was more settled, they would become good friends. She needed friends in this place.

The King had sent word to his son to alert him to his upcoming marriage. Rey did not hear the response but Han seemed to be in a very grim mood for the rest of the night when Maz came back.

Rey could sympathise somewhat. Although having never met him, she was sure that the loss of his mother was still a sore subject. The fact that she would be younger than him certainly wouldn’t help. She would endeavour to be polite and show every courtesy when they did meet.

She was not looking forward to that day.

The wedding had been a quiet affair. There were but a few witnesses and Rey dressed in her best gown. There was also a small feast afterwards but none of the exultation that royal weddings normally demand. Rey heard some courtiers complain bitterly about Han’s thriftiness. Rey did not care.

But now her thoughts were turned to another train of thought: her wedding night.
The King had never been anything but almost fatherly towards her. Indeed, when he was bid to kiss the bride, it was a dry and chaste one that lasted barely a second. But he often spoke of duty in a grim way and it was a known practise for the court to bed the couple together and look for the evidence the next day. Especially when the lady was a virgin.

If she must do this, she was sure that he would not be unkind to her. Yet still she wished it were not so. She admired this man and was certain that she was coming to love him in her own way. But as the father she never had. This may ruin it.

But what choice did she have?

She was undressed and put in her nightclothes by her ladies. She got into bed and waited looking afraid. Jessika patted her kindly.

“It is not as bad as all that. I’m sure he will have a care for you.”

Rey tried to smile but was sure it came out as a grimace.

Not long afterwards, the men of court came to deliver the King. He wore a nightgown with his shirt and breeches beneath. Han bowed to her formally and then turned to his men.

“I will take it from here gentleman, you have our leave to depart, goodnight.”

The ladies and men bowed and curtseyed and left quietly. The door shut and it was just the two of them.

Instantly, Han visibly relaxed. “Right. Now that’s over with.” He walked not towards the bed but away from it. To the fire and where the wine was kept.

Rey blinked and did not know what to do. Was this a test? He looked so calm.

He turned after drinking some wine and seemed surprised to find her still in bed.
“You can get out of there now if you wish. We’ve played our part well enough.”

Rey wordlessly slipped out of bed on unsteady feet. She picked up a dressing gown and wrapped it around her.

Han smiled crookedly. “Play the part. That’s the first step to life at court. It’s all a mummer’s farce. What we do or do not do when the door is closed is our business.” Han sat down heavily and looked again at Rey. “I was sincere when I said I wanted a companion. A daughter even.”

Rey blinked at him and then took her first liberty with him: she stepped forward and threw her arms around him.

The King seemed taken aback by this then awkwardly patted her and thrust out a goblet that had been crushed between them.

“Drink first. Hug later.” He advised. Rey giggled and sat opposite him. She took a deep drink and felt her nerve endings return to normal.

But one thing…

“Sir… they will look for proof. In the morning...”

“Again, a mummer’s farce. There’s more than one way of playing the part.” He dismissed calmly.

Rey’s wedding night was spent by the fire and talking until the tallow on the candles were nearly burnt away. Oddly, they talked of Leia. Rey was keen to know what adventures the famous warrior King and Queen had enjoyed together. She felt a sense of loss that grew everytime she heard of the stories. If Han was to be like a father to her, Leia could have been like a mother.

Was she looking down from Heaven now? Did she approve the match?

Rey was confident that she wouldn’t disapprove. She may have even been touched by her
widower’s continuing devotion to her.

The next morning they emerged to go to chapel together as a picture of unity. The new Queen seemed rosy and content and the King was solicitous to her as they broke their fast.

The bloody sheet was taken away as proof of the deed. And, when the cut on Han’s hand caused him a twinge of discomfort, Rey offered him more wine and a smile of gratitude.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comments give me more happiness than I can say. Please indulge me. Pretty please?
Life as the Queen was beyond Rey’s wildest imaginings.

The young woman who had never had anything that belonged to herself and who had been ignored all her life was now the most celebrated and powerful woman at Court. She was dressed in the finest gowns, with the fitters bidding her to stand as still as possible as they wrapped her in satins and damasks of blue, green, gold and red for day wear. Then she had to do much the same with purple and cloth of golds for the state occasions. Each one would be cut into the English and French styles of dress and maybe even Italian, the dressmaker promised, and would make her look the most regal of Queens. Rey, who had only owned three cotton and moth-eaten dresses her whole life, could only nod.

She was presented with various hoods of French and English styles to cover her long tresses and hairnets spun with lace that glinted like gold. All of the hoods were studded with jewels: rubies, emeralds, diamonds, pearls. All gems that Rey never thought to see in her lifetime, let alone own.

It was with an unsteady hand that she opened the chest to reveal the climax of her gifts as Queen: the Queen’s crown jewels.

Rey had stared at the box of trinkets with astonishment. They glinted invitingly and almost tauntingly at Rey.

“Aren’t they beautiful, Your Grace?” Jessika said in awe.

They were. Truly they were. And yet…

“Did the late Queen wear these jewels?” Rey asked quietly.
Maz smiled at her with sympathy. “It is tradition for the late Queen’s jewels to be passed on to the current Queen.”

Rey shut the box. “Take them back to the King. They will never be mine.”

Han came to her later that day and found her in her rooms. He did not seem angry or offended; if anything, he appeared confused.

“Did you not like them? I thought all women liked pretty things.”

Rey closed her prayer book sharply and inhaled. “Sire, I cannot in good conscience wear the jewels of the woman I am replacing.”

“You are not replacing her.” Han said defiantly. He sighed and said a little more softly. “You could not replace her, Rey.”

Rey touched his hand. “It is not out of ingratitude. It is more than I had ever dreamed of. But the jewels were her own and should be treasured as such. Not to mention that I would look rather foolish decked out in so many rubies and emeralds.”

Han squeezed her hand. “I had found it difficult last night when Maz reminded me…”

“Then take them back with my blessing. And cherish them as she did.”

Han looked at her as though to see if she was earnest. Then nodded. “Thank you.”

The boxes were returned to the Treasury but Han did call one piece of jewellery back: a necklace of almost metal plating. It was not be-speckled with jewels but was prominent all the same. He looked at it and held it out to Rey.

“Take this one. With my blessing.”

“Your Grace-”
“Please. It was a favourite of hers.” He looked down at it and smiled. “She wore this the day she made myself and her brother knights. She wore a white gown that made her look like a snow queen and wore this around her neck. She smiled at me with such knowing. As if she knew what we would come to be.” He looked back up at Rey. “She often lamented that our son would not be gifted any of jewels and she had no daughters to pass it down to. It would be a shame to see it rust away when it sat on her neck once in such triumph.”

Rey paused and then took the necklace. The metal plating was cold in her hands. It had not been worn for a while she would wager. She would breathe new life into it; not as a replacement but as a remembrance.

“Thank you.” She curtseyed and Han patted her arm awkwardly which caused her to chuckle.

With the Queen’s Jewels now safely back in the coffers, Han commissioned new jewels for her. They came down to her apartments in a trickle and were smaller certainly but that caused Rey to smile all the more. The pearls were more discreet, the earrings less noticeable and the crown she was to wear on state occasions was merely a circlet that sat on her brow. It would be mistaken for a hair band and for that she was grateful. They were less illustrious but more to her style. If she was to have so much she would easily become overwhelmed.

Rey had more rustic interests which caused her great delight.

She was given her old cat BB8, who would waive around her skirts and seemed delighted at the more glamorous apartment. She was also offered greyhounds and was gifted a magnificent chestnut horse. The King had seemed much heartened at seeing her enthusiastic response to being able to ride. She had often been asked to muck out the stables in the nunnery for when gentleman and patrons came calling to pay alms for good luck and it had been a rather enjoyable job. She’d formed a special bond with horses from then on in. Indeed, she preferred the company of the animals she cared for than the people who were meant to have a care for her. She smiled with absolute delight at the talk of riding and hunting when they were to go on Progress; she caused the King to chuckle with her request that she would go riding within a week with Han and his gentleman of the Privy Chamber. This turned to bewilderment when he saw she was actually a better horsewoman than even himself; although it did take her a while to understand why she would be needed to sit side-saddle from now.

Relations with the Court were a lot less simple than she had anticipated. Sir Chewbacca and Lando Calrissian, Earl of Cloud City, had been detached but polite at her arrival (although how she knew Chewbacca was polite she still wasn’t sure; he seemed incapable of talking without growling) but had warmed to her a great deal when it became clear that the King’s new wife did not have ambitions beyond her station and seemed not to be at all jealous of their strong regard for the
memory of Queen Leia. Calrissian was very charming in a way that made her chuckle and roll her eyes. He had been so bold as to kiss her hand and compliment her beauty. At which point the King had walked up behind them, taken Rey’s hand and asked Calrissian if he didn’t have any better lines three decades on. Rey wasn’t quite sure what that meant but Sir Chewbacca had started to chuckle heartily at this.

Her ladies were also very gracious. Maz never failed to guide her when she was in need of assistance, Jessika always seemed cheery at all times of the day and Rose, while still not talkative, seemed very sweet and knowledgeable of who was who at Court.

But that was where the easiness ended. The rest of the court watched her from the corners of their eyes and would stop talking when she walked past. Most of them were forced to drop into a curtsey at her approach so she didn’t pay this too much mind at first. She was so busy trying to remember who to nod to and who to smile at that it was impossible to dwell upon. But soon, very soon, she began to notice that the silence was not deferential but frosty.

They resented her. A new girl from nowhere pops up to announce she is a Duchess and within a month she was a Queen? Of course the resentment came thick and fast.

Sir Armitage Hux was fast becoming a man that she did not like. He was careful to be courteous and make no sign of disrespect before her. But Rey had always prided herself to have a good judge of character and she had the same feeling when she came up against this red-haired man as she did when she saw Plutt: distaste.

She had been informed by Maz (who seemed to know everything) that Sir Hux was suspected with having sympathies with the First Order Rebellion. Maybe with even being a spy for the Prince of Alderaan. Although that was unlikely: the two men did not seem to like one another much.

“Then again,” Maz intoned wisely while tending to her needlework, “liking someone is hardly important in politics.”

There was also another woman at court who caught Rey’s attention. Then again, this woman caught the attention of everyone.

The Lady Phasma was unlike any woman she had ever met before. The woman was taller than anyone else at court and had hair as short as a man. Even more scandalous, she wore the doublet and breeches of a man and many times came up to court in plated armour as though she were about to joust. Yet she did not seem to shock the King; he merely nodded when she bowed (for she would not curtsey) and asked for a report. This woman was the Chief Yeoman of the Guard and could
fight better than any other. She was oddly striking; short blonde hair curled upon her face, and she had freckles upon her nose like Rey and rather lovely blue eyes. If she were to smile she would even be becoming. Instead she was a stony as a statue. It was said that she was a comrade of Sir Hux and another who may have had sympathies with the First Order. She did not seem taken or opposed to Rey; she seemed utterly indifferent. Rey decided to keep her guard up until she had the woman figured out.

Her retinue was even more crowded when Captain Dameron, one of Han’s most trusted advisors and husband to Jessika, came back to court. The man, for he was indeed a man, was a little older than Rey and Jessika but looked none the worse for it. Indeed, even Rey could see that here stood a gentleman who was extremely handsome. He had olive skin and brown sparkling eyes that seemed to dance with mischief. His brown hair was curly and he was not overly tall but the same height as herself.

When they were introduced, he bowed with a flourish and offered his service to the Queen. She smiled humbly and watched with amusement and interest as he reported the skirmishes and adventures he’d undertaken on his travels. Poe Dameron would be a gentleman to watch indeed.

Of course, Rey was in a mind to pay attention to unestablished gentleman too. A young gentleman had come to be installed in her household as being her new Master of the Horse. Due to her love of her horses and her new collection of dogs, she wanted to know who would be in charge of them. She met the gentleman when she came to see how they all fared.

He was again of her height with dark skin and kind eyes. He seemed remarkably buoyant to have the job he now possessed and was also apparently new at court. Oddly, Rey felt a rush of relief that someone hadn’t met Leia and she would be spared the comparison. While she wasn’t jealous, it was nice to have the yard stick removed.

“The dogs will be walked every morning and the horses well cared for. You are free to ride them whenever you choose. Just send us warning and we will have a horse prepared.” He promised.

Rey nodded in gratitude and was friendly to him, although she did make a point of removing her hand from his whenever he took it to guide her around the rough grounds within the kennels and to step over some mess in the stables. She was not a helpless maiden and didn’t like to be treated as such, even if he was only trying to be solicitous.

Still as she went to leave with her ladies, she turned back.

“What is your name, Sir?”
He blinked as though not expecting such a question.

“Finn, Your Grace.”

She smiled. “I’m Rey.”

Finn stood astonished before smiling, “Yes, we know your name, Your Grace.”

“But you don’t know me. Not yet anyway.” And with a little secret smile, she turned and walked back to her apartments with her ladies. Captain Dameron and Finn… she would keep an eye on those two.

Two months had passed and Rey could honestly call herself happy. She was slowly coming to know the ways of the Court and the people seemed very taken with her. The people seem to have liked her understated style and the fact that she was not trying to make them forget the last Queen. Leia had been hugely popular but Rey seemed to have gained her own popularity and was grateful for it.

This did not help to improve her standing at court. Her popularity with the people seemed only to aggravate the high born members even further. And there was another matter: Rey felt suffocated.

She had gone from spending her days completely alone in her room at the nunnery to being the most watched woman in the kingdom. The feeling was making her claustrophobic and sometimes she was tempted to put her chest in front of her bedroom door and refuse her ladies entry.

But there was normally someone with her even then. A lady normally slept in her bed so she could call if she needed anything, the three women were constantly within her rooms doing odd jobs, petitioners would address her every day and Jess was even required to come with her when she went to pass water.

Relations with the King were still pleasant and comfortable. He would often take some wine with his new bride at the end of the long day and the court was awash with gossip when he did not emerge until the next morning. Rey did not point out that it was because it was weary and often fell...
asleep in his chair beside the fire. She did find herself the subject of curious gazes at her midriff though. For now it was the fascination of the court to see when the new Queen would get with child. It felt somewhat selfish and ill-mannered to tell them bluntly that she would probably die without knowing the carnal touch of man. Also when it was just the two of them in their marital quarters it was the most alone she had been for some time and Han seemed as content to sit and be quiet some nights without looking away from the fire.

Rey had started a new ritual to maintain her sanity. With the weather now so mild, she had taken to dressing in a simple gown and going out to the gardens. Jessika urged her to let one of the ladies come down with her for decencies sake. Rey relented on the condition that Jessika sit far away and gave her half an hour to herself. She would not wear a head-dress though; her hair flowed freely down over her chest. Jessika warned that this was not appropriate for a married woman but Rey cared not. It would be early in the morning and no one would see her.

She would sit beside one of the many fountains within the garden and watch the sun rise over the mountains with BB8 curled up on her lap.

Yet one morning, when the sun was high and the birds tweeted merrily to show the arrival of summer, Han turned to her on his gilded chair and spoke softly.

“I have some news that involves you.”

Rey continued to chew but nodded to show she was listening.

“The Prince of Alderaan… Ben… will be released. He is coming back to court.”

At this Rey stopped chewing abruptly.

“Released?” She looked around to see they weren’t being too closely observed. “I thought the charges against him were damning.”

“Against Snoke they were.” He agreed taking a deep drink of wine. “But Ben was always a mere puppet of those around him. Unfortunately, that wasn’t me.” There was a sorrowful look in his eye. One of regret. Even shame. “But I cannot lock him away forever. Execution is impossible; he is my heir. And he still had loyal followers. Plus he is of age. If he is close to the court, he will not be able to make plans for a rebellion. At least here, I can keep an eye on him.”

“So he is to come to Naboo?”
“Yes. Which means… you will be in a position to meet him.”

Rey squirmed in her seat. This was not an enterprise that she was in anyway looking forward to.

“When will he come?” She asked resignedly.

“In three days. He will arrive by night as to not draw any attention to himself. You will meet him the following morning.”

Rey nodded and finished her breakfast in silence. She spent the day riding in the countryside with her ladies and Finn not far behind her. She looked around at the beauty of Naboo away from the city. There were wild flowers and mountains here and even a waterfall where the poor threw alms as it was said to be a holy place and good for fertility. Jessika recommended that maybe Rey should pay homage in hopes of a son. Rey merely smiled and changed the subject. She liked the girl but there was no one outside of herself and the King (and maybe Maz) who knew of their set-up. It was best kept that way.

At one point, Finn rode up close to her on his own horse.

“Are you well, Your Grace?”

“Very well, thank you Finn.” She looked to him and his earnest face was worried. Worried for her. It touched her deeply. So few people had ever been worried for her. Rey looked around to make sure her ladies were out of earshot. “Finn, I need honest counsel.”

Finn lent forward with a nod of his head as though offering himself body and soul into her service.

“Have you ever had any dealings with the Prince of Alderaan?”

Finn’s expression turned from curious to grave in half a second.

“I have, Your Grace.”
“Rey.” She whispered urgently. “Please call me my name; so few people do.” She knew that her enemies at court would find even more fault with her for her talking to man of lower rank but she did not care. She liked Finn; she wanted to hear the truth.

“Rey.” Finn looked around as though to check it was safe to take such liberties with a woman so above him. “Yes, I have had dealings with him. You may not know this but I was once a guard of his household.”

“You were?”

“Yes, though I have been free of that role for nearly a year.”

“And what was he like?” She pressed.

Finn sighed. “The Prince… he was... Oh please, don’t make me speak ill of the son of such good rulers.”

“I will make you speak no ill providing it is the truth.”

“The Prince… was a difficult man. For both noblemen, servants and courtiers.”

Rey’s throat suddenly felt smaller. “Difficult?”

“Capricious. Prone to outbursts. Easy to anger. Seldom content.” Finn shook his head. “We were afraid of him.”

“Afraid?” Rey demanded aghast.

“He never hit me. But he always seemed to have such anger in him. The atmosphere would be electric when he was in the same room as you. Like a cobra coiled to strike. The amount of furniture he destroyed…” Finn shook his head to remember it.
“Is he truly without redemption then?” Rey asked quietly. “Am I to meet a monster?”

“I do not know, Your G- Rey.” Finn said looking embarrassed at his lack of reassurance. “Although...”

“Yes?”

“When I was part of his household, he was under the control of Lord Snoke. And if the Prince scared me at times...” Finn shuddered with remembrance. “That man was without redemption. I am rarely glad to hear of an execution but I was the day I heard he was dead.” Finn looked to Rey. “I’ve heard that his mother’s death has hurt him more than he anticipated. It has humbled him. Maybe with Lord Snoke’s influence gone and his mother too, happier and more placid times may lay ahead.”

It wasn’t quite reassurance but it was something. Rey could not help but nod and touched Finn on the shoulder.

“Thank you.” She smiled. “At least I will know what I am facing now.”

At those words, Maz, Jessika and Rose rode closer and they said no more.

The boat moved silently down river with only the ripple of water beneath making any noise beneath the oars. The night was as dark as Ben’s hair, which made the torches illuminating the great palace of Naboo all the more eerie and awe inspiring. The Prince was utterly impassive as he looked up at the approaching form of his new prison. For it was a prison. He may no longer be locked within his room with the keys on the belt of a guard but this was not liberty.

His release had been announced with as little fanfare as Ben had come to expect. It wasn’t exactly a surprise as they couldn’t imprison him indefinitely. The country was divided, and Ben was the rightful heir to the throne. If they separated his head from his body, civil war would be an inevitability.

Unless the new wife had a child.
He wrapped his cloak tighter around himself at the thought.

The boat came gently to rest against a low wall set with a hidden door to allow visitors to arrive and depart with discretion. Two guards stood to attention waiting for his arrival, and in between them stood the Bishop Lor San Tekka. Ben rolled his eyes. He might have known. Still, at least it was not his uncle. If the Archbishop of Tatooine had been there to greet him, he would have pitched headlong into the water and swam back to the Tower.

Ben stood from the boat and climbed onto the stone steps that led to the Bishop. He came to stand before the holy man. He was taller than him, but then again, Ben was taller than most people.

“Look how old you have become.” Ben noted.

The old man did not flinch at this barb. “Something far worse has happened to you.”

So it would be like this? Very well. Ben hadn’t expected a happy homecoming and hadn’t attempted to invite one.

“Am I to go into a dungeon?” He asked.

“I am to convey you to your apartments. You will sleep in the same rooms you have always slept in, Your Grace.”

“How fortunate.” Ben looked up the dark stairs that showed his way into the palace. “Will my father meet me?”

“In the morning. It is late and he is tired. As am I. So let us not delay. The wind aggravates my bones. I do not have a young man’s agility.” Lor San Tekka then turned to climb the stairs and Ben was obliged to follow. The two guards flanked him from behind.

The palace became more noticeably opulent as they climbed higher. Through corridors and halls where tapestries and golden ornaments were on display. At one point, they passed a mural which caused Ben to stop and forget his surliness for a second.
It was a picture of his parents on the day of their coronation. His mother’s long hair was flowing beneath her crown and she looked as beautiful as Ben could ever remember seeing her. That hair had changed to shining silver and the face had become more tired but she had still been beautiful. So very beautiful.

“Your Grace?”

Ben turned from the painting and looked into Bishop Tekka’s eyes. There was look of sadness, compassion, pity in them.

He did not want pity.

“Let’s keep going.” He said in a brusque tone and strode on forcing the older man to try and keep up.

Finally they arrived at his old apartments. It had changed since he had last been here many years before. The linen was new, the curtains were a different colour and there were new ornaments and chests about the place but those things didn’t detract from the feeling of astonishment Ben felt. For a moment, he was a little boy again. Tucked into bed by some sweet-faced nurse and wondering if his mother would come in to kiss his forehead. He’d kept the candle by his bed burning just encase. Soon he learnt to put the candle out.

“The King will come to call tomorrow morning. Food will be brought to you so you may break your fast and then you will be shown to the new Queen.”

“Oh yes, my new stepmother.” He said in a biting voice and was already sure he would not touch any of the food that was bought to him tomorrow.

“I would advise you to try and remain civil, Your Grace.” Bishop Tekka warned. “Your Lord father, the King, is very fond of his new bride-”

“I bet he is.”

“-and will not suffer you to treat her with disrespect.”
“If he is so worried, why bring me here at all?” Ben sat down upon a chair and looked at the elderly man. “Why bring me into this nest of vipers at all?”

“Because you are his heir and his son. And he wishes you to be acquainted with her. I have met the lady, and she is a sweet, kind woman. A little shy but utterly undeserving of contempt. She is frightened at the prospect of meeting you. Have some compassion for her.”

Ben did not even deign to reply. The Bishop bowed and left the Prince to his new apartments.

He did not retire to bed that night. It was late and he was weary, but if he put his head upon the pillow he would be as incapable of sleep as he was of taking flight. Instead he explored his new apartments, tried every door (the ones that led outwards into the court were locked) and knelt before his prie-dieu to pray.

He prayed for guidance, prayed for strength, prayed for his mother and prayed for the ability to see through this awful day. His knees ached in protest and he wondered if God were not listening to him. Indeed, it felt as though the majority of his prayers went unanswered these days.

Daylight began to peek through the windows and Ben straightened himself with effort. He would need warm water to wash and clean clothes. He may not like the prospect of this woman, but he had his pride.

He went to the window to look out at the morning view. The sun was not yet fully risen and the sky was streaked with pinks and oranges. The gardens of Naboo were looking splendid in their full bloom and…

Ben blinked. There seemed to be someone down there. At first he blamed his lack of sleep. After all, it was unlikely; it was only just dawn and not even his father rose this early. But despite his doubts, there was someone down below.

A woman. A girl.

She was sat on the fountain and looking down into the pool of water. There was a small little cat on her lap with fur of orange and white. She seemed to be pointing something out; probably at the goldfish swimming in the fountain no doubt.
She placed the cat upon the ground and Ben could see her more clearly. She wore no headdress and her hair was loose. Long brown tresses with hints of auburn flowed to her waist and somehow seemed to highlight the blue of her gown. It was a simple dress with no stomacher or petticoats yet she carried herself with a grace. Her face was youthful and she seemed to have a few freckles. Her nose was little and when she smiled at her pet it lit up her face. She had excellent teeth. Lovely eyes.

Ben hid behind the curtain. He did not want to alert the girl as to his presence; he wanted to see her undisturbed.

Who was this girl? He’d never seen her at court before. But she did seem a bit young. Possibly a new lady-in-waiting or the visiting daughter of an Earl. There were always so many at court that it was hard to keep up. She couldn’t have been here long.

She was unguarded. She was innocent. She was beautiful. Very beautiful.

Ben had never indulged in the expected dalliances with women that a Prince often did. Under Snoke’s care, he was discouraged from personal attachments. Besides, he had always been suspicious of the intentions of ladies. When he walked among them in his sober clothes and long face, the best he would achieve was a curious glance and then disinterest as to what he was doing there. Yet when he was announced with his full titles, he had every Duke’s daughter fluttering their eyelashes at him. It made him paranoid and distrustful. And his experience with women was woefully slender as a result. He should have been a long time married now. He was approaching thirty and had yet to take a wife. Another result of his estrangement with his parents and the long battles he had fought.

He’d always disregarded it as something that must one day be done. He would marry. He would unite with the country they sent a princess from and she would hopefully bare many children. It was his duty after all.

And yet this girl stirred something in him. Curiousness. A need to shelter. Lust.

God’s death, she really was enchanting.

Ben wasn’t sure how long he hid behind the curtain watching before another girl came over to the lady and said something that Ben could not hear. The sun was now fully risen and soon the two women departed with the cat. Ben watched the girl until she was completely out of sight. He closed the curtain as though trying not to make any noise.
How strange. How curious. He felt oddly excited. Invigorated. Although today was not to be a pleasant one, he now had a desire that would motivate him to keep a clear head.

He would find out who the lady was. He would see if she were free. And then… he didn’t know. But first he must have a name.

In his head, he had a name for her already.

Aurora. Goddess of the dawn.

Ben washed himself with the bowl of water provided by a servant and dressed in a tunic of blackest night with breeches and boots to match. He also wore a cloak; it made him feel more in control. More authoritative.

He ate but a little food for breakfast and waited. He looked in the mirror provided and scrutinized his appearance. He kept thinking of the lady in the garden. Would he pass her? Would he see her from a window again? He wanted her to look on his face and judge honestly.

The door to his apartments opened and an elderly man stepped in. He too wore dark clothing though of blues and greens. Ben blinked for a moment when he saw who it was.

The King, his father, was before him.

If Lor San Tekka had seemed to have aged that was nothing in comparison to his father. He looked worn, tired, greyer than the Prince had ever seen and there was no sign of the cockiness that he had come to expect from his character. Han Solo had aged and he did not try and hide it.

Ben dipped the slightest bow that decency would allow. The King did not seem to notice. He’d been born a commoner; he probably didn’t realise the slight. He was looking at Ben’s face.

“You were not what I was expecting. You’ve grown too much.”
“What were you expecting to see?” He asked.

“The face of my son.”

A pause. It was not meant to wound; just to be honest. Ben still wanted to lash out at his father: to tell him how his son was gone, how he had been weak and foolish like his father and how he’d destroyed him. Because he still wanted to hurt him. For abandoning him. For showing such grief and then remarrying so quickly. For making him feel that this excuse for a woman could so easily to take Her place…

Ben was silent. For he wanted to get out of here. He wanted the meeting with this new woman to be quick so he could be at liberty again. To plan. To scheme. To walk the gardens in the morning…

“I am told that I am to meet your new wife.”

Han blinked as though not sure who this new wife was meant to be and then nodded as though remembering.

“Yes. You are to meet Rey.”

Rey. What sort of name was that? Was it short for something?

“Shall we then?” Ben asked brusquely.

Han nodded and gestured to the soldiers. Silently they left the room.

They took a journey through the many secret passages within the court: all the better for the courtiers not to see Ben just yet. He walked with the energy of a man going to battle, for truly he would meet his enemy today.

They finally stopped outside the Queen’s Closet. Han looked to his son.
“I ask you, I beg you, do not be cruel to her. She has done nothing to warrant it.”

Ben refused to answer. The door to the apartments opened and Han stepped in. He bowed to the party assembled. “My Ladies, may I introduce my son, the Prince of Alderaan.”

Ben stepped in and looked around.

There were two ladies in waiting that he did not recognise and there was Maz. Except he did recognise the one. She looked familiar. But he barely paid her any mind. His attention was on the woman who had risen to meet them.

She was dressed regally in a royal purple gown with a matching gable hood studded with pearls. Her jewels were modest considering her status and her hands were clasped before her.

Her face though… it was young and fresh looking. With hazel eyes, a little nose with freckles spattered across them and a nervous smile. Very good teeth. Ben could just make out some of her hair before it disappeared under her hood: it was brown with hints of auburn.

The ground began to shake beneath Ben’s feet and he felt a little faint.

The lady, Aurora, was the new Queen. His new stepmother.

Chapter End Notes

Dum dum duuuuum.

The response has been amazing and I beg you to continue to indulge me. I get so excited when I see a (1) in my inbox. Bless you all.

And yes I totally took inspiration from the Ophelia still with Daisy... because I'm weak and I love it too much.
IV

Chapter Notes

Oh my... Thank you so much for the absolutely incredible response. I was so nervous posting this story as I knew some people would back away from the married pairing. But I'm so pleased I did. You've all been great.

Check out Buiana's art work in the first chapter. She is nothing short of incredible.

Massive thanks to Poet Hrotsvitha for being such a wonderful beta.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rey had prepared for this meeting with more time and gathered courage than she was willing to admit. She had risen early and gone out into the royal gardens with BB8 to breathe in the fresh dewy air. The nip of the morning cold and the gentle tweeting of the birds cleared her head better than the best wine in the cellars and she needed to be focused going forward.

She’d gone to her private chapel before breakfast and prayed. Prayed for strength. Prayed for courage. Prayed to face down her enemy. For he was her enemy – how could the man who had betrayed her husband be anything but the enemy? Finn’s words ran in her mind like an echo in a barren room: capricious. Easy to anger. An energy that could strike out and bite. Yet his more hopeful words came to her memory: calmer times ahead. It was an optimistic viewpoint but surely hope could not die today. She was not here to take the place of his mother (no-one could do that) – she just wanted a family. Could he not come to be that? Not a son to her but maybe like an older brother. Or even a friend. She bent her head over her clasped hands and prayed as hard as she could.

Rey allowed her ladies to dress her with more care than they usually did. Her hair was pushed back in their typical three buns and Jessika dressed her in a splendid purple gown with sleeves the colour of silken white. Rey was too nervous to object but had a suspicion that her lady-in-waiting was trying to make her mistress look as regal and queenly as possible. An English gable hood was put over her head that matched her dress and was studded with pearls. Again, probably Jessika trying to make a point about her leaving her hair loose in the garden. Rey decided not to notice this hint. A Queen can pick and choose what she understands.

Han came to her and took her to the window so they were out of earshot.

“I will collect him soon. And bring him here to your apartments. I will be in attendance so you won’t be alone with him.”
“I’m not scared.” Rey protested sounding more confident than she really was.

“I know.” Han interjected. He seemed amused. Maybe even proud. It made Rey feel a new flood of courage in her veins. “But he’s still under my custody. Besides, it will make me feel better.”

He was nervous, Rey realised, though he was trying not to show it. This was the King, the famed Han Solo, who never wanted to know the odds. Yet he was older now and knew that the odds always had a way of making themselves known.

Rey stayed within her rooms and waited. She sat down quite still considering she wanted to pace.

In no time at all, the door opened and Han emerged.

“My Ladies, may I introduce my son, the Prince of Alderaan.”

Rey rose to meet him.

He was dressed entirely in black. He wore a black doublet, breeches and boots with a matching cape. His hair was raven black and reached his shoulders while curling around his face. He was also one of the tallest men she’d ever seen aside from Sir Chewbacca who was almost supernatural in his height. Rey could also see that he was a strong man beneath his clothing; his shoulders were broad and she could see that a good deal of muscle padded his body.

His face was arrogantly cold and determined as he entered the room. His eyes fell upon Rey. And the creature in a mask she had expected suddenly fell away.

His eyes widened upon looking on her. The coldness and derision that he had entered with fell away and all that was left was genuine disbelief. Almost horror. Rey could not help but drink in this new face that had been revealed to her.

He had a collection of features that made him look distinctive. His nose was long and aquiline. His lips were full and almost worthy of a seductive woman. His skin was pale and there were a smattering of moles upon his face. Yet the core of him were his eyes. Pupils so deeply brown they were almost black and held a wealth of emotions. They were currently looking upon her with grief. The entirety of his face would not be the classically handsome etchings of a prince you would find upon a tapestry. But there was a sensitivity in his features that made you want to keep looking and
the more you looked, the more lovely they would become, while the good looks of other men would lose their shine and become almost dull.

Rey stood quite still as he seemed to drink her in. When it became clear he was incapable of movement, she dropped into a curtsey before him. It gave her an excuse to look down and be free of those eyes for just a moment. The movement seemed to shock him back to life and there was movement that signified that he had bowed to her.

When Rey rose up again, the sensitive mask was trying to be pushed down and the composed arrogance was being used to replace it without success.

He was far from the polished courtier; he could not hide the feelings that wore themselves so clearly on his face. What those feelings were Rey could not say. But they unnerved her more than if he had been snarlingly cold to her.

“So, welcome to court, Your Grace. I am pleased to meet you at last.” Rey managed. A Queen must always be gracious and welcoming. Even to her enemies.

She looked at him. Was he an enemy? Or a player in a game he was rapidly losing?

He breathed deeply. “They said you were young. They were right to warn me.”

Rey blinked at this. There was a bluntness to him that was almost sardonic. She’d been so used to the honeyed words used at court already that it made her feel like she was back at the nunnery again. The words there were often harsh and to the point. His voice was deep yet oddly soft and rumbling. She felt it not just in her ears but in her body.

“I do not deny that I am a young bride. Though not quite as young as many other brides. We live in a political world; it is rare for the high born to pick and choose, though I have been a fortunate bride.”

There was another flash in the Prince’s eyes: not anger but almost reminiscent of loss. For his mother whose memory still grieved him?

“Very fortunate. For you are now the Queen of England.” His tone was cold. His eyes…
“Ben-” The King entreated sounding both stern and entreatng.

“It’s true I have gained a crown.” Rey said steadily. “But I wish to also gain companions and a family. It is a hope of mine that we shall be well acquainted and… gracious to one another.” She would have said loving but such a thing did not seem prudent to say.

There was a silence that hung like a flag between them. The Prince seemed as unwilling to yield as though he were duelling for a bag of gold.

Eventually he spoke.

“I will do as His Majesty commands. And will show you every dignity at court.” He stepped back and bowed so sharply that Rey took a step back. “Good day, Your Grace.”

And before Han could utter another word, the Prince turned his back to the room and strode out as though the greyhounds in the royal kennels had been set upon him.

Han called the Prince’s Christian name as though to command him to come back. The cloak he wore billowed out and he did not turn as he disappeared back down the gallery.

Rey stood utterly still. What had happened here today?

Ben crashed into his apartments and threw his cape across the room. There was a distinct lack of furniture in his rooms but Ben did not care. He drew his sword and began to slash at the tapestries that hung from the walls of his room. Some of these pieces were made of thread of gold and silver and were about the cost of a battleship; he did not care. He had to destroy something and roar his rage until his vocal cords threatened to give out. He could hear the sounds of footmen backing away from his door and beating a speedy retreat.

No. No. No.
He had fallen into a nightmare. Was this purgatory? Or had he descended straight to Hell?

His Aurora, his goddess of the dawn, his young maiden, was the Queen of England. His father’s new wife. His stepmother. Was he expected to call her ‘Mother’ now? The idea made him throw aside his sword and tear down the tapestry with his bare hands.

The confusion of the encounter and the wave of emotion that left him adrift was overwhelming. To look upon her sweet, lovely face and know that this girl was the woman he’d hated from a distance for so long was humbling and awful. She’d been dressed in the best finery and looked as grand as any lady in her position could. She could even make the ugly English gable hoods look attractive as it framed her face in manner that was pleasant. And yet he could not help but remember her dressed more simply with her long hair hanging loosely and was reminded in that moment of a child playing dress-up. She was dressed the part and had enough presence of mind to play the great lady. Yet she was so young.

His disgust at the union flared anew. The political side of his brain was more alive to the danger she posed to his position. If she were to bear a child and it were a son then he would have a rival claimant. He was the eldest and the undisputed son of two reigning monarchs but many were not forgiving of his crimes and would be thrilled at a substitute on whom to pledge their loyalty.

His brain also recoiled at the idea of his father joined in matrimony to this girl. Her youth felt even more potent now; his father was reaching his seventieth year soon – it looked unseemly at best. The idea of the two of them bedded together… he picked up the ewer he had washed from and sent in crashing to the ground.

And then Ben sank to his knees and felt the presence of tears upon his cheeks. For worse than all of that had been the death of all his hopes. For he had hoped, even for just a moment, that there may be something new and exciting awaiting him at this court. He had wanted to know her, to woo her, to make her love him. Now she was known to him and it was as bitter as hemlock.

Ben fell upon his prie-dieu and crossed himself before the cross. He frantically began to pray. For forgiveness. For absolution. For relief. He was stronger than this and he had come so far; he must not allow himself such weakness now.

God did not seem to be listening as he had not listened for many months.

Clutching his hands, his mind turned to the only man who he felt could have understood this pain.
“Grandfather, please hear me. Did you know this pain? When you loved my grandmother was this the pain you suffered? Did this passion cause your ruin? Or was it the compassion that your children inspired? Show me again; the power of the Darkside. Show me and I will finish what you started.”

A wave of determination washed through him and he was exultant; he had been heard. He had not been abandoned utterly. His grandfather would protect him from such lusts.

When he closed his eyes, he saw a blue dress and long cascading hair of brown and auburn hues.

He remained on his knees for the rest of the day.

Rey spent the rest of her day in something of a daze. She did not wish to go riding or walking for once and chose instead to sit a while in her chambers and sew. This was normally work she dismissed as pointless (if only to herself) and her sewing, while sufficient, was not extraordinary. Still it was the duty of the Queen to embroider shirts for the King and she was loath to prove herself deficient as Han’s companion.

She concentrated on the hem and tried not to dwell on the morning’s events.

Han had seemed resigned. Like he was shocked at his son’s reaction but not surprised. He had mused, albeit only to her, that he had thought Ben would have learnt a little more tact in the time they had been apart. Clearly he had not. The ladies-in-waiting appeared in much the same manner. The only one who felt dazed and breathless by the encounter was Rey herself.

But it was not by his cold demeanour or apparent disgust at her: it was the look he had bestowed on her when he had first seen her.

Rey had thought this over many a time in the past few hours to the point where she began to wonder if she had dreamt it all. But no. She was utterly certain that when he had seen her he had been winded. Like he knew her. Or at least recognised her. Bizarrely, even though she had never seen his face until this morning, Rey had felt similar. There was a quality about him that made her feel like she had met him before.

She recognised something in him. What she did not know.
Maz came to sit beside her on the window seat.

“You’ve dropped a stitch, my dear.” She pointed out gently.

Rey looked down. Indeed she had. And indeed she did not care. Han always ruined his clothes anyway. She set her embroidery hoop aside and put her hands in her lap.

“You seem rather downcast today, Your Grace.” Maz pointed out. “I hope this morning did not upset you.”

“Not upset me, no.”

“But you have many questions about it?” Maz noted shrewdly. Rey looked at her chief lady-in-waiting. It often amazed her how the old woman could know so much in so little time.

“I am confused as to the man I have been introduced to.”

Maz nodded and picked up Rey’s embroidery while she started to right Rey’s mistakes. “He has grown into a strong man and has a great wealth of character. Not all of it good. But those bad qualities may endeavour him to work hard. Indeed he has forgone many pleasures that some princes indulge in.”

“What is that?”

“He trains five times a week and is a skilled swordsman. He is also a great rider and gifted with the bow. His meals are stricter and he does not much like sweetmeats. And most oddly he has never taken a mistress.”

Rey blinked. “But he has never taken a wife?”

“He left his parents to fall under Snoke’s guidance and affinity when he was twenty-three. Marriages were arranged for him and he was betrothed many times but the countries where he was
promised all fell out of favour or did not help with our foreign policy. I do not think the Prince minded much; he sometimes had to be reminded as to whether his betrothed was a French duke’s daughter or a Spanish Infanta."

“So he also never had a love at court?”

“No. If he did he kept it an excellent secret but at court such a secret would get out.”

“Did the ladies not like him?” Rey asked confused.

“They liked him well enough. His status as a Prince would have helped. But he was not a handsome boy. His ears were too big and quite skinny. Yet he grew up with a vengeance. Ladies began to take notice and the more they were snubbed the more appeal he had.” Maz shrugged. “His arrival back to court will make him a prize catch. Not only for a mistress but he is to be in need of a wife soon. I believe Han will grant him leave to marry any lady with loyalties to the Resistance cause. Ben will need his own heir soon and it may even make him happy.”

Rey could not imagine the brooding soldier-like Prince in the throes of a love affair but she hoped someone would soften his icy demeanour soon.

This man was meant to be her adversary and yet she felt for him. What she felt she wasn’t sure and she was not happy at her inability to decipher this.

She looked out at the gardens and did not pick up her sewing again.

It was dark in his chambers when there was a knock upon his quarters.

Ben got up from his knees and ended his prostration before God and his grandfather. The page who entered seemed alarmed at the state of his rooms but said nothing.

“His Lord, Sir Armitage Hux.”
Ben nodded and stood still as the tall, slim figure of Hux entered his rooms. He bowed to Ben and they stood facing one another before and after the page had left the rooms.

“I trust you are well, Your Grace.” Hux intoned though clearly not interested if Ben was as happy as jester or dying of disease.

“Well enough. I see you’ve been busy in my absence, Hux.”

“I have been securing my place with the King. And your place, Your Grace. It took me much work and time to convince him to welcome you back to court.”

“I am grateful.” Ben replied tonelessly.

“Evidently.” Hux interjected. The two men looked upon each other. Growing up, they had not been friends. Indeed they had looked upon each other with utter indifference. Hux was the son of an old family who had been high born since the Conquest – they hated new men and Han Solo being crowned a joint monarch had left them seething for years. However Hux knew which way his bread was buttered and sought to make himself useful if not friendly to the Crown Prince. They argued like brothers and disliked one another with a genuine flare that even having the same goals could not cure but the same goal they shared and that was power. Once Ben was King, Hux would be elevated even higher and Ben would not be ungracious. Though where Hux’s loyalties would lie then was under question. Possibly with Ben’s heir. Or maybe with the Queen’s.

He must keep his eyes on what mattered.

“I am glad you’ve come.” Ben announced. “I have work for you.”

“I assumed.” Hux nodded. “Regarding the new Queen I take it?”

“What have you heard?”

“That the King is greatly taken with her. He seems content in her company and he often spends the night in her rooms.”
Ben shuddered and could not suppress it. So the marriage was a valid one then. And by the sound of it the King was doing all he could to procure another heir.

“Does the Queen show any sign of child?” Ben asked quietly.

“None yet. There has been no sickness in the mornings and she appears no bigger around the waist. Your father is not as young as he was; it may take time.”

And more attempts. Why did the very thought make him feel so nauseous?

“We need someone on the inside who can report to us. A pregnancy can be kept a secret until about two months have passed.” Hux listed off. “I have informed Phasma. She will be here shortly.”

Ben looked at Hux in amazement and also a fair deal of resentment. Hux was always shrewd. Always thinking ahead. Always focused on the one goal. And rarely lost his temper unless it was with his army. He had a handling and a flair for politics that Ben did not and he resented him for it. Then Ben would be ashamed to feel jealousy towards such a man. It was beneath him.

A short time later, the door knocked and Phasma strode in. She had always been a most remarkable woman to Ben and he knew that it was his favour that had saved her from charges that would have left her in the Tower. For a woman to behave so unwomanly could be a sign of witchcraft but Ben had not seen it that way. She was no more a witch than Hux was the second coming. By the time he had left court and gone over to Snoke, his parents had been much too occupied with the loss of their heir to care what Lady Phasma wore. And both Hux and Phasma had been careful to not show their loyalties until victory was guaranteed.

Ben saw to his surprise that she was not alone. Within her charge (and looking more a prisoner than a guest) was one of the girls from the Queen’s chambers. The girl, Rose he thought her name might be, was held by the forearms by Phasma and looked as though she’d been dragged from her bed.

Hux turned to Phasma. “Were you seen?”

“Nay. The castle is all at dinner and she was alone. It was easy.”

Rose tried to shake herself free but Phasma was always stronger. The girl whimpered as Phasma
dug her fingers in more firmly.

“That’s enough.” Ben dismissed. “Leave us. And make sure no one comes by.” Phasma and Hux left swiftly, leaving the girl alone and looking more alarmed by the moment.

“Be still. No harm will come to you. This is not an abduction or seduction; I need your help.”

Rose looked a little more steady at this but still did not look happy to be there.

“You are a lady-in-waiting for the Queen, are you not?”

Rose nodded. “Yes Sire.”

“And you are close to her?”

“She is a kind mistress. She keeps her friends near.” Rose proclaimed.

“One day I will be King. And no doubt your family will like it if you serve at the court of a King. I am in need of help. I need you to be my eyes and ears in her apartments. I need to know what she is doing.”

Rose straightened up at this. “She’s not doing anything! She does all the work of a noblewoman and is always at work.”

“Good for her. But I still need to know everything. You will be well rewarded. And I only want the truth so you won’t be pressured into lies. You would be doing your future king a service.”

The girl stood before Ben. She was very small and looked incredibly girlish in that moment. Vulnerable. Maybe afraid. Yet there was real bitterness when she responded. “I have no choice in this matter, do I?”

Ben smiled sardonically. “Not really.” He pulled out a gold crown coin from his pocket and put it in her hand. “You will have more when you report to me. Come every three days to avoid
suspicion."

Rose nodded and left without looking at him. Clearly her conscience would trouble her about this. But it could not be helped and he had a clear idea that she knew this. Besides every family wanted to make their way in the world and spying was as common as knighthoods. He would wager he had at least ten spies from different factions in his own household.

He must not fail. He must get the crown. And he must never think on that girl again as anything but the enemy. It was the only way.

The forest was dark and sheltered by trees. The cherubs and tweets of the birds made it not more calming but more hostile. He paid it no mind. He was hunting and not for animals.

He was dressed entirely in black with his face covered by a mask. It was not the type that you wore to pageants; this mask promised only to strike fear. It promised to hide his own fear when his face would not obey.

He followed the scent, the crack of undergrowth, and he hunted.

She was backing away amongst a clearing of rocks. She had heard his approach and was armed with a crossbow. When she saw him, she shot at him blindly. She was a good shot but his sword, now red and blazing with the fires of hell, cast the arrow aside. This sword was his legacy; it belonged to only Kings.

She ran and climbed the rocks around her with surprising speed. He followed. The arrows kept raining towards him; enough of this farce.

He flicked his wrist. The crossbow was thrown back. Her body was motionless. She was afraid. Appalled. He approached. Her fear mounted.

His enemy. His prey. She was so young. So oddly lovely. Dressed in rags yet with the bearing of a warrior.
“The girl I’ve heard so much about.”

She was incapable of reaction but her fear was palpable.

He turned his back on her to contemplate his next move. When he moved back around her, she was not dressed in rags. Her gown was blue and flowing and her hair was loose and long. Yet her face was still frightened.

His hand came out to touch her face. She winced as though the act would hurt her.

I don’t want to hurt her.

He takes his opportunity. He flicks his wrist and she falls. He picks her up before she can hit the ground.

He’d caught his prey. Yet he would not perform the kill. He wanted to protect this girl. He had what he needed.

As he walked away, he turned. Han was looking on. His face was angry. His eyes sparkling with tears.

Ben carries Rey away without a word.

Ben gasped awake and sat bolt upright. Where is she? Where?

She’s gone. She was never really here.

Ben looked to his prie-dieu and shaking lay back down. No prayers would help him tonight.
It's hard to keep Rose in character as obviously we haven't seen her in action yet but I've decided to keep her loyalties ambiguous until we have confirmation. I'm already rooting for her - Kelly Marie Tran is so adorable and I want Rose and Rey to be friends :)

Once again, I love seeing a (1) in my inbox so indulge me and tell me what you think.

MWAH!
Chapter Notes

I wrote this while listening to 'Dynasty' by Miia. I think its perfect for this era and Star Wars in general.

As usual my love and thanks to https://poethrotsvitha.tumblr.com/ for being my beta and a huge help and to https://jebeslemon.tumblr.com/ for being my Reylo wifey and an all round babe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The doors to the Great Hall opened and all eyes turned towards it. Two yeoman of the guard flanked the figure of the Prince. Dressed like a shadow and with one across his face, he looked forward as though he could only see ahead and the people who formed the walkway were of no importance and as clear as glass. He looked straight ahead towards the dais.

Towards his King and overlord.

Rey could only watch as he began the silent walk through the Great Hall to kneel at his father’s feet.

Stood a little way off from the throne with her ladies (yet close enough to still show precedence) she stood in her red silken dress with cloth of gold sleeves and tried to keep her face as bland and as neutral as though she were hearing a rather bland and unimaginative sermon.

Han had explained to her what must take place before Ren was truly accepted back to court.

“He must show remorse before the court.” He’d stated while they had taken their nightly cup of wine beside Rey’s fire. “I have spared his life and his inheritance; now he must show it was not in vain. He must show himself to be humble and to be humbled.”

“What must he do?” Rey asked feeling apprehensive.

“Nothing wretched. Not in the eyes of the court and the world anyway. I’m not going to have him walked through the streets in his night shirt and hose anyway. But he must beg forgiveness.
Otherwise there can be none.”

Rey had nodded. In hindsight it seemed an incredibly easy deal. His actions had been traitorous and had broken the heart of his family. He had escaped death and the executioner’s axe; the least he could do was give the court a show.

Now, as Rey stood in her regal gown, it seemed much harsher.

This man, so proud and haughty, was to be brought low before his father. He must show himself to be an obedient son or face the full wrath of the King’s displeasure.

There was silence as he walked through the pathway made for him. Yet Rey took this opportunity to study him further. In his black clothing and matching waves of hair, he looked more a prince than ever. He had the set jaw, the determined sparkling eyes of a warrior and he towered over his guards. Rey was confident that he could immobilise them with a sweep of his sword. She noticed that his scabbard lay empty at his hip; probably for that very reason.

He came before the dais where his father sat upon his throne. Rey was stood a little off to the side leaving her own throne vacant. This was a play that she could not be a part of. She was not the late Queen and it never felt more imperative to not attempt to emulate her than this moment.

The Prince stood before the King and slowly, stiffly, as though he were being pushed by force, he sank to his knees. Han remained seating in his chair, glaring down in paternal displeasure at his wayward boy. He’d made a grand effort today. He was dressed in puffed sleeves and looked strong and commanding. Yet his eyes, oddly cold and harsh, were the most impressive thing about him.

The Prince looked up at his father and there must have been something in those eyes that shocked him for he lowered his gaze to the floor and bowed his head.

He spoke then. Quietly enough so that it felt rather intimate but loud enough for the court to hear. He had a ringing quality to his voice; it carried from the highest born lords to the most lowly of servants. It would be a good quality in his speeches later on when he did come to the throne.

He spoke of his failings, of his wayward ambition, how the influence of others had led him down a dark and unforgiving path. Rey listened to this litany of excuses feeling rather cold. This speech was full of fanciful words and high-flung sentiments but the performance was lacking.
This had all been prepared for him and he’d been forced to revise it; he didn’t mean a word. There was still ambition bubbling beneath those black eyes and he was still unable to fully mask it. He must have never been gifted at card games; his face would have lost him a fortune.

Rey raised her eyes to look around. The court’s eyes were all on the Prince and this was a good time to carry out an inspection of the enemies: when they thought you were not looking.

The majority looked haughty at the man who had betrayed his royal father. It was a sin and the whole foundation of life as many knew it was to honour and obey the scriptures. And yet Rey saw more.

Sir Armitage Hux was stood across from her with the other members of the Privy Chamber and did not look put-off by what he saw; he seemed a little amused though Lord alone knew that she’d never seen the man smile. Sir Hux’s character seemed to be an enigma to Rey. He did not seem to find the Crown Prince’s actions to be traitorous but rather troublesome. He did not like the Prince (that much was clear) but he seemed eager to keep on his side. Personal feelings seemed irrelevant to this Chancellor because where power lay was where his future would lie. That was probably why he was careful to never offend Rey as she may one day be the mother to the next heir to the throne. As soon as that never happened he would disregard her as nothing more than a nuisance.

Another face that caught her notice was the face of Captain Poe Dameron. He was not standing far from the other gentleman of the court and was looking down at the Prince was utter disgust. This took Rey by surprise as such blatant dislike between the two men had not been known to her. This was a man who took loyalty to his sovereign very serious and it made her heart lighter.

The Prince fell silent but did not raise his head. He was still the picture of submission.

Han sat forward slowly and almost bent over so that his son could hear him.

“Look at me.”

The Prince was slow raising his head. As he should be as he was soon staring into those unfathomable eyes.

It stole Rey’s breath a little when she realised: Han wanted to humble his son. He had pardoned him and spared his life for dynastic purposes but as a father he was still human and he was still furious. The anger that had been waiting patiently behind the hurt, sorrow and self-reckoning
had finally a chance to show itself and Rey could suddenly see why he had lived so long in such a
dangerous world. Han was a King not just because a Princess had fallen in love with him but
because he knew how to fight, prosper and survive. His modest upbringing was neither here nor
there as he was born to be a ruler amongst men whether it be a court of ambitious retainers or a
band of smugglers in one of the many ports and docks.

He was a King and he would command his son to acknowledge this.

The Prince stared up at his father as though shocked out of his pride and submission. This was
clearly not part of the script.

“Do you understand what you’ve done? What you did? To me? To her?”

Han spoke quietly enough so that only the gentry could hear and yet Rey wished she was huddled
down with the guards at the other end of the court. She was eavesdropping on a private moment
and it felt indecent.

The Prince’s eyes suddenly shined and the sorrow that the court demanded was suddenly there for
all to see. When it came to the mention of the late Queen not even her traitor son could remain
impassive.

“Yes.” He whispered back after a moment.

“Do you accept responsibility for it?” Han pressed on.

“Yes.”

There was silence and the court seemed to hold its breath. Would the King change his mind and
send him back to Tower after all? Not even Rey was sure.

Eventually Han got to his feet and held out his hand. “Rise.”

The Prince got onto his feet. He was still able to stand above his father yet he looked oddly like a
cowed boy. Han had made his point and balance was restored. Slowly, Han took the Prince’s
“Then come and join us. And let this matter be lain to rest.”

The court seemed to collectively breathe again and Rey smiled quietly to herself to see a family reunited when it had been so fractured. The Prince joined his father of the dais and sat at his right hand in a seat that was golden if not lower than his father’s.

Han turned to Rey’s direction and gestured her forward. The Queen must sit on the left side to show unity.

Rey stepped forward and stood before her chair. She chanced a glance at the Prince.

He was looking right at her and the sorrow that was in his eyes was still present. Then they began to harden to see Rey at his father’s side as his wife and Queen.

Rey did not look away though she felt herself growing warm. She was not at fault here; she had done what any sane girl would and did not regret her decision.

Yet he saw her as an obstacle and an enemy.

The royal family sat down on the thrones.

A mummer’s farce, Rey reminded herself, and she had been brought on for the encore.

The court was a flurry of activity once the Prince was back in the core of the royal bosom. While many still looked upon the Crown Prince with suspicion, the excitement of having the heir to the throne back where he belonged was tantalizing and many could not help but gravitate towards the younger man. He was after all their future and their chance of prosperity in the new reign. No-one wanted to lose their power or position; appeasing the next in line seemed as good a way as any to maintain it.
Of course many kept their eyes trained in all places where power was a possibility. Still the gaze of the court lingered on Rey’s waist. If Rey took a fancy or an eversion to a certain type of food, the court would whisper and buzz like a hive of bees. Rey’s stomacher remained taunt around her waist and made her look more slim than was fashionable. She knew that women were encouraged to be a little bit plump with blonde hair and rosy cheeks and knew that she was the exact opposite of fashionable. And yet she felt confident. It was pleasing to be married to a man who cared nothing for how slender she was or about her freckles or about her lack of forthcoming pregnancies. Indeed Han seemed to know all too well what the court was anticipating from her.

Rey was walking back with her ladies from the palace library when she came across a corridor that she had not walked down before. The palace of Naboo was so vast that Rey had not explored much due to her reluctance about getting lost and wish to adapt to the few rooms that she had been assigned for her own chambers. She had grown up with only one room and had needed time to adapt to her change of fortunes. Now however as came upon the wooden door, she felt her curiosity peak and she pushed it open to reveal a long gallery with almost no furniture. But portraits. So many portraits.

She instructed her ladies to stay by the door as she explored this new world. The walls were painted white and the floor was marble and echoed her heeled slippers upon the floor. The whiteness of the room made the vividness of the colours seem more potent.

She saw that this was the gallery of royal family portraits. Each of the Skywalker empire was immortalised in turn.

Rey smiled at the portrait of her husband. It must have been painted not long after he became a Sir and therefore warranted such prestige. Yet his surcoat was not glittering with jewels and he did not wear a jaunty hat encrusted with pearls. Instead he stood, hands on hips and with a quirk of the mouth, as though he posed for grand painters everyday. His brown hair looked full of lustre and his face was handsome and free of lines. He had clearly been a man of great shape and had been said to have been one of the best horsemen of his day. He was said to be exceptional in the joust and had insisted that his lance, The Falcon, was repaired again and again or that some decoration of it still remained in the detail. Rey wondered if she would have been as happy in her marriage with this man had she met him at this age.

Next to him, standing alone in her own portrait, was the late Queen Leia. In this portrait she was nothing but what she had been bought up to be: a princess.

Dressed in a white gown that made her look like a bride, her hair was done in a fashion that made it look like two buns on either side of her head with the help of a golden caul. Her face was young and beautiful and was clearly more expensive to have made than Han’s own painting. She had of course been raised with the rulers of Alderaan and had given the name to her son even when the kingdom ceased to exist. Her brown eyes sparked. There was a fight in them that lay behind the
beauty; a woman who would fight for what she wanted and hang the consequences. If any other woman had tried this, she would have been vilified as a she-wolf. Leia Organa had not been any other woman.

Rey moved down the room and saw paintings that she had not yet witnessed.

Next to the paintings of the rulers of England hung another painting. This was not of an adult but of a young boy. The sitter couldn’t have been older than thirteen when this painting was commissioned and like the Queen it was clearly by the best painter that the realm had to offer. The child was so lifelike that almost wanted to reach out and touch it to see if the painted flesh felt soft beneath her fingers. Yet she stayed her hand.

The boy was tall and wearing fine livery with a backdrop of what were clearly royal chambers. There were books upon a lectern and a window painted behind him that showed the kingdom going on behind him. He was dressed in blue doublet and hose and it made his pale face look even more marble like. His black hair was fairly long and he had ears that stuck out a little. His eyes were deep brown.

Yet what caught Rey’s attention was the expression in his face. The painter must have been very fine indeed as he seemed to capture the emotions that the sitter was trying to conceal (or so she suspected). He looked serious. Pensive. Unsure. Sad. It was without doubt the best painting in the hall and yet the sitter seemed as though he longed for nothing but to be somewhere else.

Rey stared at the painting for a long while.

“So this is where you’re hiding.”

Rey whirled around at the source of the voice to find Han standing in the door. His hands were on his hips but his face was indulgent. Like he suspected her to start sneaking off sooner.

Rey curtsied and turned back to the painting.

“Not hiding. Just exploring.”

Han came towards her and looked up at the portrait with a sigh. “I was a handsome devil in my day.”
“You clearly knew it too.” Rey mentioned a little coquettishly causing him to raise an eyebrow and then shrug as though in relative agreement.

“Many called me a braggart. Yet I was so pleased that a painter wanted to capture my likeness. I was flattered. Nay I was insufferable. Leia may have knighted me but she never ceased to poke fun at my arrogance when I got too big for my own ego to contain.” He looked up at the portrait of the wife that came before Rey and would always be his last love.

Rey looked to the portrait of the boy. “Such a sad child.”

Han looked to where her eyes rested and sighed. “Ben was always a solemn boy.”

Rey looked at him in shock and then back at the portrait.

Of course. Of course. Who else would it be? Who else had such black wavy hair and a pinched mouth? Yet there was nothing cold about this teenager; he seemed only lost.

“He was never inclined towards ruling. His mother and I both thought that he may follow in Luke’s footsteps and enter the church. He has always been devoted in his faith. Indeed he spent much time with Luke before we sent him to begin his training for ruling. When it became apparent that we would be blessed with no more children, our hopes were pinned on him. At first Lord Snoke had seemed a good thing and I wanted to believe that he was making Ben except his fate. Alas…” Han shook his head.


“There was a time where we thought he did. He was just what a prince should be.” Han led her further down the gallery to another selection of paintings. At the end of the hall, Rey’s eyes fell upon another trio of personalised portraits. The first man was blond and blue-eyed, dressed in black and clearly ready for command. Luke Skywalker looked a world away from the farm-boy he had once been. At the age of twenty-three, he was a commander amongst men and had duelled the usurper to win a victory for his people. Indeed he was the very image of a storybook prince. “He fought braver than any man I ever knew. I was honoured to be able to call him my brother-in-law. But he saw so much death; so much bloodshed that could have been avoided. I think the guilt of being the son of such a dangerous man had more of an effect than he would ever admit. So when the crown was offered to him, as the only male heir of Amidala’s lineage, he couldn’t make himself to do it. So the crown passed to Leia and by extension myself for no woman had ever ruled
alone in her own right."

“He became a holy man, did he not?”

“The holiest of men. The Archbishop of Tatooine as he is now known. He has spent thirty years watching people live, love and die and to be a spectator is all he wants now. He’s had enough experience for his troubles.”

Rey turned to look at the remaining two portraits. The last woman was painted in a crimson gown with long sleeves and elaborate jewels. If Leia was aiming for understated and virginal then this woman was aiming for grand and regal. She too wore a headdress though it was more expansive than her daughter’s; this one was style almost like she had horns. Yet her face was as lovely as her children.

Padmé Amidala had been a tragic Queen. Loved by her people, ruled by conviction, killed by devotion. That had become her motto.

For her downfall had been love and she had loved the wrong man when she had loved Anakin Skywalker.

The father of Leia and Luke had been the Duke of Tatooine who had risen from humble origins under the patron of Qui Gon Jinn, Earl of Coruscant. The maverick Earl, who believed boys should be trained on their talents rather than their birth, had died in battle no more than a month after meeting young Anakin which caused him much lamentation. It wasn’t the end for him of course as the Earl’s second-in-command, Lord Obi Wan Kenobi had taken the boy on himself.

They had loved one another like brothers and came to the attentions of the Queen. And therein lay the downfall.

Rey looked up at the last portrait. Anakin Skywalker as he had last been seen. He’d been a handsome man and it was no wonder that both Leia and Luke had been blessed with such fine looks with those two as their parents. Dressed in a brown surcoat and breeches, his sword held in his hand, he looked the image of the commander he was destined to be.

But power is addictive and he wanted more. More than the Queen could give. He fell into the clutches of the Emperor and it all fell down from there.
By the time Luke had ended his father’s suffering, he’d been a wreck of a man and his wife was over twenty years dead. Their marriage had been a source of controversy as many suspect that the union had been a sexual one and had only produced two bastards. Yet soon it was confirmed that the Queen had married her traitor Duke in secret and the way was cleared for the twins to take the throne.

Rey lowered her eyes. What a family she had married into.

“I know what they are saying.” Han intoned gently. Very softly so his voice wouldn’t carry. Rey looked up at him in confusion. “About you not being with child yet.” Rey flushed that he had heard the slander of the court. “Do not trouble yourself. We know it will not happen and I have no appetite for a child at my advancing age. You are my companion and you have been a most welcome source of strength for me; you are utterly secure.”

Rey flushed at such praise and covered the hand that held hers with her other one.

“I truly grateful for that. And I will always try and be a source of happiness for you.”

Han smiled fondly. “Well, one thing you will have to submit to is having your portrait added to this gallery.”

“Me? Who on Earth will want to paint me?”

“You are now the Queen. Whether you consider yourself important or not, you are still the most powerful woman in the kingdom.” Han teased. “Indeed, it has been many years since I have had an accurate likeness taken. God alone knows what I will be made of on a canvas.”

“You will still be a fine King who his subjects adore.”

Han shifted. Most Kings wanted to bask in the praise they saw as their right but Han never seemed to know what to do with it. As though being deemed good or wise was bad for his image.

“Yes, well, I will also have to commission a new painting of Ben. He is a man now and no doubt the ladies of the neighbouring countries will want to see how he has grown. He is well passed marrying age and an alliance with a foreign power would be shrewd… once I trust his good behaviour, of course.”
Rey nodded. It made sense. But Lord alone knew how the Prince would react to such talk.

“Maybe one of the Archbishop as well?”

“Good idea. He’s not quite so youthful now. He has a beard. And is grey.”

“No shame in that.” Rey countered.

“None at all. Besides Luke knows all about shame. He’s a dab hand at it. Most people don’t kiss their sister and live a calm life afterwards.”

Rey halted in shock. “What?” Han had the audacity to look amused.

“They didn’t know they were twins then. And Luke was granted absolution.” Han opened the door. “Twice.”

Rey could only stumble out of the gallery with Han chuckling behind her.

Ben walked down the halls on his way to dinner. His grooms trailed behind him but not in a way familiar at all. It was not like his father’s retainers and gentlemen or the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting: Ben did not have the time or the trust for friends.

The past week had been both a success and a failure. He’d been accepted back to court publicly and had managed to hold courteous if tense conversation with his father. Members of the court were already scrambling to be known to him again and the more support he had, the more powerful he was.

Outright rebellion had not worked but subtle power play might. Whether the nobility liked it or not, Ben was the next in line to the throne and would be King in time. His father was ageing and Ben was still fit and healthy. It was natural to plan for their future and the future was undoubtedly Ben’s.
But he was still on too shaky ground to do anything rash. For the time being he must be on his best behaviour. Say please and thank you and remember to bow at the right times.

And he must keep an eye on the Queen.

The lady-in-waiting Rose had come to his apartments every three days as agreed but she had nothing to report as such. The Queen was always with one of her retainers and never did anything to besmirch her dignity. She received petitions, greeted diplomats and attended the King. Her breadth at politics seemed to be short but she had spent time in a nunnery and therefore was not one for mind games.

Ben tried to keep this in mind when he asked about her and how often she visited the King. He tried to focus on his fear for his position rather than disgust and dismay.

If he found out that she was quick with child… he didn’t think he could stand it. He knew beyond doubt that he would not be able to remain at court but for the life of him couldn’t answer truthfully as to why.

She was an opponent. She was a barrier. She was an obstacle.

She was the reason he spent so long in prayer. Why his sleep was so disturbed. Why he woke up every morning before dawn to go to the window and look out.

Why he felt such loss at the lack of forgiveness he felt God grant him or why he nearly tore the curtains in frustration when Rose had informed him that she had found a more solitary spot away from his window at the other side of the garden was another matter altogether.

He strode into the court and felt a slight satisfaction as many bowed down to his entry. This was more tolerable than his last performance here. He took his seat on the raised dais that was meant to seat the royal family. It was only a moment when the trumpet heralded the arrival of the Queen… but no King.

Queen Rey was dressed in an emerald green gown with her hair masked in a French hood. Her face was not overly made up and she gave warm smiles to the courtiers. Some he knew that she had taken a dislike to; she was becoming a courtier already then. The green of her dress made her skin look sun-kissed and her corset squeezed her breasts upward to make them seem more prominent.
yet not indecent.

Ben resisted the urge to punch at his ribs where an old injury lay. Pain was a focuser.

The Queen stepped onto the dais and dipped a curtsey to Ben which he returned with a bow.

“Good day, Your Grace.” She said politely.

“Good day, Madam. Where is the King?”

“Out hunting with Sir Chewbacca. Apparently they sought a boar for such a long time that it was nightfall before they caught it. He is residing at the estate.”

Ben felt the dais tilt beneath his feet. He must endure this woman, this girl, without his father’s company? He had never done that before. He’d hoped he never would. And now he must dine with her before the whole court?

He had no choice. He sat down beside her.

The dishes were bought out and Rey sent many cuts to the noblemen as was custom. Ben would have lamented that she had usurped his duty already but truth be told he didn’t care who had venison and who had ham. Let them all starve for all he cared!

He was busy divesting his cup of wine when the Queen spoke for the first time.

“How do you find being back at court, Your Grace?”

Ben considered ignoring her and to focus on his duck but he was conscious that any reports of bad behaviour would go straight back to his father.

“Well enough.”

A silence hung like a tapestry between them.
“Your father, the King, has mentioned that he would like new portraits painted of you and myself.”

“Does he now?”

“You last sat for a portrait as a boy.”

“Aye, I remember.” A tedious time of it that had been. And it had just made him look like a lanky, big-eared, melancholy idiot.

“Your likeness must be recorded accurately.” Rey continued in honeyed tones though she sounded like she was making more effort now to stay as calm. “There will be princes in Europe who will wish to see how the Prince of Alderaan looks.”

“Portraits are rarely of a true likeness. It is just a romantic ideal that the artist wishes to flatter so he gets paid. Indeed I bet he will make my father look even more polished than his last painting. Though they may need to add the colour grey to their paint pallet.”

“Stop it.” Rey hissed though she made sure to keep her eyes on her plate and her mouth as still as she could. “He is a good man.”

“He would have disappointed you.”

“Why are you acting so hateful?” Rey demanded looking at him for the first time. Ben turned and stared back. The fire that burned in those amber gems was startling. He’d seen her serene and queenly; he’d never seen her passionate before.

“I’m not being hateful Madam.” He said through gritted teeth and willed his eyes to not sweep all over her. God’s blood, she looked ravishing. “I’m being truthful. You may love your King as is your duty as a wife and Queen. But don’t meddle in my affairs.”

“I am not trying to meddle; I am trying to be kind. As is he. As are we all.”
Ben stared at her. He’d never trusted kindness and he wouldn’t allow himself to now. Not even when kindness took such a bewitching form and smelt faintly of rose petal water. Her eyes continued to burn. And in a moment he saw: he saw her loneliness, he saw her fear of being alone. He saw the deep tiredness in her eyes; she must be desperate to sleep. But before he could look further, her own eyes furrowed as though she had seen something remarkable in his own face.

“You… you’re afraid.” She whispered. Ben sat back in confusion. “That you will never be as strong as Lord Vader.”

Ben wrenched away as though ripped from a grip of steel.

How had she known? How had he known?

Rey’s breath was also tremulous. As though she were shaken as well.

Rose suddenly came to her side. “Are you well, Your Grace?”

Rey slowly looked around and up at her lady-in-waiting. And then Ben realised that the court was looking over in confusion at the two of them.

“Yes,” Rey’s voice broke through his own scattered thoughts, “yes, I’m quite well.”

Chapter End Notes

The comments are fantastic and I’ve been so overwhelmed. Indulge me and let me know what you think of this one too.
Chapter Notes

The response... my God the response! It makes writing an absolute pleasure! Thank you all so much.

Special mentions to Poet Hrotsvitha for being my eternally patient beta and to Jess444 for being my Reylo wife and making the amazing images you see below. They can be found here at https://jebeslemon.tumblr.com/

The manips of Rey and Ben are courtesy of Buiuna at http://buiana.tumblr.com/
Rey did not sleep well that night. She lay awake in her bed, Jessika snoozing beside her with the expression of one who was untroubled by her dreams. Rey gazed at her lady with interest. She was a good woman and had been a great help to Rey. There were certain aspects of court life that had been hard to grasp when she had first become the intended next Queen.

Jessika was everything a court lady should be: she was poised, beautiful with an advantageous marriage and two young sons who resided with their governess in the countryside. As a woman and as a wife, she had done her duty and therefore gave Rey tips to conceive easily. She advised pilgrimages and special herbs as well as ways to tilt her body when ‘the King came to her bed at night’.

Rey bemoaned her need for secrecy. She would have loved a friend of the female sex in that moment. Would have said a thousand Masses if she could have woken her bedmate and laid her soul bare. Told her that there was no hope of a child and she was content to die a virgin if it meant she could stay in this palace with the man she thought of as her father. For she had prayed for a family for so long and, even if her prayers had been delivered in a most peculiar way, they had been granted nonetheless. Instead she lay quite still and stared up at the canopy. Thinking over the events of that night…
It shouldn’t unnerve her. It was no more than a whim or a lucky guess, she chided. She’d just caught him at a weak moment. He had been too busy being insolent to be a deft politician. That was all. That was all.

But…

He’d seen her pain too. She knew he did. They had seen for just a second the soul of the other in one another’s eyes. A bond. A connection. Fleeting and only for a second but more powerful in that second than anything she had ever experienced either at court or on her knees in prayer at Jakku.

The Prince was a strange man and seemed incapable to conform to any of the true roles that were expected of him. Or maybe he simply refused to out of spite. As a Prince he was meant to be gallant, generous and wise. Rey knew not to hold onto that hope as he had proved he was not a typical Prince. Rey had braced herself to meet a monster and yet one hadn’t come to call. A monster wasn’t meant to be virtuous, have a face that promised deep sensitivity and intelligence beneath his deep brown eyes and a sadness that hung around him like a cowl. The man was a contradiction in every way – when her heart was hardened against him, she would witness something that would thaw it. When she tried to show compassion he would act in a manner that would make it disappear like smoke.

The way he looked at her sometimes…

Rey gently got out of bed so not to disturb Jessika and walked to the chair beside the fire. The embers were dying and provided little warmth and light but the sight of it left her calm. And she needed calm.

The court had witnessed their… connection. People would talk. They would spread the news that the Queen and the Crown Prince had rowed publicly though no-one had been able to hear what about. How Christendom would laugh – at the Prince being chastised by his stepmother only just out of girlhood! She winced to think of the titters that would have taken place in so many chambers tonight. What was she to do? All she knew was that she could not share this with the King. She couldn’t share their moment of frightened understanding with anyone. She had to take it to her grave.

Not understanding something made it no less dangerous. And danger stuck to the person if you let it.

Grabbing a poker, she stirred the fire and wondered when her husband would come back to the palace.
Ben had been staring at a page in his book rather blankly for about ten minutes when there was an announcement to his rooms. His groom bowed and announced the arrival of Sir Armitage Hux. Ben shut the book and put it aside without marking the page. He hadn’t been paying attention anyway.

Hux was a man of great wealth but was clever in showing it off. There were never any ostrich feathers in his cap or ridiculous bright coloured silk sleeves poking out of the slashes on his doublet. Indeed the man was as against bright colours as Ben himself. He wore only black, grey and white with the gold of his chain of office looking more stark on his chest as a result. But this man exuded wealth and it showed. The fur that trimmed his cloak was made of sable, his doublet was made of the darkest velvet and his leather boots were polished until they gleamed. The redhead came from an old family and they had managed to remain in a position of power by always betting on the winning team. The fact that Hux conspired and advised Ben was a good sign of his power though he refused to trust the man from his own gut instinct.

“Your Grace, I trust you are well.” Hux said, looking like being polite to Ben was a burden he must bear.

“Well enough. What news have you for me?” Best to get the niceties over with, as neither of them were good at it.

“It’s becoming something more of a conversation topic that your father intends to have a new portrait done of you. Since your last was when you were a mere boy.”

“Yes, yes, I know of his plans.” Ben waved away turning to look out of the window. She had told him last night. Amongst other things…

“No doubt. However we must think about what this represents.” Hux urged.

“Represents?”

“In the name of God, Your Grace, surely it is obvious?” Hux demanded, doing nothing to sound less impatient than he already was.
“Maybe to learned men like you but not to me— so indulge me.” Ben replied sardonically.

“A portrait signifies that your standing in the royal succession is daily getting stronger.” Hux explained exasperated. “The King wouldn’t be commissioning an expensive portrait of you if he planned to cast you out or deprive your head company of your neck.”

Ben thought on this. Loathe as he was to admit it, Hux had a point there. That was something to think on.

“With a likeness that represents you as you now are,” Hux continued without stopping for Ben’s thought process, “you will be soon the most marketed bachelor in Europe.”

“You think my father seeks a marriage for me?” Ben demanded.

“Of course. You are well past the age of marrying and you will want heirs. Many a young man wishes to find a goodly princess to wait out his dotage.”

Ben found himself suddenly feel rather closed off and trapped. Marriage. He’d always known that he would one day marry a grand princess or maybe a duchess if none were available. He had kept himself chaste for that reason and had taken secret pride in the fact that some royal princess would not come to Naboo Palace to find a stream of bastards running around. He would enter the marriage bed as untouched (or thereabouts) as the bride. But now he found he was not expectant or disinterested; he was unnerved. Startled. Afraid.

For the truth was he did not want to marry. Not now. Not after…

He shook himself. He was running away with his own thoughts. Portraits took a long time to complete. They would have to find a good enough artist then spend an age on what he should wear to look the most princely and then there would be hours of standing around doing nothing. Praise be, he would probably be viewing the next spring before it was finished!

He therefore pushed the fear aside. He still had time. To do what, exactly? He didn’t know and that made him frustrated.

“What about the Queen?” He demanded trying to keep his voice as unaffected as possible. “She is to have a portrait too.”
“Naturally. She is the wife of our current King and, for however long that might be, it must be acknowledged.”

Ben could only nod and found himself imagining her sitting for her portrait. No doubt dripping in furs and red damask with her pearls wrapped around her fine neck. She would be the envy of every Queen in Christendom…

He wished that he could punch his ribs without looking like a madman. He had been afraid last night at her words and now he was furious. In normal circumstances, he may have accused her of witchcraft but for the fact that, even though he never gave voice to what he saw, it had been so clearly pressed upon her face that it had been like reading from a lectern: he saw her story.

He must not lose focus of who she was. He could not. He must not…

“Are you listening, Your Grace?!”

Ben looked back at Hux, who was looking irritable at best.

“Repeat it back again.”

Hux sighed. “I was saying that you will need to exercise caution at the court. No doubt many of the courtiers have seen you have reassumed the King’s good graces and will now be seeing you as a prize catch for their daughters.”

At this Ben did manage a genuine laugh. “Have no fear Hux. There is no lady at this court who can turn my head.”

Well… There was. But she was as removed from him as the sky was from the Earth.

Han returned with Sir Chewbacca the next morning (with the boar in tow) and found his wife walking in the gardens with her ladies. She greeted him warmly and smiled as he recounted the tale
of the hunting adventure.

“I am glad to see you back, Sire. It has been odd at court without you.” Rey assured.

“For that I am sorry. Also I have heard some whispers that you and the Prince had something of a disagreement last night.”

Rey’s step nearly faltered but she was learning quickly never to show any sign of shock or discomfort. It pained her to use such a courtier’s technique on Han, as his prime reason for agreeing to marry her had been because she was not a polished gentlewoman. And yet she must conceal it all the same.

“We had some sharp words. He said some unkind things.”

“About you?” Han demanded.

“No! No. About… people in general.” She could not bring herself to tell his son’s spite towards his father. It was too unfair.

“Ah. Well that does not surprise me. Ben has never been one to hide his emotions. You will get used to it and learn to pay it no mind.”

Rey did not believe that for one second but thought better not to argue.

“I have also been doing some thinking while I was away. I have been… somewhat lacking as a husband.”

Rey found herself nearly faltering again. What was he… saying?

“I have been consumed with my loss of Leia and as a result you have had to play second fiddle to her memory. That is not fair and I am sorry for it.”

Rey was genuinely astounded. She had not been ignorant of Leia’s influence over her widower’s
life and had gone into her marriage with open eyes. So for him to now apologise for it was rather baffling.

“You do not need to-”

“But I must. I have even continued to wear mourning colours in your presence. That has been tactless. Your ascension as Queen is a good thing and you are already loved. That is no trifle. So I have decided: in the coming days we shall host a joust and a banquet in your honour.”

Rey let out a little noise that was neither joy nor despair. There was a part of her, a human part, that felt a little relieved to not have to be reminded at a constant rate of her predecessor. For how could she be a good Queen in her own name when she was always reminded of the last? However she was not gratified to think of so much fuss in her name. The quietness of their marriage party had been one of the best things about it.

Still…

“I’ve never been to a joust before.” Rey admitted.

Han’s eyes sparkled and he took her hand in enthusiasm. “It is a grand event. Dangerous, of course, but so long as the rider knows what they are doing they should be safe enough. The ladies are mainly spectators but you can give your favour to the rider you want to win. I was great horseman in my day. Could knock five men off their horses and not have a dent in my armour!” Han turned around to her ladies. “Captain Dameron will want to joust no doubt, Mistress?”

“Indeed, Your Grace.” Jessika agreed looking amused.

“And no doubt Sir Chewbacca.” Han looked back to Rey. “I would not put any money on his opponent.”

“He has knocked you off your horse quite a few times, has he not Sire?” Maz mentioned drily.

“I let him win!” Han argued turning back to Rey and then saying a bit more quietly. “Well… didn’t have much choice in the matter to be fair.”
Rey laughed and put her arm through Han’s. It may have been self-indulgent, but Rey could not help but look forward to the tournament that was held to honour her.

The tilt yard was decorated splendidly with Rey sat upon the pavilion looking around at the crowds and the men preparing to joust. Many courtiers were disappearing behind layers of plated armour and Rey sat amongst the ladies and gentleman who preferred not to partake. It was a dangerous sport and had seen many great gentleman being killed for their efforts. Hence why the royal doctors had insisted to the point of getting down on their knees and begging that Han did not joust. Rey looked to her left to the pleasing sight of her husband sat next to her on his raised throne. He still looked a little begrudging and disappointed but this was a weight off Rey’s mind that might have ruined the day for her.

Captain Poe Dameron rode up to their pavilion and raised his visor so the royal couple could see at least part of his face.

“It is a fine day for such sport. Will you wager a crown on my success, Your Grace?”

“I have not kept the exchequer well stocked by taking stupid risks, Captain.” Han said wryly though with no real malice in his voice.

“Think what a fortune you would have made by now if you had taken such on me.”

Rey laughed and even Han chuckled in a tutting sort of way.

Captain Dameron straightened his face. “Actually, I came to retrieve my good lady’s favour. My lady, with your leave?” Rey nodded her approval and Jessika stood up to tie a pale pink ribbon around the end of his lance, looking quite pink and pleased.

Rey smiled. She liked Captain Poe and would have placed a wager on him if she had felt any inclination to waste money on so frivolous a thing as gambling. She watched as Finn helped Poe get comfortable upon his horse. Poe said something to Finn that Rey could not hear before laughing boisterously and smacking Finn on the shoulder. The Master of the Horse looked at the Captain as though slightly awestruck. The Captain commanded a kind of hero worship in the younger man and it didn’t look like Poe minded very much at all.
For the first time, Rey wondered if maybe the Captain was known for being flirtatious as well as charming. Rey had spent her entire life in a nunnery so was not very good at reading flirtation in others, but then again, she’d always openly laughed if any of his winks or charms were directed at her. And they were always said before the King who seemed to find it rather amusing. Most of the court flirted with her. Lando Calrissian never failed to compliment how well she looked – although maybe he was hoping that saying the words would make it true and she would become quick with child just from the wish.

The ways of the court were dangerous, she mused, and she must forever be on guard for it.

Ben stood still as his pages strapped him into his armour inside the pavilion tent. His silver plated armour had not seen much action for some time (Snoke never had much need for jousting) but his father had taken his measurements especially when he had come back to court nearly two weeks ago and had the armourer working overtime to make sure Ben was able to participate.

The Prince had not wanted to participate. The Queen and himself had not spoken since that night nearly a week ago when they had shared such a strange connection. He could excuse himself to eat in his rooms and spend much of his spare time in prayer or practising combat but to outwardly ignore a tournament for his father’s new wife would be a snub too far. And his position was still on too shaky a ground to get to cocky. Or so Hux told him.

He was told that many gentlemen were participating, including Captain Dameron. Good. He had been longing for a chance to give him a good hard whack. Using the tip of his lance to unhorse him sounded quite perfect. Ben had grown up with Poe as Dameron was of an old noble family and had been raised at court. The boys were of similar ages and their parents had hoped that Poe would provide a childhood friend for the young prince. That plan had gone array and the pair loathed one another. Ben was never free from the comparisons growing up; about how well Poe danced, sang, played the lute and rode a horse. He was all a worldly and cultured prince should be and that made Ben find him insufferable.

The one person that didn’t think Poe was the jewel of the kingdom was Lord Snoke and maybe that said it all.

Poe had made his dislike of him plain over the years for reasons that Ben wasn’t interested in finding out and since he’d been invited back to court their enmity had not ceased.

Ben pulled on his gauntlets. He was determined to have fun today.
He left the tent and went out onto the courtyard to be saddled on his horse. The Master of Horse oversaw preparing the horse, a black stallion, when Ben noticed there were a group of ladies standing nearby. Ben looked over with disinterest to see all of them sinking into curtseys. That was not unusual as he’d been bowed to since he was in the cradle but the barely stifled giggles were.

These ladies were dressed in the best fashions and when they rose back up Ben could see that they were draped in fine jewels and with rouge upon their lips. They looked hungry; hungry for attention. Hunger for him.

Ah. So Hux had been right to warn him. If the King could marry a Duchess who appeared from nowhere and with nothing to recommend her but her family connections then why couldn’t an obscure girl grab the attention of the Crown Prince and rise to be Queen of England? And even if it didn’t come to that, even if the Prince merely lay down and had his way with them, the mother of a bastard to the King of England would never starve.

Ben looked at their painted faces and over-prominent bosoms in their kirtle and felt a mad urge to shake his head. Did they not see how foolish they looked? Did they not see that he would not be made to look foolish?

He got onto his horse and took the reins. The Master of Horse, his former footsoldier he was sure, backed away from him as soon as he was seated. It wasn’t clear if he was steering away from the horse or the Prince.

There were cheers as Ben rode out onto the tilt yard. He was the star attraction, there was no doubt of that. He hadn’t made a public performance for many years. This was quite an occasion.

He rode before the pavilion where his father was seated and kept his eyes lowered as though to show deference. For he could see the hem of Her gown. He would not look at Her.

“God give you good morrow, my son.” His father said in a clear ringing voice. This was clearly for the world to see a show of unity. “I hope you will prove victorious today.”

“Thank you Father. I will not disappoint.” Ben lowered his visor and then chanced a look up.

She was wearing a lilac gown with a floral kirtle and long flowing sleeves. The neckline was square so her pretty little breast was hinted at but not in a way indecent. She wore a French hood
with a veil hiding the rest of her hair and she only more simple pearls. There was no rouge upon her face and other paints. She was as she was born.

Ben nearly dropped his lance and had to gallop back to the stands quickly lest he embarrass himself.

He was suddenly emboldened. He wanted to put on a good show. To show them what a King he could be. And to show her what a man he could be.

The joust was incredibly exciting. Rey nearly jumped up and cried out many times and it was only with the expectation that disaster was always a moment away that she managed to master herself. The polite clapping as a man was possibly crushed seemed rather obscene though.

Captain Dameron rode extremely well. He managed to unhorse many knights and gentleman with little to no effort. Sir Chewbacca was also of the same mind as Han (or his doctors) and had decided not to joust. Maz seemed a little disappointed at this but Rey assured her chief lady that she was bound to see Chewbacca nearly kill someone one day and she cheered up greatly.

Yet the part that made her body feel oddly energetic and like it had lost its capability to stand still was the sight of the Crown Prince.

He had the best plated armour and rode a grand horse but it was not this that made him powerful. He had a baring in the joust as though he knew every moment might be his last and rode towards it faster as a result. He was a spectacular horseman.

Rey noticed that Ben had not asked any lady in the crowd her favour. As the Queen it was only acceptable to give it to the King so the ribbon wrapped around her wrist had remained there. It was lilac to match her dress. She found herself looking at it and then at his lance. Maybe she should have offered it. As a sign of friendship or truce. Even if the idea of a bold knight riding with her colours was rather appealing for a different reason.

Sometimes she could have sworn that he was looking at her from across the yard but when she went to look fully he’d gone another way.

The final two competitors were Dameron and the Prince. The air seemed to be crackling now as
though not even the court of manipulators and double-dealers could deny this was anything but exciting.

The two men stood as faceless creatures in armour at either side of the list. The flag was flown and they began to ride towards one another.

Rey gripped the arms of the seat. They were both evenly matched. It could be either. It could be…

*CRASH!*

The Prince’s lance smashed into Dameron’s chest and sent the man flying off his horse. The Prince’s lance splintered as a result but he rode on. He’d won the day.

Physicians ran to check Captain Dameron was alright. He was sat up looking dazed and sore but none the worse for it. The crowd, having realised that no-one was hurt except for injured pride, clapped their approval as the Prince seemed to ride out to take the applause.

His helmet was off now and his black hair, though sweat stained, shone in the summer sun. He looked victorious and commanding. And for a just a moment, though she would deny it in prayer later that night, she wished that about his person he carried some colour.

A strip of lilac to treasure alongside his glory.
Chapter Notes

Warning: Portrayal of infant loss and miscarriages.

Massive thank you to Jess444 for the manips and to Poet Hrotsitha for being my beta.
The sun was slow to disappear in the sky that night and the heat remained to hang over everyone at court. The Great Hall was packed to bursting with courtiers who wished to finish the days festivities with a grand feast. The candles that helped to provided some light to the dying day only added to the sweltering heat. The numerous meats that were bought before the king and queen lingered in the air along with the incense.

Ben wasn’t there to see any of it. He was walking in the royal gardens beside the overhanging trees. The gnats bit at his flesh that congregated around the trees but he did not care: he had a meeting to keep.
He arrived in good time and found that he was alone. Ben ground his teeth but sat upon a stone bench overlooking the lake before him. She would come; it would not be worth her while to deny him. And she wasn’t stupid – no-one was stupid at this court. And if they were they didn’t last long.

The purse of his winnings was fastened to his belt. It was the prize for winning the joust and the day. The Queen had handed it over to him before the crowd with a stiff back and a tight smile. Her eyes, once so curious as she watched him, were now guarded and untrusting. No doubt she had taken exception to how he had beaten Dameron – already he appeared to be a favourite with the new Queen. Friendship was weakness amongst royalty and Ben knew he should tuck it away in his mind for plotting purposes. It was remembered by the Prince but more for the fact that it made his chest hurt to think of Rey cheering on his adversary.

There was a rustle of branches and the crunch of gravel, and Ben managed to style his face into a more bored expression. He looked to the source of the noise.

Rose was stood before him with a dress that matched her name and a French hood studded in pearls. She was a pretty girl, Ben mused, though never one to smile or laugh in his company. Then again, why should she? They weren’t friends, they weren’t even acquaintances outside of these meetings; she was his informer and he paid her handsomely for the service.

The lady-in-waiting clearly had no love for the First Order but her family was up and coming and no doubt ambitious. The money and protection that her double agent role provided would be invaluable. He did notice however that the French hood she wore was much finer than she had previously adorned: was it a gift from the Queen maybe? It would certainly explain her reluctance to meet. But Ben could be persuasive. And no doubt the shadow of Hux and Phasma bursting upon her in the night like the first time was still hanging like a shadow over her life.

She curtsied respectably enough but there was a set to her mouth. “You sent for me, Your Grace?”

“I did. Three nights ago. Anyone would think you were avoiding me, Lady Tico.”

Her cheeks flushed and clashed with her dress. “I have duties. The Queen-”

“It must be strenuous sewing and playing cards.” Ben quipped standing up. “Anyway, you are here now.”
“Your Grace, we must be quick. I will be missed.” Rose’s eyes darted about as though scared someone might see them. For a lady to be seen with the Crown Prince and without a chaperone would have caused a ripple of excitement through the Court and no doubt she would gain more attention by it. Being the Prince’s alleged mistress clearly did not sit well with her. But she needn’t have worried; it was dark and the only sound was the quiet lap of the water from the lake.

“Then be quick: what news of the Queen?”

“Nothing.” Rose smiled for the first time. Almost as though it were a pleasure to deliver this news. “She attends upon the King, spends a lot of her time reading and walks in the gardens with her cat every day.”

Ben ground his teeth until they threatened to bleed. “Are you lying to me Mistress Tico?”

“Not at all. Any other courtiers may corroborate my story.”

Ben steeled himself for the next set of questions. The Queen’s lack of secret activity was not really a surprise but it was maddening to have such smug confirmation.

“How often does the King visit her bedchamber?”

Rose stopped smiling. This was clearly not something she wished to share with the King’s son. But he must know.

He must know…

“Three nights out of the week. Sometimes more.”

Ben tells himself he feels sick of the idea of the married couple trying to beget a son. For surely their chances were high if they met so often. He told himself that this was the reason he felt almost light-headed with despair.

“And how do they seem the next morning?”
“Same as before. The King rarely says much but he is always in a mild mood in the morning and the Queen seems content and chatty.”

Another blow. Another wave of despair.

It is because they may have a new heir. That's it. That's all!

“Do you change her linen on the bed?”

“It is my duty Sire.”

“And there is signs of...” He cannot say it.

Rose wrinkles her nose in distaste but then her expression looks confused. Like she’s just remembered something.

“No. No, actually. The bedding is always... as it were. The sheets have been slept in but... I have yet to see anything... unseemly.”

Ben looked at her properly for this. She did not seem to be spinning him a line. She seemed almost bemused at the remembrance. Maybe... maybe they were not as taken with one another as he feared.

He knew that it was not wise to feel calmer by the news (as he knew that some people did not limit carnal activities to a bed) but Ben didn’t want to be wise; he wanted to be content.

“Sire, I must go. My lady...”

“Yes, yes, quite right.” Ben waved his hand and then handed her a golden crown. She stepped back from it as though it carried the plague but Ben kept his hand outstretched. “Take it. You’ve already said the words.”
Rose did take the coin and dipped a curtsey though without much grace and then scampered off down the path she’d come. Back to the Queen.

Ben looked out over the water for a time and then began to make his way back towards the palace. He was debating what he had learnt. Nothing of substance. Yet it gave him hope…

He sighed and crossed himself. Such thoughts must be banished. It was a sin. A sin against God. A sin against nature. She may be his younger by ten years but she was his father’s wife. For all intents and purposes he should call her Mother. The idea of it made him shudder.

He remembered the whispered gossip that Phasma had overheard – for even as a woman treated like an outcast for her clothing choices and her head uncovered, she was still allowed some womanly privileges. Being able to overhear talk was one of them. People did comment upon the Queen. She was too thin which courtiers immediately believed meant illness or weakness. Labour would be hard for her no doubt with such small hips. She was too tanned – so unlike the pale pallor that was so popular and even had freckles. Like some common farm maid!

And yet Ben did not dismiss her for that. The freckles on her nose made her look quite young and her skin was very clear and good. The fact that she had caught the sun made her different from all other women and no less becoming. The smallness of her waist just made Ben imagine laying his hands there. For he had big hands and could probably make his fingers touch if he were to hold her…

No. NO! He is better than this. He is not weak like other men. Courtly love is outside his expertise but lust is beneath him. A Prince he was born and a Prince he shall remain.

Ben is amongst the trees and can see the steps back into the palace when he stops dead.

The King and Queen have emerged and are taking the air it seems.

From the light of the torches, they both look haloed. As though they are above mere mortals and have the appearance to match their powers. The royal couple are talking too quietly for Ben to hear but he backs into the shadows all the same. Forever observing in the dark corners of the world.

The Queen looked so different with his father and when she believed herself unobserved. She seemed lighter, more calm and content. She smiled with genuine affection at his father and her eyes did not reveal a double sidedness to her nature. Her marriage was a happy one. It made him
In that moment, he compared her to the only other lady that he had allowed into his life – Lady Phasma.

Phasma was a fascinating creature. In her, Ben found a woman who was content to be merely a friend and maybe an equal as far as talents went. She was from a rather distinguished family too but her status didn’t count for a lot when she chose to be a Commander of soldiers. He knew that it was talked about in the banqueting halls of Europe as abnormal or even heresy. But he admired her. She defied convention and had remained unambitious for the most. All she really craved was a chance to govern and domineer and the rest of the court could go hang. She did not try to grab a good husband and no man would have her. Men wanted a docile and obedient wife – they didn’t want a woman who could probably wield a sword better than them!

Oddly Hux also appeared to respect her too. Hux who respected no-one, man or woman or Prince! As a nobleman, Hux sometimes took a mistress, got bored and discarded them just as quickly. He married once when he was young but the lady died in childbirth with the babe and Ben never met her. Hux does not seem much grieved by this loss as it is the way of the world. And yet he looked on Phasma with evident respect. Maybe even a small amount of affection. Or whatever affection Hux was capable.

Rey was on the outside everything a wife should be. But was she? Ben couldn’t see Rey agreeing to the marriage to the King unless she saw it as a good bet. And she still had not shown sign of a child.

So why… why could he never see any other woman in a crowd but her?

He stayed within the shadows and waited there until both the King and the Queen were out of sight.

The King sat down in what Rey had come to know as ‘His Chair’ beside her fire and exhaled as though pleased to sit down. Rey got to work sorting out a cup of wine for him. They had dismissed their attendants claiming to want time alone. Rey had little to no doubt what assumptions they would make of that.

“Did you enjoy your first joust?” The King asked as Rey walked back to him. Her hood had been
discarded and her long brown hair now hung loosely.

“Oh yes, Sire. It was such fun!” Rey replied with enthusiasm.

“We’ve talked about this: call me Han when we are alone.” He corrected and took the wine from the outstretched hand.

“Han.” She said softly. Sitting down on the stool beside him, she wondered sometimes why calling him by his name was so difficult. Maybe because he was so much older and not her equal – no-ones equal really. Or maybe it was because Sire was the closest she could get to calling him Father. Because that’s who she saw him as. That’s what she loved him as. “I had a good time today.”

“I am glad of it,” he mused happily, “as we have some more places to visit soon. We must go to Theed Cathedral to pay our respects and so you can be introduced to Archbishop Skywalker.”

“He wants to see me?” Rey asked in scepticism. “Why?”

“You are the Queen and the late Queen was his sister. He probably wants to see if you are capable of taking such high office.”

Rey hid her hands in the layers of her skirt so that he did not see the tremor that ran through them. Han seemed to sense her anxiety and patted her shoulder.

“Don’t be frightened. Luke is not cruel; a little serious, perhaps, but not unkind. He will not be like Ben.”

Rey tried to school her expression at the mention of the Crown Prince.

“I have tried to be kind, Milord.” She insists, choosing to ignore his request to call him his name for just a moment. “I have tried to be gracious but not obstinate. Nothing seems to work.”

“I don’t expect miracles and have certainly never achieved any with Ben. Do not be too hard on yourself for that. Though I do think there has been an improvement.”
“Really?”

“Oh yes. He seems to spend much time in prayer or silent nowadays. It’s not the best of improvements but indicates a more thoughtful character. And any time he is not talking to that blasted Hux is always a blessing.”

“You don’t like Sir Hux?”

“No I don’t.” Han said with a decisiveness that was unlike him. “I say this only to you: I have strong suspicions that he was involved with the First Order Rebellion.”

“Really?” Rey gaped. “But then why is he still on the Privy Council?”

“Because I could not prove it. The little weasel covered his tracks well. And I could not have him imprisoned or got rid of without sufficient proof. Vader had done that and look what happened there!”

Rey stroked his arm in what she hoped was a comforting motion.

“The world is a dangerous one Rey. And what is dangerous is that there are times when I think Vader was a more effective leader than I. Not a popular one by any means but an effective one. It’s only the memory of who he became that tames me a times. I never used to be this thoughtful. I was a brash young man full of swagger and ideas above my station. Now I know that wisdom is not always a gift.”

The fire spat sparks from the logs as Rey and Han sat in thoughtful silence.

The streets were lined with people who had come out to see the spectacle. There had not been many processions that included the entire Royal family being seen. Lady Leia had sometimes visited her brother to reunite with him and say a few Masses before her death but she often came with a small retinue to not draw too much attention to her brother. The Archbishop, although one of the highest men in the land, was of a quiet nature and preferred the cloister to the court.
The people had watched with cheers and joy as the elderly King rode upon his mighty steed with the pretty young Queen riding her own chestnut mule. She smiled a lot and waved shyly to the crowd.

The eyes of the crowd continued to clap for the Prince who was their future no matter what. But their stares were not admiration here; it was trepidation.

Ben refused to dwell on this. He did not wave to the crowd as it would look awkward and beneath him. And he was not a man who inspired people to wave hats in the air and cheer until their throats ached.

Ben was happy to be slightly behind the King and Queen. It gave him a chance to observe and not be too obvious. She was riding pavilion (as was proper) and wearing a cloth of gold gown with a matching gable hood. It was oddly becoming on her, framing her heart shaped face and empathising her hazel eyes. He had been forced to grip the reins of his horse tighter when she had emerged with her ladies into the courtyard that morning.

The noblemen and women of the land trotted behind him. Dameron had winced with discomfort at getting on his horse which gave Ben a savage kind of glee. The Master of Horse was close to Dameron and they chatted together as they rode. This surprised Ben somewhat but then as he thought on it not at all. Dameron was one of those people who needed validation. He needed love and praise to shine and Finn seemed eager to be friends with such a man. The Queen’s lady, Lady Dameron, rode alongside them but did not try and join in. She seemed almost indifferent. Theirs had been a match made to enhance both families and not made purely for love. Yet they seemed to get on reasonably well and never seemed angry about anything when together.

The procession led them past the Tower and Ben’s eyes lingered on it. He could admit it now (although only to himself) but he’d been afraid. More afraid than he had ever been before. The ride up the river to Traitor’s Gate had been both endless and too quick. The stone steps had been wet from the river tide and he’d used this as cover for his unsteady feet. That had been the last time he had seen Lord Snoke.

He remembered the Lords whispered desperate pleas to the guards. About how a deal could be reached. How he could see him rich. If they would just…

But no. The guards were Ben’s father’s men and dragged the high Lord, with his long dark robe and face so gaunt it looked like he had hollows in his cheeks, protesting and pleading to the White Tower. Ben was led the other way to the Royal Apartments. It had given him a good view of Tower Green and of the sight of his old mentor being decapitated.
Ben still felt the prickles of betrayal at the memory. Snoke, who had taught him to always stand his ground and demand respect, had been reduced to such a pathetic figure. It had been a bigger punch in the gut than his imprisonment.

But now he was safe. He was free. And he passed the Tower without a backward glance.

Theed Cathedral was a magnificent thing. It was made around the time of the Normans and had stone architecture that manage to leave even Ben slightly awed.

Archbishop Skywalker was standing in the doorway surrounded by his novices and bishops. Bishop Tekka was also there. He had visited court once or twice but Ben had stayed in his rooms those times.

Han dismounted his horse and helped the Queen down. The Archbishop stepped forward in greeting.

His uncle wore his years without vanity or pretension. He’d always looked at the portrait in the closed gallery with amazement. This tall, blond haired blue eyed prince could not be his uncle. For the man on the Cathedral steps was greying and bearded with a softer waist and slightly hunch shoulders as though the sins of the world weighed heavily on him.

Ben hung further back than rank would dictate. He did not want to see his Uncle. Of all the emotions that had been stirred by his siding with Snoke, Luke had been the most angry. He had condemned him as a traitor and as Godless. Ben was sure he would have been excommunicated if the Archbishop had had his way.

While his father sunk into self-loathing and running away and his mother’s heart broke, Luke fell into almost satisfied anger. Like he’d been proven right all along.

Many had lamented his decision to enter the church. Luke should have, by rights, been the next King and Ben would have only been the Prince if he had not had an heir. There were rumours of an attachment that Luke had held for the Scottish Princess Mara Jade. It may have been her early death of the flux that had prompted his decision.

Ben was too far away to hear Luke’s words to Rey and his father. His eyes seemed kind to Rey and he bowed to her with ease. The rest of the company dismounted and they led the way into the
church. The Archbishop looked up then and caught his nephew’s eyes. There it was. That disappointment. That distrust.

Why are you here, they seemed to say.

Ben hung back and then slipped away to the side: to the North Transep where his mother’s body had been laid to rest.

The effigy was truly splendid. With a tomb imprinted with English Lions and carved with flowers and patterns, the model that lay permanently in state looked very much like his mother. It wore her dress and headdress and had the same bright eyes even if they were painted on. Ben almost reached out to touch the hands clasped together as though the model was permanently in prayer. He would have commissioned her holding a book – that was more her.

A slow trickle of grief passed through him. He’d never got to say goodbye and this was a poor substitute. She’d suffered because of him and no amount of Masses said for her soul could change that fact.

He’d envisioned what he would do when he came face-to-face with her marble tomb. All the things he say, the tears he would shed, the sorrow he would show and yet… nothing. It would not be heard and if she were in Heaven she would have heard his desperate prayers for her already.

Staring at the painted face for a while, his eyes turned to a floor slab not far from her. It was marble and had many names printed on. He walked around and felt such a wave of grief he nearly sunk to his knees.

Royal babies normally were buried without much of an effigy to remember them by. They had not made their way in the world and therefore could not be remembered as beautiful princesses or courageous knights. It was the way of things – people died young and that was the end of it.

Except it wasn’t. Not for him.

When Ben had been born as the living embodiment of the future of the Organa dynasty, it had been almost a given that many more brothers and sisters would follow. For the boy was lusty and loud (especially when he was hungry or displeased) and the doctors had been in triumph to deliver not
only a son but also such a goodly one too. The nurses clucked and fussed and mused how the nursery would soon be full of Solo children.

However this had not come to pass. The King and Queens attempts to have more children had all ended the same. First there would be a feeling of joy in the Palace at the news of a new baby soon to be borne then there was caution as though if anyone spoke too loud something bad would happen. And then there was silence, a midwife leaving the Queen’s chambers carrying either bloody sheets or a tiny little bundle that was never seen again. Ben had to be very quiet for a while but that seemed to make the muffled cries of his mother’s grief even worse.

Courtiers would whisper of it being God’s will and the way of things and how the Queen was still young. Ben learnt to be almost silent in corners of the Palace as he listened to this. He never normally had a moment to himself as he was always flanked by nurses or teachers so to sneak away and hear what people were really saying was interesting.

Then came the news of another pregnancy. The Queen’s tummy swelled and continued to swell. For months she seemed to get bigger and bigger and there was an intense feeling of hope.

The news had been sung loudly and with such joy that it had woken Ben in the night. His governess had tried to shush him to sleep again but was eventually willing to tell the little prince (with a rare smile) that his mother had been delivered of two children: a boy and a girl.

Ben did not go to sleep that night despite lying very still so his governess wouldn’t chide him.

He was taken to the Queen’s presence chamber the next morning to be introduced. But already they were greeted with tragic news.

The midwife informed the little prince that although delivered alive his little brother had not been strong enough for this world and had gone to live with God. Ben had felt the similar feeling as before: confusion as to what to do.

Everyone seemed so sad but he’d never even seen his little brother, Jayson as he’s later to find out, but he can still hear a baby crying in the room beyond. The midwife smiles a sorrowful smile.

“Jaina lives. Your sister remains with us.”
Ben is ushered into the room of such confusing emotions. His mother is propped up on pillows and looks red-eyed and drawn. The bundle in her arms held her attention and she beckoned him onto the bed. His nurse lifted him up so she could wrap an arm around her son.

The bundle revealed a tiny little person with a tuft of brown hair and a face like she was tasting something that she couldn’t decide was good or bad. So this was a baby. This would be his sister.

“You must be a good brother to her Ben.” Leia urged. “Your brother has now gone to God’s waiting arms so it is only her now.”

Ben could not help but stick out a finger to touch the child. Maybe to poke her or see what her flesh felt like. He poked near her hand and almost involuntary her tiny little one clasped around her finger. Being only five, his finger wasn’t that big but Ben was impressed by her grip. He smiled shyly at the baby and his mother kissed his head.

The princess had her own nursery away from Ben’s. As a girl, she was important as a royal princess but not as important as Ben who would be king. That didn’t stop Ben poking his head around the door every time he could and watching her sleep, fidget, eat or be rocked. She had a soft smell on her crown that he liked to bury his nose in. Her eyes were open more and she looked out at the world as though seeing it’s colours at last.

When she’d been three months old, Ben had leant over the crib as always to look at Jaina when she’d looked back at him. And smiled a gummy smile.

Ben had been momentarily stunned. Then cried, “She smiled. She smiled at me! She smiled.”

The nurses clucked and said how the whole world would smile on Ben. It was true that he was treated quite well because he would grow up important. But his sister didn’t know that. She only knew when she was hungry or tired or grumpy. She knew Ben because he stuck his face over her cradle. Maybe she knew he was her brother. But she didn’t know he would be King.

So if she smiled at him that meant she liked him. Him. She liked Ben.

Ben would visit the nursery often to play with his little sister and his mother would sometimes sit and watch them. Ben didn’t like having people watching him as it meant he wasn’t free to say what he wanted to Jaina.
When they were alone he’d whisper his plans.

“We’ll stay together and play together. You will share my tutors and when I have to go to another palace to begin my training to be King you will learn to write to me. You will grow up tall and have hair like mine. I hope you don’t have ears like mine. I will order dress makers to make you gowns and have the ladies braid your hair like Mother’s. I will see you have a fine marriage to someone you like and who is kind to you. You will live at my court and I will be King and we’ll play together always.”

Jaina had merely gurgled but he knew she understood.

So when he went to the nursery when Jaina was six months old and was stopped from going in, he’d been furious. He rarely stamped his foot but he did then.

The nurse had explained that Jaina was not well and had a fever. The doctors were tending to her. His mother was in there. Why was Mother in there? And why wasn’t he?

He went back to his apartments and waited. He did not play the virginals or read or anything. He did not play games or eat chestnuts. He waited.

Every time a maid came in, he’d demand to know where Jaina was.

It was nearly ten o’clock when the Old Nurse came to see him that night. Her eyes were red and her skin like old porridge. She’d told Ben that his little sister had gone to sleep and wouldn’t wake again. She was with God and she was happy.

Ben at first didn’t understand. Gone to sleep? Well, wake her up. No-one sleeps forever. They slept until they weren’t tired anymore and then they got up and went to Mass.

Even as a child, he knew what it was to live close to death. But he clung to the analogy of his sister sleeping. Because she couldn’t have left him. He was a good brother and she’d like him for being Ben. She couldn’t go. She couldn’t.

He tried to see his mother but she was shut up. His father too would not be seen. He raged against this shouting and bellowing that he wanted to see his sister.
His governess tried to shake him into being quiet but he darted around her and yelled louder. The other nurse was stood in the corner, openly weeping.

They took Jaina away before he could say goodbye. Soon the nursery was like she’d never been there at all. To make it worse they had not allowed him to attend the funeral.

It had been a week later when he’d finally cracked and cried so hard he was sick on the wooden floor. He was alone. Alone again. His heart was cracked and it hurt. It hurt his chest so bad.

He was sent away to another palace soon after and he was glad of it. Glad to be away from the gallery that led to the nursery. The one that was too quiet now.

He never got excited when his mother had another pregnancy as he did not want to suffer that pain in his heart again. His mother did have another boy Anakin but Ben never got to meet him. He died not long after he was born.

Lord Snoke had told him that he would never need to feel that pain again if he gave up love. If he just submitted to his duty and didn’t care about people.

So Ben stopped getting people to like him for himself and cut off the feeling to his heart. But the time he was sixteen he couldn’t feel anything anymore.

Ben touched the marble vault that held his brothers and sisters. Jaina was laid there, still sleeping her endless sleep. He felt the pain in his chest again at the thought of her.

He would have kept his promises. He would have dressed her well. He would have married her to a good man. He would have protected her. He would have. He would have.

He kneels to pray for his little sister. He looks up at the brightly coloured glass and prays for God’s grace. He prays for his chest to stop hurting. He prays.

There is a rustle of skirts behind him and he raises his head. His rosary beads bite into his palm. He crosses himself and stands. Then turns.
“Good day, Madam.”

The Queen stands before him in her cloth of gold and with a look of the startled deer.
Chapter Notes

Massive thank you again to my wifey Jess444 for the moodboards and to Poet Hrosvitha for all her help.

And a huge kiss to all you readers who have left kudos and comments on my little story so far. You are the light of my life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The meeting with Archbishop had gone quite well as far as Rey could see. He had been gracious if a little aloof and had shown Han and herself every courtesy when he had welcomed them into the cathedral. The interior had been just a sumptuous as the exterior with high and huge stained glass windows which showed depictions of saints and martyrs and huge stone pillars along the knave. Their footsteps had echoed as they walked towards the high alter. Han’s step faltered as he looked towards the alter as though it provoked a painful memory for him but he smiled at Rey (with clear effort) and said nothing.

Luke had been halfway through his blessing and service of thanks when Rey had noticed that the Prince was absent. At first she thought he was maybe at the back to put as much distance between himself and his Uncle as possible but upon the service ending she saw that this was not the case and he was nowhere in sight. Excusing herself with the claim of exploring, she walked around the cathedral, disguising her wondering gaze for taking in the architecture. Her ladies were busy hearing the Mass and so she was allowed to slip away unnoticed.

She was dressed in exquisite clothing today. Her cloth of gold gown was rather becoming upon her and made her looked quite lovely but also quite exposed. Han had pointed out that this was the point – the people had not come out to see himself and his old face (despite Rey’s protests) but her. They wanted to see the beautiful young Queen upon her chestnut mare with a smiling face for them and a wave of her bejewelled hand. Rey thought that she had performed rather well though her face had hurt a little from the fixed smile upon her face.

She let her fall against an alcove wall for a moment of exhaustion. Her hood was heavy and her gown too tight and she was tired from riding and the list went on and on. She wanted to rip off her hood to soothe her aching head and demand to go home. Because if she was honest she would like a day to herself in her apartments without seeing a single soul. She sometimes lamented that sharp shift from her isolation in Jakku to the decadence of life at court. She even has moments where she pines for her confinement again only to then remember the shattering loneliness and feel even more wretched for her ingratitude.

It was then that she realised there was a passage leading down the other end of the cathedral. With cautious steps, she walked down the stone pillared walkway.

The choir had started to sing in a haunting way that felt as though they were accompanying her as she made her journey.

The first thing to catch her eye was the colour streaming down from the stained glass windows. The second was the marble tomb that seemed to showcase a regal woman permanently at prayer. The third was of the dark figure kneeling down upon the floor with his hand on a marble slab upon
Rey had the feeling that she was witnessing something profound yet sacred. The Prince seemed to be bent over in both prayer and remembrance. His face was closed off but clearly in a place of pain.

Rey did not know who lay beneath the marble slab but was confident that it lay deep in his soul. That silent grief and sadness that was always lurking behind the anger, pride and coldness was never so apparent as now.

Knowing that she was intruding on a potentially intimate moment, the Queen began to back away. Unfortunately the silk of her petticoats made more noise than she would have liked and the rustling alerted the Prince to her presence.

Turning around, the Prince turned his dark eyes upon her and greeted her with cold courtesy.

“Forgive me,” Rey managed while still stepping backwards to get away, “I was curious as to where you were and... I shall be leaving now.”

Rey was intent on turning on her heel but the Prince’s words cut her off. “I’m touched at your concern. Is it the wrath of my father I can look forward to when I get back? Or the all-powerful Archbishop?”

“N-Neither. I wanted to see if you were-”

“I’m quite alright to walk amongst society without a chaperone. I am not a prisoner any longer, remember?”

Rey would have snapped at this condescension but was suspicious that it hid his fear that she had seen more than he was willing to show.

“Please. I’m trying here. I’m truly trying to be kind to you but you’re making it so hard.” Rey pleaded.

“Oh forgive me. I didn’t realise that the woman who was trying to replace my mother is having
such difficulty-"

“I will never replace your mother!” Rey cried suddenly so tired and hurt by the unjust accusation. “I never could and have never tried. I’m not a deputy Queen! I’m not even a Duchess, not really. I’m just Rey. Rey and I’m just trying to survive a world I barely understand. Why can’t you see that?”

The Prince’s eyes were still cold but there was a twinge of doubt in his brows now. Like he was rethinking his previous actions. But then he swallowed and it was gone.

“You are still barely a woman and I am still forced to accept you as my superior. Your husband is old enough to be your grandsire.”

“I know that. Of course I know that. But he is a good man and a good husband. Kindness is the most a woman can hope for in this world.”

“You could have married another-”

“But I didn’t want to! I wanted to marry Han Solo.”

There was such coldness and borderline hatred in his eyes that Rey’s breath stuttered. He moved quicker than Rey would have thought such a large man had any business doing.

“Then my approval obviously means nothing – seeing as you have such high regard with the King.”

He went to storm past her but Rey suddenly caught hold of his doublet to stay his gait.

“Why do you have such hatred to me?” Rey barked in a tone that honoured her new role. “I have done nothing. Nothing!”

The Prince seemed too shocked to struggle. He was staring down at her hands, so small against his broad chest, as though not entirely sure they were there. Rey took the upper hand and pushed her case.
“I am the Queen. Whether you like it or not I deserve your respect. And damn it, if I can’t earn it, I will command it from you.”

The Prince looked directly at her face then. It occurred to Rey just how small she was in comparison to her. Her head barely reached his shoulder. His hands grasped hers to tear them off his tunic.

“Unhand me. Immediately.”

“No, damn it! I am not some churl who will do as you bid just because-”

Rey’s hands were suddenly ripped from his clothing with such force she nearly toppled over. It was the steadying grip of the Prince’s enormous hands on her shoulders that steadied her and saved her tumbling to the stone floor. He looked like he wanted to shake her by the shoulders until her head became unsteady on her neck.

“You insufferable girl!” The Prince barked. His soft deep voice was no more. Instead he was practically growling like a dog. “You may be able to coax your way into baring a new heir but that does not mean you can command me like one of your maids! Don’t you see? Can’t you see what you will do to us both if you pursue this?!”

Rey knew she must look utterly stupid and as insipid as he claimed but she could not fight back. She knew she must chide him viciously. Maybe even strike him. But instead she was hypnotised by his proximity. He smelt like woodsmoke and velum with a hint of masculine scent. He really had a most peculiar face. He was not classically beautiful but invoked such emotions in her as she would feel while watching a sunset.

The view was hypnotising for both.

She realised vaguely that in her cloth of gold gown and his black velvet that they must look like two conflicting angels. She remembered the picture that were so beautifully drawn at the convent; the good angel and the bad one. The bad promising pleasure in means of corruption and trying to drag the saintly figure down.

They were a stained glass image come to life.
So lost was she in this reminiscence that she was startled at the abrupt release of her shoulders. She nearly fell as a result but steadied herself with effort. Rey only regained enough insight to see the look of panic on the Prince’s face as he ran down the knave and out of sight.

Rey did slump to the stone floor then.

Two angels always duelling and dancing around together – but what happens when one angel does not want to fight? And what if the dancing becomes too intoxicating that she forgot what she was fighting in the first place?

Rey had arrived back at the palace as the sun was setting with her ladies and retinue. Han had decided to stay within the Cathedral for a night to have some time with the Archbishop. The King had invited his brother-in-law to court so many times that it was becoming almost a routine to accept a plea of forgiveness for his absence. This seemed the only way for the old friends to reunite.

The Prince had not journeyed back with them; according to the guards, he had mounted his horse and rode away before anyone could question him further. Rey had said nothing of this. The fewer people who knew of their confrontation then the safer she would be.

She retired early that night claiming weariness and she sat staring into the fire as her bed was prepared.

Rose was the one assigned to get into bed with her that night for a companion. The young girl always seemed nervous and shy about this like she was sure she would do something wrong and tended to not be able to look Rey in the eye.

When the two settled beneath the sheets, Rey whispered to her friend.

“Rose?”

“Yes, Your Grace?”
“What do you think of the Crown Prince?”

The young girl stiffened. Her mouth tightened like she were chewing something unpleasant.

“I have no opinion, Your Grace.” Such a political answer.

“Rose, please, I’m not going to call for the guards or send you to the Tower. I just want an honest opinion.”

Rose looked at her and her eyes searched Rey’s for the first time. She shrugged.

“He scares me a little.” Rose said in a small voice.

“You find him intimidating?”

“Yes. But he will be King one day. And we must be faithful.”

Rey wanted to demand that what if he didn’t deserve faithfulness? What if he was too confusing and complex to be a goodly Prince?

But Rey did not have the words and so she let it alone. Sleep was impatient and was calling for them both.

The King returned the next day in good spirits. The weather had taken something of a bad turn and he was caught in the rain as a result. Rey expressed concern at the sound of him sneezing but he waved it away.

“I’m not made of glass.” He laughed. “I’ve survived worse than a cold.”
Han was intent on Rey not bothering with him for she had an even more daunting task ahead: trying to stand utterly still all day.

The portrait painter had been chosen and she was to stand for the first time for the sketching.

Her clothing had been picked with more care than ever that day. It was decided that she should wear her rich purple gown to show her royal status and cloth of gold sleeves to make it beyond question. She wore a French hood studded with pearls and gold that was very becoming upon her. The overall result made Rey feel grand yet oddly out of place. She didn’t like fuss and would never wear her cloth of gold and purple again if she had the choice. She wanted to be as inconspicuous as the other ladies of the court; yesterday had taught her that her role could be pulled off but not without great effort.

She was escorted to a waiting chamber where it was decided the painting would take place. It had the right amount of light and an appropriate background.

The painter, who was dressed in a grand blue doublet and had a ridiculous feather in his cap, bowed low to her and then went about the task of positioning her just right.

In the end it was decided that she should stand in profile with her hands clasped to her waist and her head turned.

The painter did not talk much as he sketched her and Rey was grateful for the quiet. It gave her time to think.

She kept seeing the dark profile prostrate before the streaming colours of the stained glass windows and the mole speckled skin that looked soft to touch.

There was a knock and a page came in.

“His Grace, the Prince of Alderaan.”

Rey forgot to breathe as the subject of her thoughts strode in. He was dressed in his best clothing and looked as regal as she was trying to be.
The painter did not seem at all startled from the arrival of the future monarch. He instead paused in his sketching and bowed to the Prince.

“Thank you for agreeing to this painting, Your Grace.” The painter preened, clearly delighted at having such illustrious subjects for his paintings. “I have made a start on Milady, the Queen. If you could stand just here...”

Rey was unable to move as the painter began to position The Prince’s body. He was not to be in profile but instead to stand facing the painter and with his broadness to be shown to his advantage. His hands were positioned about his belt (not far from his dagger, Rey noted) and Rey could not help catching the Prince making a grimace of pain when the painter touched his back to straighten it.

It was masked into a look of irritation so quickly that Rey wondered if she imagined it. Artists were given great license when it came to their work.

The artist had more sketching to do on the Prince so bid Rey to sit a while to rest. Rey found a seat upon the window ledge and tried looking out of the gardens. The rain was still beating down heavily upon the greenery of the royal gardens. Rey smiled – she still loved rain and felt a yearning to be out in it. To stick her hands out and feel the moisture on her fingertips. Jakku had been strict about exercise and about avoiding sickness. Whenever there was ever any rain in the sky then Rey was locked away. The nuns insisted it was to grant her a reprieve from fevers and other ailments that could end her short life. Though Rey had come to suspect later on that Plutt had come to realise that she liked the rain and sought to separate her from it out of spite.

She watched as a bird flew past the window and longed for wings. To explore. To soar above the earth. To be free.

Rey signed and turned her head back. The Prince whipped his head back to look straight ahead.

He’d been watching her.

It always left Rey shaky to know his eyes had been on her and some other foreign feeling she couldn’t describe but would never speak of. Partly because she didn’t know what it was but mostly because she didn’t want to know.

His words echoed in her ears.
Can’t you see what you will do to us both if you pursue this?

Pursue what? She wasn’t asking the impossible of him. Unless being her friend was impossible.

Rey lowered her head at the thought. However much he made her spit with rage, however much he shunned her and treated others badly, she would have liked to have been his friend. If only for his father’s sake. And maybe she could have gained… what? She could no longer look upon this man as a brother figure. Never a son. So what? What would he have been?

He did look very striking that day. He was clearly meant to make a great impression to the world in his fine dress. But also with his goodly stature. His hair was wavy, his skin pale and not even the scar that ran thinly down his face could take away from his beauty.

For he was very… appealing.

Her eyes ran down his body. Very strong. Very tall. And with a fine calf to his leg. He would be a delightful prospect of a bridegroom. He would sire many sons, no doubt.

No doubt his own wedding night would not be as tame as her own. Those hands would do their duty… calloused, slightly rough hands slipped beneath a nightgown…

The door burst open and Rey nearly jumped to her feet. A surge of guilt ripped through her as though the guards were coming to accost her just for imagining…

But no. It was the Lady Jessika and she looked pale.

“Milady.” She dipped a quick curtsey. “You must come.”

Even the Prince looked taken aback by this.

“Jessika, what is it?”
Ben paced in the presence chamber of his apartments. Waiting. Waiting for something to happen. Waiting for someone to tell him to stop pacing. To stop being a Prince. To stop being a son.

He had a fever. It wasn’t a cold. It was a chill that had turned into so much more. The King was sick.

Ben wasn’t ready for this.

He’d not been granted access to the King’s rooms but had to watch as the Queen, the new wife by barely a few months, had flown down the chambers to be at the elderly man’s side. She’d seemed genuinely distressed at the news. For once, it did not make Ben feel envious or disgusted; he felt compassion.

For now he must admit, if only to himself, that the girl clearly did not care so much for the crown as she did for the life of her King.

He was forced to wait.

He spent hours trying to sleep, read and pray but they were all for nothing.

And they hurt the welts on his back.

It was a foolish thing to do in hindsight but it had been what he needed in some regards. He’d been so disturbed by their confrontation in the cathedral that he had vaulted his horse and rode frantically back to Naboo Palace. Upon entering his rooms, he’d ripped off his shirt and grabbed his old whip.

Self-flagelluation wasn’t something he practised now but it had been very popular during his time with Snoke. His old Master had used it as a means of discipline. Now Ben had decided that he needed discipline. For all he’d been able to think of during the ride home was how sweetly she’d smelt. How close she’d been. How soft her skin appeared. What it would be like to gain welts upon
his back by the drag of her nails…

Ben shook his head. The cuts were healing nicely and he felt purged from his sins. He’d also prayed through the night to make absolutely sure.

Was this his true punishment? To lose his last remaining parent?

Without any further provocation, he threw open the door and stormed down the corridor to his father’s chambers.

Many physicians tried to barricade him from entering but he had practically thrown them to the side which ceased all further effort to stop him.

The rooms were heavy with incense. There were various potions about the room. And the Queen was at the royal bedside ringing out a flannel to place upon the King’s head.

For the first time, he was not immediately drawn to her figure but at the man in the bed.

His father looked almost grey and his face was bathed in sweat. His eyes were closed and he was clearly in the grips of a delirium.

“Not now. Please.” The Queen entreated. Her hood was askew and tendrils of hair were breaking free. She looked haggard and worried.

“I… I just wanted to see-”

“What? That he was dead and you are to be King? Well have some dignity and let me nurse him!”

Ben blinked at this. No-one had spoken to him with such disrespect in his life. Yet he did not feel fury; he felt empathy.

“Milady, please you must rest!” Urged one of the doctors in attendance.
“My husband is sick. I’m not leaving where there’s anything I can do.” Rey replied with iron in her tone.

So the night went on. Ben refused to leave the apartments altogether but sat in the opposing apartments as the sun sank behind the trees of the garden. The rain was still hitting the windows with insistence.

Rey had been sat in a chair beside the fire for all of the night. The doctors had finally dismissed her with assurances that she had done all she could do. Now only time would tell.

The night sky was turned violet and yet there was still no sound from the opposite room. The Crown Prince had fallen asleep upon a sofa before she came into the room. She had been careful not to disturb him.

She had looked into the fire. She had looked at the rug. She had looked out of the window. She had looked at the Prince’s becoming face. Now she stared out from her seat by the fire and saw nothing.

If he died… if Han died then she was sure her heart would break. She had been so long without a family and this man had rescued her from a life of destitution and misery. He’d been indulgent and tender to her in his own gruff way. He’d been kind and paternal. He’d been her salvation.

Was this punishment? For her thoughts? For her wandering and villainous mind?

May God forgive her, she hadn’t meant to be entranced. She wasn’t even sure if she was. But that moment in the chapel and then at the painter’s room… had He been watching? Had He judged? Was Han the price she must pay?

No, please, I need him.

It wasn’t the subject of status. If the King died, she would be Queen Dowager and given vast wealth to support her the rest of her life. She would have to give way to other women at court but she doubted she would ever come back to court.
No, she wanted him to live because she felt they were not done yet. She longed for his guiding hand on her shoulder.

Oh please, please Jesu, don’t take him from me.

There was a ruffle of fabric and a croaky voice.

“You’re still here?” The Prince had woken.

“Where else would I be?” Rey asked dully not looking away from her staring into space.

“I don’t know. There's...”

“Still no news.” Rey clutched the rosary beads hanging from her girdle.

“Do not be afraid. I feel it too.”


“I’m not afraid. I fear no man.”

“He is strong.” The Prince sounded as though he was clinging to hope. It was oddly comforting to hear.

“He’s a war hero. He can live through this.” Rey looked at the Prince with haughty eyes. She was sleep deprived and sick with fear but she needed to say her piece. “I will be out of your hair soon enough. If he does...” She couldn’t finish.

“He won’t.” The Prince snapped. “Besides you won’t be able to. You will have to show your period of mourning. Also it will be expedient to see if you show any late sign of child.”
Again the bitterness. Again the focus on the fruit of her loins. As though she were a breeding horse!

“I am not with child and am not likely to ever be.”

“It is not impossible.” The Prince grumbled. “You are young and I am sure-”

“I am not with child! I know I am not with child because I am still a maid!” Rey cried in exasperation and anger. She was on her feet and suddenly the words she wanted to scream at the world came tumbling out. “You are worrying over nothing! No heir will come from my womb. No competition will shake your power. Nothing of the sort will come from my marriage. I married Han because I admired him but he still loves your mother and sees me as a daughter! Are you happy now, Your Grace?!”

The room was deadly silent. The Prince was blinking at her almost like an idiot. His mouth was almost open. And yet there was something else beside the shock. An awe. An amazement. A sort of worship. There was almost the beginnings of a smile on his face.

Rey suddenly felt panic. She could not believe that she had told this man of all people. How could she-

The door burst open and the doctor stumbled in. Immediately, the Prince jumped to his feet to stand beside Rey.

“Well?” She demanded.

The doctor gaped a moment and then said:

“It’s a miracle. Nothing more or less. He is stronger than any of us thought.”

Rey felt her body sway. Han would live. He wouldn’t die.
The efforts and strain of the past few days and nearly an entire day without a moment of sleep suddenly took over her.

Rey felt the world going black around her as she fell to ground in a faint.

The last thing she remembered before passing out was the feel of the Crown Prince catching her in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Nothing puts a smile on my face like a (1) in my inbox. Seriously, I have no life and writing stories is the only thing that makes me happy. That and Reylo.
Hi guys.

Please forgive the usual gap. Work has been crazy this week and only today I've had a chance to sit down and write anything.

The response to the last chapter was overwhelming and I am so happy with it. Thank you all so much for your gorgeous words!

I was planning for this chapter to be a bit longer but rather than pour over it for another week I thought I'd cut it in half and save the rest for the next chapter. Otherwise I'll never get the chance. Huge thanks again to Jess444 for the moodboard. You're a jem!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The world came back to Rey in a rush that left her almost jerking awake. The canopy was the first thing she saw above her and the softness of the bed was enough to keep her arms firmly at her sides as though she were bound to it. Her room was dimly lit and the sun was clearly on its way out of the sky which marked another day ending. This prompted some confusion for Rey: why was she waking up at the end of the day and not the beginning? Then it came back to her. Han’s illness, her desperate attempts to help, the long night that she was forced to live through and the crushing relief that he was going to be well.

And the Prince…

Rey looked about the room. There was a rustle of damask skirts as Rose came into her line of sight.

“Milady, you are feeling better?”
Rey felt almost too dazed to speak. For behind Rose’s concerned profile there stood another.

The Crown Prince was sitting. Watching. Waiting.

Had he been here the entire time? She remembered vaguely how her body had never hit the ground.

“Wine.” Rey managed which prompted Rose to scuttle off to grab the decanter to sate her mistress’s thirst. The Prince remained motionless. His face was passive and calm; that mere fact alone was enough to unnerve her.

“Why are you here? In my rooms?” She asked, trying to sound strong but instead sounding almost nervous.

“Technically this palace is mine. Or will be. So you are my guest.”

Rose placed a silver goblet filled with blood red wine into Rey’s hand. Judging from her expression, Rose had been left with little choice but to let the Prince remain but didn’t appear delighted by it. A flush of gratitude washed over Rey at the idea that her lady had probably watched over her the entire time too. If only for decencies sake.

“The King.” Rey suddenly sat up and almost spilled the contents of the goblet over her gown, “Is the King well?”

“He is much recovered, Your Grace.” Rose reassured. “He has been asking about you. He has been quite concerned.”

“Thank you, Lady Teko.” The Prince cut in clearly not in the mood for pleasantries. “I would like to speak to the Queen now. Alone.”

Rey stiffened and drank from the goblet for something to do with her hands. Rose, normally eager to comply with her superiors, straightened as though her virtue had been called into question.
“Your Grace, I cannot leave the Queen in such a state. And without a chaperone. In her room no less!”

“You may sit where you can see us in the opposite chamber. But this is not a conversation I will share with any other but Her Grace.”

Rose looked to her mistress as though for confirmation. Rey dumbly nodded. Certain things were coming back to her. They’d been sat together waiting for news. They’d argued. And she’d…

She nearly dropped her goblet of wine. May the Lord have mercy… he knew the truth!

Rey suddenly had the urge to call back Rose. To not leave her alone when he had such ammunition on her. But her lady was already at the other end of the chamber. The Prince took the seat beside her bed.

The look he gave her was penetrating yet oddly soft.

“Tell me again. Tell me what you truly have with my father.”

Rey knew that she was beaten. He knew the truth. That was her fault. She may as well give him the full story. Yet a stubborn part of her that had kept her mentally strong while locked in Jakku refused to yield so easily.

“The facts of a Christian marriage are sacred between the man and wife, Your Grace. Surely you do not want the full discourse of…”

“You said that you were a maid. A daughter to him.”

That stopped her. She had really undone herself here. Tears welled in her eyes partly out of anger that he would no doubt use this information to unmake her and for sorrow. Han had only ever wanted a peaceful life after so long fighting; what would this cost him?
“I will not say anything to hurt him-”

“I do not wish you harm. Or him for that matter.”

Rey shot a look at him which did not disguise her disbelief. The Prince almost gave a rueful hint of a smile.

“I wish to know where I stand.” His eyes were beseeching. But Rey could not honestly say that it was political ambition that she saw staring back.

Rey sighed. “Very well. I am a maid. I am no more a wife than I was when I came from the convent. If you must drag me down, all I ask is that you do not send me back to the convent.”

Rey closed her eyes. Waited for… something. Maybe a cackle of righteous laughter or a shriek of glee. Instead there was a heavy sigh. His breath tickled her cheek and her skin pimpled as she felt the effects gush through her body.

The Crown Prince was nodding. “Thank you. Thank you.”

Why was he thanking her for? For he truly did look relieved. Almost overcome with it. Did he really see her as such a threat?

“I wanted a home.” Rey blurted out, suddenly desperate for someone, even him, to understand her motives. “I wanted to be free of that place, of that life. The King was older than me in so many ways but I truly took to him. And he took to me. He said I reminded him of what a daughter with the late Queen may have been like. He suspected that if he didn’t marry me, I would be married to the highest bidder. Maybe even Unkar Plutt himself and that was a fate I could not bare. He had no appetite for a new wife or bedmate and I was too selfish to want to persuade him. He talked to me like a confidante, like I mattered, like…”

Rey trailed off at the touch of a finger to her cheek. The Crown Prince had reached forward and caught a cascading tear onto the long digit of his finger. It was such a soft gesture that Rey felt herself shrink to half her size.

“Please don’t be afraid of me.” The Crown Prince, always so brooding and with a presence that could take up a room, suddenly seemed like a safe haven in a desert storm. “I’m not going to tell
anyone.”

His finger was still touching her cheek. His eyes were more tender than they’d ever been towards her. It made Rey feel anxious and oddly alive.

“What? But why? You could destroy me and I would be no threat-”

“You’ve never been a true threat. Not in the way you believe.” He removed his finger from her cheek as though remembering himself. “I am not about to reveal your arrangement with my father. Not even to him. You will continue on as Queen. Be his companion. And I will endeavour to be a little closer to you both.”

Rey sat up. A part of her could not allow herself to believe that she could be so lucky in her fortunes.

“You will try and reconcile with your father?”

“I will.” The Prince nodded. Rey could remember then that he had clearly been distraught at the thought of his father’s death. No matter what history they may have it wasn’t so much that the Prince would rejoice at the King’s death. He wasn’t beyond such sentiments clearly.

“And to me?” Rey asked a little quietly. For she had never truly seen an enemy in his eyes. She couldn’t identify what she could see as she’d never seen what was in his eyes before.

There was a quietness that hung between them for a moment. “I will do as God will guide me” was the only answer he gave to that.

Rose came back to her mistress’s side as soon as the Prince made to leave. The time to say anything further had past yet the look he threw over his shoulder as he left told Rey so much that breathing proved difficult afterwards.

Ben went straight to his private chapel upon leaving the Queen’s rooms and crossed himself in reverence to the statue of Saint Mary. For truly he felt he may have to crawl upon his knees to
demonstrate his gratitude.

She was a maid. His father had not had her. He was unlikely to ever want her a true wife. It was more than he could have ever dreamed of. She wasn’t free but she wasn’t irrevocably lost either.

He had been to see his father while the Queen had rested (with strict instructions to Rose to call him back if the Queen so much as twitched). His father was still confined to bed and was being subjected to all the potions the Palace Herb garden could provide but otherwise seemed to be rallying. He’d been anxious to hear that Rey had fainted upon hearing that he would live but seemed reluctantly placated when the doctor assured him that it was nothing some bed rest couldn’t cure.

Ben and his father had not said much at his bedside. They seemed almost unsure as to what to say. The crisis was over; the moment calm again. Emotions did not come easy to either unless forced.

Hux would be disappointed. He was merely waiting out his time of the King’s reign when Ben would ascend and his fortunes would begin. Ben was not even sure he wanted to bequeath those fortunes anymore; it seemed almost pointless as Hux would never be satisfied. He had no limits on how much power he wanted. Even if he himself were King he would not stop until he were Emperor and onwards it would go.

Ben was too exhausted to lament on it now. For the crown was meaning less and less to him as the time went on. His earlier ambition was failing him and he didn’t care anymore.

For she was untouched. Nothing else was of more importance than that.

Which begged the question: what now?

She were still the Queen and he had been earnest in his promise to not tell a living soul. It would be of no benefit anyway. If it were revealed that the marriage were unconsummated, it would either force his father to sort that trifle out with expediency or declare it invalid. To prove consummation he would probably have to invite in witnesses for the act and that was something that Ben could not endure. But to declare it invalid…

It had been tantalising and he would be a false prince to deny he had not considered it as he sat watch over her in her bed. If it were declared invalid, he could sue for her hand. He were a Prince after all and there were doctors who could prove her untouched. He could take her as a wife. As his
one and only Queen.

But if he knew his father he was a consummate liar. If he had wanted to keep his bride, he would lie, cheat and bribe whoever he needed to get them to drop the case. Han may not love his bride as a man loves a woman but he clearly had no complaints and was clearly fond of the girl. Who could deny the word of a King?

If it were forced to bring about an annulment, he would bet his last Mass for his soul that Rey would not come willingly. She would probably run away and marry Plutt than surrender herself to the enemy. For that is what he would be.

And the worst case scenario – what if the King dismissed his claims and threw him back in the Tower? To accuse the King of such a lie would be an act of treason. And he’d only just escaped with his life the last time. He wouldn’t be able to remove his head from the block a second time.

The situation held no new answers or solutions. So why was his soul so light?

The words kept singing like Te Deum in his mind: *She’s a maid. She isn’t his truly. She’s free in the eyes of God.*

And then he bent his head in penitence.

She wasn’t free. She was his Queen and must still be respected as such. But he would sleep easier tonight and every other night.

*Aurora. Wait for me.*

Rey was up and back at Han’s bedside the very next day. She nearly wept with relief to see how much more colour there was in his cheeks and his replies were as caustic as ever.

“For the love of God man,” he snapped at a doctor, “leave me with some blood in my veins and puts those damn leeches away.”
Normally Rey would have snapped at him for such a retort but this time she merely laughed with delight. If he could be so bad tempered with Three-Pio (the royal doctor who always seemed to get on Han’s nerves) then he was truly restored.

Rey sat with him in the remaining days of his enforced rest to read to him and keep him company. She fussed over his medicines and his food in a way that made them feel as though their roles were reversed. Three-Pio even admonished her in his blustering way that she risked another collapse if she didn’t calm down. Yet Rey could not stop moving. She needed to be useful to Han. To sponge away the sinful thoughts and her betrayal to their secret.

Her thoughts had been weak and amoral concerning his son and she had asked for absolution nearly a hundred times. But the idea that he held such a heavy weight of knowledge over her marriage was enough to make her almost wild with energetic terror.

Yet there was no knock on the door to commit her to her rooms. And when Hux arrived he looked as sour as ever.

Why would he want to keep her secret?

After a few days, the King was allowed to leave his bed and return to the court.

They were greeted with much celebration as they made their way to dinner. Rey smiled at the courtiers as was her duty. Then they were stopped.

The Prince had come to join their train.

He bowed lowly to his father and asked humbly that he may join them for dinner.

Han blinked, clearly taken aback that his distant son would want to feast with them, but welcomed him warmly and with no small degree of joy. Rey smiled benignly but her heart thumped in her chest.

He did not even look at her as he took his place behind the sovereigns.
The dais was made ready for them and the court stood in respect as the royal family made their way to the top table. The King bid Rey to sit as he went to greet Calrissian and Rey proceeded to climb the dais.

It was draped in cloth of gold and made the plates and goblets that lined the table look all the more magnificent for it. Rey, who had chosen a more subdued colour of a forest green gown and white sleeves, lifted her skirts to climb.

The many petticoats were often a burden to Rey and her feet sometimes got tangled. This happened when she was upon the final step to the dais. Her slippered foot caught within her petticoats and she could feel her balance falter.

If she fell before the court, it would be humiliating. They would snigger behind their hands for weeks.

Just as she was left to surrender to the inevitable, a hand grasped her wrist and steadied her. Looking around, she saw the Prince. His face was of practised calm.

“The court is distracted with the King. Right yourself while you can.” His lips barely moved and his hand was hidden between their bodies. No-one could see.

Quickly, she kicked the fabric loose of her shoe until she could walk without encumbrance again.

The Prince was slow to surrender her wrist. The imprint of his fingers felt as though they had burnt through her sleeve.

“Thank you.” She said quietly.

He said nothing as he walked with her to take his place at the high table. Yet as the King came to sit between them in his raised chair, their eyes met briefly.

While hers held undoubted confusion, his held a sort of amusement mixed with promise of more delights to come.
To see a (1) in my inbox is all the happiness I'll ever need. Indulge me. Pretty please?
Wow. Just wow. The response of this fic has stolen my breath away.

Please forgive the longer than usual wait. I've been exhausted this week with work and RL butting in. So I'm pleased to get this up.

Massive thanks as per to my beta Poet Hvatvisha and my wifey Jess444 who does the beautiful moodboards.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The atmosphere that hung over Naboo Palace was one of relief and maybe, if Rey could read it right, of meagre disappointment. Many courtiers were fond of the ageing King and were much relieved at his recovery. He had gained a sort of reluctant and begrudging respect over the years and such loyalty was hard to shake. Yet many of the young courtiers were clearly done with the old ways. They wanted change; they wanted opportunity. In short, they wanted a new King. And even one as temperamental and changeable as the Crown Prince would do.

Rey watched Han tentatively as though worried that he may come to realise what the flatterers and politicians were really thinking. She needn’t worry too much; Han spoke of it quite calmly when they were alone in his Privy Chambers.

“I’m not ageing or fading as quickly as they would like. I was an official upstart when I married Leia and became King. I merely had the good luck of gaining the love of the people.”

“How can you sit amongst them and do your duty knowing this?” Rey asked in true bafflement. “Does it not anger you?”

“Not at all. I am a means to an end and I’ve always known it. As long as they show outward deference and keep the rebellions to a minimum then I’m content.”

Rey found that her feelings on the matter were not quite so easily mollified but said nothing. It was Han’s kingdom after all; she could not tell him how to rule it.

Besides there was no time to dwell on the factions of Naboo – for now they were about to embark upon Progress to the North and to the homes of the diplomats who housed themselves away from the court. Rey would be presented to the kingdom outside of London for the first time.

The doctors were enthusiastic for the King to go. Despite being so recently recovered from his illness, the belief that the country air would do nothing but good was still prevalent. Besides the King seemed much restored. If Rey thought that his former colour wasn’t quite back in his cheeks then her concerns were dismissed as ‘woman’s quibbles’.

So Rey watched as her life was packed up around her and she took to the saddle as they began their journey to the first of the many great Manors that lined their way. And she tried not to turn around
to look back at where she felt as well as knew that the Prince was riding behind her.

Han had been delighted at the change that had been bought about by the Prince. He was not exactly talkative at their dinners together and was still not one of jokes and japes or even boisterous laughter. Yet there was definitely a change. He would come to their presence now without pleading taking place. He would join them for walks in the royal gardens. He would sit up with them and listen to Lady Kanata read from the gospels. He was a part of things now as he had never been before.

Han put it down to his recent illness and recovery. Maybe it had shocked his rebellious son into subservience. Maybe the prospect of ruling all too soon and losing his last remaining parent had been too much for him. Rey did not want to shatter her husband’s illusion and went back to her sewing (which she would make a mess of and have to unpick so as not to ruin the shirt she was embroidering).

The illusion was not totally an unfair one or even incorrect. Rey had seen with her own eyes that the Prince had been genuinely agitated and worried for his father. But she could tell no one about the true reason for the Prince’s relaxed stance.

She was beginning to question it herself.

Was the thought of her lying with her husband more repugnant to the Prince that the idea of a rival claimant to the throne?

It would make sense. For even if Rey had borne a child or even a son it would still go after the Prince in the Line of Succession. After the Prince came to throne, married a foreign princess and sired male heirs then the most he would have to give a half-sibling was a Duchy and they would be dealt with.

So why the hostility?

Well, she was stepping into his mother’s shoes (whether she saw it like that or not) and that had probably bred resentment. Also Han was old enough to be her grandsire. The idea of anyone’s parent with a spouse younger than themselves would be enough to cause discomfort.

But the fire in his eyes… the refusal to allow her to come close… the touch of his gentle fingers on her cheek, on her wrist…
Rey gripped the reins of her horse. She mustn’t allow her thoughts to drift in such a scandalous manner. They were a sin.

He was now civil to her. At times even courteous. This had been recognised by the court who had clearly enjoyed the familial dispute while it had lasted. No one seemed to notice anything else. Like how he sometimes held her eyes for a second too long. Or how his hand lingered when he handed her something meaning their skin made contact.

His eyes were on her shoulder blades as they rode through the countryside. She could feel their heat. Like a caress.

Rey sat all the straighter and squared her shoulders. When she arrived at their first village, she was the very image of a Queen.

The first few homes that the Royal Party stopped at were little more than hunting lodges but Dameron’s family seat was the first grand house that they came to rest at.

Ben watched as Dameron swept an ostentatious bow to his King upon their arrival and introduced his two sons by Mistress Pava. They seemed healthy boys and well grown. Ben could not help but wonder idly if it was painful or maybe a nuisance for Rey to have a Lady-in-Waiting who had fulfilled her duty so well. Dameron had an heir and a spare; Lady Pava’s position was unassailable as a result. The fact that custom dictated that Lady Pava would have little role in her boys’ education and upbringing seemed rather trivial. Yet Ben did not miss how Lady Jessika’s eyes shone with unshed tears and pride upon seeing her boys. Clearly the pain of separation has no rank.

Ben found the time at Dameron’s family seat to be almost suffocating. He’d been here before as a young boy and not very much had changed. It was still a grand country home with acres of land for hunting. It was not that which caused Ben discomfort; it was the memories of what always seemed to take place here.

He would always have to watch as Dameron succeeded at everything he did. How he leapt like a stag as he danced and the indulgent claps of his mother who had always been fond of the boy. Ben made a point of refusing to move from his seat when the dancing took place in the hall for this visit.
He was more interested in watching anyway…

The Queen played her role to perfection. She was always beautifully turned out and with a bearing that was so poised that you would believe that she had been trained her entire life for this role. He could admit now what he’d always denied so vehemently before: she was the model of a good Queen.

It was almost touching to see his father’s pride in her also. For Ben saw it now for what it was: indulgence. He petted her and spoiled her like a daughter from a lenient father. There were times, stupidly, that Ben felt the jealousy rise within him again but from a different source. Ben would look at his father, always so aloof and unsure with his children, and want to demand an explanation. Why was he being so willing to please and coddle now? The man Ben remembered growing up had been all for action and command. Fatherhood had not come naturally to him even by royal standards. The Prince had looked upon his father the few times he saw him and be greeted with the face of a stranger in gilded armour.

His father had changed though. Han Solo would never admit it but the years had made him wiser than he wanted to be. He’d known loss, he’d known humiliation, he’d known love and triumph and above all he knew the inevitability of making mistakes. Did he view his family’s fate as one? Was this the true reason he had taken such a young wife: the chance to get it right at long last?

Relations between the King and himself were better than they had ever been before. They were still horribly tense at times and the pauses between them were still loaded. Yet his father was becoming indulgent once more to him. He’d rode alongside Ben during the hunt and consulted him on the best strategies for catching hares. He felt like a Prince once more, and more importantly, he felt like a son.

The activities of the Queen were notable too. Having been bought up within the walls of a nunnery, she had little experience of pleasure. So it was remarkable to see her clear wonder at such a bright new world. She watched with fascination the elaborate and quite sensual dances of their guests. She marvelled at the playing of the minstrels at the lute. She listened with wonder at the unbroken voices of the choirs when they gave their thanks to the various churches along the way.

Was the prospect of happiness and easy living as alien to her as they were to him?

But above all his eyes were on her as they could do little else.

She seemed to grow more beautiful by the day and Ben could not stop himself taking liberties when he could. A lingering of eye contact here, a touch there, anything he could gain he would
take. There were many times when he wanted to throw Finn to the ground in order to help her up onto her horse first but the court was always watching. Besides, the Queen seemed quite attached to the Traitor (as he called him) or the Master of Horse (as his title stood), and he had no doubt she would enact a similar fate onto him if he tried such a thing.

Yet he knew she was becoming aware of his feelings. The flush on her cheekbones screamed a declaration. The slight tremor of breath that caught in her chest tightened his own. Was it indignation? Or something else?

Ben was desperate to know and yet eager to repent of such sin. He confessed daily to his sinful thoughts and gave thanks for his many good fortunes. He tried to focus his mind like his father’s. To channel his feelings towards the Queen like that of a sister but it was a lost cause. He’d had a sister and he’d been devoted to her. He felt devotion to this girl too but of a very different nature.

Snoke had always maintained, during his more harsh methods, that Ben was a weak and wanton prince who craved the things that would destroy him.

As he entered the confessional bay for the third time that week, Ben believed all over again that his former Master was as insightful as he had been ambitious.

Rey walked the fields with her ladies in tow behind her. The summer had reached its zenith and they looked set for a fine harvest. The smell of honeysuckle was potent in the air and the world seemed to have taken on a golden hue. Lady Pava had tried to urge Rey to wear a veil to save her complexion as was fashionable but Rey refused. She wanted the sun on her face and the wind to tickle her features. Besides she had become oddly fond of her freckles no matter how unfashionable they were. And weren’t Queens meant to set new trends?

The sun was not her objective that morning; she was following the lull of buzzing. This lodge that they had stopped at, Cloud City Castle which belong to Calrissian, had a collection of bee hives.

Rey had a fascination with seeing the creation of food. The meals at the Nunnery of Jakku had been substandard at best and sufficiently lacking to make sure that she would never have the bonny hips of the plumper ladies at court. It was a trait of hers now to always have a tray of sweetmeats and fruit at hand at all times in her chamber. It was an oddity but it brought her comfort. Therefore to see animals create a substance as sweet as honey was remarkable to her.
She was kept a good distance away from the hives but a gentleman squire explained to her the process of making honey. Her ladies tried to look quietly interested but Rey knew that this pursuit was purely her own.

Rey walked away with the desire to ask Han if they could perhaps gain their own hives at Naboo when she came across a group of children playing in the gardens of Cloud City as she walked back.

Rey stopped and watched as she often did when there were children around. There were so little children at Jakku – she had been a rarity to be taken in and she had been too wary to trust something as dangerous as childhood friendships.

Rey approached slowly and the children stopped their playing to drop into clumsy bows and curtseys to the pretty young Queen. Rey suddenly felt oddly shy.

“What are playing?” She asked gently.

“Catch, Your Grace.” Said a rather brave little boy who was still bowed so low his nose was nearly touching the grass.

“Well please carry on. I merely like to watch.”

Rey sat herself down on a stone bench as though to prove she was here to stay.

The children, clearly deciding that this pretty lady who everyone had to be so respectful of was really rather nice, resumed their play.

Jessika, Rose and Maz sat themselves a little way off from Rey upon the grass to give her some space as she watched. It was a consideration she became grateful of. For within minutes her eyes began to burn.

It was a stupid reaction and beneath her to feel such loss. Look at all she had achieved. She was the Queen. She was the most powerful woman in the country. She had merely to snap her fingers and her orders were obeyed. And she had a kind and nurturing husband.
So why did the sight of young children now fill her with such pain?

Because they were the one thing she could never have.

Marrying Han had seemed like the answer to all her problems to begin with. He would provide her with comfort and freedom while asking for so little in return. He only wanted companionship and maybe a chance to show he wasn’t all bluster. And she loved him. It wasn’t a burning passionate love but it was one built on respect and the highest possible regard and that was just as powerful as far as Rey was concerned. But their marriage meant that they would never lie together. Her own desire to be free meant she would never remarry if she was to outlive him. Which meant she would die a maid and never be a mother.

Her acquirement of a family through the Skywalker dynasty meant the destruction of her own. She would die alone in every respect.

The constant supervision of her figure and any signs of quickening from her womb had been a nuisance before. Now it was like a hammer blow.

She watched a little boy play leapfrog with his friends and laughing madly at the rough and tumble. Would her son have inherited her hair? Her eyes? Her demeanour?

There was a rustle beside her and she looked up almost blankly at the newcomer to her circle of woe.

The Prince was standing before her, dressed in hunting garb and clutching a crossbow.

His bow to her would normally leave her floundering. Should she stand? Should she remain seated? She may be above him in rank but only just and through dubious circumstances.

The Prince took the dilemma out of her hands by sitting beside her on the bench and looking out at the children with her. Wordlessly, a fold of linen was pressed into her palm. Rey remembered herself and tried to dry her eyes as surreptitiously as she could. In the past, such weakness witnessed by the Prince would be a waking nightmare. Now she met it with only embarrassment.

“Forgive me.” She sniffed. “The pollen, my nose...” She trailed off. The excuse was weak.
“Who has upset you so?” Rey almost smiled. The Prince was not one for politics; straight to the point he went. If it were not for the set of his jaw she may have found it funny. Instead he looked ready to destroy the world.

“Nobody.” Rey dismissed. “Just women’s musings. Nothing to concern yourself with.” He looked set to snap again when she cut him off. “You have been hunting? Was good sport found?”

She chanced a look at him. And nearly backed away. He was close enough for her to count the freckles on his nose. Just like her own. The moles upon his face reminded her of the stars that she would spot from her window at night as a child.

“Yes.” He managed. “Some boars were discovered. We will make a good feast tonight.”

“I am glad of it.” Rey’s eyes went back towards the children. Two little girls were dancing together and singing rhymes.

“Are you happy?” The Prince asked lowly so that only Rey could hear.

“Yes.” She replied immediately. Then she thought she would add a flavour of truth to her sentiments. “I just lament that I cannot know my own family personally. As many of these little ones will be able to.”

“It is a mere fortune of chance to grow up with your family.”

Rey blinked and looked at him again. His eyes were staring forward as though looking past the playing children and seeing beyond their eyesight. Beyond even her own.

“You know of your history.” She managed gently. “And I know only stories told by sources.”

Rey did know a little of course. She had been told of her grandfather Obi Wan. Han had only known him for a day and it had been the last day of his life. He’d been killed on the battlefield trying to bring an end to Vader. Rey was proud of her grandfather’s bravery but longed to know something more. He’d been reportedly a magnificent specimen as a young man. Many even called him as comely as his apprentice. He’d attracted the attention of a Queen for his efforts.
Her grandmother Satine was not a true Queen of course; she was the Countess of Mandalore in her own right but her regal baring and staunch activity in politics meant that she was popular in the North. Many referred to her as a Queen in the North. Lord Kenobi has been besotted and they had married to the great pomp and ceremony of the world.

Their marriage had been fruitful bring forth many sons and daughters. Their youngest was Rey’s father. By rights she should not have been a Duchess but folly and ill luck had fallen upon the family. The offspring of so powerful a union had either fallen with their father during the Civil War or died an early death. Therefore her father had known to protect his child when danger had come calling.

No records survived of her parents. Not of their likeness either. She was left with a shadow of a man she never got to meet, a grandfather who was almost otherworldly in reputation and a grandmother who may have been sitting in her position today if she had lived to do so.

The world had torn apart the love her grandparents had borne for one another. Would she fail now to prolong their legacy any further?

“You have no relations now living?”

Rey shook her head and tried to keep her sorrow in check. A pause hung over them along with the summer heat.

“You have friends though. Allies.”

At this Rey looked back over to her ladies. Of old Maz who would outlive them all and call malaria a head-cold. Of Jessika who forsook her own family to tend to the royal one. And Rose. The most complex, the hardest to figure out and fast becoming one of Rey’s favourites. The little woman was beginning to warm to Rey though; she was sure of it and she had a suspicion that Rose was beginning to gain more friends. Finn had been keen to ride alongside her when they had moved from the latest hunting lodge to Calrissian’s abode. Rose had talked with relish to her Master of Horse and had even giggled on occasion. It warmed her heart to see a sight such as that. Finn was becoming so dear to her and the thought of him finding happiness with one of her companions bought her much pleasure. Maybe she could organise a match for the two? They were of similar rank and seemed fond of one another.

Rey hoped that Dameron’s influence over Finn would not hinder it. The two men had disregarded
rank and become fast friends. They played cards together, went hawking and generally made great merriment wherever they went. She had even noticed the other day that Finn had taken to wearing Poe’s jerkin much to the scandal of court and the amusement of the Captain. Poe was charming and excelled in all he did but she suspected that no-one was quite as perfect as all that. Rey believed that he not only attracted adoration but craved it. Finn’s clear hero worship would suit Poe down to the ground but where would it leave Finn once the Captain got bored?

The children played about her and a kind of contented silence fell over Rey and the Prince.

It was a change from the feeling of heat that always radiated up Rey at his proximity but a pleasant one.

She did not give back the piece of linen. She took to tucking it into her girdle instead.

The last banquet planned at Cloud City was a grand one and many of the nobility came to pay homage to the reduced Court. Rey sat upon her dais as many nobles presented her with gifts and well wishes. They all began to blur into one endless shadow after a time.

Rey watched the dancing with a keen eye. For that night, the Prince had agreed to dance.

Granted, the King had been quite insistent upon it. Lady Connix had been bought forward to the Royal dais.

The young girl had benefited from Queen Leia’s patronage and had grown educated as a result of the late Queen’s attentions. She was a comely girl with her hair styled much like the late Queen’s in her younger days. Possibly in homage to her former mistress.

Han had been respectful and eager to see her upon her arrival and had insisted that his son accompany her in a group dance.

Rey was forced to watch as the Prince moved through his steps with grace and dignity while the young girl cavorted about his person. She was indeed a graceful dancer, and it seemed to rub salt into a wound that Rey had never realised she even had. The achievements of this girl, no doubt an up and coming member of the Resistance court, only seemed to highlight their differences.
The Prince had a grace that left her oddly short of breath. His height and broadness could have been taken as indication of his lack of movement in that regard but he excelled at this exercise like he did in every other. It also highlighted his beautiful legs. His calves were really very fine.

She clapped with gusto as the dance came to an end. Not so much out of appreciation but relief.

Ben took his place beside the King. A page came to his side and handed him a gift covered in cloth of crimson. They talked feverishly then the man retreated.

“Your Grace, may I present the Queen with a gift?” He asked humbly.

Rey turned to look at the Prince in amazement. A gift? He’d got her a gift?

Han nodded acquiescence and Rey was handed the covered gift. Pulling aside the crimson cloth, she looked down at the gift within.

It was a sword with a ridged hand and made of the most skilled craftsmanship.

“I know you wished to feel closer to your natural family. I thought this may be appreciated.” Ben explained sounding oddly bashful.

“By the Maker, is that Kenobi’s old sword?” Han cried in amazement.

“I thought it should be returned to the owner.”

Her grandfather’s sword?

He’d held this in his own hand. A piece of him… returned to her.
Ben crossed himself at his prie-dieu and rose to exit his private chapel. It had been a long day but a rewarding one. They were due to leave for Hux’s family seat the next day. He had turned to God more than ever at the prospect. The Progress had been a success so far – he was confident that this would end abruptly.

But he’d done it. He’d found the sword. Just as he had found his own grandfather’s and now it was back in the rightful owner’s hands.

His father had seemed pleased at his initiative. He’d congratulated Ben warmly. Almost proudly. He’d not been looking at the look of amazement and the reverence that his wife had bestowed upon Ben in turn.

He closed his eyes in remembrance. What he would give for those eyes to be on him and only him at all times.

Ben walked down the shadow of nave when there was the sound of a latch opening. Looking up, the door to the chapel opened. And the Queen appeared in the candlelight.

She was dressed for her bed with a satin nightgown clinging to her to hide her modesty and her chemise. Her gable hood was still atop her head though it looked slightly askew as though shoved on in a hurry. He’d always hated the gable style and deemed it unnecessary as French hood were being push back more and more on young lady’s heads. Some noblewomen barely had their heads covered at all. Yet there was hardly a strand showing on her head. He hated that.

She was not accompanied by her ladies. She was alone and had come to see him.

They did not bow to one another.

“Milady.”

She said nothing in return for a moment. She seemed to struggle for words.

“I… I did not thank you. Not properly. The sword… it means… thank you, your Grace.”
“It was a trifle.” Ben dismissed. Though he lamented that scouring the land for a single sword had been anything but a trifle. Enough gold had changed hands to build a small monastery.

“But my gratitude… you must know that however you wish to be repaid, it would not be enough.”

Ben shook his head. “It is not a case of repayment.”

The Queen came close to him. Her face was earnest. “You have my deepest thanks, good Sir.”

She then smiled gently at him with eyes brimming with warmth. It made his heart stutter. She then went to turn away.

“There is something!” The words poured from his mouth almost without permission. The Queen turned back.

“Anything.”

“Will you… remove your hood for me?”

Ben could not believe such words had been uttered. Clearly neither could the Queen. A married woman could not go about with her head uncovered. It was the sign of lasciviousness and sin. To request such a thing was scandalous.

“Sir-”

“I just wish to see your hair. As I did before.”

The Queen blinked rapidly. “Before?”

“My window. You were in the gardens. It was early. You were with your cat.”
The colour rose to the Queen’s cheeks. Clearly his presence had not been noted.

“He plew.” His plea was quiet but there was an entreaty to his tone. Let me see you. Let me see all of you.

At first, he suspected she may refuse. Why would she not? Maybe slap him and call him a rogue. Instead, her hands tremulously went to the back of her neck and began to unlace the ribbons holding it in place.

Ben could hardly believe his luck. He dared not. Here he was; standing in God’s home watching as the most powerful woman in the kingdom made herself almost naked for her. No amount of confessionals could give atonement for this. But eternity in Hell was worth it for this.

The veil came loose. The cumbersome headdress was pull up and off her head. And there she was. His Aurora.

Her hair shone in the candlelight. It looked almost golden and hung to her lower back. She tucked a strand behind her ear in a gesture of shyness.

“Don’t.”

He held up a hand and then reached forward. His finger touched a strand. It was soft to touch.

Slowly he circled her and gazed at her all the time. Her chest was rising and falling rapidly. Facing her back, he slowly lifted her hair away from her neck. It felt like spun silk and the floral sent of rose soap assaulted his senses.

The tender skin upon her neck looked paper thin and delicate. His finger running through the strands accidentally touched the skin behind her ear.

The Queen gave a little gasp.

He must have lost himself to a spell for his sensibilities went awry. With deliberate intent, he pressed his mouth to her pulse point.
Her gasp turned to a moan of lust and her body was pulled flush to his chest.

With the idols of the church looking on and the fog of sin blinding him, they were lost.
Kudos and comments get me up in the morning. Put a (1) in my inbox. It's all the payment I ever ask for.

EDIT: Massive thank you to Buiana for making this beautiful manip. Give her as much love as she deserves:
https://68.media.tumblr.com/a67a1344b228354cd560b67632d7fbe1/tumblr_ot6tajDukP1tpctgio1_1
http://buiana.tumblr.com/
Chapter Notes

My tumblr: https://waterlilyrose.tumblr.com/

My undying love and thanks to my wifey Jess444 for her fab moodboards and my beta Poet Hrotestha who is an incredible writer. Read "Infinite Doors" if you love Reylo one-shots that are smoking hot!

See the end of the chapter for more notes
I only came to give thanks. I only came to give thanks!

The justification rang in Rey’s ears even as she did nothing. Did nothing to stop a man who wasn’t her husband press her against his body. Did nothing as he touched her uncovered head with questing fingers. Laid his lips upon her neck. She did nothing. She can honestly say she did nothing. And that made it all the worse.

The sword had genuinely moved her so. It had remained in her hands even as her ladies spoke of preparing her for bed. She bid that she wished to sleep alone that night. It was not met with opposition – the ladies seemed to know she needed time to lament. But lamentation did not suffice. She had to see the Prince. To give her heartfelt thanks. For truly, they were friends now, were they not? She would accept him into her heart as such.

To have been asked such a favour in return had left her staggered. So simple an exchange yet so scandalous at the same time. Jessika’s chastisement about going into the gardens with her head uncovered in the morning came back to make good on their words. He’d seen her playing with BB8. What else had he witnessed that she knew nothing about?

Yet Rey had always suffered the sin of pride. She was obstinate and if someone told her she should not or could not do something she had a maddening urge to do just that. Besides, it seemed so… normal after his gift. Such a small gift to give. And he was kin now. Maybe it wouldn’t hurt…

Oh, she’d misstepped. She had not realised… how could she have known, truly? She’d suspected but had put it down to the paranoia that court life bred. She’d seen maddening rage, woeful sadness, vicious amusement and challenge in his eyes before. Those dark eyes as black as coal. But there had always been something else.

Now she knew: lust.

For as he lay coaxing kisses upon her exposed neck there could be no doubt.

The Crown Prince, her husband’s son, the man who should by rights call her Mother, wanted her as a starving man wants a pack of wild deer.

Oh what a fool she was. A fool for not seeing how inevitable this had been and a fool to let her neck tip further back so he had better access.
His hands, as big as shovels, trailed up her torso and burned through her nightgown. His soft hair tickled her ear.

She turned her head to look at him as though to confirm this was real. That this was not some fantastic abominable dream. And the Prince took the opportunity to press his full mouth against her own gaping lips.

Her muffled moan was obscene in the echoing halls of the chapel.

This was passion. This was lust. This was how a man kissed a woman with purpose.

She’d never been kissed before. A wife who had never been kissed. The only kiss she had received had been at the alter and that had been close-mouthed and chaste. There was a damp sensation against her lips and they parted almost in confusion. The Prince used the opportunity to slip his tongue to touch hers.

Rey was lost. Utterly adrift. She’d always prided herself on her stubbornness, on her strength of will and the leanings towards God’s light. But now the darkness was enveloping and, lowly sinner that she was, she wanted to hide in it. Wanted to be submissive and let the Devil take her for her pains.

Was this Prince the Devil? Or her own personal fallen angel?

They had been kissing with her head titled back and her neck turned to the side. Her back nestled against his chest. Now the Prince wrenched his lips away. But not to repent. It was to turn her around and bring her crashing against him so he could see her profile utterly. Her little breasts fell upon a wall of muscle as he tilted her head up and savaged her lips again.

Rey had no other choice but to hold onto his shoulders as he went to work making her a woman.

She was guided to the side of a pew and they leant against it, not daring to stop their plunder of one another’s mouths. His huge hands grabbed her chemise. They were pulled up to reveal her stockinged legs. Rey felt like she may fall and her leg was wrapped around the Prince’s hip to give some semblance of balance.
It only made the hardness of that which a man showed his desire rub against her womanly core. The friction was enough to make them both pant. She wanted him to keep rubbing.

*Keep going.* Her own personal demon which all the world’s sinners possessed was singing gleefully. *Shrive me right here. I want to feel. I want to know.*

She knew so little of this overwhelming emotion. She had never had this…

She had never been deflowered. For that had been her husband’s job which he had saved her from.

Her husband.

Han. His father.

Suddenly the friction and the hands with those taunting demanding lips did not feel like a benediction but like fire. Fire which she would be committed to for this wicked intent. Suffocating… Choking…

“No!” Rey finally cried and pushed the Prince back with her strength returning. The Prince staggered back as though caught off guard. Rey’s skirts fell down against but not enough to completely hide her legs. To hide her wantonness.

The Prince looked like temptation himself. His cheeks, normally so pale, were flushed. His hair was a mess of curls. His lips almost purple with their previous bruised activity. And the outline of what she was capable of inspiring within him was still evident against the laces of his breeches.

Rey gasped in as much breath as she could muster. She could still taste him. Still feel his brand.

All her courage had forced him away. Now her self-preservation saw to it that she escape.

Grabbing her hood off the floor of the nave, she rammed it back onto her head, pulled her skirts down and ran for the doors.
The castle was dark and she saw no-one on her way back to her apartments. Not that she could stop even if she did.

Rey couldn’t say, looking back, how she had been so lucky as to not be noticed in such a state or how she had slipped into her bedroom unheard by her ladies who were all asleep.

For in that moment, luck did not seem to have much to do with it.

Ben watched dumbly as her skirts disappeared through the door. He was struck mute.

The echoing silence of the chapel was all the more pronounced now and he was left feeling a need to fill it with sound. If they’d continued, sound would have echoed upon to walls and he would have been damned.

He’d betrayed his father. He’d betrayed his principles. He’d near surrendered his virtue and no doubt deflowered the most powerful woman in the kingdom.

He was an abomination before God. The one thing in his life that had given him credence and a feeling of belonging.

He turned back to the alter which he had pointedly not looked at during their… encounter. The eyes of the Madonna, cradling the baby Jesus, still had their indulgent nurturing look yet there was now a hint of something else, something more contemptuous.

Had she known all along?

He put his hands together shakily.

“Forgive me Father for I have sinned. I have offended you through the sin of lust.”

His lips then did something that he couldn’t explain: he smiled.
I have sinned. And I’ll do it again.

Rey was left in a state of nearly permanent agitation for days afterwards. It was almost as though she had become out of body and she could see herself being dressed, walking to dinner, sewing a shirt and praying from upon high. She noticed nothing; she was constantly listening for the knock on the door.

The Progress north continued as before and Jessika put it down to the stresses of constant movement.

“We shall soon rest, Your Grace. I believe we shall be at Mustafar for at least five days.”

Rey smiled her acquiescence but it pulled tightly upon her facial muscles.

Even Han, never the most perceptive in regards to female emotions, had noticed a difference.

“You are awfully quiet lately, Rey.” He mentioned beside the fire as they sat in their current lodgings. “Is everything well?”

“Quite well, Milord.” She managed not sounding the least bit convincing. It took all her knowledge of survival not to burst into tears.

Han. Oh Han. Her husband. Her good, loyal husband who was far kinder than he would ever allow credit for. If he knew what she’d done he would not be quite so concerned for her pleasure.

She knew she was becoming almost neurotic around him. She couldn’t sit still. Would he like some ale? Some wine? Is the fire hot enough? Shall she call for some more firewood? Does your back trouble you tonight? Would you like me to call a physician?

Yet when it came to real talk, the kind of which she knew he liked, she found she had nothing to contribute. She was talking too much when there was no need and not enough when there was.
She prayed more than she had ever done. Her knees were beginning to grow callouses. She prayed for forgiveness; an absolution that would never come.

For she was an adulteress. And even worse, a traitoress.

She had committed treason. And she could not forget the treason she had committed.

The Prince would not allow her to forget.

Rey had been clever. She had confined herself with her ladies at all times and kept to her private chambers. She had not gone to chapel without a large attendance, she rode with Finn close at hand and she dined with the King. She did not walk in the gardens or attempt to join the hunt. She was an island and only the swimmers that she permitted to land could get close.

But he did not need words and he certainly was too wise to write any letters; his eyes were his messengers.

She’d always been oddly distracted by his prominent nose and full lips to pay much attention to his eyes. But now they spoke as though he were whispering in her ear himself.

Across the dais at dinner before the court: I can’t forget.

As they both mounted their horse: I know you remember my touch.

As the court knelt for Mass: I don’t care if God is angry.

And any other time their eyes chanced a meeting: I want you. And I must have you.

Rey kept her eyes down as much as possible. What was remarkable to her was that the hand on her shoulder that she always expected never came. No guards came to read charges against her. No boat was prepared to take her to the Tower. Not even Hux was anything except his usual unpleasant self and she had no doubt that he would be sickeningly gleeful to have such information.
Han was his usual self. Her ladies were as docile as always and she was left to her own torment.

Some respite was granted on their journey to Mustafar. For not too far from the castle there was a site of pilgrimage.

Vader’s old land was also home to a shrine he had built in honour of his late lady wife: Lady Amidala.

The late Queen was reverenced almost to the point of sainthood, with many speaking of the miracles carried out at her shrine (indeed there had been calls to canonize her for many years) and it was said offerings to her tomb helped expectant mothers and those who struggled with pregnancy. It was recommended, none too subtly, that it may be of interest to the young Queen.

Han had tried to get Rey out of it as he done many other things but for once Rey was eager to attend. It was a place of thanksgiving and peace; she needed some peace of mind right at that moment.

Rey and her ladies arrived at the chapel which Vader had given to Padmé as such a sumptuous casket. The church was well preserved and richly bejewelled.

Rey mused as she was helped down from her mare by Finn that for all Vader’s faults, and he had possessed many, he had truly loved his wife and Queen.

Rey and her ladies gave their offerings and knelt at the altar to hear Mass. Rey found her mind wandering from the word of God to the lady whose resting place was littered with gifts.

Padmé Amidala had died young. Her twin children had been separated from her after their birth and her husband had fallen victim to a lust for power. And their decision to marry had been based in a love match; utterly reprehensible in these political times. Marriage was for advancement and power. Never for personal pleasure!

Rey wondered what Padmé would think of her. She who had married the widower of her daughter. And had fornicated with her grandson.
Tears dripped down her cheeks and Rey’s fingernails bit into the gaps between her knuckles.

Padmé would condemn her as she condemned herself.

The priest noticed the Queen’s emotion and seemed quite moved, clearly mistaking her distress as devotion to the Mass. Jessika was close at hand to help her mistress to her feet at the end. She whispered soothing words, though she no doubt thought her mistresses’ misery was born from her desire for a child.

Rey lamented all the way down the nave that if they only knew what she had done they would cast her out as a heretic or a whore. Her tears were silent yet persistent as she rode for the castle of Mustafar.

Ben had ridden with his father and the rest of the gentry towards Mustafar with heavy heart. The Queen would arrive later that afternoon and he would be deprived of her sight again.

The days that had passed had been almost impossible. For as soon as he’d pledged himself to no longer live with guilt and to pursue his quarry, she had retreated so far beyond his reach he could not get near without alerting suspicion. She kept herself well guarded and they had not had one moment alone since that night.

The memory was his poison and he drank from the bottle without thought.

He had become almost bewitched by the memory. The smell and touch of her hair, the feel of her tiny waist, her nervous and unsure kisses. He was sure that had she not pushed him away he would have unlaced himself and took her maidenhead right there upon the pew seats. It should, and would previously, have disgusted him but he revisited it every night when he undressed for bed and dreamt up new ways they may have made an end. The stain of sensual pleasure was upon him and he could not wash it off.

For it was too late – now he must taste her again. And neither the law, decency, or God would get in his way.

The trip to Mustafar meant that his father rode alongside him as they had once done. Now, far from finding it touching and signal of favour, he felt suffocated.
“I am proud of you for how you have conducted yourself lately.” Han told him as they rode across the country.

“How so, Sir?”

“That gift of the sword meant a great deal to the Queen. She has been out of sorts ever since. But I know she is grateful to you.”

“It was no matter.” Ben dismissed.

“But it was a kindness you did her. And you have my thanks.”

Han’s eyes seemed so genuinely soft. So rare from his usual grumpy nature.

A rush of guilt which Ben thought himself done with flowed through his veins. In his new-found passion, he had set aside all other things and was now reminded of what stood to be lost.

Not only would he be thrown to the block once more— and no doubt feel the axe this time— but he would finally break his father’s trust utterly. That sword which he acquired would be used to plunge into the King’s chest.

A final betrayal.

They arrived at Mustafar soon after and Ben found his horse slow as he looked at the turrets. He had not been here for… a long time.

Hux now had control of the palace and it had not changed as a result.

Ben’s eye caught the stable. And his memory caught hold of a time when he’d allowed lust to govern him.
Ben had not always been seen as a Prince of chastity. When he’d been a young Prince-in-training, he’d been much like other boys his age.

At the castle of Mustafar, he’d not had many companions his own age. In fact, he’d nearly had none whatsoever. Lord Snoke had kept him isolated and had made sure that none of the local sons and daughters of the neighbouring counties were whisked away before they could get too close. It did not upset Ben too much; a lifetime of being forced to deal with Dameron had calmed his need for companionship.

But soon Ben was given a lesson in how Snoke would accept nothing but Ben all to himself.

There were various servants and maids about the castle. Ben had been taught to pay them no mind as had all royals but when he’d turned fourteen he began to notice a few.

He began to notice how tendrils of hair came loose from the scullery maid’s coif when she swooped a curtsey in his presence. He noticed how the girl who came to change and light the candles in his room kept her head down in his presence – and how it emphasised her generous chest. And he began to hear stories.

None of the servants would dare talk to him to address him much less like an equal so Ben began to play a game. When the castle had gone silent and the servants had retired to the kitchen to drink ale, he would sneak down and hide in the ceiling of the kitchen. Mustafar was a rickety old place and there were many crevices and places to hide even as he grew a foot in only six months.

Looking down, he marvelled at the change in these people that he saw every day. Under the influence of freedom and mead, they were loud, boisterous and lewd enough to make his cheeks burn.

They sang bawdy songs, told jokes (some at his expense and he had to fist his hand into his mouth to keep from yelling out in anger) and were shameless in their activities. Particularly amorous.

Several maids and servants kissed hungrily, would slip outside with some pathetic attempt at an excuse and come back flushed and with hay in their hair. Ben was entranced – was this how common people lived? Did they love freely?

One of the dairy maids drank but did not join in with their lewdness. She did not seem surprised but also did not seem inclined to join in. She was a pretty girl with blonde hair spilling out from her
hat and a comely face. Her figure was pretty too. Ben found himself staring at her for the majority of the time.

After that, he found himself looking out of his window to see if he could catch sight of her.

Ben rarely had much privacy so it was hard to get a moment to himself, let alone a moment with the girl he was growing attracted to, but he managed it. He went down to the stables early in the morning and found her tending to her business. She was flustered and almost stammering to catch sight of the Crown Prince but he bid her rise up. He was already taller than her though she was clearly older than him. The comely face was flushed at the sensation of his eyes upon her.

In hindsight it was easy. He took her chin between his fingers so her face was exposed to him and acted on the desire to press his lips to hers. She did not seem to mind if the little moans that escaped her were any indication.

After that it became a routine. Ben would rise before the household and sneak down to meet her. There was kissing and much touching over clothes but he never tried anything more. Even with his rank so above hers, he was still conscious of her virtue. To deflower virgins was a sin – he’d been taught from the books of Arthur and his gallant knights.

Yet one day she seemed to not be at all bothered about virtue.

“Would you like me to unlace you Milord?” She’d asked breathlessly.

Ben felt her fingers playing with the strings of his hose and gulped. Many men tumbled before their wedding night, he knew that well, yet he was still nervous. What if he did not do it right? Yet curiosity was a tempting mistress.

She had started to work the knot open when there was a scandalised cry.

The cook had come out to see where the milk was – they’d been caught.

If Ben had possessed any money on his person he would have bribed the cook. Sadly, Lord Snoke kept him woefully dependant on the charity of his parents and his guardian. So the cook reported to Lord Snoke as he was the better bet.
Ben had felt trepidation as he waited in Lord Snoke’s rooms. He lamented that he’d got the girl in trouble for she’d been sweet to him.

When Lord Snoke came to him, he was set-jawed and had eyes like fire. Ben was prepared for his telling off and to atone for his sins. He was unaware how he was to atone though.

“Look at me.” Snoke had snarled. Ben lifted his face. And had it jerked to the side by a blade of a switch.

The pain was like fire on his cheek. He staggered both in shock and agony. He’d never been struck before- it was against the law to whip or hurt a Prince in anyway. He even had his own whipping boy when he made mistakes in the classroom. Yet another blow came upon him and he fell to his knees.

The blows kept raining down on him. His jerkin was not removed but he may as well have been wearing nothing for the pain that he endured upon his back. It soon became shredded from the force of Snoke’s whip.

He sobbed. He begged. He pleaded. Yet the pain was never-ending and the wrath of his mentor seemed to know no bounds.

After what felt like an eternity, the blows ceased. Snoke threw the whip to the side and with one last caustic look he swept from the room. Leaving Ben bleeding on the floor.

He was left upon the floor for hours. Every time he tried to move, he faced writhing agony. The tears kept spilling from his eyes onto the wood-floor.

Why? Why had this been done to him? His princely dignity had been compromised and above all he was confused and in despair. Surely kissing a milk maid did not merit such brute force?

Ben had managed to force himself upright and against a chair when the door opened again. Lord Snoke had returned.

The Prince tried to back away but it caused him too much pain. He gulped a pathetic sob when
Snoke approached him leisurely.

Yet Snoke did not hurt him again. Instead he saw upon the chair that Ben had been clutching for support and ran his hand soothingly through his hair. It resembled a master and his dog but he wasn’t being hit so Ben thanked the gospel for that.

“There, there. Fear not little Prince. It’s alright.” Lord Snoke said soothingly. Ben dared to hope that it was alright.

“Master...”

“I’m sorry about that. But can’t you see... can’t you see why I had to do that?”

Ben blinked but did not look up. See? No, he didn’t see. What could have warranted such punishment? The hand still smoothed his hair.

“Lying with a servant... it’s not unknown. Many boys have done it and many will continue to do it long after I’m gone. But it is not the work of Princes. You must be above such temptations. Above such desires.”

Ben sniffed. “Is it because of our difference in rank?”

“Yes. And no. For you see, I would have done the same if you were caught with a Countess or a Lady. Lust, sins of the flesh, it distracts us from the business of ruling. It leaves us open to corruption. Open to influence. If you had lost your innocence to that girl, you would be bound to her. You would forever have a tenderness for her. You may have even gotten a bastard upon her. And then you would have honoured the child. Whose mother was only a lowly servant. It would be a disgrace and make you a laughing stock. You must dedicate yourself to God and follow his purpose.”

“Isn’t it my duty to marry and have heirs?” Ben asked plaintively and feeling his head spin.

“Indeed it is. You will marry a Princess for foreign policy and then sire heirs so your legacy will continue. Love will not come into it.” His hand set itself upon Ben’s shoulder. “Don’t you see now, Your Grace: this was a favour to you. It was for your benefit for it is God’s will.”
Ben did not know what to say so said nothing.

Ben never saw the maid again. He didn’t know what happened to her and wasn’t sure he wanted to know; all he knew was it was like she was never there and life went on.

Loving Jaina had broken his spirit. Attempting to love any woman had threatened to break his body.

Rejecting his parents who he had barely ever known became almost second nature when the time came.

Soft. Ticklish. Oddly maddening. The sensation crept up Rey’s body like a spider.

She was lain upon the bed in her nightdress and had been dozing sleepily. Jessika was not beside her; nor was Rose. She was alone but for someone. Who?

Hands, too big to be a woman’s, slip beneath her nightgown. They graze her thigh. They play with the curls beneath her belly. They part her. Sinking within her.

Her head is thrown back. She can hear noises that her womanhood would make while such an intrusion is made. It is lewd but makes her toss her head more.

She blinks; her nightgown is gone. She is naked and flushed with sweat. As is he.

He has the body that shows he has fought battles. Pressed against her, his weight delights her. His mouth is greedy and she is a feast.

They rut like animals. He’s now as close as a man can be. He’s grunting. She’s gasping. Her body moves with his.
She can’t breathe. She can’t. But not from desire.

She’s… choking. Smoke. Heat. Fire.

She looks around. She’s not in her bed. She’s dressed in her shift again. She standing and tied to a pole. A stake.

She’s burning. Burning!

The flames are nearly at her feet. She can’t breathe. Can’t breathe!

She calls out for help. For him.

Then she sees him. He is dressed but only in his doublet and breeches. He’s kneeling. His head is supported.

Upon the block.

The axe swings, the flames lick higher and she screams.

Rey screamed and fought off the flames that were no longer there. She sat bolt upright and panting in her own bed with no one in it.

It was a nightmare. It wasn’t real.

The door opened and Jessika dashed in. No-one had slept next to her that night for which she thanked God. Who knows what she may have cried out!

“Milady, are you well?” Jess asked.

“A dream. Only a dream.” Rey rubbed her forehead. It was damp with cold perspiration.
Jessika bought her a cup of wine which she shakily drank from. She became more aware of herself. She was disgusted when she realised that she had damp thighs too. At first she wondered if she had experienced her moon blood early or maybe wet herself. But a cursory glance quelled both fears.

This was the after-effect of her lustful first part of the dream.

Even now, she felt herself almost pulse with remembrance.

“Milady, you’re trembling.” Jessika said sounding alarmed.

“It is nothing. Bring me a bowl of rose water. I wish to wash myself.”

Jessika left the room and gave Rey a chance to collect herself.

Enough. Enough of this!

This was not like her! She was not some floundering maiden. She was strong. She was resilient. She was a Queen.

This would not beat her. He would not break her. She’d made a mistake but she could repent.

She would not be broken.

If the Prince wanted her, which looked likelier by the hour, then he would find her an elusive target!

Chapter End Notes

The response I received from the last chapter has left me utterly overwhelmed! I cannot thank you all enough. I try to keep updates as regular as possible which is hard when RL gets in the way. If any of there are any readers of Respite, I'm trying to
update really! I am just totally strapped for time with work. Hopefully I will have one up soon

Again, a (1) in my inbox is all that I long for so please make me a happy girl. I love you all.
Chapter Notes

Massive thank you to Jess444 for the beautiful moodboards and Poet Hrovistha for the amazing advice she gives as my beta.

A huge kiss to TheFaultinourAuthorss for making a playlist for this fic. Give it a listen, the music is beautiful:
https://open.spotify.com/user/qqueendoms/playlist/10lOaCcBe7bzyYoSrsqsM9

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The next morning Rey rose with the sun and ordered a bath to be made beside her fire. Having only had a shallow bowl to do her washing from when she lived within the walls of Jakku, having a bath was a thing of great luxury to her as it would be to any subject. The wooden bath was filled with linen around the edges so she could rest her back with relative comfort and she shut her eyes in contentment as Maz got to work washing her hair with rose soap. Springs of lavender were also added from the herb gardens surrounding Mustafar.

“Are you feeling better this morning, Your Grace?” Jessika asked gently as she ran a cloth over Rey’s shoulders.
“Much better, Jess. It’s a new dawn.” Rey said no more. She was washing away the dirt and sins of her past and looking towards the future.

She rose from the bath freshly washed and sweet smelling. She hoped in time her conscience and soul would follow.

Rey was dried off beside the fire and dressed in her shift. Then she began to prepare for the day.

For the first time, she paid special attention to what she wore. She instructed Rose to bring her dresses in the royal colours: scarlet red, rich purple or cloth of gold. Her ladies were clearly surprised but pleased to oblige. In the end she chose a scarlet gown with a cloth of gold kirtle and sleeves to match. She chose a Gable hood and veil with strict instructions that none of her hair should show; not even a whisper of it.

Jessika applied rouge to her lips and cheeks and hung rubies from her neck.

When it was finished, Rey barely recognised herself. She was now Queen in deed as well as in name.

“You look breathtaking, Your Grace.” Rose interjected.

She looked more than that: she looked regal and powerful.

“That was my intention Lady Teko.” She smiled. “Now, let us go to Mass.”

The days that followed at Mustafar were even more frustrating that the previous trips on Progress for Ben. The Queen still remained elusive and out of his reach but now she was something even more baffling: she seemed full of life to the point of bursting.

She dressed more grandly than she had ever done before, she ate more heartily, she prayed more fervently and she was more full of energy than even the most sprightly court dancer.
The people of Mustafar’s estate were in no mood to ask questions as to this gaiety: this was a fresh and pretty lease of life to an otherwise aged court. The new Queen was generous in her offerings to the people and they accepted her alms with humble adulation.

The court seemed quite taken aback by this new energy also but had drawn their own conclusion. The Queen was being more affectionate to her husband, the King, than ever before. She attended him every night, ate every meal in his company and seemed attentive and pleased to be with him any moment he wished it. Her trip to the resting place of Queen Amidala was now widely known and Hux had shared his observations with Ben.

“She is play acting. This happiness is for the benefit of the court and the King. She is worried that she is not yet with child and is making herself as agreeable as possible so the King will not have cause to have her supplanted.”

Ben took secret joy in hearing Hux make completely the wrong assessment of a situation and merely sipped his ale.

For he and he alone knew the real reason: she was meeting his challenge.

Ben was not a fool and a life of double dealing had taught him to read danger and games like a sermon on a lectern. No, she was not worried about the King’s interest waning.

She was making her position as Queen as noticeable and far reaching as possible.

Her eyes would sometimes meet his and they were not frightened or confused any longer; they were steely and almost goading.

Go on. Make your move, they seemed to say. I will meet you step for step, move for move.

She had thrown down a gauntlet; it was now up to him as to whether he would pick it up.

He would leave it in the dirt if only he could. Instead he had no choice but to cradle it to his breast and wait out his challenge.
She did not realise. Did not realise just how his blood burned in his veins for her. To see her bowed before the alter in prayer in her gown of blood red (the colour of martyrdom no less) was a constant reminder of his yearning for her. To see her sit upon her throne adorned splendidly made him dream of a world where she would have been Queen but he would have been King.

Sometimes he imagined her sat beside him with a ripe belly.

He had been forced to bring out his whip and strike himself for such sinful thinking. And yet what a beautiful thing it was to imagine such sin.

If there were but one consolation to this torment it was that his mind was taken off the other memories that this great castle held for him. For he saw the ghost of Lord Snoke in nearly every room he tread.

Hux had benefited greatly from Snoke’s fall. All his properties and titles had reverted back to the Crown upon his execution by Act of Attainder and while Ben had still been under suspicion he had not been in a position to reap the rewards. He had come to assume that his father had gifted it to Hux as a means of sweetening him up. Or maybe as a kind of warning; what is given can just as quickly be taken away.

Ben believed that this castle was perfect for Hux: it was made of black stone that looked almost volcanic and the sun had a way of setting over the mountain that made the grass and mountains turn almost as red as fire. It was a beautiful and yet terrible kind of magnificence.

A beautiful yet terrible kind of magnificence; a little like the crown he had longed for with such passion for so long.

Rey tried to pivot on her heel. Her slippers made walking rather difficult at times; this on the other hand…

“Stretch your arm back more. It gives you more balance when you bounce on your toes.”

Rey took Jess’ advice with good grace and tried it. It was true that she felt a little more steady. The next time she attempted a pivot the arc of her arm helped her keep her posture.
It had been one of the joys of her newly gilded life to watch the members of the court in the act of dancing. Now she had taken on a new task: to join them.

It was quite a feat to look so graceful and to move in a manner that seemed effortless. She was fortunate that she had Jessika here to instruct her and that the musicians that played within her rooms were endlessly patient.

Jessika was endeavouring to teach her the most common dance, the Cinque Pas, and while Rey could remember the steps very well, she found that the effortless grace that her ladies displayed (with the exception of Maz who didn’t set much store with such things) rather hard to emulate. A lifetime of practise was hard to match in only a few lessons. Though Jessika was adamant that she were coming on remarkably fast.

“If I were a suitable dancing master, Your Grace, you would be up to scratch in barely an afternoon I’m sure. If you would just let me send for one-”

“No, Lady Dameron.” Rey replied firmly. “I want to be taught in private and by friends.”

The past few days had been a swift lesson to Rey: there were so few people in this world who were worthy of trust. Yet she trusted her ladies. They had been nothing but kind to her and helpful in all they did. For this, she was grateful.

Their time at Mustafar would come to an end that Friday before they began their journey back towards the city of London. That last night, they would be the recipients of a great banquet. There would be music and dancing and this time Rey was determined to join the merry makers.

Han had been fondly amused at her desire to dance but encouraged her learning nonetheless.

“Maybe you should try your hand at the lute as well,” he pondered “I’ll wager you would be a fine musician.”

“If it would please you.” She responded with enthusiasm. She’d never learnt an instrument and had her eye on learning the virginals but decided to take her time.
“You seem remarkably happier these days, Rey.” Han commented, clearly pleased at her transformation. “You’ve been rather sedate these past few days. I was beginning to worry.”

“I have been tired. The travel… I am not used to it. But I am in good spirits now. And I mean to do you proud as your Queen.”

“I am proud of you, Rey. You’ve shown that my decision to take you on as my Queen was the right decision.” It was an unusually honest thing for Han to say and Rey could not contain the choke that escaped her throat. All her life she’d been longing for someone to express pride in her; in so many ways, this was all she’d ever dreamed. “What is this?” Han had asked, tipping her chin, “Why are you upset?”

“Not upset.” Rey amended quickly. “Only humbled and determined not to let you down.” The ‘again’ part was unspoken but Rey knew it to be true. She would be a true and devoted wife and would never do anything to injure his name.

So Rey committed herself to learning the steps of the dance and playing the game. For she had a contender whom she had to beat.

The royal court painter had followed them on their Progress to the North and their stay within Mustafar gave him time to set his studio back up and to proceed with his work in immortalising the Queen’s image.

Rey wore her purple gown with her cloth of gold sleeves to replicate her previous outfit for the painting. She stood straight and with relative ease as the gentleman with paint stained fingers went about his work. He muttered to himself many times as he worked; it was normally words of irritation if something did not quite work. Artists were perfectionists and did not accept a lack of perfection lightly.

Jessika sat by the doorway, quietly sewing a shirt as her mistress sat for her likeness. The rain was hitting the window pane and it was a soothing noise.

There was a knock at the door and a page walked in with a bow.

“His Grace, the Prince of Alderaan.”
Rey stiffened as Jessika promptly got to her feet. The Prince strode into the room with an ease that galled her. His hands were behind his back and he was garbed in his normal black doublet and hose. Rey attributed her lack of breath to her rage; she refused to let herself dwell on the fact that the sight of him was enough to make her dreams come screaming back to her.

She had prepared herself for this. She would not bend to the pressure.

“Your Grace,” the painter bowed with deference to his Prince, “thank you for your time.”

“It is no trouble.” The Prince said blithely. Then he sat down beside Rey. Rey, who had remained seated in utter defiance, got her feet.

“Shall I sit at the window Master Painter?” Rey asked already moving away from the object of her torment.

“That is not necessary, Your Grace. I shall take both your likenesses at once. That way I shall not impose so much upon your time.”

Rey was tempted to rip the French hood off her head and throw it at the painter. She cared nothing for her time being imposed on; she cared more for her sanity and preservation.

Instead, she sat back down, albeit slowly and with poised reluctance.

Jessika went back to her sewing and the painter back to his work. The Prince and herself were more or less left unobserved.

Rey looked astutely ahead as though her neck had lost the ability to turn. She would give him nothing; for he was waiting for her to give some kind of sign. She could feel it radiating off his skin like a fever.

The Prince seemed almost unconcerned. There was motion in her peripheral vision before the Prince addressed her.
“Are you hungry, Your Grace?”

Rey turned her head to look at him. He was close enough for her to see his freckles yet not close enough to be scandalous.

Not close enough, a traitorous part of her brain seemed to sing.

“I am quite well, thank you Your Grace.” She replied stiffly.

The Prince turned to the bowl of fruit upon the table beside him and picked up a piece. “Have you sampled the pomegranates?”

“Not recently.” Rey managed stiffly.

“They are quite a delicacy.” He drew out his dagger and idly began to cut the fruit in half. “Very succulent.”

Rey’s eyes glanced down at the fruit in his hands. The inside was spotted with blood red seeds. It looked slightly bizarre yet hypnotic. Then the fruit was raised to the Prince’s mouth.

It was obscene; the sight of his succulent mouth latching onto the fruit and biting into the core. His eyes were closed and there was an almost perverse pleasure from the suction. Rey’s own core gave a pulse and a flutter. His eyelashes fanned his cheeks with his closed eyes and, when he took the fruit away from his mouth, his lips were so red that he looked like he’d added rouge.

He swallowed the fruit. Looked down at the other half and offered it to Rey.

“Can’t I tempt you?”

Rey flushed. His eyes were dancing with mirth. He knew what he was doing, he knew the effect it would have on her and he loved it.

Her torment was his joy. The knave!
“I’ve rather lost my appetite.” Rey returned stiffly. And untruthfully. She stood abruptly. “Lady Pava, I feel a little fatigued. Let us return to my quarters where I may rest.” She looked to the painter. “Will I be required again?”

“No, Your Grace. I have all I need for your likeness. I will have it complete in a matter of weeks, Your Grace.”

Rey gave a nod of assent and swept from the room.

If she dreamt of his mouth devouring something entirely different that night as she slept, she would take it to her grave.

The final night at Mustafar came in both much too long and far too quickly. Ben had not participated in half of the merriment that the royal party indulged in; such as the hunting to the hawking. Instead he had shut himself away in the chapel most days and spent the rest of his time reading. Or sometimes just thinking. Thinking about his childhood, about his turncoat status and about Her. Always her.

He was glad to see the sun go down on the last day and prepared himself for the feast.

The banquet hall was large enough to rival Naboo’s though very different in terms of looks. While Naboo was all stone and marble, Mustafar was wood awnings and mythic creatures carved in stone upon the rooftops. Yet when Ben walked into the hall after being announced he was surprised at what he saw about him.

The long tables lined the walls leaving the centre free for dancing and the tables were ready to be served their meats. The hall looked almost cosy, with the candles illuminating the many coloured gowns and tights he saw about the bowing crowd. This was not the hall of his boyhood where he had been brought out to be shown off or lectured; it was a celebration and a sign of festivity.

The King and Queen were sat at the head table which he approached. The King smiled and nodded his head at his son. The Queen’s look was more complex. Her lips bore a smile of courtesy but her eyes were cold. Guarded.
She looked magnificent. She was dressed in the royal purple with a matching French hood upon her head. Her hair was covered but a few wisps had escaped along the edges. Her attempt at majesty was truly a wonder to behold, but her clear attempt at appearing modest contradicted itself with that regalia.

Ben bowed and then took his seat beside his father on a chair that was raised yet a little lower than the King. Almost the same level as the Queen.

The food was served and they supped themselves upon venison and peacock. The plates kept coming and each was applauded. Hux had truly outdone himself but not out of generosity. Ben knew his advisor well enough to know the game that was afoot here. This was an opportunity to show that he had the means to outdo Naboo and even the established royal court. Which was why his father smiled but tightly.

His father may be foolish in some areas but he was no idiot. Hux’s greatest mistake would be in believing he was.

The mood of the hall was jubilant and lively. Soon the plates were cleared away and the couples took to the floor.

The Queen straightened as though in anticipation.

“How is your dancing coming, Milady?” Han asked, clearly taking note of the little thrill that his Queen could not hide.

“How well indeed.” The Queen smiled to her husband. The look of pure affection that she bestowed onto the King was still enough to burn in Ben’s chest. He would give up his stake in the kingdom for only one look.

“I’ve heard you have mastered the Cirque Pas.”

“Lady Dameron is pleased with my progress.”

“A fine compliment. She is a very gifted dancer.” Indeed, as they looked on, Lady Dameron had joined her husband in preparation for the first dance.
“Will you join me in my first dance, Your Grace?” Rey asked her husband. Ben gripped his goblet. If this was recompense for his antics during the portrait painting…

“I believe my dancing days are behind me.” Han mused. “But Ben! You are a gifted dancer. Why not accompany Rey in my place?”

Han’s eyes were on his son so he did not see the look of disbelief and mingled horror on his wife’s face. But Ben did.

A part of him wanted to laugh. A part of him wanted to declare a national holiday. But he had enough control to remain almost passive in his acceptance.

“If you wish it, Father.”

Rey’s eyes flashed and his own were dancing in turn. She had not prepared for this outcome. But he would not surrender it.

Slowly he got to his feet and offered the Queen his hand. She had no choice but to take it and be led onto the floor.

He thanked the good Lord that he had kept his gloves off after eating dinner. It allowed him to feel her skin against his for the first time in far too long.

The fellow dancers bowed and made room for them as they positioned themselves at the top of the line-up.

The Queen had enough poise to not let her discomfort show. She was straight backed and magnificent as she stood before Ben. They must make quite the contrast; him in his sombre black garb with her in all her purple majesty and splendour.

The musicians started up and he bowed to her curtsey.
The dance was relatively simple (she probably didn’t want to be over confident in her first public performance) but it required them to maintain eye contact. Ben wouldn’t blink and neither would she. It was a stand-off with their eyes as their armour.

Their eyes broke contact when they were required to turn and take hands again.

“How do you find the dance, Your Grace?” He could not help but ask. His face was schooled to make his words impossible to read. He’d played this game of courtly intrigue long enough to know how to hide in plain sight.

“I’m under the impression that you care not” was her caustic reply. Her face was still smiling though; for all the world they were engaging in charming conversation as their King watched on.

“That is true. I care not.” They sidestepped and the Queen pivoted on her toe in a manner that was as easy as it was graceful. She was clearly a natural at this. “You’ve been avoiding me.”

“Can you blame me?” She questioned. “After that stunt with the pomegranate?”

This time Ben smirked for real. “Don’t pretend you weren’t jealous of my mouth on the fruit? You’re not quite that good yet, Milady.”

They turned to face one another with the rest of the dancers and he was amused to see her cheeks were flushed. And her eyes dark. Yes, she could deny it but he knew her too well.

“Your impertinence never ceases to amaze me.”

There came a point in the song where they were forced to circle one another. Her ear was too close to not whisper into. “I felt it too; in the chapel. I felt it.”

The Queen spun with the other dancers back into position but Ben was certain that she would have done so even if it hadn’t been required. They stepped back close so they were nearly chest to chest.

“It never happened.” She said in a voice so low that he had to strain to hear it. “It never happened and never will again.”
“But you want it to.” He said calmly. For he was calm. He knew this to be inevitable. They circled one another once again. “You want this as much as me.”

“I want to be left in peace.” Another pivot. Another twirl.

“If you truly did, the things I have done would not affect you so.”

Their hands were taken again and Rey was forced to maintain eye contact. He threw all his emotions into them.

Admit it. Admit your desire. And I will give you what you truly long for.

For a moment, the iron will of the Queen seemed to waver. The hand in his seemed to tremble.

Then she stepped back with the crowd and curtseyed. The dance was over. The moment gone.

There was applause around them. The court was indulgent of Rey’s dancing and she nodded her thanks.

Ben followed her back up onto the raised platform. The King was clapping.

“Very good! Very good indeed. You have excelled yourself, Rey.”

The Queen gave a modest little nod of thanks. Ben sat down silently. The King seemed oblivious to how closely they had danced on the edge. For that, Ben was grateful.

The music started back up and the King lowered his voice. “I must speak to you both seriously for a moment.”

The pulse in Ben's throat jumped and he saw the colour also fade rapidly from the Queen’s cheeks. Had he seen something after all?
“I have received news from Calais. My spies report that the remaining members of the First Order have been spotted in the ports. Some even speculate they are to make an alliance with the French King.”

Ben didn’t quite relax in the way the Queen did. This was shaky ground and it involved him closely – embarrassingly so.

“I have made arrangements with Calrissian and Chewbacca to tackle the problem head on: I intend to go to Calais for a meeting with the King. I will remind him of his loyalties and crush the rebellion before it gets back on its feet.”

Ben nodded slowly at his father’s reasoning but another thought was beginning to demand attention in his head.

“But... with you gone...”

“I have thought of that. I intend to leave the Queen as Regent.”

The King turned to look fondly at his wife who had now gone from interested to chalk white and stunned.

“Me? But... I know nothing of running a country.” She managed.

“You are stronger than you know Rey and I have trust in your judgement. But you will not be alone. I cannot take Ben with me to Calais. His loyalties are still under question and we cannot let any further gossip to flourish. He will remain with you and while you shall have the final word, he can advise you in anything you are not comfortable with.”

Ben suddenly needed his goblet topped up immediately. In his early days, he would have been furious at being passed over for Regent in place of a young girl who had no experience. Now however...

“So... you plan to leave us behind?” Ben needed to hear the words.
“As soon as I leave for Calais and all matters are settled in London, you both will rule in my place.” The King stated with finality.

Ben did not need to look at the Queen for her expression. Did not need to look upon her to understand the shock, horror and mingled guilty glee at this opportunity.

Instead, the royal family sat in silence staring out at nothing for a very long time.

Chapter End Notes

Nothing makes me happier than a (1) in my inbox. Please make me a happy girl. It's all I will ever ask in return.
Chapter Notes

Hey guys!

Thank you, thank you, a million times thank you for all the beautiful feedback I've got for this pic. You all make this fic a pleasure to write.

A massive thank you to my beta Poet Hrotsvitha for always keeping me on the right road. She's a doll!

This chapter is also dedicated to my wifey Jess444 for making me such beautiful moodboards and helping me this past week in more ways than she realises. She's such a wonderful friend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
The journey home had been pre-planned for nearly as long as the Progress itself. The Court rose with the sun and dressed themselves in their riding clothes for the journey back to the capital. Many great Lords and nobles had to conceal their yawns behind their gloved hands. The household of Mustafar bowed and curtseyed their farewell to their Sovereign Lord, his pretty young wife and his son with deference and farewell to their lord Hux with barely concealed relief.

The trip was a peaceful one with the citizens coming along to wave to their monarchs. The King cut an impressive figure upon his horse and many marvelled at his excellent health and strength. Many more delighted in the sight of the Prince. For all his faults, he seemed like a man born to rule a kingdom and face off enemies.

The Queen, however, had chosen to ride in her carriage. She claimed fatigue as her reason but in truth, she needed a moment away from the court to lament her situation. And drop the mask to show her true unease. Rose was sat opposite but seemed to understand that her mistress desired peace and averted her eyes.

Rey chewed at her thumbnail incessantly. What was she to do? What did she do?

Han was leaving. She would be in charge of a kingdom. And the Prince was to remain with her.

It was like the fates were conspiring against her.

She tried desperately to cling onto her famed inner strength. She could survive this. She had survived Jakku. She had survived Plutt’s care (such as it was). She had survived the court factions.
What was one man to her?

More than she had ever anticipated when she’d met his dour face on that fateful first meeting.

The procession stayed at several hunting lodges on their way back to Naboo and Rey used this opportunity to try and gently talk Han around. Why go all the way to Calais? Was it so important to capture these villains with his own hands? Dameron was a faithful and famous captain. He could be trusted with such an office, as could Calrissian. The Kingdom needed its King.

Han batted these fears away like flies. He was not so feeble as to not still enjoy a little adventure. It was that which had helped him live to such a ripe age, he proclaimed as he supped in their private quarters.

Rey tried a manner of other ways to convince him not to leave but soon went to bed in defeat. The more she entreated, the more he seemed set on going. If she was correct (and she was sure she was) she would think that Han saw the odds stacked against him as exactly the challenge he needed. This was, of course, the man who never wanted to know the odds. Rey’s desire to join Han on the road to Calais was the next question but again she met with a stone wall. Leaving the Prince alone with his country was not an idea that sat well with Han; he would cross the channel in much better spirits if she were here to ensure no mischief was had.

The next day she mounted her horse and rode alongside the King to try a different method. She entreated her lack of knowledge in the ways of the council. On this, she was on steadier ground.

“My education, such as it was, did not coach me in the art of government. I have been Queen barely half a year and have had no further responsibility than choosing what ladies I wished to have about me or what to wear. I fear I will be found lacking in the face of this task.”

To her disbelief, this seemed to encourage him.

“This is why it must be you. The other members of the council say pretty things but are all out for themselves. Hux would make this his kingdom in little more than a week. Calrissian and Chewbacca wish to come with me. And Mitaka can’t seem to stop himself twitching whenever he is my son’s presence nowadays. We’re asked the apothecary to proscribe sal ammoniac for his nerves but...”

“If you fear this council then how can I manage?” Rey demanded.
“Because you do not have an agenda. I cannot yet trust Ben completely. He has behaved better than ever before in recent months,” Rey tried not to snort at this, “but I still cannot trust him fully. He cannot be allowed too much power so soon. All you wish is that the land is safe and the people prosper. And you have proven yourself popular with the people. You have a shrewd manner, Rey. This would be your moment.”

Rey didn’t want a moment; she wanted a quiet and peaceful life where she followed the light of God’s path. And fought the temptation of the darkness of the devil. And of the Prince who she was beginning to think of as the devil incarnate.

But Rey was persistent.

“If the Prince cannot be trusted to rule, why not take him with you?” Rey asked as they sat at the fire on their last stop before they reached London. “He will know more about the First Orders activities than anyone. He may be of help to you.”

Han nodded at this and Rey nearly sighed with relief. Finally, she had him. But apparently Han was one step ahead.

“I had initially planned for him to come. But then I thought on it a little harder. If he was to come with us, he may grow tempted to deflect. He may rejoin his old allies and once he has disappeared into France, he would no doubt be lost to me forever. No, he is safer in the custody of his own country. Also his role as your chief advisor will placate him. I think he accepts my decision so quietly as he means to govern through you. You must use your own judgement at all times, Rey. For he will no doubt try and tempt you to make some unwise choices.”

Rey was tempted to throw her goblet at her husband’s head and declare just what unwise choices he was leaving her open to if he abandoned her to his son’s company. For the first time, she felt hot irritation at Han and began to sympathise more than ever with the late Queen.

Then finally when they arrived back at Naboo, she played her last card: she begged.

“Please Sir,” she pleaded, dropping to her knees before him in their chambers and clutching his hands, “I beseech you! Do not leave me alone here. I have many enemies and fear I am not strong enough face them all alone. I am but a woman.”
Rey found her sex of little importance normally, but she was desperate. Desperate for the King to see that leaving her alone with the Prince was as good as signing her death warrant. She was begging for life.

Han had stared wide-eyed at the sight of her clearly so distressed. “Rey, why do you do yourself such a disservice? You are Queen, and your word will be law. I have left you with the full authority to act on my behalf. No enemy can harm you. And if they tried, you could sign their warrant without anything to hinder you. I trust you.”

Rey dropped his hands in despair. She was beaten.

Han helped her to her feet and looked at her seriously. “Rey, understand this: you can do anything. I know this. Now you must show the world what I know.”

His words gave her odd strength. She had his trust. And she mustn’t let it down.

“Very well.” She sighed, utterly spent. “I will be Regent.”

Ben watched from a palace window as the King’s men mounted their horses in the courtyard. He could have been among the onlookers who waved them off but chose instead to take his leave of his father in his private rooms. It had been an amiable parting for them both; Ben had wished his father every success in France and his father had entreated him to do his duty by his country in his absence.

He also gave his word that he would be there for the Queen should she need any help.

The part that had left Ben winded and wrong-footed was when his father bid him to kneel for him. Ben had thought this a little unnecessary and galling but had done so anyway. But rather than demand fealty sworn on his knees, his father had placed his hand on Ben’s head and parted him with a father’s blessing.

Ben was slow rising again. He had not experienced such a thing since he was about fourteen and his mother had always been better at it than the King. And yet it was sincere and ardent. For a moment Ben wanted to embrace his father and beg his forgiveness for all the sins he had committed against him. But he did not.
The King let him go and Ben did not look back.

Ben pulled a string of rosary beads from his belt and threaded them through his fingers. They had once belonged to his lady mother and it gave him comfort to pray with them clasped in his hands.

How many hours had he spent justifying his actions to himself in regards to his father – about how the marriage was not a true one, of how the relationship was one of companionship and little else. But now he wondered: what would his mother say of this?

He doubted that she would have been in any way pleased. This may be the wife that had replaced her (as far as many were concerned) but Han was still her love and Ben was still her son. No doubt she would have boxed his ears for such actions.

It was a shame that Rey’s ascendancy followed the Queen’s passing – he was confident the two women would have liked each other.

He prayed to her some nights. Not even to God; but to his mother’s spirit.

He wanted to know if she still loved Han even in celestial bliss. If she still loved him for all his stupidity. If she understood why he himself was helpless to this need.

He wanted and wanted what he could never have.

Ben’s eyes caught a flash of scarlet and looked down onto the courtyard with more attention. There she was; the new Queen. His Queen.

Her back was to him as she wished her husband much success and safety on his voyage. Her hands were slow in letting go of the bridle.

Ben was not a monster, despite what she may think of him. He did feel genuine compassion for her and wished that she could see him not as an adversary but as a man who just wanted a chance to give her what no other man could.
Han may be able to give her status but did he ever hold her at night? Did he ever take the brush from her maid and send her away? Did he run it through that brunette mane with his own hands?

Ben would. He would do it every night and run his fingers through it for good measure.

He would have made her a woman as she would have made him a man. She may have even made him a good man.

There was a cheer as the King and his men rode out of the courtyard. Dameron was among them as well as Calrissian and Chewbacca; he was being left behind with a court of ladies and Hux for company.

Ben tucked the rosary into his belt. Enough of this; time to begin.

The routine of a Reigning Queen during a period of peace was actually not so much of a hardship as Rey had feared. She had managed to get instructions from Han before he set off on exactly what must be done and what could wait a little while.

Rey had asked her ladies to dress her like a Queen once again for her first council meeting. She needed to exude authority and confidence; if she portrayed it then maybe she could then feel it inside herself.

There was an odd feeling of excitement to have great men of the realm stand for her entrance and only sit when she was comfortably seated at the head of the table. Yet she would have liked to have seen Calrissian’s friendly face or Chewbacca’s hairy countenance amongst this company of hard men. Mitaka did not give her much trouble; he kept his eyes to his papers and read the reports like they were the gospel. And he generally seemed to gulp a lot like he was suffering from a dry throat. At one point she had to instruct a nearby page to bring him some wine.

Hux proved himself to be a thorn in her side in very little time. Every decision, no matter how small, was questioned. Whether it be news from Dover where the King was about to sail for Calais, or how much of the navy they should have on standby in case matters took a bad turn or how the harvest was going in the North. It was grating to Rey to have to show this man whom she so heartily disliked any respect but she did not wish to burn any bridges while Han was away. Especially with such a slippery character as Hux. The promise of no reprisal should she take decisive action against any perceived traitors was a last resort to Rey.
The arrival of Admiral Akbar back to the council was an excellent help. The old sea dog was getting on in years and had not the strength to follow the King on his latest adventures (he suffered greatly from gout) but took Rey’s side in any matter that she argued sensibly.

And then, of course, there was the Prince.

Sat at her right hand, he had not been a previous member of the council. His appointment back into the heart of politics was meant to symbolise unity within the family. And maybe to placate the fact that he was not to attend them. But his input was fairly non-explosive.

Rey could not fault his demeanour at the table where such decisions were made. He was respectful to her and let her say her piece. He sometimes agreed with Akbar and sometimes with Hux but never challenged Rey personally. He was almost an observer.

Yet Rey felt the burn of his eyes upon her. Could feel the heat from his legs beneath the table. Had to deal with the fact that he could, at any moment, slip a hand upon her thigh and no one would be any the wiser.

She always departed the meetings with her chin held higher than necessary and a quiver in her loins.

Worse than that, the Prince was now left with a duty towards his step-mother. As Han was absent, they had to attend to one another in the evenings.

The first few nights were not so bad. They merely sat side by side upon the dais with what was left of the court and ate their meals in comparative silence.

The Prince had asked if she was up to dancing on the second night. She flatly declined, citing fatigue.

But then it became harder. Many nights Rey took her meals in her private chambers so she could hear the news of the kingdom while eating. But soon that only meant that the Prince would come calling to her apartments under the pretence of ‘keeping her amused’. 
Rey could hardly send him away (her ladies did not seem affronted so how could she be?) so was forced to endure his company.

Often, they would sit beside the fire and play at cards. She was always sure to keep one of her ladies with her so that he could not try to say anything untoward. She often chose Rose. The young woman seemed to have a special coldness with the Prince as though wary of him. It made Rey feel she had an ally.

His eyes continued to pin her with a stare. His mouth always seeming obscenely stained and moist whenever he took a sip.

But he said not a word. It should have been a victory. But it wasn’t.

Rey slept alone now having claimed that she chose to pray late into the night and wished for some peace in doing so. Really it was out of fear of what she may call out in her dreams.

The visions she was forced to endure in sleep were as exquisite as they were sinful. She often dreamt of his mouth on hers. Of tasting him as she had once before. Of him tasting her. Tasting her flesh and her womanhood.

She often woke in a gasp and was not strong enough to not slip a hand beneath her shift. She had learnt that rubbing her fingers over her pink moist flesh gave her a pleasure such as she had never known before. She sometimes rubbed so much that she feared her skin may burst off her bones and wrenched her hand away in fear of the feeling. It always left her wanton and uncomfortable to stop but what would she experience if she did not? Would her heart give out with lust? She sometimes hoped it would. Anything to make this feeling go away.

It was nearly a full week after Han’s departure when Rey rose for another day. Rose and Maz came to attend her but Jessika did not follow them. Upon asking Rose where her chief lady was, the young woman looked like she’d been pinched rather harshly and Maz seemed to suppress a sigh.

“She is unwell, Your Grace. An upset stomach.”

“Oh dear.” Rey furrowed her eyebrows. “Shall I send her my physician?”

“No, Your Grace. She will return soon.”
Jess did eventually emerge looking pale and drawn but generally like herself. Rey rose to her feet.

“Jessika, I heard you were sickening for something.”

Jessika bobbed a curtsey. “Only a little. It has passed.”

“Have you been to the doctor?”

Jess seemed to go paler. “Yes, Your Grace.”

“Have they found a reason? Was it bad meat?”

“No. It’s… they can’t be totally sure but all the signs...” She looked up at Rey. Apology seemed to brim in her eyes. “They believe I am with child.”

Rey lost the ability to move, to speak, to feel. A hot rush seemed to run to her brain.

With child? With child?

So the pilgrimage to Amidala’s shrine was successful after all? If there were signs, maybe Jessika was carrying a child within her before they came to such a place. Or maybe Padmé Amidala had a very dark sense of justice.

Rey tried to speak. To open her mouth and say the things that a woman was meant to say to another when one is so blessed. To wish her God’s protection and a fruitful birth. But no sound came forth.

“Milady?” Rose was at her side as was Maz. Their dark looks made sense now; they had known and they had pitied telling her. She who had no child and would have to witness Jessika bring forth another child when she already had two.

“How wonderful!” Rey burst out making Jessika, Rose and Maz all jump. Her voice was too high
and her eyes were no doubt too bright. “Does Poe know?”

“Y-yes. I told him before his journey. He was… most pleased.”

No doubt this was another feather in his cap. Rey remembered his smile to her as he bid her farewell. Had he felt any awkwardness at the idea of his wife having to grow ripe with his babe in the presence of the Queen with no baby to show for herself?

No. He’d probably been more concerned in getting Finn to promise to write to him.

“Well, you must rest. You must try and not exert yourself. Sit down. Pray to the Lord for a smooth delivery. Would you like to sit by the fire? Oh no, too hot. You must be careful of your humours. Would you like some sweetmeats? Some air? I will open a window!”

Rey said all this very fast and without taking breath. She dashed to the window and threw it open. The breeze was cooling now as autumn came to pass over the city and it whipped at her face. The air was not for Jessika truly; it was for her.

“I must write to the King! Tell him the news!” Rey spun around to face her uneasy ladies. “I will take my letters in my room. Excuse me!”

Rey dashed to her room and shut the door. With manic energy, she dashed to her trunk and pushed it to the door. Now, no one could get in.

No more state affairs. No ladies-in-waiting who can’t seem to stop conceiving. No Princes who were determined to be her torment.

She looked at the wooden door and picked up a knife. Slowly, she marked a line in the door.

If Jakku had been her cage, this was her prison.

Something was odd. It was too quiet. He had not seen the Queen all day.
There was no business to discuss in council that day so she had not missed anything of importance but she had not taken her morning walk in the gardens or had her apartments filled with musicians to practise her dance steps.

This did not perturb him too much. She was often solitary with her state business and there was so little at court to amuse her while half the men of the land were away. When he turned up for dinner however, her seat was empty.

“Where is the Queen?” He asked Lady Phasma.

The blonde haired woman merely shrugged and went to work on her meat pie. “Probably sewing. Isn’t that what women do?”

“Phasma, you are a woman.”

“Not out of choice.”

He resolved to go to her chambers after supper.

He found her rooms in state of such dourness that it felt like a house of mourning. Jessika was sat beside the fire, with a book in her lap but her eyes not moving at all. Rose was staring out of the window at the darkening sky. Maz was sat beside the door to the Queen’s room and calmly sewing. She looked the most serene of them all. Then again, so little perturbed the small woman. She had seen too much to ever panic over anything non-life threatening. There was a small comfort in that.

The women all stood to curtsey to the Prince.

“Where is the Queen?” He asked without preamble.

“She is indisposed.” Rose said stiffly. The tiny woman seemed to have grown in confidence as she was not so shy in showing her distrust in him now. He had not called her to him for information for many weeks as he was more inclined to seek out information on the Queen himself. Yet he had noticed that she seemed to be quite similar when dealing with Dameron. This had been a great
Ben was of the opinion that Finn would forever be in Dameron’s shadow if he did not break free and become his own man. Maybe this young lady might be the key to that independence and the departure of Dameron might give him more room to find it. Or maybe Rose could slap him with a glove and demand a duel for the Traitor’s hand.

Either way, it would be amusing.

“Indisposed? Is she ill?” He demanded.

“Not ill, no.” Maz interjected. “But not herself. Maybe it is prudent to let her rest.”

“I have state affairs to discuss with her.”

“Surely they can wait til the morrow?” Maz questioned looking unimpressed.

“The running of a kingdom waits for no man. Or woman.”

Maz went to the Queen’s door and knocked softly.

“Your Grace? Your Grace, the Prince is here to see you.”

There was silence and then an odd scraping like furniture being moved. The door opened and the Queen emerged.

Ben straightened. The Queen was dressed in a more modest burgundy gown and French hood but had none of her jewellery on and looked drawn. There was a greyness to her pallor that was haunting to see. If she was not ill, she was certainly not well.
“Your Grace.” She curtseyed tonelessly. Her eyes were dull. Like she didn’t really see him.

“I… I have some matters to discuss with you. Of a sensitive nature.”

The Queen waved a hand. “Please leave us.” She said to her ladies. “These are issues that are confidential in nature. And we are kin after all.”

The ladies could do nothing but obey. Ben got the feeling that they could not have argued if they wished it. Rose lingered the longest but eventually left them alone.

He was alone with her for the first time since the chapel. Yet it felt a hollow victory.

“Are you-”

“What news?” The Queen snapped.

“What’s wrong?” Ben demanded ignoring her. “Something’s happened.”

“If there are no state matters to discuss, I am going back to my room.” The Queen turned to go.

“Tell me who has upset you!” Ben demanded. “Has someone insulted you?”

The Queen made a sound with her back turned to him. Something between a snort and a laugh of disbelief.

“What do you care? You insult me on a daily basis and care not!” The Queen spun around and looked at him again. There was a cold fury in her eyes.

“I… I have not meant-”

“What?” Rey demanded. “Not to mock me? Not to find pleasure in my discomfort? You have been
my torment and revelled in it!"

“What has-”

“Jessika is child.” The words were spat at him. Ben merely blinked.

“Jessika? Dameron’s wife?”

“Who else?” She demanded. “She is with child. Another one.”

Ben suddenly understood. Her lady was pregnant and it was yet another reminder that she was not. Nor likely to ever be. The girl had only ever wanted a family. So to see those around her forever "grow their own brood…”

“I’m sorry-”

“Oh enough!” She barked suddenly releasing her cold fury. “You would rather rest your head on the block than see me with a child! Is this not what you always wished for: for me to fail?”

“You have not failed.” He implored. “How can you fail? You’ve never even been with a man!”

“Like that matters to this court! Like that matters to you! Is that why you taunted me with a pomegranate of all things? The symbol of fertility? Was that your idea of a jest!?"

Ben suddenly felt sick. He’d never even thought of any subliminal messages. He’d never ever meant to cause her pain.

“I can’t even be angry!” She exploded. “I can’t blame Jess for doing her duty! I can’t punish her for a miracle! She’s been nothing but kind to me. What woman is cruel to a pregnant woman?”

“Send her away to the country.” Ben urged. “Say it is for her comfort.”
“But I will know. I will know and so will everyone else. I wanted a family so I got taken in by the greatest in the land! But if Han dies…” Ben did not even feel outrage at the Queen mentioning a subject close to treason. They had crossed that line already. “If he dies, I cannot remarry without the council’s permission. I will be passed like cattle again. I barely got out unscathed last time! I will grow old and alone. I might even be sent back to a convent! I will be sent back to Jakku! I will be alone! Alone…”

The Queen was becoming almost hysterical in her rage and panic and Ben didn’t think. Marching forward, Ben caught hold of her and pulled her to his chest.

“No! Get off me. You knave! You… you…” Rey was striking at his chest with utter fury and rage. Ben took it and did not let go. Let her launch her fury at him. He would take it without complaint. Her punches carried on for a moment and then suddenly the Queen let loose a wail of agony and slumped into his arms. It was only his strength keeping her from crumpling to the floor.

He’d dreamt of this. Of holding her in his arms. Yet now it was here it was all he could do not to curse God for giving him such bitterness with the sweet.

Her tears were heaving and ugly and desperate but Ben didn’t let her go. He didn’t hush her or tell her to remember her Queenly dignity. He held her and let her weep her fill.

His hands remained firmly wrapped around her shoulders and cradling her head. To even attempt to touch her lower back seemed more obscene than their display in front of the alter.

Ben wasn’t sure how long she cried or when she began to quieten but eventually she went utterly still. He did not want to let her go but knew that now was not the time to be selfish. Guiding her to a chair, he sat her beside the fire and took her hands. Her face was blotchy with her tears and she seemed so tired that her eyes remained shut.

“Forgive me.” He whispered to her. “I never meant to cause you pain. But you are strong. You are young. And I will never let you go back to Jakku. I will burn it to the ground before I let that happen.”

The Queen did not rip her hands away from him; she seemed to be too tired to fight him.

“Why are you being kind to me?” She asked quietly.
Ben tightened his hands around hers. “I have always wanted to be kind to you. Ever since that morning I first saw you, I wanted to be kind to you. I wanted to be the one person you could depend on to be kind. It hasn’t been quite that way between us and for that I’m sorry. But I would rather fall on my sword than cause you any pain.”

The Queen said nothing but kept her hands in his. It was a victory in a field of destruction.

Rey spent a long time in her bed the next day. Her eyes stung and her body found it difficult to move yet she felt oddly free. To rage against the world and the Prince had been most gratifying and what she needed. To admit her sorrow and despair also made her feel lighter. And when she emerged she was the Queen once more.

She sorted through her letters. She attended the council meetings. She held court over what was left of it. She was everything a Queen should be.

And yet her soul felt lighter. The Prince’s gentleness with her had been a revelation to her. Having always been so predatory with her, to see him show her patience and understanding had shaken her nearly as much as his lust. And that was hard to forget.

She stroked her hands where his hand been. She remembered his earthy smell as he held her. And how his eyes, so dark and penetrating, were kind and remorseful when she’d met them after her outburst.

She did not send Jessika away as it would have been too unfair for her to justify. She remained as kind as she could and kept her tears for her pillow.

So, when one morning she rose with more energy than she had previously experienced, she determined to go riding in the woods and to experience the lakes of Naboo.

She alerted Finn of her need for a little exercise. And was pleased to hear a hunting party were venturing out that very morning.

When she emerged in her riding clothes to the stables, she was taken aback to see the Prince upon his horse.
Of course, who else was there left to lead a hunting party?

He nodded to her in deference and her heart gave a little skip. She mounted her chestnut horse and rode out with the party.

It was a crisp day with grey clouds hanging ominously overhead. Yet this did not deter Rey; she had not had a chance to experience the outdoors in rainy season. It was an oddly tantalizing prospect.

Rey observed the hunt with benign interest. The life in the trees that the forest of Takodana provided was of more curiosity to Rey that any boar the men were to catch. Rey was watching a squirrel run along the branch of an oak tree when someone’s horse sidled up alongside her own.

“Your Grace.”

Rey turned to see the Prince atop his war horse. His stallion was a formidable looking beast; it would have to be to support its master who was as strong as he was tall.

“I hear you have an interest in seeing some of the lakes that you have not yet explored?”

“Yes, that is my desire.” Rey agreed serenely.

“There is a waterfall that I was fond of as a boy.” The Prince indicated towards the trees in one direction. “I would be happy to show it to you.”

Normally, the idea of being alone with the Prince would be enough to send fear into her soul but not now. Now there was an earnest desire to be in his company; to feel safe.

They separated from the party to ride across many fields to where the Prince guided. The clouds were getting darker overhead but it only enhanced the feeling of excitement in Rey’s blood.

Eventually they came to the waterfall. It was quite a sight and the water that cascaded onto the
rocks below seemed to be almost multi-coloured. Fish swam in the stream and Rey mused that she had always wished to learn how to fish. It was a man’s sport and not suitable for a Queen but the wish persisted.

“It is most beautiful, Your Grace.” Rey mused. The sound of the water falling before them was the only sound for a time.

“Are you… are you well?” The Prince asked tentatively.

“I am better. More content.”

The Prince nodded.

“You seem more comfortable with me now.” His voice was low though there was no one around for miles.

“I am.” Rey agreed still looking at the water.

“It… surprises me.”

“Why should it? Why should the evidence of your kindness surprise you to get happy ends?”

For the truth was that the box that she had stuffed him into was now no longer appropriate. She was forced to admit that to herself whether she wanted to or no. When he was lustful and predatory, she could resist with all her dignity. Her dreams may torment her but she could retain her strength.

But when he was kind and she was reminded of his other acts; her grandfather’s sword, stopping her from falling before the court, comforting her, then it became harder.

Passion she could forsake with some work. Kindness… so few people had been truly kind to her.

There was a rumble overhead and Rey looked up at the clouds. They were now an angry grey and a raindrop hit her cheek as she looked up.
“Come! We must find shelter.” Ben called over the thunder. They steered their horses back and were riding across the fields at speed when the rain began to fall in earnest. Rey could only laugh at the sensation of the rain whipping her face. It felt cold and would no doubt give her a chill and yet it had been what she had yearned to be free to feel for so long.

They sheltered under a large beech tree in the forest which gave them sufficient covering from the storm. Dismounting, they huddled under the boughs, the ground mercifully firm where the dirt remained dry.

Rey was still looking out at the rain in wonder when a warm huge blanket dropped over her shoulders. Further inspection showed it to be the Prince’s cloak.

“You must be cold” was the only reasoning he provided.

Rey clutched the lapels close to her.

“Thank you for your kindness.” She whispered.

“I would always be kind to you. I would never let anything hurt you.”

His words were too earnest to ignore. Rey looked up at him. He was so tall even though she was not exactly small.

“You know, a kindness would have been to desist in your goal to seduce me.”

The Prince nodded slowly. “It would have been a noble thing, yes. But I am not noble.”

“But you are!” Rey insisted. “You have proved yourself noble. Many times you have. So why have you been so insistent upon this game?”

“It is not a game. It is too late for that.”

“Then what-”
“I love you.”

It was like all the air had gone out of the world. There was an odd mixture of defeat and desperation in the Prince’s eyes.

To be loved… was all she had ever desired. Yet she was not without her wits.

“Swear to it. Like a knight swears fealty. Swear you are in earnest.”

The Prince blinked as though expecting many things but not that. Yet slowly he sank to his knee. With one arm crossed over himself and his hand in a fist above his heart, he looked up at her.

“I swear, upon the eternal damnation of my soul, that I will be true to you and only you all the days of my life. I shall be your servant body and soul until the day of judgement and love you without restraint until I last draw breath.”

Rey could only look upon him. Like a knight before his Queen, he had lowered himself and said such words. His piety was well known; he would not swear before God lightly.

This man was everything she shouldn’t want; everything that was forbidden to her in both the spiritual realm and earthly decency. She had married his own father who had been kind and good to her. She was risking so much for just this moment. Anyone could come upon them even now. She could be shamed. She could be locked away. She could even be put to death.

And yet didn’t he have as much to lose from this? Wasn’t he risking shame, banishment, infamy and even death? Yet here he knelt before her with pleading eyes and a desperation to be loved that rivalled even her own.

This was the one thing Han couldn’t give her; all the fatherly concern and affection in the word couldn’t replace this kind of feeling. This desperation for a look across the room; a touch of the hand; a word in her ear.

How could she continue to run from this when just his eyes could convey more devotion than she had ever experienced in all her young life?
“Rise up,” she said softly, feeling the last of her defiance crumble. “And claim your reward.”

He was back on his feet in seconds and Rey was back in his embrace just as fast. The rain pounded the world around them as he reclaimed her lips with his own. It was different from before. The passion was still very much present but it felt like a release; a relief and a reward for too long a resistance.

Beneath the tree that sheltered them from the world, he devoured her scruples and she could do nothing but open her mouth to his questing tongue and welcome him home.

Chapter End Notes

A kudos or a comment is worth more than gold to me. It gives me happiness and that can't be bought.
Hey guys.

Sorry for the longer than usual gap in updates as I've been suffering from migraines lately which make writing difficult. But thank you as always for your amazing support.

This chapter is shorter than usual but I think the pace works. I hope you enjoy.

Kudos to my wifey Jess444 for the gorgeous moodboard as always.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Rey sat alone at the window seat beside the biggest window in her apartments and looked out at the rain that hit the glass. The royal gardens were blanketed in damp and grey sky yet she still watched on in fascination. And lamented, thinking of the last time she was beneath such a tempest.

Her rooms were quiet. Rose and Jess were sat beside the fire working upon a new tapestry and Maz was passing the evening by reading a book. It was a newly published, rather scandalous read which the Church had tried to ban. So of course Maz had procured herself a copy with her initials engraved. Rey had pleaded a headache and had asked if it would be prudent if they could dedicate themselves to quiet activities so the pain were not exacerbated. For she needed time. Time to think and let the events of the past day sink in.

She’d surrendered. She’d committed herself to an enterprise that was surely doomed to failure and ruin. But she had done so nonetheless.

The Prince of Alderaan, her husband’s heir and natural son, was now her lover.
The self-hatred and disgust was still within her, for she was not a monster. But there was a level of acceptance— and almost relief— about the whole affair. It was over, and giving in to the inevitable had almost felt like reconciling herself to something that was pointless to fight against.

They had kissed beneath the sheltering tree with her back against the bark and him laying waste to her defences. That old passion which had been lying in wait for its perfect moment had risen once more and it had only been by the barest grasp of Rey’s wits that she managed to extract herself before he could try slipping his hands anywhere else. She had forced him to help her remount her horse; they must be careful. She would return to the party first. She could claim that she had lost sight of the Prince in the storm and Ben could re-emerge some time later. She would leave it to him to invent a story but the outcome would be that they would not be suspected of anything untoward. It had been reckless and utterly foolish to kiss with only a forest for covering – caution must be their prime occupation now.

Yet before she had ridden off, he’d grasped the hand that held the reins and beseeched her.

“Soon?”

Rey had looked down upon him. At her Prince. “Soon.” She agreed.

Then with that promise, she had galloped away from him and back towards the life of a reigning Queen Regent.

No one had been in the least bit suspicious and Rey now had a desire to keep it that way. If she was going to do this, and it certainly looked like she was, then it must be a complete and utter secret. For the time being, the odds were on her side. Han was away in France with the majority of the court, leaving only minor noblemen and women in his absence. The Privy Council meetings were an excellent cover for why she had to speak to the Prince alone on occasions, and so long as they made sure Hux was kept in the dark, she felt that this may burn itself out over time.

For Rey was a realistic woman. She may not have been raised within the court but she was a fast learner. The game of courtly love was a regular occurrence and many played it was gusto. The gallants of the court passed their time by making love to the various maidens who had come to pay homage and it was not really a surprise that many were forced to leave post-haste when the results of such love making became apparent. Not a month passed without Rey hearing how some nobleman’s daughter had given birth to the bastard of a Duke.

And yet Rey could not help but reflect that this did not ring true, even to her cynical ears. The Prince had never taken a lover, nor a mistress, nor had any gossip of anything untoward ever reached her ears. It was a status that made many a worldly man titter behind their hands; to her it
proved that this was no passing fancy. And she could not forget his previous actions, the look in his eyes, the passion of his words – no, he was a man in earnest when he spoke of love. Rey, who had dreamt of love since she could remember dreaming, was helpless to resist such a call to her senses.

She sat upon the window-seat until the sky went dark before Lady Maz came to attend her.

“Are you feeling better, Your Grace?” She asked, clearly deciding that she needed a break from her scandalous book.

“Quite well, Lady Kanata. I think I shall be able to attend dinner in the hall tonight.”

She stood still as her ladies draped her jewels about her person and dabbed a little rosewater behind her ears when no one was looking. Pinching her cheeks, she hoped for the first time that she looked as lovely as a Queen should. Not for her court, but for her Prince.

The hall was fairly quiet, as was often the way when the King was abroad. Even so, it was full enough with the gentry to justify a large dinner being prepared. The men of her company had caught a boar during the hunt and it was paraded into the hall with much clapping and cheer. The Prince came into the hall and took his place beside her upon the dais.

The chatter had risen and the scraping of silverware was deafening before the Prince dared speak lowly for only her ears.

“You look breath-taking.”

Pinching her cheeks had evidently not been necessary, as they heated from his words. However, Rey nodded her head sagely as though he were telling her a matter of state business.

“You are too kind, Your Grace.”

Rey helped herself to a goblet of wine before he spoke again.

“I must see you. Tonight.”
“Do you believe that wise?” She queried, her face still neutral lest anyone look over.

“To the dogs with wisdom! Will you deny me your company?”

Rey picked at her venison. She did want to see him. In truth, she longed for it—and not before an entire court, but where they could be alone and not disturbed from embracing as they were wont to do.

“I intend to attend the royal chapel tonight. I believe it is deserted after the hall empties.”

The Prince seemed to catch her meaning well enough. “I shall wait inside. I know how to enter unseen.”

Rey nodded regally and went back to her food. The court looking on had no way of knowing that her heart was beating a rhythm erratically in her chest.

Ben paced about the altar trying to calm his nerves. Every noise echoed within him and made him jump around to look at the door. Yet it was always a passing servant or the hoot of an owl.

Would she come?

She must. Oh she must!

He’d been in unparalleled delight and ecstasy after their embrace beneath the tree that saved them from the rain. She had given herself over to his protection and it was a role that he would exercise to the very last. She’d never looked so beautiful than when she had been stood before him as he pledged himself and looking up at him as he caressed her face as though she may be ripped away from him in only a moment’s notice.

His Queen. His Aurora.
He’d won this battle but the war still raged. And his enemies were everyone who may see a
difference in his behaviour with the Queen.

The door creaked and Ben turned. This time it was no servant. It was her.

She was dressed in the same gown she had worn to dinner but her jewels were removed. Somehow
her lack of adornment suited her even better than all the dressing up that the Royal wardrobe had to
offer.

She moved forward towards him slowly as though unsure of her welcome. Laughable! Surely she
knew he would throw himself on his knees before her?

“You were not seen?” She asked quietly.

“I was able to sneak out of my apartments unseen. My virtue is not something my servants are too
concerned with.” He nodded to the closed doors. “You had no difficulty, I trust?”

“Lady Teko is standing guard outside. She believes that I am desirous of private prayer.”

Ben nodded and then stepped forward. The Queen let out a little start which dissolved into a sigh at
being taken into his arms. He kissed her neck in rapture and her fingers threading into his hair
alerted him to her own ardour and lack of outrage at his own boldness.

“We… we cannot be rash.” She sighed, clearly trying to be the less impulsive of the two. Yet she
angled her neck to allow him better access and when he moved his head to capture her mouth she
did nothing to prevent him.

He kissed her with a passion the likes of which he did not know himself capable of with the
opposite sex. Women had always passed through his life unnoticed – he’d never dreamt that he
would know what it was like to lay aside your sanity for the touch of one woman’s lips.

Yet the Queen pulled away and stared at him with all seriousness in her hazel eyes. Oh how he
loved her eyes.
“We must find a way to be seen without arousing suspicion.” She pressed. “Writing letters is much too dangerous. The chapel is not a place for rendezvous. So we must be careful.”

“We will, I promise.” He chuckled. “You seemed well versed in this.”

“Hardly.” The Queen scoffed. “I’ve never had a lover before.”

“Nor have I.” Ben whispered and for a moment her worried expression softened and she let her forehead rest against his. Not an easy feat when her French hood had to be avoided from causing him injury.

“Then we must both learn quickly.” She urged softly. Her fingers toyed with the collar of his doublet as though she were thinking. “I never believed myself capable of such actions. I thought they were for silly girls without any sense.”

“It is, but it is also for those who are earnest and wish only to be together.” He explained. For he would be content to die without ever fully knowing her so long as she would smile upon him with affection and let him indulge in her kisses until their lips were raw.

“Is that so, Your Grace?” The Queen answered.

“Please don’t call me that when we are alone. It sounds wrong when we are like this.”

“Well then, what shall I call you? Sweeting? That hardly sounds appropriate for us.”

Ben pursed his lips. He would have liked to have called her Sweeting but he did not relish the idea of being laughed at.

“Ben. Call me Ben when we are together.”

Rey angled her head as though scrutinizing him. “Ben. Beeeeken.” She rolled it around her mouth as though seeing how it would taste. Then she gave a slight smile. “Ben is a goodly name. It suits you.”
“And what am I to call you. I am more than content to call you My Queen if you wish.”

She shook her head. “I don’t want to be a Queen with you; it will just remind me of the terrible circumstances in which...” She looked down. Ben understood. If she were a Queen, that would mean that this was a dalliance and she was an adulteress and it was clear that it was not a title she took any pleasure in. He did not want such thoughts to permeate their moments together.

“Aurora. It could be my code name for you. If I must send you a message I could address it under such a name.”

“Very well. But only in emergencies. Call me Rey when it is just us, as I will with your Christian name.”

“My Rey.” He whispers, as if to try it like she did with his name. The slight flutter of her eyelashes as though she wanted to close them and listen to his voice forever was enough to showcase that she found the sound appealing. He pulled her to him so that her head was nestled against his chest. “My Rey.”

Chapter End Notes

I love feedback. I crave it. I need it. Feed my addiction please!
Massive thanks yet again to my beta Poet Hrovtisha and my wifey Jess444 for the moodboards. Ain't they both an absolute doll??
Rey returned to her apartments that night in such excellent spirits as to make even her ladies feel a little taken aback. Without doubt, their Queen was a kindly mistress and with as good a nature as any creature living but such an obvious gaiety was rather unlike her. Rey knew this and tried to tame her broad smile and twinkling eyes but with rather limited success. For she was in state of bliss.

It was the simple effect of being held in the arms of her sweetheart that left her feeling so contented with her lot. For a few wonderful moment she was cloistered alone against the warmth of Ben.

Oh it was so strange to think of him as Ben. She had become so used to simply thinking of him as ‘the Prince’ that there were times he felt like almost a mythic figure in her life. But now the man had a name and soft lips and eyes that promised tenderness and passion. Now he was Ben and all the more brilliant for how real he was beneath her fingertips.

Ben. Beeeeeen. She kept trying it out in her mind. A soft yet solid name. It was said he put that name aside when he abandoned his family for Lord Snoke and took up the mantel Kylo Ren. She’d be damned before she ever whispered that name against the shell of his ear.

She was undressed by Lady Rose for bed and was sat before her dressing table with her lady slowly running the brush down her brown hair when she noticed that the little woman seemed rather preoccupied and held herself stiffly even in the tarnished glass of the mirror.

“Are you well, Lady Teko?”

“Quite well, Milady.” Rose replied in not a very convincing manner. Rey turned in her chair and looked up at her attendant. Rose looked anything but quite well.

“Rose, something is clearly troubling you. Now what is it?” Rey lowered her voice to a gentler tone. “Is it Finn? Is it to do with him?”

“N-No, Milady.” Rose managed and the look of almost astonishment upon her face at such a
question indicated to Rey that she was being earnest in her denial here. “Nothing to that effect.”

“Then what Rose?”

Rose fiddled with the brush clutched in her hands. “I feel… I must warn Your Grace that I believed the Prince was inside the chapel tonight. I believe he may have been watching you pray.”

Rey blanched. Fear mingled with confusion came over her. “What makes you believe that?”

“When we departed the chapel, you remember I forgot my fan?” Rey nodded that she had bid Rose to run back and retrieve it while they were still not too far. “Well, when I came down the hall where the chapel is secreted, I saw a figure step out. He was wearing a cloak and could not have prayed so fast as have to entered and left in the time it took us to leave only a few paces. I… I recognise the tread of his person. I know it to have been the Prince even shrouded in a cloak.”

Rey sat before her lady feeling rather unsure how to react. Yes, Ben had been spotted (foolish man! Surely he knew it was advisable to wait a while longer!) but Rose seemed not to suspect the new dynamic in their relationship. Their previous enmity served them well.

“If you fear that the Prince meant me harm,” Rey managed slowly and maintaining an impressively steady voice, “then rest assured I was not even aware of him in my presence. No assassination was attempted.”

“Oh Milady!” Rose managed as though the thought left her chilled to the bone. The hairbrush dropped from her hand and she sank to her knees to retrieve it. But she did not rise again. Instead Rey saw to her amazement that Rose seemed to be willing herself not to weep.

“Rose! Do not trouble yourself! I am in no danger I’m sure of it.”

“But you are. The Prince is not to be trusted!” The brush forgotten on the floor, Rose clasped her hands together as though in prayer. “I beseech you not to put faith in anything he says!”

Rey was feeling more bemused by the moment. Rose had always been overly formal and maybe even cold towards Ben but never had she shown such vehemence against him. The wild look in her eyes frightened Rey but her suspicions were now aroused.
“Rose, why are you so against the Prince? You speak treason and you are not one to do so rashly.”

Rose quaked and Rey stood up so she was towering over her. If she had to put her majesty on display to get answers then so be it.

“Tell me Rose, why?”

Rose was shaking and her head was bowed as she spoke. “Because he wishes you harm. I know.”

“How do you know such a thing?”

Rose sniffed. “The night after you first met him in your apartments when he came back to the Court, I was taken from my apartments. I didn’t know where I was being taken. Only that I was to go before a person of great importance.”

Rey listened in silence. A trickle of dread, like cold water, ran down her back.

“I was still in my nightclothes and I was terrified. When I was put into the apartments of the Prince to find him waiting for me, I feared the worst.”

Rey could well imagine it. For a young woman to be abducted in the night wearing little more than her nightgown… she must have been terrified.

“What happened Rose? Did he hurt you?” Rey asked. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to hear the answer.

“He didn’t touch me.” Rose answered and there was something like relief in Rey’s chest. So no matter what Ben was that had made him so reprehensible, it wasn't that. “He gave me a bag of money and a mission. I was to report to him… about you.”

Rey blinked. “Me?”
“Yes, Your Grace. Anything you did. Anything you said. Any of it that would be of… advantage to him.”

Rey slowly sank back down onto her seat. So Ben had paid a spy to monitor her? He’d paid one of her closest attendants to betray her? The room suddenly felt oppressive like a corset tied too tightly about her waist or like a summer haze had stolen all the breathable air.

“Your Grace?” Rose asked tremulously. Pitiably. Rey felt a stab of hot anger. What right did she have to be pitiable after confessing that she had been a Judas all along?

“Leave me. Go!” Rey spat. Rose blinked and then struggled to her feet through her many folds of skirts. She bobbed a curtsey and then dashed out of the room. Rey went to the door and slammed it shut. She would have a locksmith install a bolt on her door tomorrow. She’d be damned if she let anyone in if she didn’t wish it again.

Finding that her hands were shaking, she picked a goblet made of Vatican glass and threw with a shout of anger against the wall. The resounding crash and shatter of the glass did little to calm her fury.

She had trusted Rose. Trusted her as she trusted so few people in her life. And now through his own machinations with who knew what motive Ben had crumpled that trust into ash.

Her happy idyll was clearly at an end.

Something was wrong.

Ben had attended the court that morning to find that the Queen and her ladies had not been seen that morning. Apparently the Queen did not feel able to attend Mass or break her fast in the Great Hall. Ben was perplexed. She had seemed in rude health only last night. What ailment could have struck her so quickly?

He went to the Queen’s apartments to find that Rey was nowhere insight. Lady Dameron informed him that she was not risen from her bed and would have only Maz attend her. Herself and Rose were not permitted entry.
The Lady Dameron was becoming more noticeably with child by the day so her healthy distance seemed a wise choice but Rose was normally her chief attendant. Yet now she were sat beside the fire clutching her sewing listlessly. Her face looked a bit blotchy as though she had been crying.

Ben went away with the appearance of letting the Queen rest none the wiser as to what the matter was.

When he returned at dinner to see if the Queen was willing to be escorted into the hall, he was met with a still closed door. Maz was there that time and she explained, rather firmly, that the Queen wished to see no-one. Alarm was now beginning to mount within him. Had something happened? Was she sickening for something serious? He enjoyed a troubled night’s sleep that evening.

Ben awoke the next day and was nearly weak with relief to find the Queen and her ladies at the alter of the chapel with their heads bowed in prayer. Yet as she walked out, he couldn’t seem to catch her eye. She walked on like he were made of glass.

He arrived at her apartments that afternoon ready to break down her door if she refused to see him. It was with some surprise that he found her quietly sewing at her fireside with her ladies. She barely looked up with he was announced to her.

“I trust you are restored to health, Your Grace?” Ben broached cautiously.

“Much recovered, Milord.” Rey’s tone was polite yet cold. Her eyes were hazel daggers.

“May I speak a moment with you? I have some matters to bring you up to date with in regards to the council meeting you missed yesterday.”

Rey’s needle stilled. She seemed to almost repress a sigh. “Very well. You may go.” She gestured to her women and they all rose and took their leave. Rey stood along with them and put her needlework on the seat she’d vacated. She gestured to the window for Ben to follow. “What news do you bring?” She asked blandly.

Ben made sure they could not be overheard even from a distance before speaking. “Rey, what is-“
“Do not address me as such. You forget yourself Sir.”

Ben took a step back. There was no denying her tone now. Her fury was palpable.

“What is the meaning behind this? Why are you acting this way?” He demanded. They had parted on the best possible terms only two night ago with him kissing her sweet rosy mouth and whispering words of love for her to bask in.

“You want to know? Why not ask Lady Teko? No doubt she will give you some good information providing the price is right.”

It was a blow that Ben was not prepared for. For he had been rather blind to reality of Rose’s past double dealings. He had taken for granted that she would have no need to find out that foolishness. Alas.

“I… It was a foolish thing.” Clearly lying wasn’t going to do much for his cause after this. “I was confused as to my feelings and your position. I acted rashly as I am want to do.”

Rey looked out of the window and was clearly trying to take deep and measured breaths. “So not only do you see fit to spy on me but also to corrupt one of my ladies. Rose was my friend!”

“I simply did what all ambitious men do at court!” He argued with a hint of pleading for her to understand. “I have little to no doubt I have spies in my household. They will no doubt be reporting to the noble families and to Hux-”

“- I don’t care about Hux and damned gentry!” Rey snapped. “I am used to them poking their noses in where it is not welcome. But you… not only did you see fit to go behind my back but you have tainted one of the few friends I have ever had.” Tears were now brimming in her eyes and Ben wanted nothing more than to wipe them away and hold her close.

“Forgive me. Please.”

Rey looked at him and then away. “I have nothing more to say to you.”
“Rey, please! I understand my mistake and I repent truly. If I have to beg forgiveness I will-”

“You may well beg forgiveness!” Rey snapped viciously. “But I am in no mood to grant it. Now out before I call the guards.” The tilt of her head and the gleam in her eyes that looked like fire stoked with a poker alerted him to the fact that this was no idle threat.

Her door was closed to him. And her heart even more so.

It was like a dark shadow had fallen over the Queen. She had a desk made up in her apartments and all the letters from petitioners brought forward. It was not suggested that she open every single one but that’s just what she did. Her days were filled with the scratch of a quill and the rustle of parchment. Her meals (such as they were) were brought to her on trays and she would eat the good meat and cheese without much attention as she debated how much grain supply the landowners could sell to the royal kitchens that winter. Autumn was now upon them and the wind had begun to whistle a tune outside her window. She would sometimes drop her quill and look out at it. It was odd how the death of summer could be so very beautiful. Then she would lament who the death of beautiful things rarely gave such pleasing results and would pick up her quill again to scratch out her signature with renewed vigour.

For if she worked, she could not remember. And if she did not remember, maybe the pain would feel something of a reprieve.

For it was a pain that she felt. One that made itself known at bedtime when she was nearly dead with exhaustion and yet she lay on her pillows with no sleep forthcoming. The tears always seemed to come and her anger at herself for being so stupid would make them come quicker.

Rose seemed willing to walk over hot coals to show atonement but Rey wasn’t sure if she wanted that. She had contemplated dismissing her and sending her home in disgrace but that seemed overly harsh. She had simply done what all courtiers do when they want advancement. And she was hardly a willing participant. No doubt the bag of money Ben provided her was more than she’d ever had in her life and she had a family to provide for back in the country. Rey knew of a sister Paige who would likely need a dowry if she were to make a good match. But then Rey was reminded of when Plutt had tried to take BB8 from her – he’d offered her more food than ever if she just surrendered the cat. She’d been tempted, she’d even reached for the bread in his hand, but she’d stopped. Looked at the cat. And backed away. BB8 who now slept beside her in her bed and purred softly was not for sale and neither were her morals. She’d wished that the girl she had come to trust had held her in as much esteem as she had done a stray cat.
And then there was Ben. For try as she might she could not go back to the days of ‘The Prince’. He was Ben to her now. She’d refused to leave her apartments and go anywhere where he may be able to draw her to the side. Her work was a perfect excuse and the court seemed to think their Queen was overexerting herself if nothing else. Maz often said that the Prince had been inquiring after her though Rey knew that he was aware of her threat all the same if he came too near. A sadistic side of Rey found that she liked the idea of making him suffer; it was worthy punishment for what he had done to her heart.

For this was not like before. Not like their first fraught weeks of acquaintance where Rey was baffled and rather perturbed by his attitude. Not like their shared moment in the chapel where he had touched her naked head and kissed her like a man possessed. That had ignited feelings of passion, confusion and self-loathing within her.

Now she felt a sting in her chest like someone had slowly but surely been pressing a blunt knife into her bosom. She remembered his soft eyes and passionate declarations. If he were some fool or gallant she would have paid them no heed. But he had been earnest. She was utterly sure of that. No-one could lie that well. He loved her – to lose him now… could she do it?

She could send him away but the whole point of her staying was so she could keep a close eye on him. Putting him back in the lodgings of the Tower would raise more questions again and she wasn’t inclined to do so.

No she was stuck in this sea of indecision and despair. She could see both reasons but it made it hurt no less. And why, why had it been Rose? Why had it been a friend?

Being a Queen gave you no end of earthly riches but the price for such adornment was high indeed.

It was nearly five days before things came to a head.

Hux had come to the apartments to discuss a matter regarding the North. It was a boring meeting and Rey did not like to endure the red-haired man’s company for longer than necessary. Indeed, he seemed to be struggling not to roll his eyes in her own company, Queen Regent or not.

Only Rose was in attendance that day though she were wise enough to sit beside the fire with her head down and not say very much. Jessika had taken a funny turn and wished to rest and Maz had gone to accompany Sir Chewbacca to view his new stallion in the stables. So their audience was
intimate when there was an audible scuffle and shout from the door of Rey’s apartments.

Rey was in the process of seeing what all this noise were about when the door flew open. She could vaguely see one of the guards on the floor as though he had been thrown there.

“I must see you! I don’t care anymore. I must!”

It was Ben. But not as Rey had last seen him. It only a matter of days the effect of his banishment was telling. He looked thinner with his cheekbones looking a little alarming on his features and his hair hung rather listlessly upon his head. He looked a wreck and there was a look in his eyes like a man who would not be denied.

This was the famous Organa temper. And it had just kicked down her door.

Of course, he came to something of a stuttering halt when he caught sight not of a gaggle of ladies but the raised eyebrows of Lord Hux.

“Your Grace.” He nodded his head in the slightest imitation of respect and it was as unconvincing as it was slight. “You know that knocking would have sufficed.”

Rey felt the grip of fear take hold of her. How would she be able to explain this? Was their affair, no matter how brief, about to be exposed to the unsympathetic listener of Hux? Ben seemed to be of the same mind for he were temporarily struck dumb. Rey had to think rather quickly.

“Have you news of your father?” She asked. There was a warning in her words and her eyes were stern upon him: Remember who the King is. And remember who I am married to.

“No news.” Ben managed.

“Then what would warrant such behaviour?” Hux pressed. The bastard was clearly enjoying this.

Beside the fire Rose had risen and looked from the Queen to the Prince and back again. Confusion bloomed into disbelief and then understanding.
Rey could only shut her eyes. The axe was hanging above her. She could only wait for it to drop upon her neck. *Ben, you fool!*

And then something happened that Rey could not have believed possible. Rose suddenly buried her head in her hands and let out a woeful cry. Then she sank onto her knees before the startled audience.

“Forgive me Your Grace! But I am only a woman and weak in the flesh.” She pleaded.

Hux, who looked down at her with both annoyance and disgust, snarled, “What are you talking about woman? Get up!”

“But it is all my fault. It is me he wished to see.” Rose looked up with shining eyes and an almost resigned countenance. “I am the Prince’s mistress.”

It was nearly dark before Rey was able to fully process what had happened and as a result she called Rose before her. The two women looked at one another. Rey was sure her expression was one of amazement and disbelief while Rose wore an expression of resolution and had an air of someone prepared to make the best of things.

“Rose… why did you do that?”

Rose merely gave a gesture of non-commitment. “I promised myself that I would earn your forgiveness. If this is what is required of me, then I am willing to do so.”

“But… to put yourself forward as… it may cause scandal.”

“It will probably cause surprise for the Prince to finally have an acknowledged mistress but it would not be so far beyond the realms of believability. I have probably been seen going to his rooms after all.”
“Your virtue-”

“I have none that I would wish to marry.” Rose said rather blandly. Her thoughts had clearly arrived at Finn and all her hopes there. “Even with Captain Dameron being abroad with the King I have little doubt that it is his influence that still hangs over the Master of the Horse.”

What a sorry state of affairs this was.

“Rose, I cannot ask this of you. I will be putting you in danger.”

“I already know so surely it is not so very different.”

“Rose!” Rey almost wanted to shake her to make her see sense. “This is not some courtly game; this is treason.”

“I do not profess to understand. Why of all men in this court...” Rose looked down as though afraid to say too much but Rey could understand. Why him? Him of all people? He is meant to be your enemy!

“If I could explain, I would.” Rey whispered.

“Please let me help you. I can be a go-between. And it would allow him into our company without suspicion. Please I must make amends.”

The temptation to dig her heels in and cry out NO was enormous but Rey could not deny that to have just one confidant in this was a gift she never believed she could have. And Rose had already committed herself before Hux. No doubt it would be the talk of the court in hours – to disregard Rose’s help seemed very much like ingratitude.

So they agreed and that night Rose accompanied her to the chapel. Ben was waiting within. Rose sat outside as always.

Rey looked upon Ben with smarting contempt. Indeed he looked even more diminished than before. The urge to strike him was enormous.
“You foolish man! You could have undone us both!” She hissed.

“It was folly. Forgive me. Forgive me all of it.”

“I confess I am struggling to find forgiveness within me right now. How can I care for a man so hot-headed and impulsive?”

“But you do care for me.” His hope was evident as he clung to the words.

“I wish to God I did not. Rose… not only did you enlist her as a spy but now her reputation may be forever tarnished.”

“What is to be done?” Ben asked.

“She is adamant that she will help. Which means that the pretence of affection between you must remain.”

Ben blanched and took a step back as though he had received a hit.

“You mean I must pretend to… Rey, I cannot!”

“You must. I do not wish for you to romance her or caress her in public; just make the impression of favour towards her above all others.”

“But what of us?” He whispered. “Do you wish to let me love you in private?”

Rey rinded her teeth. A part of her was still angry with him and wanted to deny him out of spite. But the sight of him, still so beautiful even from all the stress and clearly so eager to be allowed close to her, thawed the frost on her heart. For she was beginning to see that he did genuinely repent.

“We must act with utmost caution. No more of those little displays as we may not be so lucky the next time.”
Ben took her at her word but stepping forward and kissing her soundly. Rey could not help but respond and placed her hands on his shoulders. Ben tore away with a hiss of pain.

“What is it?” Rey asked.

“Just be a little careful of my back.” He recommended gently. “I was rather hard on myself when I thought you lost to me.”

“Hard on yourself?”

Ben shrugged and slowly removed his doublet with evident struggle. He lifted his shirt aside to revealed red and ravished skin upon his back. Rey could not help but to let out a cry of despair.

“What did you do?” She demanded.

“It is a standard practise.” Ben said rather tonelessly. “To whip yourself in your devotions. I have done so since I was a boy.” The phrase: since I lived with Lord Snoke hung unsaid.

The sight of the slashes and barely healed cuts on his back made Rey want to strike him anew for such foolishness. How was this showing devotion?

“You will never practise this again. Do you hear me? NEVER!” She barked.

“Rey, many do this-”

“I don’t care. Do you think I would be happy with this? Flattered? No, if you take up the whip again I will never touch you until the skin it strikes is white with time and healing.”

Ben blinked as though not used to such fervour but he nodded. “I will not do so again.”

Rey nodded and then gently kissed some of the exposed skin that was revealed on his collarbone.
She rested her head against it for a long time as she contemplated how baffling love could be.

Rose was allowed to sleep beside her that night as she had before. It was awkward and a little too quiet at times but it was a sign that Rose had been forgiven her past actions.

Rey was staring up at the canopy when Rose spoke.

“Forgive me Milady, but I cannot but ask: why the Prince? What makes him so different?”

Rey almost chuckled. How to explain the unexplainable?

“He is not like any man I have ever met.”

“How so?” Rose turned over and leaned on her arm. “Tell me what it’s like to be with him.”

Rey looked at her. For the first time, they were equals. The secret had made them so. They both had as much to lose now.

Turning to face her, Rey put her arm under her head and dreamily began to talk about Ben.
Hey guys!

Please forgive my longer than usual absence - I've been extremely ill with the flu and I could barely sit up let alone write. I had the chapter all ready for ages but I was just too ill to do it. Hopefully this will make up for it.

This chapter was meant to be longer but I think it's long enough and I was desperate for an update of any kind.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The new dynamic that had settled over Rose and Rey’s relationship was one that was overly polite and rather cautious. Rose still seemed to be rather bemused at the revelation that the Prince, who had proven to be the bane of her life, was capable of such devotion to her mistress. Rey in turn seemed winded at the levels her lady was willing to go to in order to prove her loyalty. So in many ways they were equals for the first time and it did not insult or offend Rey; it comforted her.

The court and the Queen’s closet did not seem to take the news of Rose’s new place at court as calmly as Rey and Rose did. But then again, they did not know the truth of it all.

Rey watched as the court reeled from the news that Lady Teko, a member of the Queen’s household and a minor noblewoman at that, had taken the role of the Prince’s mistress. Jessika and Maz’s reactions helped symbolise the divided mood of the court. Jessika was cool towards Rose and had an air of righteous disapproval. She was worldly wise of course and did not even try and assume that her own husband had been completely without lovers in the time of their marriage but she did not like it. She seemed disappointed that Rose would take such a title. Maz on the other hand seemed to be only mildly surprised. Her eyebrows did disappear into her gable hood upon hearing the news but she kept her own counsel at the time. Her attitude towards Rose did not change and she treated her the same as she always had done. When Rey and herself were sewing beside the fire one night however she did raise the subject.

“I had not thought,” Maz had announced out of the blue and without waiting for Queen to speak first – which she did not fain to do at any other time anyway, “that the Prince was too… pious to take a mistress.”

Rey’s fingers shook a little but only beneath her needlework where they were already hidden. “Some may have expected it from him many years ago.” She replied in a tone that was deliberately bland.

“Indeed. And yet… this feels rather unlike him. I did not know that Rose and the Prince were anywhere near so close. They always seemed rather aloof towards one another.”

Rey focused on the shirt collar she was sewing and wouldn’t look up. Not for the first time, she felt
sure that Maz and her spectacled eyes saw more than what Rey wanted them to.

“Desire makes people do most peculiar things.” Rey answered quietly.


There was also another side to Rose’s new role; while many at court looked on in disapproval at her sinful position, many more were noticing Rose for the first time and she was now receiving more offers of service than ever before. Not a day went by when she wasn’t approached or paid tokens of flattery by an ambitious courtier with their eyes on a position or who needed a daughter at court. Rose handled this well and smiled rather blandly every time an upstart would compliment her dress sense or her jewellery.

Her wardrobe had improved. Ben, clearly at a loss about how he had found himself in such a situation but determined to go along with it, had been forced to rise to the occasion. He had thrown his money into the venture as his enthusiasm to pay court to Rose was seriously lacking. Rose was now a very richly dressed woman indeed. Not a day went past when she didn’t sport new sleeves, a brocade petticoat or a new jewel at her throat. She also had a bag of money a week – mostly with Ben’s ‘compliments’ but Rey suspected to also ensure Rose had another reason, beside her scruples, to keep her mouth shut.

Ben was not pleased about the situation. He did not complain to Rey about it but it was obvious. In the few times that they met secretly, he clung to her even tighter than normal and kissed her like she may be snatched away at a seconds notice yet held himself back as though to prove to her he could. A small, rather petty part of Rey could not help slightly enjoying his disquiet. Rose was proving her loyalty by putting herself forward as a decoy so to speak. And while Rey never wanted Ben to hurt himself again (the memory of those whip marks still troubled her) this did feel a bit like justice. The fact that he was a little clueless in how to convincingly portray affection and just threw money at Rose to symbolise her favour was rather gratifying. If anyone knew Ben at all, they would know that his love and affection was absolute. She had little doubt that if she were free and a maid at the court, he would throw everything at her disposal but above all he would want to be with her as much as he could. He was not practical – he was passionate and ruled by emotions. He would not be shut away in council meetings and discussing the harvest with her if she were merely a monarch and his love was on the outside. He would probably leave as soon as possible and go and find his love. A night would not pass when he wouldn’t summon her brazenly to his bedchamber. A day wouldn’t pass when he wouldn’t send her love letters. His apparent wooing of Rose was laughable in comparison. He sent her letters with the gifts to keep up appearances but they all inquired as to her health and how he hoped she was comfortable. Any courtier opening would think him addressing an elderly aunt; not a lover! Yet when Rey raised this, he looked so affronted at the idea of writing anything more loving that Rey did not bring the subject back up.

So the court continued to believe he was merely cold in the ways of love and Rose wore her new
Rey herself had moments of doubt. It was purely on behalf of Rose however. Many times she would question her gently when Rey was alone with her if she was really sure about this. To her amazement Rose was calm and collected.

“I was a nobody at this court. I went unnoticed and not important – many never understood how I became part of your entourage in the first place. But now… even if it is a sham, I have status. I have money. At the very least I will be able to provide for a comfortable life when I am old. If this is my lot, I could have a worse deal.”

There was one slight upside for Rose – Finn had certainly noticed this new status.

Rey had watched her Master of Horse approach Rose in the courtyard and had observed their clearly heated discussion. Finn seemed amazed and even angry at Rose yet she held herself with dignity. She did not beg Finn to understand – she merely walked away as though she would not be made to feel like she were doing anything wrong.

Finn had managed to talk to Rey when she next went hunting and it did not take much for him to break apart with his vexation.

“Rose is his mistress. His mistress!” Finn exclaimed as they rode alongside one another. “I don’t – I mean… when… how did this happen? Rose has always seemed rather dismissive of him. Even a little afraid of him.” Finn looked at Rey intently then. “He didn’t force her to submit, did he?”

“Rose seems utterly content to me, Finn.” Rey replied honestly though she kept her eyes on the forest ahead. “The Prince seems to have acted utterly noble in his pursuit. And it is the court where love is the most discussed of all topics. Maybe things can changed.”

Finn chewed the corner of his lip as though he was suffering a particularly painful cold sore and Rey could not help but repress a smile that was forming on her face. Maybe Rose’s new position would have the benefit of making Finn realise just how much the idea of Rose as anyone else’s lover bothered him.

Rey resided over the court in much the same fashion as before. Every night she sat at the head table and watched with a benign smile as the courtiers that remained talked, drank and chatted amongst themselves. Ben took his seat beside Rey at the high table and they kept conversation to a
minimum so to not raise attention to themselves. Yet Ben’s foot was always close to Rey’s own slippered heel and he took any opportunity to speak into her ear. He often pointed out new members of the court and spoke as though informing her of who they were. But from saying: Sir Wedge’s sister. My mother was once a patron, he instead said things like: that hood doesn’t suit her. She looks like she’s going to fall over.

Rey had to bite her lip to keep from smiling and more than once nudged him, none too gently, with her own foot.

Of course, they could not waste such an opportunity and most nights Ben was forced to rise from the table and ask Rose to accompany him onto the floor so they could participate in the group dance. At the beginning Rey was worried how the sight of Ben dancing with Rose would make her feel; now she felt rather amused by it. Rose always nodded her assent with perfect poise and held herself with fantastic grace. Ben however had to summon one of the servers’ who was holding the flagon of wine over to his table and down two full goblets before he got up to ‘do his duty’. There were even times when Rey wanted to tell him off for being so difficult and how Rose was doing them a great service. But she stifled her tendency when she spotted Rose stand rather purposefully on his foot one night and had to help herself to a sweetmeat to stop herself from laughing out loud at Rose fluttering her eyelashes and apologising sycophantically.

Rose was now their official courier of letters. No one batted an eyelid when she slipped across the palace to Ben’s chambers and no-one therefore got to see the letter she had secreted about her person. Rey addressed the letter to Ben and signed them off as ‘R’ for a security measure. And when she received her letters from Rose who would return in as short a time as possible as to not arouse suspicion (Rose tended not to stay longer than ten minutes out of a wish to get back to her mistress) they were addressed Aurora. All letters ended up in the fire as soon as they were read but Rey would imprint Ben’s words on her memory before committing them to the flames.

The memory of the words would comfort her until the sun rose and it was time to face the world once again.

The leaves were falling from the trees with gusto when Rey received a letter from Calais. It was from Han.

For a moment, her fingers were incapable of the task of opening the parchment. There were times when she forgot about Han. There were times when she forgot she would be regent for only a short time until his return. There were times she forgot what she was doing; who she was betraying and how little he deserved it.
For a time she sat behind the desk simply staring down at the unopened letter. Stared down at his spiky handwriting. Self-loathing the likes of which she could barely stand washed over her.

He was a good man. Her husband was a good man and he deserved better.

It took a goblet of wine and many deep breaths before she could break the wax seal. Before she could read his words and fully digest them.

The letter was jubilant. The journey to Calais had been a success thus far and his meeting with the French King Deris Panteer had been cordial.

Rey did not need to consult a Seer to know that he would have been reminiscing of his first meeting with royalty. Of a beautiful princess who did not act with decorum but mocked his means of transport and had shot a bow and arrow better than even Han himself. Rey did not begrudge the unsaid memories; she would permit him anything to ease her own guilt at her failings.

The French had agreed to help round up the First Order. The English Court were now honoured guests at the city of Paris and were often shut away while pouring over maps of France to debate where the last of the traitors were hiding.

Han asked her to write back as to how she was faring and wished her the best of health. Rey could not help but smile at the awkward, almost self-conscious way he seemed to wish her happiness. Plotting the downfall of enemies was an area he was much more comfortable with.

Rey decided on impulse to call for some pages to give her instructions. She stood behind her desk and knew that she probably made an impressive figure to the young men who bowed with what looked like genuine deference.

“I want to organise a celebration. A joust in honour of the successes of my husband in France.” She gestured to the letter in her hand. “Have it arranged.”

Rey showed her ladies’ the letter and they all seemed ready and eager to participate. Jessika was clearly gratified to hear that her husband was obviously in his element. Maz seemed ready for any excuse to start a celebration and Rose too seemed to enjoy the idea of a joust.

Rey busied herself with preparations. Even if she was the opposite of a good wife, even if she was
the worst Queen to have ever sat upon the elevated throne, she could hoodwink the world into believing otherwise. And if it was an excuse to see the men at the court hit each other with lances… all the better.

Ben peeked out from his tent out at the waiting lists. It was certainly colder but very dry; good conditions to joust. If it had been raining then he would not have been so confident in riding at full gallop. He wanted to be good today; he wanted to be the flower of the court; the chief knight of the joust.

He did not have much competition this time and he was sorry for it. Many of the most gallant knights of his father’s court were abroad with his father in Paris but no matter. There were many up and coming gentlemen who had been dying to show their talents. The naive and enthusiastic were always keen to showcase themselves to the ladies; it made it even more satisfying when he knocked them into the dust.

And this time he wouldn’t have his father’s eyes upon him. He would only have hers.

She had been distracted lately. Distracted and a little aloof – ever since she had received that damn letter. There was nothing exceptional about it. His father had merely sent her news and his hopes that she were not dying of the flux; it was hardly a sonnet! And yet it had reopened a trench within her. Guilt, that damnable guilt that he knew he should experience with her, had caused her to try and honour his father.

It was not that he did not feel for his father. His conscience troubled him greatly and the sight of that familiar spiky handwriting had made him feel a lurch of remorse. But he had made his peace to a certain extent with the fact that what he was doing was wrong. He was a bad prince, a bad son, a bad person – he just wasn’t sure he cared enough to give her up. She was the light after so long in the dark.

If he were to be honest, his eyes strayed from the throne he had coveted for so long and sometimes forgot its existence. It were the girl sat upon it that held his attention.

Stretching and moving his arms in circles to ensure that his armour was allowing mobility, he walked to the centre of the pillion tent. His attendants had left him alone by his request and would not disturb him; he always needed a few moments before the sport to centre himself.
Which meant… they would not be disturbed.

The back of the tent opened. The cloak she wore did not do much to entirely conceal her gown beneath but if there was one benefit of this facade he had to endure with Rose it would be that she would be mistaken for her lady if spotted.

She lowered her hood slowly and held her hands in a manner that made him remember his old matron. She looked a mixture of nervous and pleased.

“I trust you are ready to joust.” She announced a little stiffly.

“I am always ready to prove myself.” Ben had to force himself not to wince at his own words. He wanted to sound confident and calm; instead he merely sounded rather blustering.

Rey raised an eyebrow but said nothing. Ben tried to ignore the burn in his cheeks.

“I am pleased to get you alone.” Rey mentioned. Ben lifted his head feeling hope in his heart which was dashed by her next words: “I needed to talk to you about how to use the joust to our advantage.”

Ben blinked. “Advantage?”

“Indeed, it would be wise for you to ask for her favour. For your lance.”

Ben looked at her in something close to bemusement and then a feeling of irritation and anger surged within him. “You want me… to ask Rose for her favour?”

“It would make sense.” Rey nodded. Ben could not help staring at her face. There were no signs of distress, jealousy or amusement; just a calm demeanour as though this was merely the way things had to be. For a rather startling and unnerving second he thought he saw a flash of his own mother pass over her features. They had shared a husband and a title – they were both Queens of England.
Ben could only lament that the girl beside the fountain playing with her cat seemed to have been shut away in a cage.

“No.” It came out almost without consent. It did not sound petulant this time; it sounded final.

Rey blinked, clearly taken aback. Maybe she was not used to being refused anymore; well she had better get reacquainted with it!

“No?” She repeated slowly as though testing the word out in her mouth.

“No. I’m not doing it. I... I can’t!” He turned his back on her and tried to look at something, anything, else.

He had played his part as best as he could. He had thrown money at the problem in the hope that it would be enough. He had attempted to send letters to keep up appearances. He’d even danced with her! But this…

Somehow the idea of riding up to the stands and looking past Rey to Rose. To ask for a piece of ribbon while she looked on… It was too much.

“Ben, Rose is putting herself in great danger by even knowing of what's between us-”

“Yes, yes, I am well aware of the fact that I am to blame for that as well!” Ben snapped, losing patience. “And I’ve tried to remedy it. I didn’t buy her ridiculous amounts of brocade for her gowns just to keep up appearances, for mercy’s sake. But...” He felt himself deflate.

Rey stood calmly before him as he allowed his temper to get back within his control. Her profile was as it was but her hazel eyes looked anxious.

“How would you have me remedy this situation?” It was a challenge as well as a question. For what could she do to make it easier exactly? But the solution presented itself immediately to him.

“I want... I want the favour to belong to you. I will ask it from Rose before the crowd but if I know it to be yours...”
Rey’s cheeks turned a becoming pink. She began to fiddle with her hands. “I do not have a ribbon on my person.” No doubt she felt it unnecessary with her husband being abroad.

Ben was not going to be denied this. Some of his famous impetuosity rose within him and he felt an overwhelming urge to win this game even if no one knew he was the winner or even that a game was in operation at all. Striding forward he was suddenly within inches of Rey. Her breath came out in more noticeable pants but she did not withdraw. She was too brave for that.

Her neck was almost wantonly displayed to him. He’d kissed the skin there. He’d been careful not to leave mark with his teeth. He’d fisted his fingers through that covered head and indulged in the feel of her brunette tresses. The bodice of her gown pushed her breasts upwards and every breath she was taking made them move almost tauntingly.

He’d been on his best behaviour of late. He knew that she had not forgotten his stupidity at the beginning of their meeting and he had been as docile as possible as a result. He was not meant for meekness.

Slowly, almost silently, he fisted his hands in the skirts of her gown. Her eyes did widen this time and darted to the tent entrance. No-one was coming. His orders were not to be denied.

Slowly he sank to his knees, still pulling up her blasted skirts. There were so many of them beneath her gown that this was not without its difficulties. Eventually, her stockinged legs were displayed to his eyes.

She was trembling. So was he. Her legs were endless and beautifully slim. He’d felt them during one of their more amorous moment over the fabric of her gowns but he had not glimpsed them until this moment. The ribbons that secured her stockings with tied at mid thigh. Pretty white stockings with blue silk ribbon.

“Ben...” She breathed, her hand having grabbed his shoulder and her nails digging into the blade there.

His hands were quick and nimble. Tugging the bow on one of her stockings open, he gave a sharp tug and there was a rip. Her gasp of indignation was ignored and confusion settled into her beautiful features when Ben suddenly dropped her skirts back down and rose up to tower above her again. She looked up at his face as though wanting an explanation. He lifted his hand so his finger held out the blue ribbon that had been ripped away from her stocking.
“You will give Lady Teko this. This will be my favour.”

Rey gaped up at him. The pretty blush had now spread over her nose and made her eyes sparkle. There was a hint of outrage in her eyes but there was something else, something that she could never escape from: desire. For he needed this; he needed to remind her that he couldn’t be planned. He was her slave and he was damned if she would forget it.

She gave a shaky nod and took the ribbon.

The kiss he bestowed upon her was almost timid in hindsight to his actions.

“Will you come to me tonight?” It was whispered against her lips and almost without his consent.

That was not important however; her nod was all that mattered.

He watched Rey pull up her hood and dash out the back of the tent without another word. She would make her official entrance before the crowds. She would sit upon her raised chair and nod to the opponents. She would watch blandly as Lady Teko was asked for her favour by the Crown Prince.

Only they would know where the ribbon had been acquired from. Only they would know that one stocking was wrinkled and sagging down her leg in the absence of her ribboned support.

Only they would know that she would slip across the palace in disguise that night.

Ben stood taller than he had in weeks and stepped out into the sunlight. He had a favour to claim.

Chapter End Notes

My tumblr account: https://waterlilyrose.tumblr.com/

Feedback is my kyber crystal!
Rey’s heart was pounding in her chest. This was not due to any activity. On the contrary, she was lying in bed beneath the coverlet and not moving in any way. She was utterly still. Yet her eyes burned with lack of tiredness and she watched the one solitary candle left alight not far from her bed and within her line of sight.

The candle had to burn halfway down. The court had to go quiet. And then… then she could go to him.

She wasn’t sure whether she wanted the candle to drip wet wax all over her floor or watch the flame burn on for all eternity.

It had been an intoxicating day. She had only visited his tent to give her support. She hadn’t meant to almost lecture him. She should have foreseen how it would be almost offensive to him. She had thought that her veneer of Queenly royalty that she had done much to perfect in recent weeks would somehow cow him into obedience. It was laughable; not even the Tower, his parents’ displeasure or even the threat of the axe had done that. Yet she hadn’t thought he would take such incentive. The sight of him dropping to his knees and lifting her skirts to expose her legs had been enough to strike her temporarily mute. She had almost wanted to instinctively pull the skirts back down to cover herself but her hands had done nothing. Because the sight of him looking at her exposed legs had been almost as stunning as the act itself. He looked in such veneration upon her that she felt almost holy and divine.

She’d wondered briefly if he were going to run his hands further up her body. Touch places that were sinful and delightful. So it was with complete shock that instead he’d ripped the ribbon that held up her stocking clean away from her thigh. Rey had almost chastised him about ruining her stockings. As though that mattered in that moment(!)
her raised seat upon the dais. Yet she was sure that there was a faint tremor to her hands as she had handed Rose the garter ribbon to give to Ben. And she could feel her ribbon-less stocking slipping down her leg beneath her gown. Even if it wasn’t, Rey knew that she would be able to have felt the slackness of her stocking in her heightened state.

The sight of Rey’s stocking ribbon around Rose’s wrist made her flush. She was grateful that Maz had helped her dress that moment so she would have a few hours to compose her reaction before Rose realised her mistress’ mangled undergarment. She could not tell Rose yet. She would have to watch and wait.

She couldn’t honestly say that she remembered the competition. Apparently it had been good sport. The young up-and-coming men of the court had rode well and with great potential. Many saw this as their opportunity to showcase their talents and gain the attention of the Queen. She smiled and applauded every contender politely but without much enthusiasm. For there was only one knight that she longed to see enter the lists.

He looked magnificent upon his stallion. This was so different from the last time he saw him joust. The last time, she had been determined to not let him nettles her and to have him show her some respect. Last time she had briefly wished that he had worn her favour. Now she was just as determined to not show her agitation but he would wear her favour. He would wear it and no-one would know. No-one would know it had touched her inner thigh. No-one would know he had ripped it from her in a flurry of passion.

It sent a wave of excitement through her that left her squeeze her thighs more tightly together.

Ben rode out to her and her ladies. He bowed to her and then turned his eyes to Rose. His eyes were slightly closed off – he was doing this because he must; not because he wanted to.

“Mistress Teko. May I have the honour of wearing your favour?” Rose nodded her head in deference and then stood to tie the ribbon upon the end of his lance.

Ben bowed his head in thanks to Rose but his eyes met Rey’s for a fraction of a second. They said everything that he could not voice. His eyes always promised such delights that left Rey weak-kneed.

He rode with energy and almost brute strength. Rey wondered in some amusement if he was showing off a little. Maybe this was his way of staking a claim upon his masculinity? Or maybe he enjoyed a bit of blood sport?
Probably both.

Rose looked quite lovely that day in a pale blue dress and navy sleeves. Her headdress was lined with pearls and made her eyes shine. Rey’s eyes flickered to the seats to her left. Finn was sitting not far off and he kept glancing at Rose. Her lady and her Master of Horse had not seemed to have spoken since their confrontation in the courtyard but it was evident to Rey that Finn was finding the estrangement quite hard. The determined way that Rose would not so much as turn her head in Finn’s direction even to watch the horses ride past was evidence that she was still angry too. Yet there were times when Rose would look almost disappointed when it was announced that Finn was indisposed at dinner or at court. Rey could sympathise: she knew all about looking with longing and an almost gnawing need.

Ben won the day. Of course he did. He wasn’t going to let anyone else gain a victory when Rey had her eyes upon him.

As Regent and the main lady of the court it was her duty to present the bag of gold to the winner. Her stocking nearly slid down to her ankle as she did so.

The feast afterwards was meant to be jubilant and carefree to celebrate the King’s success and for the most part it was – just not for the Queen.

She called Rose to her side in the pretext of having her on hand for minor duties. Instead they whispered treason.

“I wish to go to his chamber tonight.” Rey said it so lowly that had she not breathed the words into Rose’s ear it was doubtful that her friend would have heard her. It was testament to Rose’s new found confidence and calmness in the face of danger that she merely nodded as though Rey had asked her to ensure that a bath was drawn for her when she returned to her chambers that night.

“Do you wish me to create a diversion?”

“Diversion?” Rey asked.

“Act very friendly around the Prince? Make people think that I...” Rose tailed off. She did not need to finish. Rey thought it over. It would make sense and if someone spotted a cloaked figure entering his apartments – well, in the dark, one woman looked much like another!
Rey thought hard. Might it antagonise Ben? He had made it clear he had no love for this game. But if Rose was close then maybe she could whisper the Queen’s plans. It was worth a try. Rey nodded and Rose went back to her venison as though Rey had merely been enquiring when the sweetmeats would be brought out.

The night had dragged on, Rose and Ben had danced together and talked quietly and the resolute nod of Ben’s head at Rose’s unheard words was enough to make Rey reach for the tankard of wine and refill her goblet quite liberally.

She had excused herself to bed at a reasonable time. Had been patient as her ladies undressed her, put her into her night-shift and brush and plaited her hair. She asked to sleep alone that night for she was weary. Rose would sleep in the antechamber. The candles were blown out and Rey watched the solitary candle burn.

It had burnt nearly down to the wick when there was a scratching tap on the door. Rose was outside. It was time.

Ben had spent time walking the grounds in the dark before retiring to his chambers at a late hour. His chambers were prepared for bed and his attendants merely waited out of duty and decency before they were dismissed. No-one ever stayed the night. There were no pages, no groom of the stool, nothing. The Prince was a solitary creature and no-one was complaining; many squires were seen taking a sharp change of direction if they could hear the Prince in a rage.

He had no close menservants and that was how he liked it. He had never had a friend and didn’t know what he would do with one if he did. Trust was needed for a friendship and trust was not something that came easily to him.

Yet he had no choice but to trust Rose. She was their only ally. It was clear that she didn’t like him much but her love for her mistress was apparent in her willingness to commit treason by helping them. That had to count for something.

And he trusted Rey enough to know that if she said she would come to his chambers, she would.

The court had begun to quieten and the lights that glowed from individual windows, that he observed from his own window, were going out.
He didn’t light any more candles than were necessary. The soft light from his fire was enough for his dark rooms.

Ben went about his business or attempted to. He knelt at his prie-dieu, checked his reflection and paced his apartments. It was all pointless of course. He was waiting for the latch of his door lifting.

It was most likely middle of the night when she finally came.

She was shrouded in a cloak that he recognised as one he had gifted to Rose. It was a handsome garment and hid her face completely. So much so that for an infuriating second, he believed that Rose herself had come. Maybe with some kind of message or apology.

Then Rey lowered her hood. Her head was uncovered with any kind of hood; instead her hair was braided in a simple plait that was clearly meant for bed. Her night-shift was plainly beneath her cloak. His breath caught in his throat.

“Did anyone see you?” Ben whispered. Talking too loud would be too coarse an action for this kind of moment.

“No, the palace is deserted. Rose kept a look out for when it would be safe.”

Rey walked a little further into the chamber as Ben made sure the door was locked this time. When he turned back to her, she was still facing away from him. She seemed unsure about what to do.

That made both of them.

Rey was a complete novice to this but he was just as clueless. He knew that it was the way of the court for the gallant knight to seduce the gentle lady. To whisper sweet words into her ear until she submitted and was pliant to his touch.

But he was no good at gentle words – they came out clumsy and unbecoming. As for taking her in his arms, he had done that before and revelled in it. But there was an unspoken understanding between them that tonight it would not just be holding one another and desperate kisses. More would happen tonight than ever before. And he didn’t have the first idea what to do.
His virginity had never felt like a disadvantage before and certainly not a blemish on his character like many men of the court would have him believe. Yet Rey was still a maid and may be expecting him to know what to do. He had some knowledge of course but no practise and in truth he was as nervous as she clearly was.

Ben crossed to where his decanter of wine was rested. He suddenly needed all the courage he could get.

He had taken three large gulps when Rey finally spoke.

“May I have some of that?”

Ben stopped and looked at her once more. She seemed to be almost shivering. Like she was cold.

“Come closer then.” The fire was still burning brightly and he was now standing beside it. Slowly, almost cautiously, she approached on gentle footing. Were it not for the rustle of her cloak she would not make a sound at all. She did not take a separate goblet and fill it with wine; instead she wordlessly took the half full cup and drank deeply if not a little shakily. It brought her close to Ben. He could smell the fragrance of her hair just beneath his nose.

He stood silently as she lowered the cup from her lips. The warmth of the fire seemed to have eased the trembling but only a little. She looked up at him. They were not used to being so close yet not embracing.

“What happens now?” Rey whispered.

“I’m not sure.” Ben couldn’t help but smile a little. “I’m not experienced in...” He looked down feeling his cheeks burn.

“I see.” Rey stepped close enough to touch him. To lay her hands upon his chest which was prominent through the sheer material of his shirt. “Well... we shall learn... together.”

She looked up at him and there was that trust in her face. There was still caution and a hint of self-reproach in her delicate features but above all there was trust and no-one had trusted him in so long.
It was more enticing than if she had invited him with lowered lustful lids.

They kissed. It felt like a natural thing to do. Their lips gravitated towards one another’s as a safe haven. Ben relished the opportunity to thread his fingers through her uncovered hair again. The cloak which Rose had donated to her mistress’ escapade pooled around Rey’s feet.

There was no rushing in their movements. They tasted one another, passionately, almost desperately yet there was no tearing of clothing or scratches on skin. They just stood and clung to one another as they marvelled in how sin could taste so wonderfully good.

It could have been a moment or an hour before Ben pulled away and led her to his bed.

She followed him by the hand and as she sat upon the bed she looked incredibly innocent. Her bruised lips complimented her rosy cheeks and her eyes looked wide yet sparkling in the light of the fire. Ben knew he must look not much better.

Not knowing how else to proceed, he fumbled with the strings of his shirt and Rey’s hands helped him remove the material off his body. His chest was solid and padded with good muscle; a good body for fighting – fit yet sturdy. He was a pale man yet the fire light made him look tanned and threw his freckles and moles into focus. Rey’s hands, so small yet so strong, ran down his chest as she explored this new land, this new territory, like a conqueror surveying a new kingdom. Ben let his eyes close at the feel of her hands exploring his skin. It felt good; it felt exquisite.

When he opened his eyes, hers were almost black. Her hands felt more confident as they ran down his sternum and over his pectoral muscles.

Slowly, he let his hand drift up her leg.

There was a pause in her movements. Clearly she understood that he meant to touch that place which is most private to a woman. In all truthfulness, he had done it before he could lose his nerve. Yet now he looked at her and paused all movements. Did she truly want this? If she did not then he did not want it from her. There could be nothing worse than taking from a woman what she was not in a mind to give.

She stared back at him. And gave a little nod of ascent.
His hand moved slowly up her leg underneath her nightgown. The skin is soft beneath his fingers and soon he encounters the sensation of wiry hair and wet flesh. They both gasped; so close that they shared a breath. Ben decided to go with his instincts and her reactions. He ran his two fingers up and down her womanhood. The flesh was so wet and hot that his fingers would come away as damp as her slit. He watched her face. Watched as she tried to get used to this brave new world.

It took several minutes of exploring to see what he had only dreamt of for so long. He discovered from her face and her reactions that taking the puckered flesh at the front of her mount and rubbing it in circular motions had Rey sink from her previous position of resting on her elbows and lay on the coverlet with her eyes closed and her throat making such beautiful sounds. She was not loud but earnest in her joy and when she finally felt that which was only whispered about at court, she did not make a sound. Her body spoke for her. It bowed and tensed so much that he wondered if she was in pain with her face screwed up in almost a grimace. Then she sank back into the covers with her eyes closed and her breath panting. She let out a sigh a little like a laugh and opening her eyes she stroked his face and looked at him in wonder.

His laces on his breeches were undone and his member was set free. It was so hard that it nearly caused him pain.

He watched her face. Her eyes widened at the sight and she inhaled harshly. She looked a little afraid. Ben believed himself to be well proportioned to his build yet did not have anyone to compare with. Yet she did not look repulsed; she looked intrigued. Almost hungry.

He took himself in hand and slowly began to pump a release. Rey watched and then slowly replaced her hand with his. The touch of her nervous hand had him nearly gasping.

When it became apparent that his release was imminent, he felt a desire to not stain her nightdress yet share something of his body with her. Her nightgown was pulled up and the skin of her mound and abdomen exposed. Rey flushed at her body being displayed for him but kept moving her hand. If anything her hand moved faster and tighter and that was the end of him. He growled as his spend burst from him and onto Rey’s flat stomach. Rey panted with him as though she too had experienced a second awakening and let him rest his forehead against hers. Their breath and sweat mingled with one another.

There had been an awakening. They had both felt it.

Chapter End Notes

Any feedback is all I want. Please please please leave me some.
Chapter Notes

This is a bit of a filler chapter but just allows us to bask in Reylo fluff and smut so it all serves a purpose.

I'm feeling pretty down at the moment so I'm just trying to update where and when I can. I'm thinking of doing a Reylo Story of different one-shots and I need prompts as what to write about. Please let me know on Tumblr or any way you can on what you want to see.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Han had told her that life at court was a mummer’s farce. Only now he was absent and she was participating in an illicit affair did she know herself to be equal to it.

She had been lying for months. Han and herself had built their marriage on a lie; it was becoming second nature to pretend. Only now that she saw how little people suspected her of anything and how the court moved about her as unsuspecting and unconcerned as ever did she realise that she was a skilled actress indeed. There had been no whispers; no rumours. Rose would have come to her if she had heard so much as a whisper of any untoward behaviour and Maz was not of the character to keep council if she had any suspicions – though Rey had sometimes wondered if the tiny woman was beginning to suspect. Maz’s eyes, obscured by her spectacles, seemed to see more than Rey would have believed possible. Yet there had been no confrontation; no accusations. Rey covered her tracks well.

For now nearly every night was spent in Ben’s arms. She had done things that she had never dreamt herself capable of doing. The nervousness of that first night was swiftly leaving them. For only the previous night, Rey had been out of her nightgown and sprawled upon the bed for Ben’s indulgent eyes to feast on within moments. His mouth had caressed every inch of her skin. His hands had mapped every crease. His fingers had ventured within her body and left her in such a state of wantonness that her eyes had rolled back in her head. Ben loved to see her uncovered; it had been much the same with her hair. He was a greedy man for hidden treasures and her body was the ultimate gem. She was the Queen and sat upon an anointed seat; the most untouchable woman in the land and he could lay waste to the canvas of her body. No man had ever known her like this and she doubted any other ever will.

She had tasted his skin too. Miles and miles of pale, soft, scarred and freckles flesh. Rey had felt an odd desire to add a mark of her own. To bite the flesh of his hip and suck a bruise there. She could mark him in so few ways that it seemed like recompense. Yet her mouth remained soft upon him.
Their nights were often the same yet it was so delicious an experience that within seconds of departing, she would be greedily planning their next night. They would lie together naked as their name day and feast themselves. His fingers would find her womanhood and play her like a lute before she too would return the favour. She found, much to her own shock, that she loved the feel of his manhood in her hand. To squeeze and pump him was to give herself power and to see him, a huge hulking man who commanded both awe and fear, so docile and willing to do whatever she would have asked was intoxicating. She always liked him to spill himself upon her body too. It gave her a perverse delight.

They were acting like heathens and the most deplorable of God’s children yet Rey could not find it within herself to care as she enjoyed him in his bed. She attended Mass nearly twice daily now as a means of atoning for the delight she took in his arms yet she knew as she prayed for forgiveness and absolution that she would be back the very next morning asking the same thing. The Church made it clear that no pleasure should be taken in the act of carnal acts. It was a means of procreation and they were taking pleasure without the act of conception possible. It was some kind of small comfort to Rey that her maidenhead was still intact. It was a talisman for her to cling to. Yes, she was betraying her husband, his father, in the worst kind of way but at least her virginity was not sacrificed. She was not exactly acting like a maid but that was between her and her conscience.

Her conscience did bother her of course. She read and re-read Han’s letter so much that the parchment was beginning to darken with dirt around the corners. She had started to write a continued correspondence to keep him up to date with the goings on of the court. The small councils continued to meet and they had experienced a good harvest. The winter was becoming crisper and the candles were being lighted earlier in the days to provide some more light to the darkened halls. The people of London seemed content and many came out to greet her on the roads when she moved from Naboo Palace to the more demure Theed Court – a regular routine in winter as the marble of Naboo did little to keep the occupants warm. She smiled and waved to them as she rode pavilion on her mare. Rey tried to do right by her people as she felt the late Queen would have tried to do. So far she felt she had not made such a bad job of it. The Prince rode behind her on his war horse. He did not generate the same adoration; the people still felt wary of him. He did not seem to care so much.

Rey had almost wanted to call out to the crowd: He’s changed! He’s gentle and kind and loving. He needs to feel love and he will lay his soul before you. Trust him and show him affection; you will not be disappointed.

But of course she said nothing. How could she? And how could she blame such distrust? Had she not been guilty of it at the beginning? The past was not so easy a thing to be rewritten especially when it was all you had ever been told.

Theed Court was situated just outside of London to avoid the cold and disease. It was made not of
marble but stone and wood. It was like a magnificent hunting lodge with fresher air and great lands
to ride upon. The leaves were falling from the trees and the forests were turning a startling array of
orange, red and brown. Rey rather liked to take her walks beneath those trees so the leaves
crunched beneath her slippered feet. How she would love to walk arm in arm with Ben beneath
those trees…

Rose was still receiving all the rewards of apparently lying down with the most powerful man in
the land. She was even starting to look a little exasperated at the amount of new sleeves and
jewelled hood she was receiving – for she could hardly change her clothes four times a day in order
to display them all. Rose said nothing about the number of times she had to act as lookout for her
mistress. There was no judgement in her eyes yet they rarely spoke of the affair anymore. It almost
felt that if they did not speak the words then there would be less to hold against them.

Rey found that she would rather listen to Rose speak instead. Especially of a certain Master of
Horse.

“Have you decided to speak to Finn yet?” Rey asked one day beside the window of her solar while
they were working on a rather tricky tapestry.

Rose’s face looked oddly blank at the sound of his name. Like she had trained herself to give
nothing away. “I have nothing to say to him. I do not owe him any kind of explanation.”

Rey could only nod a little sadly. It seemed preposterous that a woman’s virtue could be held in
such high esteem at court yet a lady could be rewarded if she only took the right lover. However
Rose seemed to be finding the certain level of independence and authority it afforded her to be
much desired. “I think you miss one another. If only you would admit it.”

Rose furrowed her eyebrows but did not contradict her. “He chastised me like a child.” Rose
complained, looking furious at the mere memory. “Told me that I was making myself infamous.
Like his beloved Dameron has not ruined many a good lady’s name.” Rose’s eyes flitted guiltily to
where Jessika stood across the room. She was beside the fire as she felt the cold much more keenly
nowadays and was out of earshot anyway. Her abdomen had swollen considerably in recent weeks.
It still gave Rey a twinge at times but she was become rather used to it now.

“Well…” Rey was glad that Poe had been brought up. It was something that she had wanted to
broach with Rose for a long time. “Maybe this will take his mind off Poe a little. I mean, he has not
been so keen for Poe to return lately. When I mentioned him the other day, he seemed almost
surprised. Like he’d forgotten all about him.”
“I highly doubt that.”

“Oh, he did. You see, you were riding beside the Prince at the time while we were out hunting.” Rey had been happy to be given an excuse to look at Ben at the time. He had looked rather beautiful with the wind making his hair fly about his face.

Rose seemed a little taken aback but not displeased. In fact, she was in a good mood for the rest of the day.

Ben managed to settle his breathing with some effort as he looked up at the canopy above his bed. His skin was dewy with sweat and his flesh was heated to fever point. This was not helped by Rey’s naked form curled up on his side with her head resting above his heart but he would rather sacrifice his inheritance than ask her to get off. He was willing to burn in Hell for his actions with his stepmother; if his immortal soul was in jeopardy then his body could suffer the same.

He loved these nights. The reunion after a day of being perfectly respectable, the passion, the release and then this: the calm. To just lie in a bed in complete nakedness and enjoy the silence of a world that was often far too loud. Rey sighed and laid her lips against his chest. He ran his hand over her unbound hair. Ben considered any moment where they were safely together and she was still clothed as a moment wasted. Her body was beautiful. Her breasts were small but pert and fitted his palms almost like they had no other purpose in life but to be held by him. He’d sucked upon her teats like a baby wanting to be fed. The sound of her cries of shock at both the act and her own reaction was a delight that felt almost otherworldly. The feel of the moisture between her lower lips was beyond description. Her long willowy yet oddly strong frame contrasted with his own hugely but it made their activities oddly more satisfying. Her narrow hips and endless legs sent him wild even though he knew that her frame was out of fashion at the court. Men wanted heaving busts and rounded hips apparently. It was better for the childbed and would ensure the lady could endure more during the trials of labour. Yet for all their frantic rubbing and panting together, they had not truly lost his innocence yet it was becoming a more tempting option each time. The idea of merging his body with her own made his cock twitch in his breeches every time he thought of it.

But no. They must be strong enough to resist that at least.

Rey looked up at Ben and gave a gentle smile. Her fingers brushed the crease of his eye.

“You seem tired. Are you well?”
Ben caught her hand and brought the fingers to his lips. “Never better, my love.”

Rey pinked at his words but seemed pleased. She looked about his room. It was less opulent than his rooms in Naboo but Ben liked the simplicity and rustic feel of the place. “I like it here.”

“It will suffice.” He agreed. “The hunting is good here. Lots of land to ride about in.”

“You seem to be conversing a little better with Rose from what I can see.” There was no jealousy in Rey’s tone yet Ben frowned. He wanted there to be no doubt, none at all, that he was doing this because he must. Not because he had to.

“I feel its not exactly prudent to snipe at her when we have to be playing such a ruse.”

“Maybe you should stop sending her presents so often. I think her wardrobe is getting a little overcrowded.”

“She will get used to it. I refuse to do anything else that might be romantic. I won’t. I won’t!”

Rey shushed him gently, laying a kiss on his chest again. “Don’t get upset; I understand.” Rey propped herself on her elbow. “Besides I think Rose is a little preoccupied about Finn at the moment.”

“My old soldier?”

Rey nodded. “He is not taking her new status very well. I suspect he’s getting a little jealous. It might be good for him; it will stop his hero worship of Poe if nothing else.”

“I thought you two were the best of chums.” He could not keep the resentment out of his tone. He doubted he ever would where Dameron was concerned.

“He is charming and entertaining but he can be a little swept away with his own character. It can be a little annoying.”
Ben blinked. No-one had ever said anything against Dameron in his hearing before. To have it come from her…

Rey let out a little squeal as Ben tackled her onto her back but seemed more than willing when he kissed her with vigour.

“Mercy! What’s gotten-” But Rey’s words were cut off as he lay his lips upon her neck and she merely sighed.

He moved down her body laying kisses on her as he went.

“Ben! You can’t! It’s... it’s…”

He knew what it was. The Court had only ever whispered it within his hearing but it had caught his attention all the same. The idea of worshipping a woman with his mouth was intriguing and now he could think of no other way to show his devotion and gratitude to her for all she was.

Attaching his full mouth to her mound, he pushed her thighs further apart so they could not block out her sounds.

Let Dameron be the fairy tale prince. Only he could give this to the Queen and surely that counted as services to the Crown.

Chapter End Notes

Comments are the medicine I desperately need right now.
Chapter Notes

The trailer is out tomorrow. The TRAILER is OUT tomorrow. This is not a drill. This is not a drill!!!

Massive thanks to Poet Hrotevisha for being my gorgeous beta.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a relaxing morning beside the fire with their needlework when Rey heard the sound of hoofbeats in the courtyard beneath her window. Jessika rose from her position and looked out; thegasp that escaped her caused Rey to straighten in her seat.

“Jessika? What is it?”

Jessika let her hand drop from her mouth and looked at her Queen. Her eyes seemed wide as though she could not believe the sight that greeted her.

“It is… Milady, it is my husband.”

Rey let her sewing drop onto her seat and rushed to the window to look down into the courtyard. Sure enough, Poe Dameron was dismounting his steed. Windswept and road-splattered as he evidently was, his handsome face was split into a wide grin as though delighted to be back in his native court. Instinctively Rey looked out at the entrance of the courtyard as though expecting to see a brigade of horses thundering in. Symbolising the return of the court and the King. But Dameron was alone.

Rey returned to her spot beside the fire and straightened her skirts. She would meet her returning Captain as a Queen was meant to do.

She wondered briefly as her ladies prepared for the Captain’s arrival why she did not feel as excited to see Poe as she would have been when she first arrived at court. Was it to have to see his reaction to Jess’ advanced pregnancy? He was a man who would delight to see his wife’s fertility and he had been away from the country when Jess had discovered that she was with child. The winter was fast approaching and Jessika’s condition was now prominent even beneath her skirts. Was it selfish to wish that they could celebrate an entire palace away?
Was it the news he may bring to her? Where was the King? Was he well? Had he sent Poe ahead to deliver some dreadful news?

Or was it because she now saw him in a slightly different light? She had spent many a night in Ben’s arms and it had not been completely spent in sinful delight. They had talked too. And she had begun to see the Poe that Ben had been forced to deal with as a boy and a disillusioned man. Dameron was a brilliant courtier and an accomplished man; he had not been shy about it either. Was Poe’s self-given title of *The Prince That The Queen Had Deserved* been too much for Ben? Rey was beginning to suspect that it was. She doubted that, for all the damage that Ben himself had done, he would ever forgive Poe for effectively trying to replace him in Leia’s affections.

It seemed a bit redundant to explain to Ben that his mother had never given up on her surviving child. Poe may have been a model Prince but Ben had been her boy.

The doors were opened and Poe strode in. His red cloak swept the ground as he dropped into a deferential bow before Rey. She gave her hand for him to kiss and bid him rise.

“Captain Dameron, you are alone? How is the King? Has all fared well?” She kept the panic out of her voice but she felt the fire behind her own eyes. Was Han well?

“Your Grace, the King is very well. He is currently in Calais with the court. He sent me ahead to see how his Queen doth.” His eyes flickered to Jessika who was stood beside Rey, the very model of poise. Clearly the King had sent the Captain ahead to see how his own wife was faring as well as the Queen.

“I am well, Sir. The court is in Calais?” The last Rey had heard had been that the King had progressed to Paris.

“Indeed. Business at France was a success. The King has found the last of the vagabonds who defied him. They were put to death with the French King’s blessing.”

Rey nodded. This was good news as it meant that her husband’s expedition had been a triumph. Yet the mention of such a death made the goose flesh on Rey’s neck rise.

“So he is coming home?”
“When the weather permits it. Even with the best of ships, the Channel crossing is a merciless thing. I caught the last of the autumn tide. Hopefully he will not be delayed too long.”

Rey nodded her understanding. Two of the most fundamental parts of her soul were doing battle within her. Han was coming home. He was well and in good spirits. She would see him again. They would talk beside the fire and the man who had raised her up would be back at her side to teach what she did not know and let her tread alone amongst issues of which she was now a master.

But…

*Han was coming back.*

And all that Rey could think was ‘But what about us?’ And she didn’t mean her husband.

*Ben. Oh Ben…*

Everything would change now. Her freedoms as Regent would come to an end. The old game of watching her stomacher for any signs of thickening would begin again. And with the court returning to their main hive, she could not permit Ben to visit her bedchamber or to sneak across to his. Han may not have stayed the night between her sheets but he would undoubtedly have questions if she excused herself and disappeared into the night for hours at a time.

Not now. Act now as you should.

“You have come a long way Captain. Why don’t you take your wife for a walk in the grounds?” She gestured to Jessika. “It will give you time to reunite.”

Poe bowed his deference to Rey and held out his hand to take Jessika’s. She stepped out of the line and took it, dropping a quick curtsey to him. Rose held herself rigidly and without pride. And as Poe went to turn away, he momentarily caught Rose’s eye. A smile crossed her face. It was a knowing smile. A smile you did not want to be on the receiving end of.

Maybe Rose has more in common with Ben that either ever imagined, Rey mused to herself.
Rey ordered the kitchens to provide a sumptuous feast for the Captain’s return as well as the news he bought with him, and there would be dancing soon after. Jessika helped Rey get ready for dinner.

“How is your husband faring?” Rey asked as Jessika attached her gown sleeves.

“He is well.” Jessika nodded as she straightened Rey’s kirtle. “Business at Paris went well. And he is… pleased with how things develop here.” Jessika always seemed to elude to her pregnancy as though it were a political deal. Although Rey had never once vented her own frustration and heartbreak at her unlikeness of begetting a child, she knew that her lady was not stupid. You couldn’t survive this viper pit of a court and not become adept at reading a situation. Rey felt a strange wave of guilt; this was not how she wanted her court to be.

“How is the child?” Rey asked quietly. Jessika looked up from Rey’s skirts as though not sure if she had heard correctly.

“Um… I believe the child is well. I feel him kicking quite vigorously.” Rey nodded, unsurprised at Jess referring to her child as a son. Many people referred to their oncoming offspring as a he; as though that could wish the sex of the child into being. A girl would not be worth thinking of.

“Is… is the child kicking now?”

“Not kicking but I can feel movement.” Jess fiddled with her rings. She was clearly waiting for some kind of violence in Rey’s reaction. Would her mistress become hysterical like last time?

Rey whispered the words before she could take them back: “May I?”

Her hand was outstretched to gesture to Jessika’s bump and what she was asking. Her lady blinked in bemusement but was used to taking orders without comment or question. She took Rey’s hand and placed it upon her abdomen.

It was a gentle thing. Like raindrops upon a window pane. Yet Rey found herself forgetting her pain and jealousy for a moment as she marvelled at the miracle of life. There was a child in there;
growing within its mother. God willing, the child would continue to flourish in its mother’s womb and survive the birth to live a long life.

Rey wanted the baby to be strong and healthy. It suddenly didn’t matter that Jessika would be its mother and she would remain barren; the baby would not suffer for her own jealousy.

The two women stood quietly for a moment as they let the unborn child bridge the gap between them and, when Rey finally looked up into Jessika’s face, she smiled gently.

The feast that night was a grand affair. Dameron was plainly the star of the court again and Rey wondered once more what Ben would make of this turn of events.

But Ben wasn’t there.

Rey asked Rose where the Prince was while the venison was being devoured by the court.

“I don’t know, Milady.” Rose admitted looking a little taken aback herself. She seemed to be perturbed; almost a little unnerved. “I have not seen him since we broke our fast today.”

Rey furrowed her brow. This was strange. Ben never missed a chance to dine; he trained vigorously and tended to be ravenous by the end of it. He was known to eat an entire chicken by himself.

But then Rey looked up to see Poe working the room and reasoned that maybe it wasn’t so unusual. Poe being in his element was probably not something that Ben was eager to see.

From the distance of her dais, Rey could see Finn and Poe in the middle of a reunion. Poe seemed delighted to see his friend and talked animatedly while slapping him upon the arm in a manner of deepest happiness. Finn too seemed pleased but… his eyes kept straying from his friend up to the high table where Rey was seated. And Rose too.

Poe seemed to eventually notice his friend’s lack of enthusiasm and distraction as he too began to look up to where the Master of Horse’s eyes kept straying.
Rey was across the room so she was not able to hear what was said, but she had a good idea. Poe seemed to be almost vehement in his approach but Finn did not seem to be drinking in his words like before. He instead began to look down at his goblet and frowned hard. Like he did not like what he was hearing. And wished to hear no more.

Eventually Finn snapped something back and took his leave of the Captain. Poe seemed taken aback by this response as he stared after Finn’s quick retreat. Rose daintily sipped her wine, and Rey noted with some quiet amusement that she was in a rather good mood for the rest of the feast.

There was much dancing and talking as the candles began to burn lower and the wine flowed strong. Rey took her ladies back to her apartments with some of the court as she desired a little more of a personal party. Finn was absent but Poe recovered himself quickly. He asked the Queen whether she would be happy to play cards with him.

“I have learnt some new games in the French court. I think they will please you.” Rey nodded her agreement and let the Captain deal the cards.

“How is the French court?” Rey asked during their second game.

“It is grander and livelier; their King is still a young man and passionate at that.” Poe kept his eyes on his cards almost determinedly. Han’s advancing years had constantly been an unspoken issue; the eyes of the court constantly strayed to the strong and passionate Prince who was now a good age to take the throne. Rey wondered where that would leave Poe. He was a favourite with Han; where would his fortune lie when his nemesis came to power?

“I take it that by ‘passionate’ you mean ‘amorous’?” Rey took a card from the table and examined her hand. It was still precarious at best.

“He is… not a faithful monarch to his Queen.”

“How does she bear such a burden?” Rey could not foresee a future in which she would be able to sit quietly if such an insult was paid to her. She would have loyalty as well as love or she would take vows and rejoin Jakku nunnery.

“It is the way of Queens.” Poe shrugged. “She has been raised to her position as a Princess from a foreign land. So long as she provides heirs, no other woman will ever come before her.”
Rey took a sip of wine and frowned. She wasn’t stupid; she knew full well that this was the way of a woman’s life. She was to get pregnant, easily and often, and once she had a campaign of sons and maybe a daughter or two (just to ensure politically beneficial marriages) then she would reign supreme. Yet the idea of a marriage with no affection, not even the odd, paternal affection she shared with Han, and having a man take you to bed merely for sons left her cold. The idea of that husband then bedding another for mere pleasure and enjoyment left her almost boiling with rage.

But then was she any better than all the other men of the courts? Was she not doing just that?

*It is not just lust; we have something. Something… real.*

Yet it did not sit quite so well with her conscience.

“I hear that the Prince has been participating in amorous activities of his own.” Poe said almost casually. Almost.

Rey placed a card upon the table. “Lady Teko has indeed caught his attention, yes.”

“I cannot deny that I am clean amazed.”

“Why so?” Rey asked. “He is not attached. No third party is getting hurt.” Except me when I look too long.

“The Prince did not strike me as… the romantic type.”

Rey wanted to quip that he would be amazed what Ben was capable of when he felt romantic but said nothing.

“Finn seems to be most put out by this.” Poe said. There was a touch of bitterness in his tone at this.

“I believe that he and Rose were close before this.”
“And how close would you deem them?”

“Why does it concern you so, Captain?”

Poe took a deep drink of wine. He seemed to be considering his answer. “Finn is a great friend of mine.”

“Yet you do not seem to have been on the best of terms tonight.”

Poe blinked at her. He clearly wasn’t expecting her to see so much. “I… may have commented that Rose was not worth such attention. If she was so easily dazzled by the Prince’s status.”

Rey put her cards down slowly. “What two unattached people do is not a matter for your concern.” There was a hint of warning in her tone. Even Rey could hear it. “Are you more indignant that the Prince seems to be capable of charming a lady? Or the fact that Finn seems more concerned with said lady’s welfare than your return?”

Poe seemed to be taken aback by both her question and her tone. Rey liked Poe, she really did, but now felt like a good time to deliver some hard to hear truths.

“Milady, you don’t understand-”

“I understand what I see. You ought to be careful of who you show such disdain for, Captain. Those who you show contempt can one day have the power to cast you low.”

The fire crackled close to them and Rey called for her page: “More wine please.”

Rey was preparing to retire to her bed when there was an announcement.

“You Grace, the Prince requests an audience.” A page bowed.
Rey was puzzled. They only came to one another when they had no chance of being disturbed. Why would he come to her when he knew she would still be in attendance with her ladies? “Please show him in.”

It was apparent as soon as he entered that this was not a normal visit. Ben was still wearing his riding cloak and looked the same colour as parchment. Something was wrong.

“Your Grace.” Rey welcomed formally. “Why have you come at such a late hour?”

“I must speak with you alone. It is a matter that cannot wait.”

Rey gestured to her ladies to leave their presence. There was no time for worrying tonight; something must be discussed with all haste.

As soon as the door closed, Rey stepped closer. “Ben? What’s wrong? Where have you been all day?”

“Riding. I… I needed...” He was striding back and forth as though standing still would hurt him in some way. “I received a letter this morning. From Dameron’s page.”

Rey nodded thinking that she understood where his distress came from. “Ben, we always knew that Han… he had to come back eventually.”

“I didn’t know. I didn’t know that this...” He drew out a crumpled letter from his doublet. It looked like it had been crunched in a fist. “I’m such a fool.” He was looking at the letter like it was something poisonous. Something that could kill him.

“What are you...” Rey suddenly had the letter thrust out for her to take. Like Ben could not even bare to say the words himself.

“Read it.”
Rey took the letter and uncrumpled it. It was Han’s writing.

Slowly, she read the words and yet the meaning could not seem to sink in. For it couldn’t… it couldn’t be…

“He is bringing back some French ladies to the court?” She whispered. “Is that a normal practise?”

“It is,” Ben whispered, “when a Prince must decide upon which one he will take as a bride.”

Chapter End Notes

It couldn't go that smoothly forever could it?

Just encase you are wondering, I happen to like Poe. I think he's cool as hell but something that has always interested me is the feedback of him: he's as dedicated to the Resistance as Kylo is to the First Order, he knows he can be manipulative when he wants to and the reports that Leia slaps him in the upcoming film is veeeeery interesting. So I thought I'd play about with that a bit.

Please please please give me feedback. It's my birthday this week and it's all the pressie I want.

Also... TRAILER IS OUT TOMORROW!!!!

*Kisses*
Hi guys!

Oh it’s been a good week to ship Reylo. That trailer... I’m still not over it. I don’t know if I can handle the film at this rate!

It’s been like a firework up the backside for inspo though.

Massive thanks to my friend Poet Hrotvisha for all her help.

The day was losing its light and the chill that had began to linger over the kingdom in the harvest months was gaining more of a bite to it. Even with his cloak, Ben was beginning to shiver on his horse. Yet he was keen to remain seated upon his stallion until he could barely see any longer. The views of the country weren’t enough to calm him but it numbed the rage and the despair for a few hours. Which made it worse when he was forced to feel again.

His insistence of riding out every morning and returning when the candles in the palace were lit again was raising suspicion. Yet he couldn’t find it in himself to care too much. Let them try and drag him before the small council and question him. Let them follow him. They would only come up empty. He’d learnt lying at his mother’s knee; she was match for any man. His body ached, his muscles were hardening and he felt his tunic hanging looser around his waist but he didn’t care. All that matter was getting away from this nightmare he found himself in.

He was falling apart inside his own head. His father was coming back; surely that was enough? Why did he have to bring potential brides with him too?

He was a Prince and therefore he did not the choices of normal men. His wife would be chosen for her. If this had happened just a year ago, he would have been nothing more than perturbed. Then he would have picked the bride who looked like she would annoy him the least and marry her to do his duty.

He was a different man a year ago.

Sometimes he imagined that he would keep riding his horse to the sea coast. Pawn some of his jewels and sail across to Brittany. Live quietly. Anonymously. But that was merely a dream; a fairytale. He couldn’t leave his kingdom.
He couldn’t leave her. And yet he couldn’t be around her just now either.

When he’d gone to her that night, disorientated, frightened and half crazed with a refusal to accept what he would be forced to, he’d been unsure of her reaction. Just that he knew he had to tell her what they were facing.

When she heard, she’d turned white to the lips and had slowly sat down as though her legs were not up to the task of holding her up in that moment. She’d drunk an entire goblet of wine in less than three gulps and then seemed to control herself.

“Well… this is hardly surprising really.”

Of all the reactions in the world, he’d not been expecting that one.

“I’m sorry?” He asked quietly. For he was sure at first that he’d misheard.

“It’s not surprising.” Rey said a bit more steadily. “You are more than old enough to take a wife. Some might say too old. Many princes are married at the age of fourteen or younger. To be in your thirtieth year, the heir to the throne and no son of your own...”

Ben had always loved Rey’s composure. But her calm reasoning on how this was merely the next step in his life made him baulk. He’d been bracing himself all day for the fact that this would give her more pain than he ever wanted to inflict. This measured diplomatic woman was a shock and not a good one. Surely she should feel something close to the horror that he did?

If Ben was being truthful, he’d wanted her to go to pieces like himself. For her to wail, moan, gnash her teeth and cling to him, declaring that she would never let him go and no other woman would ever marry him while she had an ounce of strength left. It wouldn’t have achieved anything but it would have been a comfort for him to know they were feeling the same thing.

“A bride will be chosen for me for French politics! How is this anything but a disaster?”

“It makes sound political sense.” Again there was that deadened rationalism. Could she throw something at least?
“To the dogs with politics!” He’d roared causing her to stiffen but show no other sign of life. “I’m meant to choose a bride. Does that not mean anything to you?”

Rey gave him such a blazing look that for a split second he felt a little abashed. But no… he needed to know where he stood in all this.

“Of course I… how dare you suggest-”

“Well show it then!” Ben demanded. “Stop being rational and pragmatic. Stop being Queen Regent for five seconds and tell me what you, Rey, thinks of this travesty!”

Rey fiddled with the rosary on her girdle. Was she praying for guidance? Or stealing for time?

Finally she raised her head. “I cannot block the marriage. Han is the King. If he demands it… I can try to reason but it will arouse suspicion. I don’t think we have a choice.”

This level of complete hopelessness had sounded like surrender to Ben. He’d backed away as though burnt and squared his shoulders as though he were facing the judges of his life.

“I will not do it. They can’t force me to marry. They can throw me in the Tower again; threaten me with beheading but I am not marrying some woman I have never met. I won’t!”

He’d bellowed these last words as though shouting up at God himself. In his minds eye, he looked somewhat like his Uncle Luke.

Ben had stormed from the room and slammed the door so hard that the ornaments in the royal apartments had rattled. He hadn’t seen Rey since.

His days were spent riding and brooding. Finn, his old solider and the Master of Horse, was looking at him with interest. In his melancholy he had refrained from trying to have any contact with Rose. He’d sent no presents and had not seen her at all. He did not care. Let the court gossip about her lapse in favour. It would stop them talking of which bride he would take.
The news had gotten out as news always did. The English Court was not stupid; when a gaggle of high born women accompanied the ageing King back to his young wife and bachelor son it was an easy conclusion to draw. What they thought of his renewed surliness and his rediscovered love of smashing things was unknown.

The sun finally began to wane completely and Kylo steered his horse around. Back to his palace. Back to his prison.

Rey was wrapped in her sable furs and a red and gold gown which felt heavy on her body. Her hair was done up in an elegant up-do and a golden coronet was placed upon her brow. Rose had tried to rub some rouge on her cheeks to give her more colour. For Rey knew she was looking drawn and pale.

Never had she been more grateful for Rose’s part in their deception before. It had been Rose who had shared her bed that night and Rose who had gently pressed Rey to tell her what’s wrong. Rey had told her through numb lips.

Rose seemed taken aback but rather resigned. Clearly she had been wondering when this would happen too. She did not hush Rey as her tears rolled into her hair but stroked her long brown strands until the headache that had been building since she heard the news felt bearable.

Rose had tried to sneak to Ben’s rooms in the days prior but he had shut himself away most successfully. No doubt he had heard the news of Han’s coming. The seas, in a cruel twist of fate, had become rather calm and it was safe enough for them to cross the Channel.

Now after two weeks of travel on the mud-splattered roads of France and England, the royal party were within reach. The main royal party were returning.

It had been a hard and difficult two weeks. Rey had been forced to endure a separation from Ben as he seemed intent on being as far from her presence as he ever was before. Rey had tried to write letters to him but every one ended up crumpled up and tossed into the fire. A part of her wanted to bang on his chamber door and demand how he could accuse her of coldness when it was him that was pushing her away.

Because truly… what could she do?
The idea of Ben being married to some faceless princess made her want to scream. The idea of then having to endure the company of that woman, maybe to even invite her into her inner circle was repugnant to her. She was not so near-sighted that she didn’t understand that the lady would probably have as little choice in all this as she had done the day Plutt had taken her to court to marry her off to the highest bidder. This was the way of women; they were born into noble families in the hope of an advantageous marriage. And they were only treated well if the family had sons to spare. Otherwise they were seen as a burden to be palmed off.

Some days Rey tried to be pragmatic as was her way. Maybe this was for the best. This… romance, dalliance, affair; whatever you wanted to call it really… it could not continue now. Han would be coming back. He was bound to notice.

She’d stupidly never envisioned an ending to this. Life with Ben had been all about the now. About loving him. About making sure he was faithful and earnest in his regard. Beyond that there had been no plans. Nothing built for when Han returned. They’d had nearly two glorious months of stolen moments, lingering kisses, passionate hands and lustful endeavours. Maybe this could be filed under a beautiful memory?

But the idea of such memories never stopped her turning over in bed and smoothing her face in her pillow so to not wake up Rose.

If he’d just see her. If he’d just let her see him in the court. If he could just see how powerless she was in all this…

…then he wouldn’t be Ben and she wouldn’t love him so much.

For she did. She loved him. Only love could hurt her so badly while not leaving a blemish on her. Except a difficulty in stomaching food and a pale complexion.

But now was not the time for all that. Now she had to greet her King.

The entirety of the court that had stayed behind were waiting in the courtyard slightly behind her. All her ladies were lined up patiently along with other minor noblemen who had been disinclined to follow Han on his latest adventure and ladies who were waiting for their husbands return as she was. Poe was stood slightly behind her. He had been rather less confident in her presence as of late. Rey wasn’t sure whether this was resentment or an attempt at chastening himself. It didn’t really matter. Poe’s affairs seemed to be a mere inconvenience to her now.
The court were waiting not only for the King’s party but also for the Prince. He would need to take his place beside the Queen so they could greet his father together. Yet he was running late.

He was in the castle for Rey had given orders that if he took a horse from the stable and tried to leave, Finn was to run to report to her and she would given chase herself if she had to. She almost wished for it; any excuse to get him alone again. But he’d made no attempt.

Eventually there was a crunch of boots on gravel. Rey turned to the motion of many people bowing and curtseying the arrival in deference. The Prince had come down and silently took his place beside her. In every material way, he looked much like a prince. His dark red doublet set off his black hair and gold chain about his neck. He stood tall and with his hands behind his back as though ready to face anything, whether it be pleasant or not at all. But Rey could see in her peripheral vision that, up close, he fell below the mark.

His face looked unnaturally hollow and his cheekbones stuck out a bit too much. His hair, always so buoyant and soft, looked rather lank. And there was something defeated about him that no amount of his acting the part could mask.

Rey wanted to reach out and take his hand. Show some sign that she was here in some capacity. But she continued to face ahead towards the gates where the real world would come thundering in.

It was barely two minutes later when the look out called out. “They are coming.”

There was a drum-roll of approaching horses hooves. Rey suddenly felt weak. Like an enemy army was about to thunder through the gates. And then there they all were. The standard bearers came in first along with some soldiers of high rank and there behind them was the King.

Rey was surprised to find that a feeling of happiness rose up inside her at the sight of Han. For all the heartache that his return would mean for her, she found that to see him did her heart good. She had not realised until this moment how much she had missed his company and council.

She dropped into a curtsey with the rest of the court.

Han dismounted and approached her with a smile. He took her hands and raised her up kissing them warmly.
“My Queen, how do you fare?”

“I am well Sire.” Rey smiled. Yet her eyes narrowed a little at seeing him so close. Han, who had been old enough to be her grandsire when they married, looked somehow depleted like his son. His enthusiasm lit up his face and from the way he rode his horse he was clearly still strong. But he looked more like his true age than he had ever looked in Rey’s time of knowing him. For the first time, Rey could see evidence that he was in the winter of his years. “Are you well?”

“Never have I been better, Milady.” He said happily, though Rey noticed that he was a bit breathless. All Rey wanted suddenly was to get him inside and serve him some spiced wine.

Han turned then to Ben. He blinked a little at the sight of his son. Clearly he had noticed the difference in him too and he did not seem happy with it. Ben’s face looked grim and rather haughty. He was clearly not happy to see Han in any way at all.

“I… trust all has been well here?” Han’s eyes flicked back to Rey.

“There has been peace in the land. And the court has worked well together.” Rey replied diplomatically. She would give Han the more intimate details when they were alone. So long as he didn’t suspect how intimate she had been with the Crown Prince.

There was a slight noise behind them and Rey noticed for the first time that two carriages had drawn up with the company of horses. For a brief shining moment, Rey had forgotten that Han was bringing company with him.

The steps were let down and several finely dressed yet clearly tired girls stepped down from the carriage. The eldest of the company was a tall woman who wore a pink French gown with a matching head-dress. Although clearly past her thirties, she looked rather pleasant and friendly looking.

Han held out a hand for her to introduce her. “Milady, this is Lady Amily Holdo. She was a past friend to the Rebel Alliance.” Lady Holdo curtseyed to the Queen which Rey graciously returned. “And these lovely girls are her three daughters.”

Rey looked at the girls. They were very young; the oldest could be no older than seventeen. They were all looking rather nervously at Ben who no doubt had been pointed out as the future King and the one to catch. None of them looked like they wanted to even look at him. Rey felt a wave of pity
for these girls; Ben should surely realise that their coming was not their choice. And he was not looking like an appealing gallant prince or charming bridegroom. He looked at that moment like the stuff of nightmares.

Han seemed to notice this too and looked rather uncomfortable but Lady Holdo, who was clearly a good politician, knew how to break the awkward silence.

“I last came to this court when you were merely a boy of six. You have changed a great deal.”

Ben blinked as though surprised to be addressed in such a manner. There was something in his eyes; had this Lady been a friend of his mother’s? Had she played with Ben as a boy? It was an odd scene to conjure up.

There was more movement behind them and the second carriage revealed its passenger.

This woman did not seem to be suffering nerves or lack of enthusiasm at all. She was dressed in dark scarlet that oddly matched Ben’s tunic and an extravagant head-dress that was studded with jewels. She stepped from her carriage and looked about the courtyard as though she already owned it.

Rey supposed she was beautiful. Certainly her dark eyes, prominent eyebrows and pouting lips would indicate as much. But as she came forward, there was an air of determination about her. A cunning. A desire to succeed at the game of life.

Rey would normally have found this a trait to be praised; in this woman, it merely unnerved her.

Han cleared his throat. “And this Lady Netal, the Duchess of Chaaktitl. She is a great friend of the French royal family.”

I wonder if they had much choice in it, Rey thought wryly but inclined her head gracefully. Bazine rose from her curtsey and her eyes swept over Ben. Her eyes were not lustful or filled with desire but calculating. Like she was deciding on whether to give gold for an item.

“Let us go inside.” Han declared. “The air is freezing and I hear word that the Archbishop of Tatooine is arriving tonight.”
He took Rey’s hand and led her back into the court. To take her eyes off the Duchess’ appraising stare and leave Ben unaccompanied beneath her gaze took more from her than she would ever admit.

Chapter End Notes

Being 30, unmarried and without children was unheard of in medieval times. Especially if you were heir to a dynasty. Life spans back then were not good so by definition Ben is a long time getting a wife and Han is ancient by those standards.

It's my birthday tomorrow and I'd love some feedback as a pressie. More than cake actually and thats saying something.
Rey and Han retired to their private chambers to dine and allowed the King to take his refreshment. Rey busied herself with making the room comfortable for him, urging him to sit beside the fire while she got him a cup of spiced wine. Han rolled his eyes at this fussing but was clearly a little pleased by it too. No matter what he claimed, it was nice to have someone looking after him, even if Rey knew herself to be clucking like a mother hen.

He gave a little groan of relief to be sat in a comfy chair in a warmly lit room.

“The campaign was successful then?” Rey questioned, eager to forget the formalities and the eligible women she had just left Ben alone with in the courtyard. “They were all caught?”

“The ringleaders are disposed of.” Han nodded and taking a deep drink of wine. “The First Order, such as it was, is no more.”

“That is excellent news.” Rey congratulated. “So there will be no more disturbance? No more threat of war?”

“Ah.” Han smiled at her wryly and maybe with a hint of melancholy. “Alas for that, I cannot promise. There has always been rebellion. Always been war. Just because one enemy is stamped down does not mean another will not rise up. But one more enemy is brought low and for that I cannot help but be grateful.”

It was an almost sobering thought that no kingdom will ever truly be safe but Rey mused that this was more than likely the way of governorship.

“Anyway, I will have to tell and retell my own story until my throat dries up.” Han waved away. “What of you? I have received reports that you have been an admirable regent in my place.”

Rey smiled a little bashfully. “It was a trial but one I was able to get my head around eventually. We have had a good harvest which has helped and the kingdom has suffered nothing but petty farming disputes. All easily dealt with.”

“Either way, you proved me right in my judgement. I’m proud of you.”

Rey could not helped it; she glowed beneath his praise. She had forgotten in Han’s absence how nice it was to have someone declare pride in her. To raise her up even if it were only behind closed doors.

“Especially in light of Ben’s lack of mischief. For that, you must have performed a mere miracle.”

It was only due to Rey’s razor-sharp reactions that she managed to prevent the wine glass toppling out of her hand. It was folly to believe that Han would not have noticed how Ben had been remarkably quiet and amiable for nearly two months. Especially in light of how he found his son during their greeting.

“I have had no trouble with him. He has had no contact with anyone I deem suspicious. He has been at court the entire time. I think we are safe from rebellion from that quarter.”
“And yet he greets me now as though I were vermin upon a rat.” Han leant forward so his elbows rested upon his knees. “We parted well. Very well in fact. He wished me well and I bestowed a father’s blessing. I should have known that he would not take kindly to taking a wife. Maybe I was overconfident. But he seemed so much happier nowadays.”

“Then why did you bring the ladies forth?”

“They seemed eager to attend.” Han shrugged. “And… I felt it best that Ben had his pick of them at least. Decided who he liked best. I had no wish to marry him to someone he found repulsive.”

Rey knew Han well enough by now to know he was trying to do his son a kindness in this. But the idea of herding the best of the bunch across the channel just for his son to scrutinize which was the best bet… well, Rey was glad she had not spilt her wine.

“And do you think any will make him a good match?”

“Lady Holdo’s girls are all charming. Granted they don’t say very much in my presence but very few women do. And Lady Holdo was once a great friend of this court before she followed her fortunes over seas. I think Leia would have approved of bonding the two families together.”

“And the Duchess?” For this was the one Rey wanted to really know about. “Is she a relation of Lady Holdo?”

Han shook his head. “From what I gather, Lady Holdo is not a fan. Then again, the French court seemed to be happy to wave her off and she seemed happy to come. I think she is something of a mistress of intrigue.”

“And you want Ben to marry a woman like that? For her to be Queen?”

“Of course I don’t want it but I am forcing this on Ben as it is and the more choice the better. She is a distant cousin of the King so has great connections and none of the French princesses are old enough yet. If she happens to make Ben happy, for I do see similarities in them, then I will never say another word against her.” Han drank from his cup. “Of course I know why he is acting so cold. It shocked me I won’t deny.”

Rey felt the blood leave her face. Had rumours got out after all? Had-  

“I must confess Lady Teko was not who I would have imagined that he would take for a bedmate.”

Rey drained her goblet and set her cup back on the table between them. It was clearly a bad idea to hold anything. “Lady Teko is a sweet and fine young woman.”

“Oh no doubt.” Han agreed without much evident interest. “But I saw no signs that Ben took any kind of interest in her.”

“Emotions can change.” Rey reasoned. “And Ben’s changed for the better. No doubt he is upset about taking a wife when he now has a mistress.”

“But that’s not right.” Han was twirling his cup as though it held the answer. He sounded as though he were talking to himself. “Ben has always been so pious. And now he throws that away for a girl who he barely looked at in the courtyard? It doesn’t make any sense.”

Rey said nothing. What could she say? Now was not the time for Han to get perceptive.

Han thought a little more to himself then shrugged. “She must have charms that I know not. Indeed
I have received reports that he has been in excellent spirits since I left. Though now I wonder if maybe it was my parting that caused such joy...

“Don’t say that.” Rey reached forward and took his hand. “He loves you dearly. More than he would like I believe.”

It was bizarre to comfort her husband when the very event which bought him back had left a rift between Ben and Rey. But she had never blamed Han for that. Indeed this was a harsh reminder in how much she was risking and who could stand to be hurt.

dAll the feasts that Rey had proceeded over were as nothing compared to the banquet that was held for his return. The hall when she entered with hand clasped in Han’s was stifling hot with the smell of roasted meat and the proximity of almost too many people. The court was now more big and daunting than Rey had ever remembered it. And they were noisy in their applause as the King entered.

There was a man standing in the middle of the hall waiting for the King. It was a man she recognised for they had met briefly before. Wearing plain homespun garments and a cloak which was clean but clearly of rather shabby quality, the Archbishop of Tattooine had the look of a rather careworn traveller. And yet despite the lack of jewels and silks, there was an undoubted quality to him. No man who came into his presence could ever doubt that this was a man of greatness and with an aura of royalty. It was not hard to see that while his twin sister had been dark while he had been fair, he had carried Leia Organa’s bearing when she could no longer do so.


“It was your Majesty’s Command.” The Archbishop reasoned in a manner that both dismissed the praise of his brother-in-law and yet did not sound plaintive or complaining.

Han laughed with pleasure at the sight of his old friend and invited him to sit at their table. Luke agreed with courtesy. He bowed in deference to Rey and was as ever polite yet a little closed off. Rey wondered if he were even capable of relaxing at this late stage of his life. He had suffered much. Yet as a man of the cloth he had authority that allowed him a certain amount of power. There was something graver about him. Although San Tekka was an older and more feeble man, Luke seemed older still. There seemed to be a lack of joy in his blue eyes; he’d seriously watched far too much.

Ben did not try and see his Uncle so sympathetically. They bowed to one another amicably enough but there was challenge in their faces. Cold contempt.

Rey was careful not to turn her head to look down the table towards the Prince. She was under the eyes of far too many that loved to see things that were not there.

Her eyes kept drifting to the ladies of the French court. Lady Holdo was talking with Lando Calrissian and her daughters looked fresher if a little sleep creased. They ate together and talked together. None of them spared a glance at Ben; they wanted to forget about him for one night clearly.

The Duchess of Chaakti was sitting beside Sir Hux. They mainly drank and talked. Hux seemed to be as taken with the Duchess as he was with anyone. He didn’t seem to be enduring her company at any rate. Rey wished that she could hear what they were discussing.

Steadily, she sipped her wine. To be a Queen was to play a part. Even if she didn’t know what part
there was left to pay?

The last of the leaves had fallen from the trees so that an orange carpet blanketed the forest. Every morning now began with the grass underfoot crunching beneath boots that crossed over it and Rey had to have her furs brought from the royal wardrobe. The fires’ were built higher and hotter in the grates and winter had taken over the kingdom.

Ben began to lament the days when he felt crippled with despair and loneliness when Rey became exchanged from him. He also cursed himself for that action now; why had he wasted so many opportunities? And why was it now nigh on impossible to be completely alone?

Ben had taken to walking in the royal garden before the sun was fully risen. He had hoped initially that Rey had maybe continued her ritual of going to the fountain with that cat of hers. It was yet another disappointment when Ben encountered only the light tickle of water landing on the circular pool.

The Prince walked in the gardens every morning for the solitude it granted him. Without it, he feared he may explode. So when one November morning, about a week after the party had arrived back to court, he heard a voice call out to him, he felt a mixture of wild hope and almost indignation that he was being disturbed.

Rey?

But no. Lady Holdo was walking alone with her travelling cloak about her shoulders and a fur muff covering her hands. She curtsied to Ben which he returned with a stiff bow.

“Apparently I am not the only one that needed a little space.” She mused with a smile.

“You’re unlikely to get it in this court.” Ben mentioned wryly. They continued to walk side by side. This was oddly strange; he remembered Lady Holdo from his younger days at court. She’d been a lady-in-waiting to his mother and had always been very kind to him. That was years ago though; he was no longer a child and she was probably not that woman anymore.

“It is not much different from the French court. But people drink more ale than wine here.”

“And colder in the winters too, I’ll wager.”

“Calais was just as cold.” Holdo reasoned with an air of amusement. She seemed completely at her ease. It irritated Ben. “I don’t suppose you remember very well… but I used to walk with you around these gardens when you were a child.”

Ben looked at her sharply as though expecting her to burst into a giggle yet her smile was placid as though this were a conversation they were always going to have.

“I’m sorry you had such an arduous task.” Ben said for lack of anything else to say in response.

“Oh no, it was no hardship. You were a pleasant little boy. But very quiet. Very serious. I remember thinking it was a little like talking to an old man in a child’s body. You never seemed to smile…” At this Lady Holdo’s twisted into a sad smile. “Maybe you have not changed so much after all.”

Ben tried hard to remember. It was so hard to remember things before he was taken to Lord Snoke for his education to learn the art of kingship. He remembered little pieces and most were not pleasant memories. His childhood at the palace mainly consisted of hearing his mother cry through
closed doors and swollen abdomens that seemed to go back down a bit too quickly. Only one period of his life could he remember before Snoke.

Seeming to know what he was thinking, Lady Holdo said in a quiet tone: “I also took care of you when your mother could not. I was not a governess but high born enough to attend on you. And on...”

It was so sudden a memory that Ben forgot to walk. He remembered looking into a crib and chattering happily to a little baby. About promises of what they were going to do when they were old enough. And of a woman in a pink gown in a chair with the baby’s nurse. A woman escorting him every day to the nursery. And gentle hands stroking his hair as he vomited his grief and despair when the news sunk in that his little sister had gone to heaven without him.

He looked at Lady Holdo as though seeing her for the first time. Her past kindness suddenly made her feel less like an intruder.

“You remember Jaina?” It felt almost difficult to say her name. He had never spoken of her to anyone. Not even to Rey. Lady Holdo nodded.

“She was the babe that lived longest beside you. We had such hopes. And she was such a sweet little thing.” Lady Holdo looked down as though trying to master her calm demeanour. Yet this unusual pain made Ben begin to trust her. No-one could think of his baby sister without tears; not anyone who could be his confidante anyway. “Your mother’s grief was terrible to behold. Your father’s too. But you… I wanted to keep you close to me. Comfort you and be like a mother to you while Leia was recovering. But you were sent to Lord Snoke not long afterwards.” They don’t speak further of this. Not of what happened to make Lady Holdo go abroad to the French court. Or how far he grew away from that little boy she had wanted to coddle under Snoke’s guidance.

“You do not like my daughters. Or the prospect of a bride.” It was not a question but not voiced as an accusation either. Lady Holdo seemed to be simply stating how things were and would continue to be.

Ben began to walk again. “I am not in possession of the qualities that would make me a good husband.”

“It would require smiling from time to time.”

Ben looked at Lady Holdo and for the first time felt something akin to remorse to his cold treatment of her daughters. “It is nothing personal against your girls; I am sure they are all very lovely and would make fine wives. But would you honestly want one of your daughters’ married to a man like me?”

“I am not so without ambition that I do not relish the idea of one of my daughters rising to future Queen of England. What mother in their right mind would? But above all, I want them to be happy. Happiness is not something that women in this world have close to hand. My own marriage was cordial but not a love match though it much grieved me when he passed away. If you could just stop making them back away whenever you enter a room, I would be obliged.”

The lack of anger or disappointment was oddly chastising to Ben. If this could prove repayment for her past kindness, he would try. He offered Lady Holdo his arm and they walked side by side.

They were nearly back at the court when he saw a small procession. His uncle was making his way back from chapel with his pupils and squires. He clutched his rosary beads in his hand as though he were about to be martyred. Ben slowed his pace so they would not have to cross paths.
“It saddens me to see the change in him.” Lady Holdo said confidentially to Ben. “So different to the sunny boy I once knew.”

“I can’t imagine my uncle ever being capable of ‘sunniness’.”

“But he was. He was a bonny lad with golden hair and bright blue eyes. And so happy when you were born. But Mara’s loss destroyed him.”

Ben looked to Lady Holdo. “So it was true? The Scottish Princess Mara Jade was his desired?”

“Indeed. This was before the days that he realised his full potential and helped your parents take the throne. He was much enamoured of her.”

“But she died...”

“Yes. Of the flux. It left him changed. When I next saw him, he was colder. He entered the church rather than be tempted into marriage. He seems to have only gotten worse with time.”

Ben looked after where his Uncle had disappeared. The loss of his uncle’s true love had destroyed him. What could his uncle have been had Mara lived? Maybe he would have accepted the throne after all? Maybe his mother would have had less time for politics and more for him? Maybe she wouldn’t have let Snoke near him?

Maybe his Uncle would have been happy.

He remembered the grim line that had become his Uncle’s mouth and deduced that his Uncle was many things but not happy.

Three things were discovered during that walk. One was that maybe Lady Holdo would be a welcome face at court though Ben was far too weary to trust her just yet. The other was a small wave of sympathy for his Uncle’s life. It wasn’t much and would probably be gone before the day’s light faded but it was something.

And the last was this estrangement from Rey could not go on.

He had to have her presence in his life in whatever capacity he could manage. Life without her was like being shut away in a room with no windows and no candle.

That darkness was a part of him. He needed her light. And he didn’t care what he had to do in order to keep it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for the birthday messages last week. You lot are so damn sweet. It’s a good time to be a Reylo right now. It feels good to finally have some kind of recognition that our theories might not be total rubbish.

I’ve set myself a deadline: I’m gonna finish this story before the film comes out.

Feedback is love. And I do really love you all... *bats eyelashes shamelessly*
*waves* Hello all.

Thank you so much for all the feedback I've had so far. It means so much. I've literally worked continuously for three days to get this done so I'm hoping it does justice to the chapter.

Massive thanks to my wifey Jess444 for making me a new moodboard. I've missed them so much!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Rey’s private apartments had never been so full. She not only had Jessika, Maz and Rose at her side now but also Lady Holdo and her daughters who had graciously accepted Rey’s invitation to come and join her at her fireside. Lady Netal had declined, stating her wish to walk about this new court and explore – an answer in which no one was keen to lament about.

The young Queen had at first been rather reluctant and had felt almost duty-bound to show their French guests the hospitality that she had doubted she had it within her to give to them. Now, however, she felt almost grateful for their company and mused that, while rivalry was all too quick to spring into life at court, unexpected regard was also present and capable of such showcase. Lady Holdo was a very pleasant guest and was keen to honour Rey in any way that she could. Her previous kinship with the old Queen was not a secret yet she did not seem put out by the elevation of this new woman. She seemed content to sit with Maz and talk over their sewing of the old days. Which left Rey with her daughters.

Lady Holdo’s daughters, Sabe, Satine and Breha, were all young and pretty girls and Rey feared they would be empty-headed and keen to catch a Prince no matter what the stakes. However Rey soon found herself to be wrong. The girls had clearly been tasked with the duty of trying to gain the Crown Prince’s attention but seemed keen to almost blend into the walls whenever he came past. Sabe was the eldest and most serious of her sisters. She seemed to age whenever Ben would come stalking into a room. At seventeen, she was the most suitable in terms of age to be a prospective bride for Ben. It was a title and unofficial status that she clearly felt like an albatross around her neck. She would make a comely bride as she was tall, with dark hair peaking beneath her French hood and steely demeanour that promised no silliness from her in times of trial.

Now if only Ben and Sabe could make eye contact without Ben scowling and Sabe looking both afraid and offended all would be well.
Satine was the most impish of the girls and more inclined to laugh. Not as tall as her sister yet just as pretty in her face, she tended to bend so low into a curtsey whenever the Prince was in her presence she was practically turned into a crab. Her unwillingness to rise back up again would almost be funny if it weren’t so tragic.

Breha was the youngest at fourteen and was clearly not being considered with any seriousness to be a perspective bride. Therefore she was the one who tilted her chin highest when he deigned to look at the sisters as though no Prince in all the world could humble her.

Rey liked these girls. Not only did she find herself feeling rather sorry for them, but they were pleasant company. Sabe was a good conversationalist and seemed learned in the way of philology, Satine was an able dancer and was able to distract Rey’s cares with little lessons of the French dances and Breha treated Rey like her new sister albeit with deference and a curtsey to go with her awe.

Their lack of enthusiasm for Ben did not offend her; it made her like them more.

Rey had coaxed Breha into taking off her French hood so she would braid it for her hair. She pinned it up and Breha admired it with delight.

“Magnifique!” Breha cried in delight at being passed a looking glass. “I must make sure no-one spoils it all day beneath my hood. May I braid yours, Your Grace?”

Some may have found it impertinent but Rey found it charming. “Indeed. It is only us ladies present after all.” Rey began to unpin her hood.

Breha’s brushstrokes are soothing upon her head. Oh, if she could just stay like this, she mused. If she could just be allowed to hide in these apartments forever. Be allowed to dance, and sew, and gossip about nonsense and have no other care in my head. If only…

The doors open so abruptly that the page has no chance to introduce him and Breha gets such a fright that she drops the brush. The Prince strides in as though he owns the room and stops just as abruptly at the sight before him. As though he had never suspected to see people in the Queen’s private apartments. Or the sight that greets him.

Rey’s hair is unbounded and loose. Rey remembers, and she knows he is too, the last time he had seen her hair loose. She had been lying in his bed with her long strands fanned out over a pillow as
his lips caressed her body as though she were a map of a town he was about to lay siege to.

She is half tempted to scramble to shove her hood back on her head but manages to stamp down such an urge. These are her apartments; he is the intruder here.

She rises from her chair and addresses him, “Your Grace, is all well?”

Ben manages to regain himself… with some effort. “My Lord, my father, is keen to ride out for a hunt today. He has requested your presence and the presence of all in attendance.”

Rey almost asks why a page could not have delivered this very simple request but she says nothing. She already know that answer. “I will change into my riding habit and be in the courtyard as soon as I am required.”

As soon as he has left the room, Breha starts to mutter hotly.

“Storming in without so much as a warning. Into the Queen’s closet! Who does he think he is?”

“He is the Prince of Alderaan.” Sabe reminds her little sister as though this settled everything.

“He is not my Prince.” Breha mutters hotly. “My prince will know to knock!”

Rey picks her hood up and says nothing.

The forest is sheltered enough that the bitter wind does not whip at the hunting party’s bones too much but the branches of the forest sparkle with ice and bitter frost. It will be hard to catch many animals but the thrill of the chase will amuse all those upon their horses well enough.

The King is swathed in furs and talking happily with Calrissian and Chewbacca. Rey is pleased to note that despite the cold he has colour back in his cheeks. He looked healthier if not still a little tired. Yet her eyes cannot help but drift to Ben even though she makes sure she is always looking over his head if he ever turns to look at her. It is something of a surprise that Ben does not ignore
her as he has been known to do these past few weeks. Instead he slows his horse until he is riding alongside her. Her ladies are far enough away that they can talk without being overheard.

“I have not spoken to you in quite some time.” Ben starts without preamble.

“How could you?” Rey asks lightly though with a caustic drop in her honeyed voice. “You’ve been ignoring me for weeks.”

Ben’s cheeks pinken but he does not bite back. “I have.” His agreement is unlike him so that Rey turns her head to look at him albeit with disdain in her Queenly face. “I wasted time that we had together. Forgive me.”

“It is forgotten.” Yet Rey is still a realist. “Have any of the ladies caught your eye as a potential bride?”

Ben’s face darkens as though a thunder cloud has broken over it. “You know perfectly well that I have no intention to marry anyone.”

Rey has to use all her Queenly dignity not to roll her eyes.

“You are next heir to the throne. You must have a son. Or daughter. Otherwise the Organa dynasty will die altogether. Do you want civil unrest?”

“I can appoint a successor.”

“This would be easier.” Rey wonders to herself why on Earth she is trying to persuade Ben into an action and decision that will cause her nothing but grief. Has she become as politically minded as the council she once resided over? Or does this cold reasoning make the pain of separation easier to deal with?

“I am not marrying anyone that I do not love. I don’t care about being a Prince anymore; I will defy the kingdom as I did before.”

Rey stiffens on her chestnut steed and lowers her voice even further. “You speak of treason.”
“I speak the truth. Do you honestly look at me without feeling anything? With no love?”

Rey looks at him. At that long face, pale skin, aquiline nose, sensual lips and dark brown eyes… he is not a man it is capable of looking at and feeling ‘nothing’.

“No.” Rey finds herself whispering. For it is still there. It will always be there.

“No, you feel nothing or no, you still love me?”

“Why do you taunt me? You know well enough that I love you.” It is said almost in anger yet Rey’s voice breaks a little at the end. He knows how much it taunts her every moment of her life; why must he make it harder?

His face suddenly softens and there are those damnable eyes. So kind and soft when they were previously blazing and challenging.

“I may know but I will never tire of hearing it from your lips. Surely you know that too?”

He is a romantic man who will do anything for love. The tales are right – there’s too much Vader in him.

Ben looks ahead and glowers at the sight. Lady Netal is laughing coyly with Sir Hux at her side. Phasma is not far behind but Rey can tell from the stiff set of her back that she is not finding this an enjoyable hunt. Does she love the red-haired man? Or was it the feeling of losing her last loyal ally that caused her to tilt her head so as though she were being led to a garret?

At that moment, Hux turned around and gestured to Ben.

“Milord, come forward. You are neglecting our guests.”

Ben clenched his jaw but knew better than to argue. He turned back to Rey briefly as though taking his leave. Instead he said:
“I love you and only you. No-one else. Never anyone else.”

Then he whipped the reins and his horse cantered so he drew level with Hux.

The hunt is a moderate success and they ride back into the courtyard before it gets too dark to see. She is helped off her horse by Finn and about to depart back to her rooms and her roaring fire when she is suddenly intercepted.

“Your Grace. We have not had the pleasure as of yet.” A lady dips a curtsey so low that she is practically on her knees. Her French headdress is beautiful and twinkling and her gown is a deep burgundy. Lady Netal is before her.

Rey is trapped in this gesture of courtly courtesy. She cannot ignore this; Lady Netal must be acknowledged. Rey had the suspicion that Bazine knows this and this is why she had literally lowered herself before her.

“Lady Netal.” Rey replies smoothly and gestures for her to rise. She does so with enviable poise. “How may I be of service?”

“May a lady not want to speak with the Queen without a service being needed?” She says with a tickling laugh. Her eyes do not laugh with her; they remain sharp.

Slowly Rey walks into the hallway with Lady Netal by her side. They talk politely of inconsequential things: the lack of game caught in the hunt; the cold possibly effecting the quality of trees; how Lady Phasma should really consider becoming attired with a dress rather than her armour. They are soon in her rooms and Rey invites her to take a place beside the fire. She half hopes that Bazine will not accept. But of course she does.

The ladies of her chamber take up their sewing and other duties but sit themselves a little further away from the Queen than usual. The three Holdo sisters look at Lady Netal with even more distrust and dislike than they show to Ben. She has clearly not endeared herself to the girls who are also her rivals.
“How do you like this court, Lady Netal?” Rey asks taking a delicate sip of wine.

“It is… very different to that of France.” Her tone is deliberately teasing as though she has no wish to disclose whether she prefers the old ways that she once lived by or has a deep affection for the more conservative and quiet court that Han rules. “This King, your husband, is very fond of hunting and talking with other men.”

“And your King is not?”

“He likes to hunt but also to dance and sing. And write poetry. And he prefers the company of women.”

Rey nods. She knows this. She knows all of this. The French Court is more grand and more joyous than the English traditions. With an ageing King and a Queen who is happy to simply be fed at the end of every day, their court must look woefully dour in comparison. Deris Panteer was young and lusty; he found no better past time than taking many noble ladies to be his mistress.

“Did he prefer your company, Lady Netal?”

For a moment, it was as though Lady Netal had lost the power of movement. Her coquettish demeanour freezes and she looks out over Rey’s shoulder as though seeing something that the younger woman could not. It was a stare of sorrow, disappointment, bitterness and… Rey was sure of it – heartbreak.

The goblet found its way to Bazine’s lips and the red wine seemed to revive of her of such a recollection.

“He was fond of me, yes. But not fond enough for my liking.”

“Indeed?” For Rey was interested. Her unease and dislike of this woman was pushed to the side when such a tantalizing piece of gossip hovers before her like a carrot for a lame donkey.

Bazine looked at her as though summing up whether it would do her cause ill if she were to tell her own tale. Then clearly deciding it would do no harm nor good, she gave a little shrug of her shoulders.
“King Deris is fond of beautiful things. His Queen was considered the most beautiful in Christendom and so he had to have her. A good purchase for she has borne him two sons that have lived.” Bazine spoke of the Queen of the French as though she were an antique vase and the King an obsessive collector. She also spoke as though the Queen was an interesting as an ornament too. “But a collector is never finished. He must have more.”

“The mistresses?” Rey asked.

“Mm-hmm. I have seen many women of my station go down to his way. If they were married and became heavy with a bastard, they were at least paid well enough to have the husband recognise it as his own. Who knows: if the King was feeling generous, he may acknowledge the child himself and give it titles. He already has four daughters by different women. No more sons sadly but it is of little matter.”

“Did he… try and collect you?”

Bazine smiled an oddly unreadable smile. “He was most eager, yes. Offered me quite a title. Mistress-en-tête.”

“Official mistress?”

“Yes. But I declined.”

“You did?” Rey could not keep the shock from her voice. Bazine seemed to know when to drive a hard bargain. And aside from being Queen this was the best title that the French court could offer her.

“I am no whore.” Bazine stated with steel in her tone. “If he wanted me, as I do believe that he did, he should have expected better from me.” She looked down into her goblet. “Then such an opportunity came that I may be a part of another court. With an eligible prince. And no royal bastards running around although he has a mistress.” Her eyes darted to where Rose was sat beside Maz with her head bent over the old woman’s latest procurement of banned literature. Bazine looked on her like she was a chess piece that must be taken out. Like a rook. Or a mere pawn.

“You are to be congratulated Lady Netal” Rey raised her goblet “on your… persistent knowledge of what is owed to you.”
Bazine raised her own goblet to mimic the toast though neither woman so much as blinked as they drank.

Rey finally knew a little more about Bazine; she knew enough to know she was not coy with her own attractiveness but wily and intelligent enough to not throw away her virtue even on a King.

She must find out more – even if she didn’t like the answers.

There was dancing and musicians playing after dinner that night. Rey did not try and participate in the dancing this time; she had neither the spirit nor the energy to dance. It was taking all of her focus and control to not throw her goblet across the hall at the sight of Ben having to take another partner and another and then another.

His face was a mask of royal arrogance as he was obliged to dance with various ladies. He didn’t seem too perturbed to dance with Lady Holdo. He seemed to have a respect for her and was more gracious to her than any other lady at court yet he did not seem to be in any hurry to explain why to Rey. He was even a lot more welcoming to Rose and kept her for two dances though Rey suspected that this was more to do with avoiding being passed around like old linen to the other ladies than actual preference. He had almost absent-mindedly sent Rose a bag of sovereigns that afternoon so hopefully he hadn’t given up on the pretence altogether.

His dances with Lady Holdo’s daughters were a much more serious affair. Sabe allowed herself to be led out onto the dancefloor and it seemed to be a competition of who could look the most serious and least inclined to crack a smile. Satine had become so nervous at the prospect of having to dance with the man she had been studiously avoiding for so long that she nearly spilled her wine down her gown prompting Lady Holdo to take pity upon her and let her be excused. Breha was the most lively and the tilt of her chin indicated that she may have been dancing with a suit of armour for all she cared – she was light on her feet and graceful to a fault. Her attitude seem to be that if this dour man was determined to look unhappy, let him! She was going to enjoy herself. Rey could not help but laugh behind her goblet at this infectious attitude and admire her young guest. Life would no doubt demand great tests of ladies from a great household – let her have a little fun while she could.

Then Lady Netal takes to the floor and Rey does not feel a predilection to smile anymore.

The lady is grace personified. Her beautiful skirts fluttered around her as she pirouettes to the
music as though they are wings and a part of her. Her hood does not dislodge as she moves about Ben but a tantalizing strand of dark hair escapes and looks more fetching than if she had tossed her hood into the air for the men of the court to catch. All eyes are on her. Men look from their conversations to look upon her. Some men are old enough to be her grandsire or even married many years but she takes no prisoners with her darkly dangerous looks. The only man whose eyes aren’t wide in wonderment is her dance partner. Ben matches each of her steps as though they were duelling not dancing. This is a fight to the death and Rey knows Ben well enough to know that he wants to win at all costs.

“You don’t like her, do you?” A voice sounds in her ear. Rey looks around. Breha is looking where her eyes were previously and there is a look of intense dislike upon her face at the dancing pair. Sabe also looks at her younger sister as though scandalized at this lack of propriety and even Satine looks like all the laughter has left her lungs. “You don’t have to lie, you know. I hate her too.”

Rey can’t help but laugh at this. “I cannot say that she is endearing.”

“She was hated at the French court as well.” Breha whispers conspiratorially. “Due to her influence over the King.”

Rey sees her opportunity. “What happened in regards to that?”

“Enough to keep us up gossiping in our rooms!” Breha giggled. Sabe put down her knife sharply. “If you’re going to tell tales Breha-”

“Well you tell it then!” The youngest sister shot back a little sulkily. “You were in the Queen’s presence chamber for most of it.”

Sabe turned a bit pink but then squared her shoulders as though summoning all her dignity.

“Very well. What would Your Grace like to know?”

Rey thought quickly. “Was she ever the King’s lover?”
“No. I am pretty certain of that. If she had been, he would have lost interest quickly enough. But no, I believe they were never carnal.”

“But was there affection?”

Sabe nibbled her lip as though debating with herself. “There must have been. The King was pretty keen to have her acknowledged as his true love and I don’t think that Bazine is that good an actress. Sometimes she’d look at him with such...” Sabe shook her head. “But yes, the Queen was getting anxious over her and that is never good.”

“The Queen? But the Queen cannot be touched.”

“Oh no, the King wasn’t that stupid. She’d given him sons; he couldn’t annul their marriage or he would have to make more again and who was to say they would be boys. But Bazine is powerful. No, I think being the official mistress wouldn’t have been good enough for her. I think she wanted the crown.”

Rey gaped at this. “To be Queen?”

“Yes. I think maybe he might have even promised her to get what he wanted but she saw through the lie. That’s why she came to England with us, I think. The Queen wanted her gone and she had enough power to ensure that happened. It was either a new court or a nunnery.”

“So she came here looking for a different crown?” Rey said almost dazed.

“It would seem so, Your Grace. And if she couldn’t have the crown of the man she felt love for then she will take the next crown that is available. Even if she feels no love for the man.”

Rey looked out at the couple that were coming to the end of their dance. 

*Even if she feels no love for the man.*

Must Ben always be passed from this victor to that one? Never knowing love so long as the winner is the one with the better hand?
Rey looked at Bazine. It truly was women who waged the wars around here.

Han retires to his chambers when the last of the dancing is done but invites both Rey and Ben to take some sweetmeats with him before bed. This cosy farce of domesticity makes the wine bitter in Rey’s mouth.

The ladies of Rey’s rooms remain in the hall and so it is only the three of them and some serving pages who sit in Han’s apartments.

Rey nibbles sweetmeat after sweetmeat without tasting any of it as the two men make polite conversation about the Christmastide festivities and where would be best to celebrate this year. Rey offers some rudimentary advice about the collection of holly for the tables but without much true interest. All she wants is to get Ben alone to warn him that in spite of her earlier aloofness, he must not let himself be dazzled by this new beautiful woman.

Han sets down his goblet. There is an air of reluctance about him. Like he wishes he could avoid what he must say.

“So, Ben. Have any of the ladies taken your fancy?”

Rey felt the bile rise to her throat. Swallowing it back down takes every bit of determination she has.

Ben blinks but does not change his countenance. He looks as disinterested as he was when they discussed the winter preparations.

“They are all very fine.”

“Do any in particular catch your attention?”

“Lady Sabe is very good at needlework.” The air is crackling with something other than firewood and heat. This is a battle of wits.
“Ben, you know why I brought them home with me.”

“I know it well. You want to marry me off.”

It sounded so harsh that Rey had to try not to wince. She wondered if she would ever be reconciled to it.

“You are approaching your thirtieth year. I am advancing in age and you are my only heir. By rights, you should have been married years ago. You should have your own children.”

“I don’t see what my bachelorhood has to do with all this?” Again that bite in Ben’s voice. As though he was trying to exercise the control that he must possess one day as King.

“Ben, if I die and then you die, who will succeed us? The Skywalker dynasty will die.”

“Then let it die.” It is whispered so calmly that the crackle of the fire nearly masks it. Han’s face pales and Rey can not stop a tiny gasp escape her lips.

“You don’t mean that.” Han stated with a tone that dared Ben to contradict him.

“What have the Skywalkers bought to this kingdom? Nothing but folly. My mother was the last good one left. Why not let the past die? Kill it if you have to.”

Han sprang to his feet that Rey knew would have caused him more pain in the joints than he would ever admit.

“You would have this country fall to civil war rather than marry?”

“You can appoint a successor!”

“Don’t you realise that your status as heir to throne saved your life?!?” Han barked, sounding more...
angry than Rey had ever heard him. “The council wanted you dead! They drew up a warrant for me to sign. I would not sign. I did not want to sign the death penalty for my own son! I pleaded a father’s mercy but they wouldn’t listen. It was only when I reminded them that we had no other heir than you that they finally agreed to pardon you.”

Ben was now on his feet too and Rey wished that she could be like one of the pages and melt away into the wall.

“So your fatherly concern was too weak to save me? And that is meant to endear me to marry? I would rather die in a monastery!”

Han’s face was pale with fury. “It may come to that.”

Ben’s own pallor seemed to drain away. Then he let out a sneering laugh. “Ah. So that’s why my Uncle is here?”

“I had hoped… that seeing his example would help reconcile you to marriage. You were never meant for the clergy; please don’t force this path on you.”

“So this is my choice? Marry some insipid girls or be locked away with my hermit of an Uncle?”

“Remember that this choice saved you from death. I have pardoned you when many fathers’ would throw you to the wolves. Do not push me further!”

And with that Han stormed from the room and slammed the door so hard that the wood panelling rattled behind him.

Ben’s knees were hurting from having knelt so long at his prie-dieu. His rosary was clutched between his hands so tightly that the beads had left dents in his palms and the crucifix before him now looked a mere mass of gold and jewels. There would be no comfort given by God this night.

What do I do? What do I do?
He kept chanting the words in his head in his darkened room with only the fire blazing in the hearth. He felt like a small child asking a superior for help.

For there was no help here. He was alone in this.

If he married, he would be forced into a loveless marriage. If he refused, he faced disinheriance and a life locked away in the church with his Uncle with whom he had no love for.

He was trapped. Either one promised misery and a life separated from the woman he loved more than life itself.

He’d prayed to God, to his mother, to his sister, to his grandfather and even his grandmother who had never thought much of before. Now he knew prayer was useless.

Ben got up and ignored his bruised and aching knees. Walking to his fire he stared into the flames.

*What do I do?*

He could run. He had enough coin to survive a journey to the coast. He could seek refuge at the French court.

But then what? No doubt, the French King would try and marry him to someone of his own choosing so when Ben finally regained his crown, he would have a Queen with French interests.

He didn’t want a Queen. He wanted the Queen.

There was a quiet little scratching at the door. At first, Ben reasoned that it might be a mouse or that damned cat of Rey’s BB8. He ought to get a cat. A black one with hate in its soul. It would suit him quite well at the moment.

Feeling oddly in need of company, he went to the door. The white and ginger fur-ball couldn’t make him feel worse, could he?
But when he opened the door, it wasn’t a cat that came sliding in but a hooded and cloaked figure. He knew it was her before she even lowered her hood.

She was in her nightclothes and looked rumpled enough to show that she had clearly attempted sleep without success. There was no sign of Rose. He wondered if she had come alone.

“I couldn’t sleep.” Rey croaked. It was dark enough to be the middle of the night. “You neither?”

“I’ve been thinking. Praying.” He slumped to the chair beside the fire. He was too despairing and without hope to even catch hold of her. It would just hurt when he let her go again.

“Has God provided you with an answer?” She asked in her small, scared voice.

At this Ben laughed. “God abandoned me a long time ago. It’s only now that I have truly realised it.”

“Don’t say such blasphemy-”

“Why? Why not? There can be no greater punishment than this! I would happily face hellfire than this.”

Rey sank down onto her knees before him and took his hands. He shook his head.

“What do I do? I can’t go into a monastery. I am not meant for the religious life. I don’t want to turn into my Uncle. Bitter and jaded over what I could have had. But I can’t marry a woman I don’t love!”

Tears were dripping freely down Rey’s cheeks. She took his hands and squeezed.

“Don’t leave me. If that means you must marry then...”
Marry someone that wasn’t her? Make vows with her? Live with her? Bed with her? Ben suddenly surged forward and kissed Rey’s surprised mouth. She did not push him away or reprimand him. Instead she fisted her little hand into his wealth of hair and kissed back like pulling away would be her doom.

“Let us be together.” Ben whispered feverishly. For it was like the sand in an hourglass was trickling away.

“I’m here, I’m here wit-”

“No.” Ben took her by the shoulders and made her look right at him. “Let us be together. Like a man and a woman. A husband and wife. Let me have your innocence; your maidenhead.”

Rey did not recoil but seemed to sway at his words.

“It… it is a sin!”

“I have sinned my entire life. But if I must do this and it looks like I must… then let my first time lying with a woman be with you.”

“The danger…” It sounded as though these were arguments that Rey had rehearsed but never really believed in. Yet he would not push her into this. She would come willingly or not at all.

“Rey… will you come to my bed?”

Rey seemed to gape, said no more words and then suddenly lunged at him, throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him wildly.

It was all the confirmation that he needed.

Trembling somewhat, he swept her up and carried her to the bed. Just like he had done when she had fainted from the news of his father’s survival. He’d carried her to the bed then too. This would have a different ending. Much different.
She is trembling too. With nerves and longing most likely. She clings to his shoulders and lays desperate kisses on his neck and skin of his collarbone. They seem to be thinking the same thing: *this is happening. This will happen now.*

Lain out upon the bed, he struggles with the strings of her gown. They loosen and he pushes off her dressing gown and leaving her in her shift. Ben lifts the sleeping shirt off her with slowness and then she is bare before him. Her nakedness is even more startling to him now. Her budding breasts, her endless legs and the dark thatch of hair that covers her secret place; all his. All his own.

Stripping off his shirt and pulling down his breeches, he is soon naked too. She has seen him bared before yet his manhood seems to look almost threatening now. He sees her swallow a little with her eyes upon it and no doubt she is wondering if he will cause her pain.

He knows it is not unusual the first time to feel a little but he wants it to be as small as possible. He positions himself above her but does not move to take her. He kisses her lips, her cheeks, her eyes, her neck, his pretty breasts with their rose coloured nipples and every freckle he can find over the ridge of her nose. His hands stroke her body until she is no longer rigid but as supple as butter beneath a churn. She holds onto his shoulders and gives little mules of delight until she whispers through his hair into his ear: “Now. I’m ready.”

Ben positions his cock against her dewy lips that shield her womanhood and feels a spasm of panic. He’s never done this before. He’s as innocent as she and while he is no novice to her likes and dislikes, he has never had a woman before. But he wants one now and he wants her to be the first and true one. She must be his first.

He pushes forward.

The linen rips beneath his hands as he slowly sinks inside. He’s trying to let her reactions guide him and whenever she gives a start he tries to go slow. But then he meets resistance and he knows he must push on to claim her utterly. He bares forward until he is as far as he can go and it is done.

He can’t move. If he moves, he will spill himself and it will be over. It can’t be over that soon but this is a trial such as he’s never known. The sonnets and poems didn’t write about this: about how wet, and tight, and hot it all felt. No wonder men of the court tumbled with milk maids and serving girls outside of marriage; it felt divine!

Then he remembers himself and looks down at his beloved.
Rey is tense beneath him and her eyes a little closed.

“Are you well?” He whispers.

Rey nods. There is sweat on her forehead and the corners of her eyes are wet.

“Pain?” Ben croaks.

“It is easing.” She touches his face with a trembling hand as though to show reassurance. Ben is thankful for this as it gives him time to regain himself and let her have a moment. For they need a moment; they’ve done it. She is a virgin no longer and he will not go forward as an untouched man. They belong to one another now utterly.

Soon, she slides her hand along to his biceps and whispers, “Go on.”

It is hard to not slam himself against her like it is a race but Ben manages to keep his thrusts slow and measured. Her little noises of discomfort soon fade and are replaced with little hiccups of pleasure. Her legs come up to lock him closer around the waist and he moves quicker, more aggressively which does not hurt her but makes her twitch and pant louder with delight.

It is like a bubble bursting in his loins when his pleasure is complete. He spasms into her warm welcoming body and she gasps as though she can feel it bursting forth within her.

They shared the same breath passing it back and forth and then Ben withdraws from her body. It is done.

Rey is still and clearly shocked. As is he.

“I am no longer a maid.” She says in a whisper.

Ben can only nod. He feels different yet he does not at the same time. He is sated and satisfied but does not feel like a different person as he thought he would. He is still caught in an impossible
Rey rolls over a little to look at him. “Do you have regrets?”

“A million. But none about this; this is the pinnacle of my life.” For he knows no matter what power he wields, no matter what thrones he sits on and what crowns will be placed on his head, he will always return to this: when he was a man who loved a woman in a bed draped in cloth of gold.

He does not want it to be just this one moment.

Clearly Rey feels the same for she kisses him hungrily and it is evident that as sore as her body may be, she wants to feel this moment again. He rolls her over while kissing her hungrily as he lays waste to her once more.

When Rey sneaks away back to her rooms, and he is alone again, he sees it then.

The blood on his sheets. When he washes, he sees the matching blood on his shaft. Proof that he is the first.

He knows that he should burn the sheet on the fire. Instead, he takes out his dagger and cuts a square where the blood was spilt.

He places the folded piece in a chest beneath his bed. A treasure to be prized amongst his other jewels.

Ben goes to Mass that morning and prays for forgiveness. Forgiveness he isn’t sure he really wants nor needs. Forgiveness would indicate that he regrets it. He cannot regret it.

Sunlight shines through the windows of the chapel and he is not even joined by his devout Uncle who hears Mass four times a day. He is still in a perilous situation but feels oddly resigned. He has felt the touch of a woman he loves; maybe he can endure a lifetime of servitude with another woman. He might even admit that the eldest Holdo girl Sabe might be the best bet – she wasn’t overly flirtatious or silly. She seemed quite serious and like she could hold a conversation at least.
Satine seemed to drop whatever she was holding when he walked into a room and Breha seemed to toss her head in contempt at him. But he would not marry that Netal woman; he didn’t know what he read in her face but he didn’t like it regardless.

He rose from his knees to leave when footsteps came behind him. Turning he was shocked to see the silhouette of his father. He bowed and kept his eyes lowered. He could not look him in the eye this morning; how could he when hours earlier he had taken his wife to bed and made her a woman at last?

“Ben.” Han sounded hoarse as though he’d received hardly any sleep.

“Milord.” Ben wanted to make a quick exit but Han caught his arm gently.

“Ben, please. We must talk. Let us sit.” Han indicated to the pews (he was never the most religiously zealous) and Ben found he had no choice but to sit.

They both looked up at the altar, at the burning candles, the crucifix, the marble and stained glass for lack of something to do. Then Han spoke:

“I was wrong to say what I did last night. I did not mean it.”

Ben merely shrugged. “I doubt any of it was untrue.”

“Untrue it was not but unfair it certainly was. I should not have forced such a choice on you. I will hold you to neither.”

Ben did look at his father now and he was sure astonishment was plain on his face. “You… will not?”

“Of course not. I would never see you married to anyone you truly despise and I have no wish to have another family member so committed to God I am lucky to see him twice a year.” Han shook his head as though tired. “No, I will look elsewhere for a bride for you. It is plain that you do not view any of our guests as good brides.”
This was generous beyond Ben’s wildest dreams. For even he had realised that there was truth in his father’s outburst – he must have an heir.

“Ben, I just want you to be happy. I will even accept Lady Teko as your Queen if that’s what-”

“What?” Ben blanched.

“Well, she is your mistress, is she not?”

“Y-Yes but...” His head was beginning to ache. “But she has no property, no status-”

Han laughed at this. “And you think I bought any wealth to Leia’s treasury? She married me for love and the people happened to like me. I’m sure for peace that they will do the same for you.”

Ben groped around for an answer to all this. His worst nightmare seemed to have been ripped away. What did he do now?

“I need… time to...” Han nodded at this as though he understood.

“Of course, of course. But let us be reconciled; I’ve had enough family feuds for one lifetime.”

Ben spluttered a bemused laugh and nodded. As he followed his father from the chapel, he tried to let what had transpired sink in.

He wouldn’t be forced to marry – not yet anyway and his father wanted them to be good friends again.

Oh, if only he knew…

He’d taken Rey to bed and deflowered her. And he wanted it to happen again. His first prayer wasn’t of thankfulness but of cunning. When could he see her again? How could he get her alone? When could he next kiss her, touch her, take her?
The answer came to him as he saw her in the Great Hall for breakfast, resplendent in a green gown and looking at him from beneath her eyelashes.

_Soon. I will have her again soon._

Chapter End Notes

*exhales* I'm exhausted.

If anyone was wondering I've based Bazine's character on that of Anne Boleyn. An extremely complex and driven woman, she is praised by some and reviled by others. Bazine normally plays the roles of villain in my stories but after reading The Perfect Weapon I decided I was giving her a bad turn. Our characters are made through experience and shape us as humans. I'd like to think that survival is Bazine's primary objective and trying to get a good deal in a man's world was all a woman could hope for in Tudor times. I'd like to think I've sown the seeds for a more questionable woman rather than a 2-D villain.

Also for anyone who thinks Han was too harsh - to have a son pushing thirty, never married and refusing to contemplate marriage was unheard of. It simply wasn't done. Especially if they were noble. In the grand scheme of things, Han's been incredibly patient with Ben.

That was literally double the length of my usual chapters. Please please please give me feedback on this chapter. I need it badly.
Chapter Notes

My Reylo family!

Thank you so much for your continued support and reviews. They mean the absolute world to me and inspire me to write even when I can't really be bothered. But this couple is the gift that keeps on giving.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Rey crossed herself before the cross and lowered her head in prayer. Her ladies were lined behind her: elderly Maz, blossoming Jessika whose child was causing her discomfort if she knelt for too long and serene Rose whose very presence seemed to offend the pious priest. The balding, droning man who seemed to be revered enough to celebrate Mass with the royal family while also destroying the sanctity of it with flat deliverance did not know the truth of it all. He did not know that the true sinner was at the front of the altar. Dressed in finest green with cloth of gold sleeves and whose skirts shielded the ache between her legs.

He did not know that the Queen who he bowed to had lost her innocence just the previous night to a man not her husband; to man who was the natural son of her husband and had been prophesied the ruin of the kingdom he would one day inherit.

Rey bent her head and gave herself up to prayer and God’s forgiveness. She wondered if she would ever look upon her husband’s face and forgive herself in turn. But she also wondered if she would ever look upon Ben’s face, remember his body becoming one with hers and regret it either.

The danger was removed. He would not be married yet. There was still a little time.
Han had told her while the family broke their fast that matters had been resolved and the relaxed posture of Ben’s shoulders alerted her that the marriage question must have been postponed for a little while. Maybe a better match was sought? Maybe a Spanish Infanta which would take months, if not years, of planning and negotiations? For they couldn’t have been relieved of the threat entirely. But instead Rey could only nod and mutely place the bread into her mouth. Ben’s eyes were glittering; dangerous and hungry. The monster within him was awakened. There seemed to be an answering howl in her own head at his wordless call.

Rey dedicated herself to prayer and meditation that day. For she needed time to comprehend all that had happened to her.

Now as she crossed herself again before rising, she remembered the short letter stuffed into her hand by Rose later in the day. She had been summoned to Ben’s rooms coming away with a new pendant and the small note for his mistress.

*Come to me tonight. I will be waiting beneath the trees of the gardens when the sun is low.*

Rey did not write back that it was nearly Michaelmas and there was a bite of chill in the air. She only made a note of the sun in the sky.

Rey had gotten to her feet with her ladies and was about to depart when she spotted someone that she had not seen for many months. Crossing himself before the alter with his eyes on the crucifix behind her and nothing else, the Archbishop of Tatooine stood before her. They had only exchanged pleasantries before when they had met in Theed Cathedral for the first time and again at court. Yet Rey longed to say more to him. To make more of an impression on this man who never smiled and looked older than his years.

“My Lord Archbishop.” She curtsied to him.

“Your Grace.” He bowed to her though not as ridiculously low as some courtiers dropped before her. Rey noted that he looked at her with apprehension. “How may I be of service?”

“I wished only to speak with you.” She gestured to her ladies to depart which they did obediently. “I know you have been a close servant of the King, my husband. I wish only to know you a little better.”

“I serve God and his son, My Lord Jesus.” He crossed himself at the very mention of the Higher
Power. “I have dedicated much of my life to prayer, Madam. There is not much else for me to tell of myself.”

“Oh but that cannot be true.” Rey pressed. “I have heard such stories of you. Such tales of bravery and valour. The portraits of you in the gallery show that you were once an expert in your field.”

“That man is no longer. This poor vessel is all that remains.”

Rey felt a little startled at his blunt reply. It seemed the very memory of his past was too much for him and a cold armour tightened around him at the mention of such. He looked away a little as though knowing himself to have been blunt.

“Forgive me, Your Grace. But the past which I shun was painful as well as glorious. I cannot pretend that the death of my sister, the late Queen, had not… affected me.”

Rey looked down at her hands now. A feeling which she’d experienced before, that of inadequacy to the glorious Queen she was meant to come after, blossomed full force. Of course, to this man – the twin of Ben’s mother – she would seem almost like a child playing dress up in her mother’s gowns. She almost regretted her cloth of gold sleeves for a day of prayer.

“I am sorry. I cannot imagine such pain. Han is still affected by his loss and talk of her every day. And Ben...” For Ben she oddly had no stories to tell. Ben never spoke much of his past family life with her. He had touched upon Lord Snoke’s influence and his old habits as a boy but never on his life at his mother’s knee. Maybe speaking of his mother would be an experience too painful. Or maybe talk of his mother would lead to talk of his father. And that would be the slipperiest of slopes.

Luke read her halting talk of his nephew with scorn.

“Ben.” He began with a sniff. “I doubt that boy is capable of anything that does not end in disaster for us all.”

Rey nearly recoiled. Luke reading her clear astonishment merely tutted. “Come now Madam. You cannot tell me he has never been impertinent to you. When you came to Theed, he could barely get away from you quick enough.”
“I do not deny we have had some... difficulties.” Rey hoped that this would cover more than she could ever explain. “But I have seen more than most are privy to. I can see his remorse. There is good in him.”

Luke flinched at these words and Rey wondered if she had revealed too much. Her words seemed to resonate something dark and uncharted within him.

“My nephew, the Prince, broke his mother’s heart and mine in turn. I confess I was often stern with him though not as stern as that traitor.” The word was hissed as though no word was bad enough to describe Snoke – even from a holy-man. “She was a great Queen and he was destined to be a great King. He was all our pride as my dear sister was not blessed with other children. I have since learned to not store such hope in any man. Such power in the hands of the wrong person...”

Rey stood a little apart from this man. He was resolute and Rey knew that even on the rack he would never take back what he’d just said.

“You speak treason by talking of your nephew in such terms.” Rey whispered.

“I speak the truth. I will not censor my tongue for that. We have but one hope of being delivered and that a slender one.”

“And what might that be?”

Archbishop Skywalker turned to look at her and the statesman beneath the cassock was evident.

“Is there any sign, however small, that you might be with child?”

Rey gaped. For a moment she felt a spike of fear that her activities with Ben had been discovered. Then she realised that it was her husband he spoke of in the hopes that her womb would quicken.

Was she not even free from such inspections even from this man?

“I have seen no sign that I am anymore with child than the night of my wedding.”
“But I hear the King still visits your chamber.”

Rey’s cheeks flamed. Yes, Han still came to her at night, but often to talk, drink wine and lose money to her at cards. On the rare occasions they did share a bed, he would be on top of the covers and she beneath. His days of sleeping in her chair by the fire had come to an end when she started insisting he lay down on the bed so his health might see some improvement. But no-one could know that.

“He does.”

Luke sighed with disappointment. Clearly he had been relying on her fertility.

“I see. Then I will include you in my prayers tonight – that you shall be fruitful. And that I can then sleep at night.”

With that, Archbishop Skywalker bowed to the Queen and resumed his place before the altar to say his piece before God. Rey stood for a moment looking at his bent figure before the crucifix and then out at the windows. It was getting dark.

Like a ghost, she scuttled down the nave of the chapel.

Ben was wrapped in a cloak lined with fur ermine against the bitter chill. Upon reflection, it was probably not one of the best ideas he had ever had to ask her to meet on such a cold night but the area within the garden was well-concealed by trees and the night. Also there was something invigorating about being out in the cold. The moon was not shining upon him, for that would be folly, but when he had been moving through the gardens to this meeting place, it had seemed to make his pale skin glow with a mystical pallor. There was even a smell of snow in the air; it would make the Yuletide celebrations all the more merry.

His skin itched. His body yearned. He must see her.

He couldn’t stop thinking about their night. About her body, her reactions, the feel of being within her; how could he ever stop craving that?
It had been impossible to prevent himself scribbling a note and pushing it into Rose’s hands when he had summoned her to his presence. The young maid servant seemed a little taken aback by his manner as they had been known to exercise discretion and caution in the past. Ben wondered if she knew yet that he had taken his affair with Rey even further.

Rey had spent most of the day in prayer. He knew he should too. But he merely walked the halls and gardens in a total daze. He could not stay still at all.

There was a crunch of frozen grass nearby and he looked around. “Rey?”

The dark cloak that masked her from the night was lowered and Rey was revealed to him. Her cloak was deprived of ermine and all the trappings of majesty. She was never more of a Queen to Ben. Taking her in his arms, he kissed her hungrily which she reciprocated with enthusiasm.

“Why are you not wearing furs? It is cold.” He asked when they pulled apart.

“You never did get the hang of concealment, did you?” Rey admonished with a laugh, plucking at his cloak. Ben shrugged but did not apologise. He was too exultant to care about anything other than her embrace. He pressed her against a tree with a new air of need.

“Ben… Ben, we must be careful.” Rey warned as he tasted her neck greedily.

“I’ve thought of you all day. All day I’ve dreamt of you.”

“I know. I know.” Rey kissed his lips in acknowledgement to the feeling he described. She threaded her fingers through his locks and he groaned at the feeling. The cold could not cure his ardour.

It was stupid; crazy and reckless yet almost natural to lift Rey’s gown and petticoats, wrapping her slim legs around his waist and unlace his briers. Yet Rey could not voice any protests. Instead she wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and let her mouth hang open as Ben positioned himself at her warm opening and let her seat herself on him fully.

It was not like the lazy rocking that they had indulged in only last night. Their mating this time was
harder, more forceful and just as delicious. Ben longed to have her back in a bed where he could strip off every vestige of clothing and see her beautiful naked body fully displayed; she deserved to be worshipped and honoured. Instead he could at least ensure that she felt as much pleasure from this tryst as possible.

The shocked little moan that escaped her as her inner muscles fluttered caused Ben to groan in turn into her neck as he reached his own climax. It was so good. So damn good. How had he ever lived without this? He never would again.

The first flake that touched their hot flushed skin was enough to drift their attention upwards. Even within the shade of the trees, the first specks of snow were beginning to drift around them.

Rey had began to procure a potion of herbs to ensure that she was allowed the freedom of consequence. Rose had been shocked when Rey had whispered during their night times together that particular leaves and weeds would be needed from now on. As luck would have it, Rose had a packet of unused herbs that had been pushed into her hand by Jessika when she first came forward as Ben’s apparent mistress. Rey made sure to take them every morning before she broke her fast and when no one was looking.

There was an atmosphere of buoyancy in her chambers the previous day. The Holdo daughters were all in much lighter spirits when it became apparent that they would not be required to marry the Crown prince and Breha even decided to magnanimous.

“You know, he’s not all that bad really.” She conceded as she worked upon a new tapestry. “He complemented my hood this morning and seems much more personable when he doesn’t look so cross.”

“Are you lamenting your loss, Sister?” Satine teased down the other end of the tapestry.

“Oh gracious no! But I wish he’d smile a little more. He looks so very different when he smiles.”

Rey said nothing at all but looked to Jess who was sat beside the fire. Her friend was struggling to sit still in her chair without evident discomfort. Her belly was very big now and Rey had announced that she would be sending Jessika home in a litter the next day for her lying in. The baby was clearly not far away. Jessika had clearly been grateful for this but she was still fanning herself quite frequently.
“Are you no better Lady Dameron?” Rey asked.

“Just a little flushed Milady.” Jessika was certainly rather pink in her features.

“You should rest. Why not go to your rooms to lie down?” Rey asked kindly.

Jess was too uncomfortable and tired to even argue. She curtsied her gratitude and left.

“She should not still be at court.” Rey lamented to Maz. “Doctors believe she is...”

“Seven and a half months, they say.”

Rey twisted her lips. Yes, her lady should really be back in the country by now.

Rose went to change her gown for dinner that night when they realised that something was amiss. For Rose burst back into the royal apartments looking pale.

“Rose? What is-”

Then Rey heard it: a pained shriek. It sounded almost inhuman.

“It is Jessika!”

With a complete lack of propriety, Rey strode after Rose with Maz not far behind her. She gave terse instructions to the Holdo daughters to remain behind.

In the Maiden’s Chamber where they all slept when they did not sleep beside Rey, Jessika was bent over a bed with one hand upon her stomach and one upon the bed for support. She was in her night shift and was groaning in agony. Rey was immediately at her side.
“Jessika! What’s happened?”

Maz, not one for preamble, strode behind Jessika and lifted her shift to see what was going on.

“It’s coming. That baby is on its way.”

“No!” Jess cried as another wave of pain overtook her. “It’s too early. The doctors said-”

“Curse the doctor! I’ve been on this Earth long enough to know when a baby is going to make an appearance and, believe me, this one is nearly waving at me. You must be further along than you thought.”

Rey felt the blood from into her slippered feet. They needed to call for a doctor quickly.

“I can’t! I’m not in confinement. I need to be churched-”

“You must lie upon the bed.” Rey instructed with no argument available in her tone. This baby had been her torment but she would see it safe into the world.

This baby would live. She defied God to stop her seeing to that.

Chapter End Notes

Few titbits of information:

Contraception varied in courtly circles but a concoxion of various herbs were believed to stop pregnancy.

Pregnancy could be dangerous and also the doctors had unreliable methods of attaining when a pregnancy was due or even if a woman was pregnant at all. For there to be a slip-up in the dates is to be expected. And this is Jessika's third baby so they tend to come quickly and without warning (premature babies are common in my family).

Reviews are love.
Hello. It's me :)

Thank you so so so much for all the continued support this fic gets. It's so humbling and heartening. I really hope I continue to impress you all.

Massive thanks to my wifey Jess444 for continuing her beautiful moodboards for me and my beta Poet Hrotvisha who is also a badass writer (go read her stuff. You won't regret it.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jessika was guided to the trestle bed as Rose ran with all speed to get a physician or a wise woman. Rey threw off her gilded sleeves which were cumbersome at best and clung to Jessika’s clenching hand. Maz looked down at Jessika’s nether regions and seemed to be nodding along as though everything was as it should be. That was good; Rey was willing to bet that Maz had seen enough births to know what to look for and what was viewed as dangerous to mother and child.

Jessika seemed to bare the pain rather well considering though her face was breaking out in a flush of sweat and she was gripping her mistress’ hand so hard that Rey was beginning to fear for the bones in her hand. Maybe she should have taken off her rings as well as her sleeves.

A part of Rey wanted to almost laugh at the absurdity of it all. Ladies of high standing were not meant to give birth to their babes at the court; they were meant to be sent away to the country where the air was cleaner, to be shut away for two months before the birth and if they were of royal birth to be cocooned in a dark room of stifling warmth only to come out into the world weeks after the birth looking calm and content. Instead, Jessika’s cries were bound to be echoing down the halls of the court. They were in a maiden’s chamber with many beds for ladies in waiting for the Queen and far from being removed from the world, she was clinging to the Queen as she bore down to move the baby from her body.

Rey was soothing Jessika the best she could when Maz announced: “It’s crowning. You need to give a big push Jessika.”

Jessika groaned as though she was doubting her ability to lift her head but then with grip so hard that Rey was sure she would lose her fingers altogether and a scream that curdled the blood, Jessika threw her body forward to do as Maz instructed.
“The head is out. One more!” Maz instructed and then after another exhausted push, the elderly woman gave a cry of jubilation. The pungent smell of blood was not so loud as a new sobbing that rang around the room. It was loud, high pitched and lusty. “A boy! Another boy!”

Jessika cried too but from relief rather than pain this time. Rey laughed with her friend as an outlet for her own relief. The baby was clearly well. Her friend did not seem to be suffering from ill effects. The afterbirth looked soon to come and Maz called Rey to her side.

“Take the child while I see to this. There is a basin of water over there where you may clean him if you wish.”

Rey soon had a tiny, squalling infant thrust into her arms.

He was so very small. Smaller than an infant should be but then again she supposed that this was the early deliverance coming in to play. Yet he had a set of lungs on him that would put a herald to shame. Rey did not wash him at once for she was too enthralled in watching everything the child did. Every flex of his hand, every angry whimper, every indignant kick. He was blood red and his eyes were unopened and yet she found him beautiful to look upon. She tucked the blankets around him a little further to keep him warm. He was sticky with blood and various fluids and she was vaguely aware of her dress that she was to wear to dinner becoming stained beyond saving but she didn’t care.

The afterbirth was safely delivered and Maz disposed of it with as little concern as though it were a frayed material for a garment. Maz then seemed to noticed that Rey had not moved or attempted to wash the child.

Eager not to have the child taken from her, she moved to the basin. The baby did not seem anymore inclined to being washed than he had at being forced into the world rather early but soon he was clean and more pink than red. Rey wrapped him tightly in a blanket that was at hand and the baby seemed content enough to stop crying. He was beginning to look content and more sleepy than cross.

Rey walked towards the bed and very slowly, very gently, placed the baby in his mother’s arms. The Queen sat down beside Jessika on the bed so she would not have to look away from the little bundle. Rey felt greedy to be around him; Jessika would be able to add this baby to her growing brood. Surely Rey could keep close to it for as long as she could? She was the Queen after all!

Jessika looked down tiredly at her little son. She looked oddly serene at the sight of her little son’s scrunched-up face. There was something ludicrously ugly about a newborn, Rey mused. Their
features hadn’t had the time to take shape and therefore they looked constantly bad tempered. But that vulnerability made them so much more beautiful. Something to protect to the death if needs be.

“Can’t wait for anything; not even his proper time of birth. He’s just like his father.” Jessika mused in a sort of tired humour. “But he’s healthy. Small but he’ll grow.”

“He’s perfect.” Rey stressed. She brushed her finger across the soft little cheek. Oh it was so soft.

“You did well.” Maz declared, wiping her hands on a bloody sheet. The lady-in-waiting would have been a good midwife or wise woman, Rey mused. But Maz probably considered herself those already: she just wore good gable hoods while doing it.

“It’s so silly but...” Jessika shifted as though about to mention something shameful.

“What?” Rey questioned.

“I had… almost hoped for a girl.”

Rey blinked at Jessika in plain amazement. It was the desire of every woman and especially man that a marriage would bare forth sons. Not daughters. Too many daughters or no sons was considered an expensive disaster.

“It’s not to say I don’t love him!” Jessika said quickly, cradling her baby as though someone was about to snatch the child from her arms for saying such things, “I do! I truly do. But... a son will be seen as a pawn for his father’s gain and a girl... a girl would belong to its mother. It would be the mother’s task to teach her things.”

Rey thought she could understand. Her son would be an asset to Poe’s ambitions; a daughter would have belonged more to Jessika than any of her other children. She stroked Jessika’s hair.

“This baby is yours. He is your son. You are his mother. No other.”

It caused much distress to Rey’s heart to say those words. But say them she did. It was fair. And
who knew: maybe one day should could fill her court with children and help raise them? Maybe then her heart would yearn so much and she could ignore the pain for a time.

Rose arrived not long afterwards with the royal physician. He seemed most put out that Maz had dealt with it all without so much as a complaint so instead made a great fuss about caring for Jessika in her childbed and her aftercare. Rose knelt down to admire the newborn and her delight at the little child made her look as young as a girl fresh from the schoolroom.

Rey was being led away, much to her reluctance, by Rose to let Jessika rest when they came across Poe running pell-mell down the court gallery. He stopped at the sight of Rey’s blood smeared gown and blanched.

“Oh Jesu, is she-”

“She is well.” Rey hastened to reassure. “A boy. Another son for you, Captain.”

Poe smiled and looked like he wanted to grasp her in a hug if not for her soiled gown. “A son! Oh another son! I shall soon have an army!” He laughed slapping a nearby page on the arm instead and bolting into the Maiden’s Chamber to see his wife. Rey almost wanted to tell him he couldn’t as Jessika had not been churched but decided against it. None of the other confinement traditions had been followed.

Rey returned back to her rooms and had Rose help her out of her gowns so she could dress herself in her nightgown and shift. She asked for some plain meats and bread to be sent to her instead and sat beside the fire. Rey almost wanted to weep but there were no tears that could be wrung from her. For one night, Rey just wanted to think on one subject at a time and muse on the healthy birth of a child before her wants and desires came back to play with her mind.

Away from the flickering of the fire and the warmth it exuded, Rey did not notice the snow beginning to fall in earnest outside her window.

The roads were too bad and it would be considered improper for Jessika to leave her childbed so soon that it became evident that the baby’s first few weeks would be at court. Rey ensured her lady-in-waiting was gifted the finest apartment that they had to offer and was attended by the royal doctors. She was recovering well, they were pleased to inform the Queen, but she would need time to fully restore to health.
Han seemed pleased at the news of a happy birth for his Captain and clapped Poe on the shoulder. He seemed even more heartened when Poe asked if they may call their son Han in honour of the King. Yet Han declined going to see the newborn under the excuse that Jessika would need to regain her strength before entering the world of men again. Rey knew that Han thought such traditions were rather silly even under Church lore and wondered if even now the sight of a newborn would bring back painful memories of his own children.

Ben was cordial with Poe over the birth of his son but did not go out of his way to be friendly. Rey could feel his eyes flicking to her as though to check her reaction to all this but she kept a smiling face on. She did not resent Jessika or Poe this happiness; she was duly honoured when Jessika asked if she would stand as Godmother to little Han and she also saw, for the first time, the yearning that Jessika underwent for her children. To be constantly fruitful was not always the prize many make out when you were high-born.

Rey soon turned her attention to the approaching festivities of Yuletide.

Holly was wound around every available wood space, there were marvellous caskets of cranberry wine and the smell of roast oxen and goose was becoming a constant scent amongst the galleries. Rey began to dress in royal colours of red and gold and delighted in dressing the Holdo daughters in green gowns. Sabe seemed demurely grateful while Satine and Breha were too busy squabbling over who got the coveted French hood.

Han liked to indulge in mulled wine and chat with Calrissian until late into the night yet when they got back to their apartments, Rey found herself becoming more nurse than wife. Han sometimes winced suddenly as though suffering an unseen pain. Rey had taught herself as much about the Palace Herb Garden as she could that she could make up a calming remedy for Han for the pain. Han’s face looked lined and slightly dull in colour and Rey found a cold wave of fear wash through her. The doctors had examined him daily but assured her that he was in remarkable health for his age yet Rey still fussed. He was a good husband and had been like the father she’d never had. He must not weaken. He must be strong.

Rey knew the contradiction she was becoming. Her affair with Ben would not be so dangerous if Han was dead. Ben would be King and would let no scandal touch her. And she did love Ben. Loved him with all the passion that romance and troubadour tales could promise. Her every waking moment was spent dreaming of him; wanting to see him even if it was just a kiss and whispered word that they shared. But the idea of losing Han; of Ben losing his father... no, nothing on Earth could move her to wish Han dead. She would do all in her power to preserve her husband’s life.

Rey also noticed, with some amusement, that Bazine was looking more and more put-out that her
attempts to lure and impress Ben were coming to nothing. She had seemed rather disgruntled by
the news that the King was not pushing his son to choose a French bride out of her and the Holdo
daughters. Now that Ben seemed to be in better spirits than ever but only paid her courtly courtesy
she seemed more perturbed than ever. There was no denying that she was looking as ravishing as
ever and Rey had felt a brief flame of jealousy at the sight of her womanly hips and generous
bosom framed by the square neck of her gown.

The darkness of Ben’s eyes as he looked at her and only her calmed her. And the remembrance of
the last time he had suckled her petite breasts hungrily all the while growling ‘Mine. Mine!’ left her
inflamed.

Let the Duchess be offended. She was the Queen and what subject should not love their Queen?

It was Christmas Eve when Ben was walking back from midnight mass and found someone sidling
up to him in the gallery. At first he feared it might be that damned Duchess but instead he saw the
dour face of Sir Hux.

“Armitage” Ben greeted, knowing that his adviser hated the use of his Christian name, “what can I
do for you?”

“Can’t a courtier take a refreshing walk alongside another man after chapel?”

“Courtiers can; you can’t.” Ben entered his rooms leaving Hux to follow him. He’d long since
given up the idea of shaking Hux off when he had a bone to pick. Ben picked up an empty goblet
and poured himself a generous amount of wine. He didn’t offer Hux one. “So. What is it?”

“I’ve heard that the King has loosened his pressure on you to choose a bride.”

“He has.” Ben took a sip. It was good vintage.

“Any reason why?” Hux snapped as though annoyed at Ben’s blasé attitude.

“I am not predisposed towards marriage.”


“You are nearing thirty! You have no heir and no previous wife. Surely you should contemplate it by now!”

“Says a man who married at seventeen, widowed at eighteen and has never made any moves towards another marriage(!)’’

“I’m not heir to a throne!” Hux snapped angrily. “Why not the Sabe girl? She seems agreeable enough. Like she won’t make such a fuss.”

Agreeable enough? God preserve us, Hux could command a fleet but he was never going to be capable of wooing a lady.

“Well, what about that Duchess Netal? She seems to be a fascinating creature.”

“Yes, I have noticed that you two have become well acquainted.” This did not bode well for a future wife in Ben’s eyes.

“At least she seems savvy. She’d make you a good Queen.”

“Why don’t you marry her if she pleases you so much?” Ben shot back irritated.

Hux looked offended and exasperated. And also a little conflicted. Ben knew of all the women at the court, Phasma was the woman that was most likely to appeal herself to be Hux’s wife. They were allies and that counted more to Hux than useless lust. Hux was forward thinking enough to want a wife that could hold a conversation over matters that mattered to him. If only Phasma hadn’t been dancing on the edge of a heresy charge for her love of wearing knight’s clothing, she’d be an ideal bride. Ben rather liked Phasma for all her gruffness.

“My marriage prospects are not priority. Yours are!” Hux paced the room which he often did when he was thinking. “We can write abroad for other marriageable brides if you really insist. There’s bound to be one that pleases you.”

“You can write nothing. I’m not going to get married anytime soon and that is the end of it.”
Hux looked utterly put-out. In the past, Ben had been so ambitious, so desperate for the Crown he coveted, he would have done anything or married anyone placed before him. Now Ben knew that Hux was panic-stricken that his reintroduction to his family seat had softened him. Made him less ambitious. Less power hungry.

When Hux had stalked off, Ben reflected on his changing priorities. The crown didn’t feel intoxicating to him anymore. He wanted to be King certainly but in the future; not immediately. Sometimes his ambition gave way to doubt and even fear. For what if he was bad King?

He drained his goblet and inhaled deeply. Not even a year had passed and so much had changed. It seemed an age when he looked out his window and planned his courtship of a pretty maiden by the water fountain who the next day he discovered was his stepmother.

The heavy snowfall had blanketed the palace gardens in whiteness. Han and Rey had indulged in a walk together on Christmas Day with her greyhounds. When Han went in to indulge on some warmth from the braziers, Rey and Rose had indulged in a little snowball fight with drops of ice dripping past their fur-lined cloaks and making them squeal. Maz even ventured to make a snowman with her husband Sir Chewbacca with her own barely reaching Rey’s knee and Sir Chewbacca’s threatening to cause injury by falling on passing courtiers.

There were church services where the whole court grasped candles and Rey had to concentrate on not letting her gaze flick to Ben too often. The candle before him illuminated his freckled nose and smattering of moles in a manner that made him look so comely that Rey felt her chest ache.

The feasts were splendid and so many dishes were bought forward that Rey wondered how there could be so much food in the world. Rey ate so many meats, pies and sweetmeats washed down with Hippocras that the stomacher on her bodice began to feel uncomfortably tight. The court came forward to offer gifts to the King and Queen while Rey gifted Han a new crossbow with a set of arrows. He seemed much pleased with this as Rey knew he still loved hunting and she was jubilant at the collection of books that Han gifted her to increase her learning. She had expressed a desire to learn Greek and fill in her woeful education and was touched that Han had remembered.

Her heart had begun to beat very fast when Ben presented his own gift to her. His pages brought forward sumptuous materials for gowns. They were of rich green, muted browns and autumn leaf orange: her favourite colours. She’d become almost tired of the royal purples and reds that she as Queen often had to wear and therefore had longed to look a little bit more inconspicuous. She could make such gowns from this and wear them knowing that he’d picked them…
She thanked him graciously and tried to blink away the gratitude that was making her eyes itch. She would give him her present later; paltry as it was.

A masque was performed for the court with Rey taking part in the dancing. She stood at the front and was led into the dance by one of the young gallants at the court. Bazine was partnered behind her with Rose, Sabe, Satine and Breha. She reminded herself to watch her foot placings as the court and the Prince watched on.

Rey retired to her apartments with Han quite early and did not protest when Han found himself nodding off in his chair. She knew that he hated to feel his age but there was no point torturing himself.

Jessika was still resting in her private rooms and Maz had begun to snore at the feasting table so there was only Rose to attend to her. Yet Rey had given her leave once she was undressed in her night-robe and shift to leave her to her own devices.

“It is a time for contemplation.” Rey mused, patting Rose on her hands. “Besides I’m sure your sister would like to see you on this sacred night. I know you have not had much time for Paige thanks to your service to me.”

Rose bobbed a curtsey and Rey suddenly felt an odd urge to fling her arms around her. To hug her friend. For truly Rose had been the greatest comfort to her in the past months that she could have ever wished. She’d lied for her, spied for her, committed treason daily for her and Ben. It seemed rather pathetic that all they could offer her in reward was more jewels than she could wear and a tame thank you at the end of it all.

Rose seemed to understand and gave Rey an answer smile. She tapped her finger to her lips as though to indicate that some things were best left unsaid.

Rey was left alone to watch the fire crackle. She’d received no special message but something told her that tonight… tonight she should be alone.

Within half an hour, there was a gentle tap on the door.

Rey dashed over to the door and lifted the latch. She let the cloaked shadow into her room without a word. She knew that height and posture anywhere.
As soon as the door was closed, he’d pulled her into his arms and rained kisses down upon her face. She put up no resistance – she’d missed those lips. Those beautiful lips.

“Sweeting.” He whispered huskily. The endearment had never been used before and she wasn’t sure it suited her but loved the way it sounded from his lips.

“I’ve missed you. It’s been too long.” Rey ignored the fact it had barely been four days since their last tryst against the tree-trunk like she’d been a common serving girl.

“I know.” He pressed a kiss to her neck. “I know.” Rey drank him in for a moment then straightened.

“I have a Christmas gift for you.”

Ben blinked as though bemused and surprised. “What is it?”

“Only a trifle. Nothing of value but… it meant something to me when I had nothing.” She pulled open her wooden chest and extracted a beaten, weather-stained Bible. It was one of the only possessions she’d had for herself at Jakku Nunnery and she’d protected it as furiously as she’d guarded BB8. It would be hard to part with after so long but she knew he might appreciate it. “This gave me strength when I felt I had none left. I know how devoted you are to your studies so…” She held it out for him to take.

He took the Bible in one hand. His hand had dwarfed the tiny book. She wondered if he was disgusted at the old thing or disappointed after spending so much on silken materials for her. But when he looked up at her, he seemed genuinely moved and couldn’t have accepted it more graciously than if it had been gilded with diamonds and gold.

Rey wanted to tell him about her other gift. How Finn had told her of a litter of kittens born in the stables and how she had asked him to save the pick for him. But his eyes were hungry suddenly and the words did not come.

Ben captured her lips with his soft ones and caught her up in her arms. He was so tall that Rey’s toes grazed the floor from his embrace. It was impossible to pull away from one another as Rey felt the familiar stirrings of desire and need. It was a need now; even an addiction. She needed to feed it or she would go mad.
Ben moved forward with her still in his arms yet not towards her bedchamber but towards the fire. A plush bear fur rug lay before the fire and Ben let his knees drop onto it with Rey collapsing with him. Rey did not care where she had him. She helped Ben divest his doublet and shirt and was practically panting at the sight of naked body. God, what was happening to her?

Rey was stripped of her night-robe and her chemise. Ben’s fingers went down to her womanhood and Rey whined with the feeling of wonder that she experienced.

When they were both naked and panting before the fire, Rey was ready for him in every way and wanted him to have her quickly. Instead Rey was almost startled when Ben turned her over so she was facing away from him. She looked back at him in confusion.

“I want to try something. I’ve read… trust me.”

Rey was confused but too wanting to argue.

Rey gripped the bear skin rug in her hands as she felt his member enter her wet and ready womanhood. She let out a little cry at the feel of him rubbing and hitting places within her that he had never hit before. This was sanctioned against the church; it was an act of sodomy to have intercourse in such a way. But it felt so good. It made Rey feel riled up, sinful and glorious. The slap of sweat skinned flesh hitting her buttocks and hips made her feel wild. Rey tried to keep her moans in check but her groans and pants came forward unheeded. Her small breasts swung with the motion of Ben’s powerful thrusts. Rey wished she could turn herself properly and look at him. His own exertions and gasps were music to her. His hands gripped her hips hard enough to bruise.

Their climax felt almost violent and Rey had to bury her face into the fur rug to muffle the scream she could not suppress. Everything felt hot and dizzy and oh-so-wonderful. Ben eventually extracted himself from Rey’s body and collapsed beside her upon the fur rug.

They kissed in a dizzying passion with their skin sticking together from the sweat of exertion and heat from the fire. Rey knew that their appetites would probably have them having each other again and again before the sun came up.

They were the benediction they both needed to survive. And they drank deeply from that offering.
*Blushes* I never like my own smut but I think that's one of my better pieces. But who knows? You are the readers. I await your wisdom.
Greetings!

Thank you so much for all the continued support. Every comment really does mean so much. I've been struggling with confidence lately so every bit of feedback really does inspire me to carry on. And I mean that.

The portrait in the story is the work of Poet Hrotvisha who paints as well as writes. Her page can be found here: https://thepoetdraws.tumblr.com/ It's a brilliant piece so check out her other works.

Moodboard is courtesy of Jess444, my reylo wifey.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Rose tightened the strings of Rey’s gown as gently as she could. Despite her lady’s maid being tasked with helping her dress each morning, Rey could not bare the sensation of her breasts bound too tightly today. The heavy gown rimmed with jewels along the bodice seemed a harder burden to cope with than she was used to today. She wondered if she should ask her dressmakers to ease up on the many pearls and diamonds they attached to her finery. They seemed to be making her small chest rather tender and sore.

She needed to look regal today though. Today her portrait would be revealed to the court and the Prince’s too. In truth, Rey had needed prompting by Han to remember that she had sat for her image to be taken just a few months ago. Now her canvas would be added to the secreted corridor of the royal family.

She wished with all her heart that she felt she deserved to be remembered in any capacity for future
generations. Other than a traitor and a poor substitute for a true Queen.

Rose attached her cloth of gold sleeves then stood back to scrutinize the overall effect.

“Beautiful, Your Grace!” She clapped her hands in clear delight. “The very image of a Queen.”

Rey smiled a bit tightly. She was dressed in a royal red gown with cloth of gold kirtle and sleeves. The rubies about her neck were not helping her sore chest and the gable hood atop her head was feeling especially heavy today. She should have opted for a gown that favoured a French hood but alas. She could not endure getting changed again.

“You look lovely too Rose. That gown is new I take it.”

Rose nodded. The gown was a sapphire blue in the French style and made Rose look grand and regal. It was odd how, considering she was of tiny stature, Rose held herself like a Queen when the occasion called for it. “The Prince sent me the fabric. I think he doesn’t want appearances to slip especially as the Duchess of Chaaktıl now seems to have become such an ally to Hux.”

Rey nodded. That had not escaped her notice either and whatever it meant it did not bode well for Ben. She had never liked nor trusted Hux in any capacity but at least he had been firmly in Ben’s pocket (as it served his interests to be). If Ben’s cause was not drawing his attention like it used to… Hux was not an enemy she wanted. She remembered Han’s tale of how he always suspected Hux of being in league with Snoke and the First Order but never had adequate proof to condemn him or even arrest him. It made her feel cold and uneasy to know a man like that still held any vestige of power.

“Don’t look so worried; I’m sure its nothing. We’ve been careful.” Rose assured her friend soothingly.

Rey could do nothing but nod. “Come along. Best not keep the court waiting.”

Rey left her apartments with her ladies close behind her. Jessika had been churched and was back on her feet at last. She left baby Han with his nurse to attend her duties. Maz was also behind her, dressed in her usual gable hood and looking like this was something she did every day. Then again, her eldest lady was now so old she had probably been around to see Padmé Amidala’s portrait painted.
The King greeted her warmly in the hall where the paintings would be revealed. A red velvet curtain was draped over half the wall to conceal the works of art until everyone was present. Most of the court was gathered in attendance for the unveiling. The King was dressed in his own ceremonial garb of a heavy coat and matching plumed hat. He didn’t look too happy to be wearing such things; he kept blowing the feather that kept dangling over his face out of his way.

There was the sound of the herald banging his stick upon the floor and then an announcement.

“His Grace, the Prince of Alderaan.”

Ben walked into the hall unaccompanied by serving pages but looking as regal as though he owned the souls of every courtier that bowed and curtsied to him. He was dressed in his usual black garb and the simple chain about his neck that all princes wore. Rey had to keep her head down a little longer than necessary as she rose from her own curtsey. Somehow his lack of pomp and colour made him all the more impressive and she was reminded once again of how he looked without even the black garb. His body was that of a warrior and lit by firelight it had been almost golden marble to her.

She had to focus very hard to stop her mind wandering to her fist wrapped in the fur rug as he grunted behind her. She could still feel the bruises on the back of her legs.

The painter bowed with as little humility as it was possible to possess to the King and his court. He spoke of what an honour it was to have painted such people as their sovereign lady and their goodly prince. Rey wished he would get on with it; this gown was very heavy and her breasts were starting to scream.

Eventually, finally, the painter motioned to the pages to pull the velvet off the wall. It came away in two sharp jerks.

Rey blinked. The portrait of her was staring out at her. Her likeness…

She remembered that dress; purple with a square neckline and cloth of gold sleeves. And that French hood studded with pearls. But she had not imagined it captured so vividly. And the woman within the finery…
She had good cheekbones, she mused. Good lips. Kind eyes. And her brunette, slightly auburn hair was peaking out beneath the front of the hood. She was slim but not frail or ill looking. She looked in the flush of youth. Generations would look back at this portrait. And they would see a Queen who was also a woman. Apparently a very pretty woman.

She felt humbled but not displeased. It was well done. Well done indeed even if it had been meant to flatter as portraits were want to do.

“It is a true likeness!” Han proclaimed with many murmurings of ascent from the court. They did not seem feigned or put on. “A wonderful addition.”

“It is… It is wonderful.” Rey breathed. “I’m honoured by this.”

“It is your right. And Ben’s portrait is brilliant.”
In her amazement, she had not focused upon anything else but her own portrait. Now she looked at Ben’s.

It was remarkably like him. And it showcased his best features will not shying away from his flaws. The moles upon his face were not painted out as was sometimes the want of a portrait painter and the thin scar that ran down his face was present. But it seemed to enhance his beauty rather than detract from it. His lips were sensuous like a woman though he did not smile for the portrait, his nose aquiline and his eyes so dark and intense it was like looking into the very man himself. He was stood in the position of a soldier. Dressed all in black with his shoulders squared, he had the air of a general and a commander of men.

A true King in waiting.

Ben’s real persona was as inscrutable as his portrait. He stared at it for a long time as though trying to fathom out who exactly was staring back at him.

There was a great feast at the court that night to celebrate the new portraits. The painter was the man of honour though Rey and Ben were closely followed behind him in that regard. Their images were now immortalised and would be looked upon forever more by scholars, future sovereigns and courtiers. Rey’s demure sweet face would become the symbol for most to dwell upon when she was long gone and called to God’s grace.

Rey wished she could enjoy herself a little more but she felt tired and irritable. She knew why of course; she had spent last night cutting up linen pieces to place beneath her gowns for her monthly course. Her ladies also knew this which was why they did not comment on Rey being a little less hospitable than usual in the run up to it.

Rose patted her hand kindly.

“The sweetmeats are coming out soon, Your Grace. You do enjoy them.”

Rey smiled. It was true that she was more prone towards sweet things before her womanly course than any other time. And maybe it would put her in a more palatable mood.
Yet when the dishes were bought out and a sweet pastry was put before her, she did not begin to eat. In fact, the smell of the sugar almonds were not agreeable to her at all. Almost recoiling, she pushed the plate a little further from her. Oh Lord, the smell…

“Are you well, Rey?” Han asked, looking concerned.

“Sorry.” Rey put her napkin to her mouth as nausea washed over her. “The smell… is too much.”

Han pulled the plate forward and inhaled. He looked more confused than ever. “It smells very nice.”

Rey shook her head not knowing how to explain but did not touch anything more. She felt that even a crumb would make her lose control of her stomach.

Rey stayed for as long as was polite before excusing herself. She nearly cried with relief at the gown being removed and for once had all the candles snuffed out. Her head could not endure any light.

She slept deeply and with vivid dreams that night. Of Hux posing for a painting as a Roman Emperor, of Maz trying on a variety of French hoods and of a room dark and cold. So cold it was made of stone and when she looked out, she could see all of London and there were bars around the window.

It was a common practise for a newborn to be sent to the country when it was young. The air was cleaner there and there was less likelihood of diseases being caught. So it made perfect sense for baby Han to be sent to live with his brothers at Poe’s family seat. Yet Rey felt utterly bereft at having to bid farewell to her little godson. Although only a month old now, he was beginning to grow into a personality. There were even times when Rey would have sworn on the Bible that he knew who she was and was pleased to receive one of her daily cuddles. He was such a sweet little baby; Rey doted on him.

Yet when the time came to part, Rey had been forced to retire to her room lest she lose control and demand he be kept here with her. She was the Queen after all and his godmother; she could demand what she wanted. It was so ridiculous that she was appalled at herself yet she wept into her pillow when she learnt he’d been sent away. So bereft was she that she did not even want to see Jessika. Poor lady; she who had been so kind to her in all things. Yet Rey felt unable to master
herself. She’d tried to be calm when Jessika had been pregnant and when she had been forced to witness the birth. Yet now she was meant to wave the child off and say nothing?

It was too like her own experience in Jakku. Her parents had put her somewhere ‘for her own safety’ and never returned. A mother should be with her child and more importantly a child should never be left without a protector. Nurses weren’t enough and nuns certainly weren’t.

She was lying upon her bed when there was a gentle knock upon the door. She was tempted to shout for them to leave her in peace but Rose came in anyway.

“Your Grace? The Prince is here.”

Rey raised her head. Here? Now? Whatever for?

But still she rose from her bed and made herself ready. Only Rose was in attendance right now and she could always nip away into a corner to allow them some privacy.

Ben was stood beside the fire. He looked concerned at her pale appearance but she waved that aside.

“I was wondering if you would be coming to dinner tonight?”

The mere mention of dinner made Rey’s stomach protest. “I think not.”

Ben’s eyebrows furrowed. “This is not like you. Have you seen a physician?”

“It’s just woman’s fancies. It will pass soon.” Rey dismissed.

“I hope so. I do not like to see you so ill.”

This was not a carnal call; he was here because he was worried for her. He wanted her to be well. He cared.
“Why are you crying?” He asked in alarm.

Rey did not know what he meant until his hand touched her face and he showed her a wet finger. She couldn’t feel her cheeks that were damp or even take heed of her swimming vision. Suddenly she launched herself forward and clung to Ben like a small child.

“Rey-”

“Don’t go. Don’t leave me behind, please.” She whispered brokenly. Such a strong sense of foreboding swam over her that she could scarcely breathe.

He didn’t demand to know why she was acting so out-of-character. Instead he wrapped his arms around her, one hand nestled in her unbound hair and whispered: “I won’t, my love. I won’t.”

Rey began to understand in two days time.

Her cut up linen came away clean.

Rey stared at it in confusion. She was never late for a monthly course. She prided herself on it.

Rey destroyed it on the fire and put another up her dress. A mere fluke that was all. The next day, her bleeding would come.

That one came away spotless too.

She waited. She used all her supply of cut up linen. Nothing.

She could not think. Could not panic. Could not do a thing. For a few days, she utterly refused to believe what could only be a dream.
Then the fish on Friday made her rush to her stool closet and vomit it up without ceremony.

Rose came in, looking ghostly white and terrified. Somehow the look on her friend’s face told her what her mind had refused to believe.

She was with child. Ben’s child. Her husband’s grandchild.

“What do we do?” Rose whispered through lips that had drained of colour.

“Pray.” Rey whispered back. “Only God can help us now.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, it was always going to happen...
XXVI

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The royal chapel of the palace of Naboo was grander and more opulent than the little cloister that Rey had said her prayers at Theed Court. But it was therefore less private and Rey had to wait until the candles had nearly burnt out in the palace before she descended with Rose to gain some spiritual enlightenment. They had arrived back at the official palace of the royal court only that morning after Han had decided it would be easier to conduct state affairs from the heart of London. Rey had voiced no protest to this. She barely voiced a single sound.

Leaving Rose at the door, Rey walked up the nave of the church towards the altar. Her slippered feet echoed with almost indecent loudness upon the stone floors and around the house of the Holy. She had no place here she knew; yet here she stood, here she walked, here she would remain.

Rey crossed herself before the jewelled crucifix and sank to her knees upon the steps.


Hope?

She didn’t know which to scream for first.

Only Rose knew apart from her. She needed to keep it that way while she gathered her wits. Rey knew that she was in an impossible situation. There was no hope of deception or lying by omission here; Han had never been her true husband and Ben had been the only man who had ever entered her bed. And she knew she could not have lied even if there was a way. Han deserved better than that.

She’d been forced to think through the other options.

The first was maybe the easiest one to many. There was a root in the palace herb garden. A mild form of poison that if taken in moderation and with carefulness... it had worked for many a desperate maiden in the same situation apparently.
Rey had absolutely refused to even contemplate it. She could not commit such an act even to save herself. She would never be able to rest again and would end her days raging against a God that would force her to such acts.

No, the babe was in her belly and in her belly it would remain, God willing, until it was time for it to come into the world.

Rose had suggested another option.

“There may be a way to avoid disgrace Madam.”

“How?”

Rose swallowed as though steeling herself to say the words. “I have known some women who find themselves with child and married to someone other than the babe’s father. They pass the child off as the husband’s. They… entice the husband to their bed and then claim the baby came early.”

Rey knew in her heart Rose was trying to think of a situation that would save her but the idea of getting Han to lie with her and then saying that his son’s child was actually his… Rey wanted to spit on the floor at the thought.

“The world may condemn me as a whore” Rey had declared with as much Queenly dignity as she could muster “but I will not act as one and never shall.”

Rey almost wanted to giggle at the memory. Fanciful words. Wasn’t she already a whore? Already ruined?

And yet… she placed her hand upon her belly.

There was no change. No visible difference to be seen. Lord knows, she had checked again and again enough times. It was too early for the baby to truly quicken. How long had it been since she first lay with Ben? About five weeks?

Had she gone from maid to mother in one night?
Or had it been one of the other times? Beneath the stars in the frosted gardens of the court? Or before the fire when their passion overcame any decency and she spurred him on to claim her harder and faster?

But there was one indisputable fact: she wanted this child. She wanted it more than she had ever wanted anything in her life. And she would protect the little life she had been blessed with even if it cost her own life in the end.

She would not live a lie. She would throw herself upon Han’s mercy. She would beg for the child’s life.

And she must tell Han first.

Rey had been forced to fight the impulse to summon Ben and throw herself upon his protection. To proclaim to him that she was carrying his own natural child and he must protect them both. It pained her that he did not know but she had to be sensible if she had any sway on this outcome. If Ben knew, she had grown to understand him well enough that she was certain he would not act rational.

Ben would dream up some adventure where they fled in the night and rode to Dover to take a ship to Calais. That their salvation lay in the hands of escape.

It would achieve nothing. In every court in Christendom they would be vilified. For a married woman to flee a good husband with his own son whilst heavy with child? No one would help them and for that Rey could not even hold them to account.

She would tell Han the truth at long last. She would lay herself before him. And then she would await his judgement. Han was too old to risk executing his only heir now. And she knew he would not harm a child. His own grandchild. As for her... well, it was often the women who paid dearly for sin.

She prayed at last. For resolution and strength. To face her destiny.

She had fallen to the darkness and been corrupted. But there was still light in her. Even if it was dimmer now.
It would blaze brightly again.

Rey was making a poor job of stitching a shirt the next morning (her hands were trembling too much to deftly work a needle) when Breha and Satine came bustling into her chambers clearly enthralled in gossip. Sabe, who was reading from the gospels, shot her sisters a scandalized look at such decorum in the Queen’s chambers but they did not seem to care.

“What is it?” Rey asked abandoning her work at the first opportunity.

“Oh Madam!” Breha dropped into a curtsey and then scooted froward almost on her knees. “The news! Such news.”

Rey thought for a terrible, bone-chilling moment that someone Breha knew but then realised there were no men with pikes to lead her to the Tower. It could not be that… not yet. She had planned to confess to Han tonight as they dined together.

“It is Sir Hux! He has secretly married the Duchess of Chaakti!”

For a moment, Rey sat in a manner that showcased her absolute bewilderment. Even Sabe closed her book and promptly lost her page.

“He has married Mistress Netal?” Sabe stuttered. “But… I thought she was trying to gain the Prince’s favour.”

“Clearly she realised that wooing him would get her nowhere. She went for the next best option. And Sir Hux is a powerful Earl. And their temperaments are both as ambitious.” Satine chimed in.

“Does the King know about this?” Rey demanded.

“If he hasn’t then he will soon, Your Grace.” Breha said with clear relish. The prospect of Bazine getting a reprimand would clearly come as a delight to her. While there was never a pre-contract or
any signs of betrothal between Ben and the Duchess, it would still be deemed an underhand and shameful tactic to marry a woman who the world believed might one day be Queen.

Rey got up and started to pace. There was more to this story: why had Bazine and Hux done this? Bazine would never have given up upon a potential Crown unless she knew the cause to be lost or the potential to achieve it to be depleted. Hux too would never have made so bold a move for something as trivial as affection. That man had advancement in his very bone marrow.

She wondered if Ben knew anything of this but could bring herself to enquire. Ben had travelled to Theed Cathedral that day to visit his mother’s tomb and would not be back until nightfall.

Rose came quietly to her side while the sisters discussed the scandal in detail. “What does this mean?” Rose whispered.

“Nothing good. No good at all.” She looked at Rose. At her lady. Her dear friend. The woman she had once deemed a traitor but had shown her loyalty a hundred times over since then. Rey was suddenly struck by an issue she should have paid more heed to: what would become of Rose?

She knew that Rey’s own actions were about to make themselves known and all her ladies would be questioned as a result. She had comforted herself that their genuine lack of knowledge would protect them (she hoped Maz was not quite so perceptive as she appeared in any case) and Han was not cruel but Rose did know. She knew enough and helped enough to be condemned of misprision and treason. She may even go to the block for it. Or worse, the stake.

This new information about Hux and the Duchess spurred her into action. She went to her desk and got out a fresh roll of parchment. Furiously dipping her quill, she began to write…

The Holdo sisters had gone to their mother’s chambers by the time that Finn came to her rooms. Her Master of Horse bowed to her. Sweet Finn who had been a good friend to her. Would he hate her when he knew what she’d done?

Well, she give him a chance of happiness.

“You asked to see me, Your Grace?” He asked rising from his salute.
“I did. But it is not for my sake that I have called you.”

At that moment, Rose came out of Rey’s bedroom after her mistress had set her the, rather pointless, task of rearranging her coffers. In truth, it had been to get Rose out of the way when Finn was summoned. For she knew Rose would raise protest. Sure enough, Rose visibly blanched at the sight of Finn.

“Rose? I mean, My Lady?” Finn stammered. Rose looked from Finn to Rey.

“Madam, what is this?” She demanded.

“The least I could do for you.” Rey turned back to Finn. “You have made two horses ready with good provisions?”

“Yes, as you requested, but where are we going at such short notice?” Finn asked.

“I’m not going anywhere; you two are.”

Finn could not have looked more taken aback if she had declared Chewbacca the new Bishop of Tatooine. Rose looked terrified.

“Milady, no! I must stay here with you.”

“Rose, you have done more for me than I could ever have asked. More than my conscience will allowed. But you will not suffer on my account. I will not permit it.”

“Suffer? What is-” Finn stammered but Rose cut him off.

“I can’t leave you like this! You… you know what you may face!”

“I know. But I also know that you two still care deeply for one another. Even if you are both too
stupid to admit it.”

Finn stopped protesting. It was clear that Rey had struck a truthful cord with him.

“You know as well as I that you are in danger too and I can’t have that. I know you’ve been sensible, that you have a vast amount of gold and you know how to survive. Take it. Leave now and take Finn with you. That is” she looked to Finn “if he will go with you?”

Finn clearly wanted to ask more questions as to why on Earth this was at all happening in the first place but his eyes fell upon Rose. He nodded.

Rose was openly weeping now. “Your Grace...”

“Go now. With my blessing... my friend.”

Finn had to step forward and taken Rose’s hand to pull her away. Rey looked at Finn.

“You will know soon enough. I give you leave to know everything but only when you are both on a ship and have the sea between us. Only when you are safe. Then Rose can tell you the truth; the whole truth.”

Finn nodded. Something about her manner made it clear to him that this was not the time for fighting but of action. Of escape. He’d escaped his old life before; he could do so again.

Rose made much lamentation but was finally led by Finn to the door. His arms about her seemed to both strengthen and quiet her. She turned back to Rey at the door.

“May God send me back to your side – in this life or the next.”

The door clicked behind her and Rey stood alone in every sense of the word.
Han required her to meet him in the audience chamber so she could sit at his side as the newly-weds explained themselves. Jessika got to work making her look as Queenly as possible.

“This is an old tradition and sometimes the Queen is required to beg the King for mercy on their behalf.” Jessika explained fixing her rubies about Rey’s neck. “This will require Hux to humble himself at best but you will have to show yourself available should Han pass judgement.”

Rey was not daunted by this; she knew Han well enough to know that, hate Hux as he did, he wouldn’t condemn him to the Tower for this. At worst, Hux may stand to lose some favour and maybe his place upon the Privy Council. Clearly, Bazine’s plan to always side with the best option had not worked as well as she had planned.

Jessika looked about. “Where is Rose? I haven’t seen her for over an hour.”

Rey had to swallow very hard to stop her voice breaking. “She… has had a note from her mother. Her sister is taken ill and she wants to be there for her. She should be gone about a week.”

“Oh poor Lady Paige, I shall pray for her.”

Pray for us all, Rey mused as her stomach churned ominously. She wanted to place her hand over her abdomen in a way that might ease the nausea but did not need any attention drawn towards her belly. Once again, she wished Ben were here. Somehow knowing he were in the palace would be of help to her.

Rey walked to the throne room and Han greeted her distractedly. He was clearly deeply grieved by this and eager to reprimand the couple.

“Do you think Ben will be hurt by this?” He asked Rey in a tone of weariness.

“He did not even like the Lady.” Rey reasoned. “I doubt he will see this as anything but amusing.”

“Yes. Yes.” He agreed looking a little less grave. “Well, he always had a rather dark sense of humour.”
Rey looked at Han a little longer than necessary. Wanted to savour this moment. In trust in her and his regard. She may very well lose it after dinner and she felt more fear and sorrow for that than anything else.

The doors were opened by the guards and Sir Hux and Lady Netal (or was it Lady Hux now?) were shown in by the guards.

Hux held himself stiffly and gave nothing away as he bowed to the dais where Rey and Han were seated. Bazine, dressed in burgundy velvet and looking almost demure with a high colour and jewelled gable hood, look a more supplicating figure. There was no regret or fear in either face; why would they feel anything like that? A perfect match indeed.

“Could you explain, in your own words, why you have done this?” Han asked coldly.

A muscle in Hux’s face twitched but he did not give his usual tart reply. “I deemed it a good match, Your Grace. The lady was not pre-contracted and the Prince showed no sign of favour so...”

“So for advancement? Well, that’s no surprise. But for you my Lady Duchess?” Han’s eyes narrowed at Bazine’s bent head. “Why the sudden change of heart? You seemed very taken with my son not two weeks ago!”

“Forgive me, Your Grace. I hold the Prince in the highest regard! He is a most goodly and desirous Prince!” Rey had to repress a snort at her sycophantic reply. “But it seemed clear that the Prince did not see me as a wife. And Sir Hux has been so very kind to me.”

Han raised an eyebrow. It was clear he did not believe Hux had been kind a day in his life.

“You did not deem your chances on being the next Queen of this kingdom as being good then?”

There was a twist of Bazine’s mouth but no other reply. “I did not believe it possible. And I felt that in light of the great news-”

“What great news?” Han asked clearly annoyed.
Hux’s eyes flickered to Rey and Rey felt a cold wave of fear wash through her.

“I have eyes in all areas of the palace, Your Grace, and I could not help but notice… when the cloths were delivered to the laundress without a need to clean…”

Oh Lord have mercy. Her linen… why… Oh Lord, why hadn’t she burnt every single one and not just the first. She had given it to Rose to give to the laundress. And of course, they thought the need for an heir from the Prince was no longer necessary. That’s why they had married and that’s why…

“I felt it was not necessary to marry the Prince in such haste.” Bazine interjected. “Now that Your Graces’ are with child.”

Han had gone rigid in his throne and Rey had practically turned to stone. It was not meant to be told like this! He turned his head and looked at her slowly. As though in disbelief, denial and a refusal to believe. She knew that the look in her hazel eyes was all the confirmation he needed that this was not a fable or a nightmare.

_I will save my child_, a fierce voice told her from within, _I will save my baby. Even if go to the block for it._

And no victim is condemned without a hearing from the King.

Chapter End Notes

Shit is officially getting real.

I hope this is okay. I'm suffering a terrible bout of a depressive episode right now. I'm not even sad or suffering mood swings; I feel lethargic and self-isolated. Company is repugnant at the moment and I'm dreading Christmas. Season to be jolly = an absolute nightmare for me. My only consolation is in Reylo right now. The feedback has really helped me so much and I was so happy to see 2000 kudos for this fic. All my readers and commenters have kept me sane and keep me writing so thank you so much for that. It is my medicine to keep going.
The chambers that Rey was sat within were ominously quiet. Almost oppressive in its silence. She was sat upon her chair beside the fire which she had sat upon so many times before. She had talked into the small hours with Han, eating march-pane and drinking hippocras, about ships, fleets and politics. She remembered his promise to take her on a tour of his fleet. He had never fulfilled that promise.

She had not fulfilled hers: she had not given him her obedience and she had not given her loyalty.

Rey could not remember much of what happened in the throne room. It was as though she had been floating above the dais and seeing it all from above. Han, the man who had made a career of blustering his way out of difficult situations, managed to school his expression enough to brazen it out in front of Hux and his new lady. The penance and dishonour that was handed down on the newly-weds was severe – banishment from court and a heavy fine but Rey does not notice. All she knows is that when Han stands, she stands too.

She remembers the gruff command to wait in his chambers and then the sight of his retreating back. She had not seen him since.

Rey has removed her rubies and hood. All the trappings of majesty have been removed. She never wanted them anyway and she feels a certain relief that they are off her body. She wants to be seen as Rey. Not the Queen or some courtier; just the Rey he took pity upon and made his wife.

There are footsteps and the latch is lifted upon the door. Han comes into the apartment.

Rey stands. Out of respect and out of a lack of anything else to do.

He looks grave, tired and grey in the cheeks. He looks at her for a long moment as though trying to read her person like a book; or maybe to try and recognise her for the girl he had once knew.

“You’re with child?”
Rey’s throat was so constricted with emotion she could only nod.

Han looked about him, looked back at her and then pinched the bridge of his nose as though staving off a headache. He did not look like an indignant and vengeful King; he looked like a man completely out of his depth and unsure what to do.

“I’m so sorry.” Rey croaked wishing she didn’t sound so depleted and urging herself to try and remain as strong as she could. “I never… never planned for this to happen.”

“I must know” Han burst out suddenly as though forcing himself to say the words “I must know… even if I don’t want to… was this child the result of… violence?”

Rey did not understand and blinked. Violence?

“It happens to the best of women. I have known it before and I will see him punished Rey, I swear-”

“No!” Rey cried out suddenly all too aware. “I wasn’t- It was nothing like that. This… this is my folly. I was as much a part… It was nothing like that.”

Han looked at her shrewdly as though see if she was lying and then upon seeing something within her that was earnest, he gave a sigh.

“Thank the Maker. Then it is not so bad after all.”

Rey had expected many responses including goblets being thrown at her head, weeping and exploding anger but not this; not concern closely followed with relief.

Han still looked shaky but somewhat resolute. “Oh Rey, don’t look so frightened. Ours is not a true marriage and you are young. You are not the first maid to fall victim to the charms of a gallant courtier nor will you be the last. It is not ideal but we can work with it. There is always a way.”

Rey sank back down into her seat not even caring of what was going on about her. To have such a compassionate response from a man who did not normally know how to handle such situations that
involved sensitivity…

Han looked horrified when her hands flew to her mouth and she burst into heaving sobs.

“Rey! Rey, please! Calm down, this is no need for this…” Han’s hands rested upon her shoulders in a manner that was doubtless meant to be placating but just made Rey cry more. He picked up the ewer of wine on a side table and poured her a decent amount into a goblet. It was thrust into her hands much like the time when they first met.

Somehow his measured response instead of sending her straight to the Tower was more than enough to bring her to her knees.

“Forgive me, Milord. I never meant… never meant….” She couldn’t finish for her sobs.

“Yes, yes, no doubt but please calm down. We need to discuss this.”

Rey took several shaky sips and then managed to gain some control over herself. When she was finally able to see through clear eyes, Han was seated across from her.

“I had thought… that you would tell me yourself. Rather than… hearing it from the likes of Hux.”

“I was going to tell you tonight!” Rey was eager to redeem herself in that regard. “Over dinner. I was going to tell you everything you wanted and needed to know.”

Han nodded and then rubbed his head. “Does the father know?”

Rey shook her head.

“Right. Good. We can pass this off then. My own blood has muddied the precious waters of the succession. Ben is bound to marry one day and one illegitimate child is unlike to do much damage in the long run.”

“You’re… going to claim the child?”
“It shouldn’t be too hard. Many men do it without realising the child isn’t theirs. And so long as the child’s father is dealt with…”

“Dealt with?”

“Sent away. Paid off. Imprisoned. Whatever it takes for him to disappear quietly.”

A new cold wave started to trickle down Rey’s back. Of course. Of course.

He thought that she had fallen prey to some amorous courtier. A man who had flattered her and petted her until she’d been duped into lifting her skirts for him. He didn’t, couldn’t, suspect…

“I must know as soon as possible… who is responsible? If we are to pull this off…”

It was like he was planning an ambush. He was a man of action. This was his kind of world.

Rey could only stare at him as she shook her head. “Sire, passing the child off as yours… it cannot be. Nor can we send the father away.”

“Is he a man of influence?”

“You could say that.” Rey replied dryly.

“Well, that is unfortunate but it is not impossible. We can-”

“No, Your Grace. There is no way. He will know.”

“How can he possibly know if you haven’t told him?” Han demanded.
“He will know.” Rey felt the tears begin again. “I will know too. And to do such a thing… I cannot allow you to do such a thing. Not when-”

“I will not be unkind to the child. It is not to blame.” Han argued.

“No, you would not be unkind to it. How could you be?”

“Then why-”

Rey took the deepest breathe she had ever taken.

“You could never be unkind… to your grandchild.”

There was no sound. The crackling of the fire seemed to fade into nothingness. The sound of approaching horses in the courtyard died to a ringing silence. There was not a footfall in the palace, not a cry nor a whimper, as Rey finally laid bare that the man to get Rey into this situation was her husband’s own son.

Han is at first struck with a look of bemusement then his face was as pale as though he were only a corpse. He slowly rose to his feet and with slow steps he walked about the room. It was as though he’d lost something but didn’t know where to find it or even what had disappeared in the first place. He eventually stood before his chair again and put his hands on it as though to keep himself upright.

“I knew I wasn’t mad. That look in his eyes… I should have known.”

Rey didn’t trust herself to speak or the effect it would have so could only watch and listen in wonderment.

“He kept looking at you.” Han sounded like he was almost talking to himself. “At first, I thought he was jealous and distrustful – well, how could he not be? You were so young and now the Queen. But then he wasn’t so hostile. He was acting almost nobly. And then he kept looking at you. His eyes… his eyes…” Han looked not at Rey but almost over her head. “When did this start?”
“When you went to France. When I was Regent. It became… more than just words after that.”

“You begged me not to leave you alone with him.” It was not a question and Rey wasn’t required to answer. “What did he do to…”

“He was kind. Gentle. I held out for as long as I could but…” Rey didn’t need to explain how she had only been human and how the warmth of his arms had become too much to resist.

“But… but Ben. Ben?”

There was confusion in his voice. Unspeakable hurt. He could have forgiven a tumble with a faceless man but to be cuckolded by his own son.

Suddenly Han threw the chair to aside. Rey jumped to her feet in fright but Han was on the other side of the room before anything else could happen.

“Han! Please, my baby!”

“You will stay in your apartments. “There was a steeliness in his voice that he had never directed at her before. “You will await my judgement. While I deal with my son.”

Rey wanted to fly across the room and beg her case but the door was shut on her before she even reached the carpet before it.

There were no bars on the door but still sentries posted outside.

A gilded cage… was still a cage all the same.

Ben crossed himself before the marble-tomb of his mother and rose from his knees. After kneeling on a stone floor for the better part of half the day, he felt achy and fatigued but spiritually uplifted. It had been a day of remembrance and he’d felt especially drawn to the tomb of his mother and siblings. He scrutinized once again the likeness of his mother that lay in eternal rest and prayer
above her resting place. Ben would have sculptured an effigy that had her hair loose and flowing. The gable hood had been too cumbersome for her. He could remember her in her prime with hair so long and dark that she could sit on it. She’d kissed his own hair that was so like hers and let him touch it and sometimes brush it. He wished that his memories had been more vivid and not sinking away and blurring with advancing years.

It had been a good idea to come here today. He’d sought comfort and spiritual restoration that could not be achieved at court. And he’d felt an overwhelming need to seek his mother’s blessing as well as God’s.

He’d opened his heart in prayer and yearned for Leia to sit it all. To see the love he felt. The hope and the joy that Rey was capable of providing.

*She’s not his wife,* he’d begged her to understand again and again. *It is no true marriage. He cannot love her like he loved you. He cannot love her like I do. Do not condemn me and do not judge her. For I suspect she loves me too.*

He’d reached out to Jaina too. That little baby with brown curly hair and a toothless grin always ready for him.

*You’d be almost four and twenty now. A woman with maybe her own family. Would you have liked her? If you knew what she meant to me would you forgive us? Would you swap French hoods and gowns and dance together as I watched?*

He crosses himself one last time and bows to the effigy of the Queen before turning away and retreating to the main cathedral.

Theed Cathedral is as quiet as it ever is while the monks sing their evening-song.

Rey has been out of sorts for nearly a fortnight. She is not the sort to be prone to weeping or ailments yet she seems to be shut away from him a lot lately. He will have to try to get Rose to arrange for him to see her. He needs to see her.

There is an approach behind him and he turns. Dameron was approaching him with a delegation of soldiers. At first Ben thinks that maybe they have come at the Archbishop’s request (Ben was careful to come in while his uncle was not in attendance) but they stop before him.
“Dameron? What is this?”

“Your Grace, you are to come with me by order of the King. He requests you to meet him as a matter of urgency.”

“What for?”

“That is not my business.” Dameron declared, looking a little put out to not know the source of the Prince’s summoning.

Ben looked at the soldiers with a growing sense of unease.

“Where am I to go?”

“The royal lodgings. At the Tower.”

The Tower. He was to be housed in the Tower again?

Ben wanted to demand what caused him to be called to the place that was the most feared prison in the country. He had spent enough time in that place without wanting to go back.

Then a voice told him in his head: *He knows.*

*Oh God help me.*

*Rey.*

Chapter End Notes

The response from the last chapter was so overwhelming I decided to update a bit earlier. Writing is my solace and I wanted to deliver.
For those who wondered what Han's reaction would be: I always saw that he would be shocked but somewhat practical in the event of Rey falling pregnant by an unknown source. But to find out Ben is the father... Han is a human man and isn't an angel by any means. Of course, he's going to be angry and betrayed. There's only so much a man can take calmly. For him to clap his hands and go, "Oh goodie a grandchild!" at once is a little unrealistic even with their marriage of convenience.
The barge up the river was quiet and smooth. There was no spectators upon the riverbank, gawping to see who had been captured and led up the Thames in disgrace. So his impending imprisonment was as secret to the world as it was to Dameron and his soldiers. There was small comfort in that.

Ben had his cloak on and his hood raised. Not to hide himself but to give himself an element of privacy from Dameron’s hawk eyes. He had come quietly to the barge that was waiting for him. What was the use of running? It would only cause a chase to ensue; one he could not possibly win. Yet as he sailed up river with the sky as grey as old porridge, he looked up.

It was a cold day that promised a colder night. Still he closed his eyes. He felt the chill on his face. Looked up at the sky. Watched the gulls fly overhead. Even the stink from the river was welcome to him. He had not known this fear before when he had last been captured.

Maybe because he had a reason to live now.

They arrived at the Tower steps in an obscenely quick amount of time. Traitor’s Gate. An apt title. The steps were slippery as he alighted and he had to watch his feet so he did not stumble. He looked up at the sky again. There were crows squawking out in a melody that was anything but pleasant. He wished he had longer to listen to it.

“You are to be taken to the Royal Apartments.” Dameron informed him. “There will be pages to wait on you there.”

“I don’t need pages. I can look after myself.” He argued without heat. He did not care; it all seemed so unimportant. He looked up at the White Tower: was Rey here? Or in a dungeon? The idea of her on a straw-strewn, filthy floor made him want to grab a sword from one of the guards and make a foolish bid for freedom. He could only keep his eyes sharp as he was led to his rooms.

The rooms were much like what he had expected and encountered before. It was still spacious with the old canopy above the bed, a prie-dieu and pieces of furniture. It was a sumptuous lodging rather than a cell. If it were not for the locked door and the guards outside it may have been pleasant.

“Your needs will be attended to here. You shall be honourably housed.” Dameron announced a
little uselessly. Ben knew how things were run here. He walked to a window and looked down at Tower Green. He’d been at this window when Snoke had had his head stricken off.

Would he kneel there too?

It was night and his food had been bought to him (and taken away uneaten) when Ben heard sounds from outside his rooms. Footsteps and locks turning.

Ben stood, half expecting to see the Constable of the Tower before him. It was customary for the man in charge of the prison to make himself known to guests. The door finally opened.

Ben had to blink several times before he believed his eyes.

It was not the Constable; it was the King.

With his pages in attendance not far behind him, Han made a gesture with his hand to them, effectively dismissing them. They bowed, retreated and closed the door.

The two men were left alone.

Ben was shocked to not only see him here but how grey and defeated he looked. But also at the set of his jaw. The hard look in his eyes. Ben saw, for the first time, flashes of the man that Han Solo had once been. Of the mercenary and smuggler who had dared to tell a Princess of the Royal Blood that she wasn’t going to run roughshod over him.

Han stepped forward so he was within two feet of his son. Ben opened his mouth to speak…

And fell to the floor.

At first Ben lay there dazed. His mouth stung viciously and when he spat onto the floor there was blood. Ben touched his bleeding mouth tentatively and found it only an external cut. It would heal.
Han had never struck him before. Not ever.

“Get up.” The voice of his father was dangerous and barely audible with palpable fury. Ben pushed himself into a sitting position and looked up at the King, his sleeve still blotting his lip.

Ben got to his feet soundlessly. He did not try and repay his father for the blow; in his heart he knew he deserved much worse. He would endure much worse for her.

“Why?” Han spat. “Why did you do it? Why her?”

Ben put a few steps between them as he walked to his desk. Best to be safe. “I love her.”

“Is that what you told her? Promised her?”

“It’s what I meant. It’s what I still mean. Will always mean.” Ben said with heat in his voice. He was a useless excuse for a son but he wouldn’t be accused of being anything but devoted to her.

“You knew that she had been alone her whole life!” Han threw at him. “You knew that she craved love and acceptance above anything else! You used that and pursued that until you got what you wanted-”

“NO!” Ben bellowed, affectively causing his mouth to sting but not caring an inch. “Don’t do that! Don’t make out as though I did this to cause her hurt! To cause you hurt! It was never about that. I was heartbroken when I found out...” Ben turned away to prevent his father to see his eyes beginning to water at the mere memory. Even now, when it may redeem him, he would not show his father how much he had suffered upon realising how far removed that Rey would always be to him.

“Found out? You knew I’d married again and I had no other option. You knew her age. You knew who she was-”

“I didn’t!” Ben bellowed. “Not the first time.”

“First time? You met for the first time in my rooms!”
“She met me for the first time in her rooms. But I had seen her before.” Han barked no argument to this so Ben saw that he clearly had a desire to hear what on earth Ben was alluding to. Ben sigh and he looked out of the window as he had done that first morning. “I saw her. She was sitting beneath my window by the fountain. With that damn cat of hers. She had her hood off and a simple dress. She didn’t see me but I saw her. I thought… I thought she was a simple Knight’s daughter. Maybe the sister of an Earl. But she was like nothing I’d never beheld before. So innocent, so pure… so beautiful. I made plans; I was going to find out who she was. Imagine my horror when I was led to your rooms and saw her dressed as a Queen and claiming to be my stepmother.”

There was a brief pause. “But when you found out who she was… you’ve never given your heart to any woman from what I know of. You’re honestly saying that you had no control over yourself with her? You? Who has always controlled everything you do to a fault?”

“Your have no idea how much I tried. Why else do you think I was so cold to her? I hated her and I hated you for the pain I was forced to endure.”

“You’ve always hated me.” Han said with sudden derision. “You’ve never forgiven me for my mistakes! Over and over again you have blamed me for what you suffered as a boy. Did you never consider that me and your mother suffered too? You grew close to one sister and never came back after that. Me? I lost so many children that I can’t pray for them at night without tears! Yes, I failed you and yes, we should have realised what an absolute bastard Snoke was but we’ve paid a thousand times over for it! Your mother died for sorrow of it. Is this your way of punishing me too? By taking a girl I took into my care hoping to be a father again and utterly ruining her!”

Ben grabbed hold of a goblet on the table and was in the process of throwing back his arm to hurl it at his father when suddenly he stopped. What was the point? It would only prove his father right. He lamely threw the goblet away like it disgusted him.

“Don’t you understand?” Ben asked in a quiet almost defeated voice. “For the first time in my life, my actions weren’t influenced through hatred or resentment. I did none of it out of hatred for you but for love of her. This had nothing to do with you! I hated myself for what I was doing and I promise you she never let herself rest in the knowledge that she was betraying you. She despised herself and she despised me. But I loved her enough that she couldn’t let me go. And I wasn’t going to set her free. I was too selfish for that.”

“That’s easier to believe.” Han sighed. He didn’t sound as furious as he had been but beaten down. Disorientated. Almost confused in how he got here at all.

Ben looked at Han. “Where is she? Is she safe? If you’ve hurt her-”
“I couldn’t hurt her even now.” Han dismissed. “She’s confined to her rooms but no-one knows… no-one knows.”

“Thank God.” Ben whispered and sank onto a chair. If she was in relative comfort then he could quite easily suffer the Tower’s worst torments. “What do you intend to do?”

“You’ve put me in an impossible situation.” Han grunted.

“Release yourself of the marriage and put me away.” Ben suggested. He didn’t care anymore; he could live his life shut away if he had to.

“To release myself would leave her dishonoured. It would declare her a loose woman.”

“Why? No-one knows of what has passed between me and her.”

“Oh think sensibly Ben!” Han hissed. “If I declare the marriage null and void and leave her in her condition, she will be the mother of a declared bastard.”

It was as though the words took a long time reaching Ben’s head. His brain had suddenly turned to churned butter.

“What?”

“The rules of the Church!” Han snapped. “Divorcing a wife while she is with child would rob the child of my name. To be a bastard son of a King has a certain prestige if they are recognised. To be the abandoned pregnant wife of a King… the world will know.”

Ben stood slowly and looked at his father through eyes that had lost their ability to focus.

“With child? Rey… is with child?”
Han stopped pacing and looked at him. His eyes widened in dawning amazement.

“You didn’t know?”

Ben couldn’t even shake his head.

_With child. My child._

Han put his face in his hands, looking like a man who didn’t know how much more he could take. The two men stood in silence for a while, one clearly wondering how this came to be at all while the other couldn’t get past any other thought other than the baby now in the Queen’s belly.

After five minutes torturous silence, Ben spoke.

“What are you going to do to them?” It was them now; mother and child and the stakes had suddenly never been higher. He had to save them.

“I don’t know.” Han said almost plaintively. “If… if the child had been the result of Rey falling for some random courtier, I could have passed it off as my own. It would have hurt but… we’ve never truly been man and wife. I’m sure you know that during your little pillow talks.”

Ben nodded dumbly. “When you fell ill with a fever… I was being obstinate and she… she blurted it out in temper.”

“I could have looked the other way.” Han sighed. “Seen the child as almost like a grandchild. But now that I know it actually will be of my blood… I don’t know what to do!”

“You should never have married her.” Ben suddenly said with irrational fury. “She was too young and you didn’t love her! Why did you do it? Why?”

“Because if I didn’t, she would have fallen to our enemies!” Han spat. He shook his head as though in contempt. “You want to know the truth? I ask the council to have her married to you.”
Of all the retorts that Ben had anticipated, that was not one of them.

“Oh yes. I had just lost your mother and I wanted to remain alone. She was a quarter of my age and you needed a wife. But the council wouldn’t allow it. You were still lodged in here for treason! You were utterly unreliable and couldn’t be trusted. So I stepped into the void. I offered my hand. I offered her a home and she took it. But just think: if you hadn’t been so caught up in hatred, if you hadn’t been blinded by Snoke and had just shown me and your mother an ounce of loyalty, everything you have ever wanted could now be yours! She could be a Princess and a Queen in waiting. Her pregnancy would be heralded and celebrated. God forsake us! She may have even birthed you a child by now! But before you blame me for what you can no longer have, take a moment and remember that I would have given you all! This is your true punishment Ben: to be denied to you through no-ones actions but your own!”

Ben had been beaten with fists and with emotion nearly all his life but nothing had sent him to his knees like this.

Rey… could have been his? He could have loved her in the open? The axe was nothing to this.

Ben remained on the floor on his knees when he finally spoke.

“Can I ask two things of you?” His voice was croaky like he hadn’t spoken for days.

“What?” Han asked sounding just as bad.

“Spare them. I don’t care how you manage it but for the love of God, spare them.”

“I would never hurt either of them. One of them is my blood after all.” Han replied. “What’s the other thing?”

Ben breathed deeply through his nose.

“Will you bring the block to me? I want to practise how to best lie my head on it. I want it done right.”
There was a silence and Ben looked up at his father. Han looked like he had received a hit much like the one he had dealt Ben. For the first time, Ben thought that maybe his father didn’t quite know what to do with him. But the idea that Ben wanted to be prepared for death was clearly not a welcome prospect.

“I must think on this.” Han replied gruffly and turned from the room.

The door was ominously loud as it shut behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Interesting fact: Katherine Howard, the fifth wife of Henry VIII, asked to have the block brought to her the night before her execution so she could practise how to rest her head on it. If I was being beheaded I think I'd ask for the block too.

Thank you so much for everyone’s amazing support for this story. It’s so wonderful to read and makes me update all the quicker.
His rooms were lit with candles when Han arrived back to his apartments but the King dismissed his pages and proceeded to blow out as many of them as he could to make it dim enough to be almost dark. The moon is full and bright through the windows. He would throw them open to let in the night air if the Thames didn’t smell so bad and the threat of disease wasn’t always imminent.

He takes up the ewer of wine and a goblet and sits at a table to drink and ponder how it had all gone so wrong and what he was meant to do now.

For that was the thing: he genuinely didn’t know which way to turn.

Ben’s quiet and rather clever request to have the block brought to his rooms before an axe severed his head had left him so cold that he had practically ran from the room. They hadn’t been clever words either; he’d been as serious as though he’d just placed his hand upon a Bible. His son; his own son; their first baby; that funny little boy with big ears and lots of dark hair even as a newborn… he was prepared to die and he was expecting his father to give the order. This wasn’t bluster or a bluff and it terrified him.

This was diplomacy and he was always poor at it. He needed Leia for this. She was hot-tempered and volatile but she had always had the ability to sit down and think things over. But could she have dealt with this?

Han takes a deep gulp of wine to try and calm his heart. It’s racing again. It’s been racing since he’d sat in the throne-room and been told by Hux, of all men, that his wife whom he had never lain with was to become a mother.

What did he do? He couldn’t kill his son. He couldn’t put away Rey. He couldn’t take the child away from his mother. His own grandchild.

He was angry with them both for lying to him. If they had just come to him before he went to Calais… what? What could he have done? He cut his hand on their wedding night. He produced a bloody sheet to prove his wife’s virtue. Would anyone believe him if he then turned around and said he had been lying after all? Probably not but if he swore on the sacrament that he had never lain with her then who could contradict him? He was still a King after all.
But now Rey was with child and even if he did declare that he had left her untouched that would expose her to the world as an adulteress. Adultery in a Queen was high treason. The penalty was death by burning.

Even if he pardoned her for the act, the child would be known as a bastard. Even if he annulled their marriage and wrote to the Pope for a dispensation so Ben and Rey could marry, she would be forever shamed and dishonoured. She would never be free of the scandal and the child would never know peace. It was all a complete mess.

“Even I would struggle with this one.”

Han, who had been leaning over the table in despair, raised his head slowly. He’d heard it… yet he couldn’t believe it. He’d thought never to hear that voice again.

He turns and looks into the shadows.

She’s sat upon one of the high-backed chairs in the corner of the rooms. She doesn’t wear any ugly gable hood upon her silvered mane. Her hair is not loose but done up elegantly. It is so long that she could sit on it when it is loose. Her gown is grand enough to show status and her jewels only add to her magnificence. Her face is serene and a little amused as though his shock was comical and almost to be expected.

“Leia?”

“Well, it’s not fitting to refer to your wife as ‘Your Grace’, is it?” She remarked drily.

He doesn’t quip back as he usually would. He just drinks her in for a moment and oh how his heart is glad to see her.

“Leia… what do I do?” Best get to the point. “What do I do?”

Leia sighs. “He loves her. She loves him. Of that, I am certain. Small consolation though it is.”
“The child. The child!”

“Our grandchild. An heir at last.” Leia said almost wistfully. “You know that you could never hurt any of them Han. Otherwise you wouldn’t be the man I married.”

“I didn’t want to remarry at all!” Han suddenly felt a desperate need to explain. “I just wanted to-”

“I know.” Leia interrupts. “I don’t doubt you. You’ve done well. I’ve been proud of you. Heaven forfend, I’ve even been proud of Ben. No matter how stupid and selfish he’s been, this at least proves he’s capable of genuine love. I even like her. I can’t help but like her.”

“She’s not a bad person. She’s made mistakes. But haven’t we all?” Han grips the table. His chest is finding the task of breathing hard. “I’m so tired Leia. Oh God, I’m so tired.”

“Then finish your business. Do what we both know needs to be done. Then come to me.”

Han staggers from his seat and moves. He moves towards her.

Rey sat in the window seat with her shoes off and her arms around her knees like she used to do in her little stone room in Jakku when the nights were cold and she huddled within herself for warmth. She’d cried all the tears she was capable of shedding and now she felt a calm wash over her. She looked over the royal gardens and wonders yet again where Ben is. Whether he is well? Whether he knows yet that she is ruined and carrying the baby that she had always dreamed of. Her gown is all creased where she’s huddled in on herself and she looks less like a Queen and more like a clueless girl. She hoped that Han comes back to her so she can explain. She also hoped that he never comes back and she never has to encounter that betrayed look in his eyes. To know she was the cause of such despair is more than she can stand.

Rey unfolds herself slowly and ignores the pain in her stiff body. She wonders whether she should try and get some sleep. She’s so very tired but feels she will never rest again.

She is standing in the middle of the room when there is a commotion outside. A page is through
the door and past the guards before she can even grab her hood.

“Your Grace.” He gasps. “You must come quickly; it is the King.”

Rey sees the look of alarm on the young man’s face and realises that this is not the summons for her to be taken to a dungeon. Han is in some kind of trouble.

Rey ran with the page down the galleries to the King’s chamber. Her sleeves are discarded, her hood is off and her shoes left behind by the window seat. She must have made a sorry sight of a Queen. But it mattered not.

It mattered not.

When she finally bursts into the King’s rooms, she was faced with disarray.

Doctors were dashing about Han’s bed and Han was lying prone upon it. He was now so pale that Rey could see the veins upon his face and there was a thick sheen of sweat upon his face. His eyes were closed but he grimaced in pain. It was clear that losing consciousness would have been a welcome relief to him.

“What happened?” Rey demanded, feeling fear rise up.

“We found him on the floor. We think it’s his heart.” The page explained looking to the royal physician as though to confirm this. The old man, looking flushed and overwrought, nodded gravely.

“We have applied poultices and infusions but it makes no use. I think you need to be here.”

Rey looks at Han again. Han was fading? No. Even now it was repugnant to her. She crossed to his bedside and grasped his hand.

“Han? Han, it’s me. It’s Rey. Can you hear me?”
Han did not answer at first but he grasped her hand tightly as another spasm of pain took him. He was murmuring distractedly.

“Lei… Leia.” He twisted his head as though hoping wherever he turned, his late wife might be, even with his eyes closed.

“Han, it’s me!” She called to him as though to break through the haze. Slowly, his eyes opened and focused on her. His eyes, once so accusing and betrayed, seemed almost glad to see her.

“Is she here?” Han asked. “Is she still here?”

“Who?” Rey asked though knowing deep down to whom he referred.

“I told her to wait for me. She’s been waiting.” Han looked at Rey almost plaintively. “I’m too tired to feel anger now.”

It was the closest to forgiveness that Rey could have expected. Choking on a sob, she kissed his hand. “I’m so so-”

“I know.” He sighed and then grimaced as another spasm made his chest almost jolt.

Rey didn’t notice the room filling up until a hand was on her shoulder. She looked up to see Lando Calrissian standing over her and looking utterly distraught at the sight of his old friend. Mitaka was here too and Sir Hux. Chewbacca came to the other side of the bed and grasped Han’s other hand. The huge hairy man looked to be in such pain at the immanent loss of his friend that Rey wanted to comfort him in some way. She shot a glare instead at Hux who, far from looking grief-stricken, looked rather interested in the clear death of a King.

“What are you all doing here?” Rey demanded.

“The council must be witnesses. For his soul and for the good of the court.” Rey could read between the lines there: he needed to make sure Han was dead before he ran off to tell the world.

“I don’t care about that!” Rey spat. “He’s in pain! He’s… he’s…” Rey couldn’t say the words
‘dying’ - she just couldn’t.

“We want to be here.” Lando said gently. “We don’t want him to be alone.”

A priest was brought forward and gave him unction (though Rey knew that he was too weak to care and had never been a theologian anyway) and Rey was soothing his hair off his head when he spoke.

“I entreat you to watch over my son as he rules. And the child which is yet to be born. It is of my blood and my Queen must be treated with honour.”

He said this with great effort but with a clear enough voice for it to carry. Rey nearly dropped the hand she was clasping. Had he just publicly declared responsibility for the baby? Had he just saved her from any possible problems and declared her child a prince?

There was a ripple around the bed as this news sank in. Chewbacca’s head raised and looked around as though the baby that had been spoken of was about to come forward and shake his hand. Mitaka was trembling (as usual). Lando, whose hand had not left Rey’s shoulder, now clutched it tighter. His murmurs of consolation and condolences were lost to Rey. She could only stare at her husband in the most earnest gratitude.

“Can I have a moment alone with him? Please?” Rey croaked. The sight of Rey, normally so composed and unemotional, blotchy with tears, grief and gratitude was enough for the men to back away to the next room. Turning back to Han, who was clearly losing strength fast, she whispered: “Why?”

“Enough blood has been spilt.” He said in a voice as rough as gravel, his chest heaving for breath and with pain. “Maybe this will go some way to apologising to Ben.”

Rey moved as close as she could to him. “I swear that your name will not be besmirched. I will have none call you names in your death. I will not have you known as a cuckold. I swear, upon the damnation of my soul, I will never stain your reputation. I will never be any other Queen but yours.”

The words were spoken wildly and with fervour. But it was a promise that she knew she would keep. She would birth Ben’s baby, she would love only him with all her heart and she would live quietly. But she would never wear another crown without staining Han’s reputation.
She would never be Queen again.

If this was the only way she could show her gratitude and true repentance to Han then she would do it. It was the least he deserved.

Han looked to her as though seeing if she was being earnest. Seeing her eyes and the truth within them, he seemed to almost sag. With relief. And with rest.

“Ben...” He croaked. “Tell him… tell him...”

“I will.” She knew what he would say. She would pass the message on. “I will.”

The Privy Council came back into the room as he finally murmured: “Leia?”

Rey sniffed loudly. “She’s waiting. Go to her.”

Rey clung to his hand so hard that when his went slack, she almost didn’t notice. But then Rey saw his face. She saw the peace.

He had seen Her. He had gone to Her. She would look after him now.

Ben had been lying, unsleeping, upon his bed when the gates to the Tower opened.

He’d been incapable of sleep. His pillow was damp and his eyes stung with tiredness. But he couldn’t rest. He’d never rest again.

Rey was with child. His baby. He was going to be a father. Yet would he ever see his baby born? It was looking increasingly unlikely.
An heir at last. But at what price?

*If you hadn’t been so easily led, that heir may have been legitimate. Rey could have been yours. She could have been your Queen. She could have been yours!*

It was like he was walking in a continuous circle with no end and no respite. It was all ruined. It was all hopeless.

So when the gates open and Ben pulled himself to the window to look down into the yard, his stomach heaved at the sight of the lit torches leading the way and the barely distinguishable figures of the Privy Council.

Was this it? Was he to die this very night? In the dead of night and without any more time to even write a letter?

Ben wondered what he could do other than face it bravely. He was no coward in the face of battle. He wouldn’t whimper before the block.

There was the sound of keys in doors and the heavy tread of footsteps up the stairs towards his rooms.

The door was opened and Sir Chewbacca, Lando Calrissian and Mitaka came into the room. Ben stood tall before them and was about to ask if it was his time to die when Calrissian stepped forward and dropped to his knee. Chewbacca and Mitaka promptly followed.

Ben looked at them with mounting bewilderment when Calrissian raised his hand and offered him something.

It was a ring. A ring that Han always wore. His coronation ring. He didn’t take it off. No King took it off unless…

“God Save the King.” Calrissian announced and then bowed his head in homage.

Far away outside the tower walls, the bells of every church in London began to ring.
You have no idea how much writing and people's words have been helping me. My moods are not good and I'm constantly teary at the moment. So truly you have helped me more than my medication at the moment. You have my eternal love.
It was said that, while the kingdom was in mourning for the old King, there was definitely a note of excitement in the streets of London. It had been over thirty years since they had held the hope for a coronation and a new reign. Even the past scandals and unsuccessful usurpation was conveniently forgotten in favour of enthusiastic hope for the future. It was, after all, a seamless succession. From parents to a son the crown would be passed and the kingdom had not experienced that in over a hundred year. If anyone was sceptical of Ben’s ability to rule as well as his famous parents, they were keeping suitably quiet. For now.

Ben heard it all through a haze. All he could do was pray.

His emotions was so confused from the constant chopping and changing of his circumstances that he didn’t know what to do. In that moment within the Tower, he was grasped by three different emotions simultaneously.

Unspeakable grief for his father’s passing.

Relief for his own survival for he was now beyond Han’s malice (such as it ever was).

Anticipation for his crowning. And for when he could see Rey again.

The Queen was as well as could be expected, it was reported. She had adorned her mourning garb with clear grief and had been sequestered in her chambers as was befitting for a Queen Dowager. Her ladies were with her as were the doctors to keep account of her condition. It had been announced to him that the Queen was revealed to be with child. The next heir to the throne after himself, of course. Until he married and beget his own heirs.

The news of Han’s words to his council, announcing Rey’s state and claiming it as his own, renewed his grief all the more and he could not help but weep into his mother’s rosary beads for his father’s soul. He ordered that five hundred masses be said for his father’s soul. He would make
the order to five hundred daily if he could only show his father one more time how sorry he was for all that he had done. He’d been a truly pitiful son in every respect and saying sorry was simply not good enough anymore.

He would have his father buried alongside his mother. Their tomb would be made of polished marble and their hands would clasp. In life, they had been a tempestuous couple at best. In death, they would be reunited and rest together as they should have been allowed to before. It was the only way he could say goodbye to either of them now.

Ben tried to sit down and compose a letter to Rey. Telling her that all would be well now and everything was going to go right for them. That she just needed to sit tight, keep their baby safe and he would fix everything. But even now that was too dangerous to commit to a letter. So he planned to go to Naboo Palace and see her himself.

For, as soon as her mourning garb was taken off, he would make his offer plain: he would make her Queen once again. It would take a lot of work to convince his council that it was politically advantageous but she was still a Kenobi and that name meant more than even her dower lands. She was a popular and well-liked Queen. And she was clearly fertile.

It would require a dispensation to marry his father’s widow and he would need to pass an act of parliament to declare the baby both his own and legitimate to the succession. He would probably have to forfeit almost all his gold to do so. But he would do it.

He would get his dispensation, he would marry Rey and she would be Queen once more.

In light of that thought, the crown that was due to be placed upon his head looked almost trite.

The journey up the river to Naboo was done at nightfall. The river was smooth and it was best to conduct his business in private; to travel at daylight would draw too much attention to himself and would prompt too many questions as to why he was leaving his royal residence before his coronation. It was decided that he would be crowned within a month. That would give him enough time to provide a sumptuous funeral for Han and not look disrespectful in assuming his own much weightier role.

Lor San Tekka awaited his arrival. It was a bizarre reflection upon his first arrival from the Tower. Only this time, he was not being ushered by cover of darkness into his room and kept under close
watch as a prisoner without a cell. He was now King and to be treated with honour. The bow that the aged Bishop bestowed to him was much more dignified and earnest now.

“Welcome, Your Grace. My deepest condolences.”

“Thank you Bishop. You will be participating in the funeral service I trust?”

“I shall. Your father was a great King. And a good man.” He crossed himself to indicate his respect and earnest desire for Han to find rest.

“How is the Queen?”

“She is melancholic as to expected. It is so sad to know that this happy time should be marred with such trials for her.”

Ben nodded. “I wish to see her. I feel I should pay my respects. She takes her meals in her chambers, I believe?”

“She claims to need the privacy to grieve. There will now be less need for women to be present within the court. Until you marry of course.”

Ben nodded but said nothing. It was best to speak to Rey himself before he declared his intentions for her to remain within the Queen’s apartments for many years to come.

The mood within the palace of Naboo was sombre. All the courtiers were donned in respectful black but bowed and curtsied deeply to their new King as he walked through the halls. How the wheel of fortune turns for us all, Ben thought drily. There have been times when half these people would refuse to talk to me for fear of losing Han’s favour. Yet here they were, already clamouring to show deference to their new King and the man who could give favours and influence. He had not a word for any of them.

Ben was escorted to the Queen’s rooms and allowed access.

At first he thought it looked a little like a confining chamber. There was black and mournful
tapestries hung all around the room with only candles and the fire providing light. The night sky would not have been permitted to let in daylight anyway for the tapestries also covered the windows. It was like walking into a cocoon. Or a sweltering hive.

The ladies of the bedchamber, Jessika and Maz, dipped into low curtsies before him. They were both wearing unbecoming gable hoods and pained expressions. Their grief, Ben was glad to see, seemed genuine. He saw genuine distress at what they had both lost; Maz had been around long enough to see Han crowned and Jessika had seemed genuinely fond of Han as she had grown up in Leia’s household.

“Where is the Queen?” He asked as softly as he could.

“Resting, Sire.” Jessika ventured. “She is in need of rest. She eats what we give her and goes to bed when bidden but… she is struggling.” The tremor in Jessika’s voice was quite touching to hear. She seemed to be genuinely worried for her mistress. It made her crimes of having children far too easily and frequently seem pardonable at last.

“May I see her?”

Maz was in the process of explaining how Rey needed rest when the door to her presence chamber opened. Rey came out with her eyes cast down.

She was wearing a damask gown of the deepest black and not a single speck of her was showing beneath her gable hood. The veil beneath her headdress was also black. And for the first time since he’d known her, she looked pale. Yet his eyes went to her midriff. There was still no sign beneath her stomacher of the life that bloomed within. The life he had put there.

She came into the middle of the room and curtsied so low that she was practically sitting down. Her eyes remained cast down so she had not yet looked upon him.

Ben motioned for her to rise but her eyes were so resolutely cast down that she did not see. It was only when Maz began to help her up that she finally looked upon him. It was enough to take Ben aback to see how dull and washed out her eyes looked. Like a shutter had come down behind them which let no more emotion out. What had she endured while he was within the Tower first as a prisoner and then as a King in waiting?

“Leave us.” He instructed to her women and without argument they departed to the next room. The
door closing behind them seemed to echo.

Ben wanted to grasp hold of Rey. Kiss her lovely face, her rosy lips, and whisper over and over again that they were safe. That he would look after her now. But he saw clearly that such attentions would be unwelcome in her current grief. She was grieving; he could see that as sincerely as he could see his own face in the mirror. This poor lost girl was grieving for the first man who had ever shown her affection.

“Are you well?” was all he could think to ask instead. “Do you need anything? Anything at all?” It all sounded rather infantile in his mind. Yet he heard that women sometimes craved on things in pregnancy. He would indulge her anything right now.

Instead she walked, almost without seeing, to a chair beside the fire. She sat without asking permission but Ben couldn’t really care about etiquette right now.

“I was there.” Rey whispered. She was staring out as though far away and at something that Ben couldn’t see. “I was at his side in the end. I held his hand as he...” She swallowed. “Chewbacca and Calrissian were there too. He wasn’t alone. He was never alone.”

Ben swallowed as his throat burned. He almost wanted Rey to stop speaking about it but he knew she needed this. She needed to tell him what happened.

“The doctors believe it was his heart. He’d been having chest pains for a while. You know how I’ve been using the palace herb garden for remedies? I thought they had done the trick. He seemed so much better lately.” Her eyes were over-bright. “He kept calling for Leia. Your mother. He wanted her with him. He wanted his wife with him. His true wife. Sometimes I felt he could see her when I could not.” Her hands were shaking in her lap but he didn’t dare take them in his. “He forgave me. And he forgave you... he kept trying to pass a message on to you. A message of love. Of forgiveness. But it was too taxing for him. He was in too much pain. I said that I would pass it on to you. That I understood. Then he called for Leia one last time. I told him to go to her. And then he was gone.”

Her hand flew to her mouth as a sob broke free of her chest. She nearly bent double with the pain of her grief. Ben, no longer calm either, went to his knees before her.

“It’s okay. I know. I know.” His own cheeks were damp with how well he knew her pain. May God forgive him for the pain he had bought his earthly father. “Try and stay strong. You need to stay strong.” In that moment he felt bold enough to press his palm to her stomach.
He felt overwhelmed. The life that was in there was half of him. And even in this terrible pain, he couldn’t deny the joy that bought him. His own beautiful child was growing within her.

Rey’s sobs subsided enough to place her hand over his. And for a moment they felt the kindling of hope. The world couldn’t be truly lost to them when they had created something so lovely.

Rey was the first to break the moment. She took her hand away and Ben took that as his prompt to remove his own though he did so with much reluctance.

“I will see him honoured. He will be remembered as a hero. Though, God knows, he shunned that role in life.” Ben began to pace. “We need to show a period of mourning. It would be unseemly if we did not. Maybe half a year? Then I will petition the council and the Pope for a dispensation. It will probably be a lot more if I maintain that the child is my father’s. It might be easier to confess.”

“Publicly declare my child a bastard?” Rey’s tone is withering as though daring him to contradict her.

“We can have him declared legitimate by another dispensation. And marry before we have any more children. The kingdom has swallowed worse. And your name still carries much weight; they will be more willing to accept you as Queen a second time than a foreign alliance no matter what benefits that may bring.”

Rey looked at Ben with the same shuttered eyes as she had before. There was no joy in them and for the first time that began to unnerve him.

“You plan to crown me again?”

“Who else would I marry?” He demanded before dropping to his knees and taking her hand. “The worst is over now. There’s no danger. We can live openly and freely. As King and Queen. Man and wife.”

Rey let him hold her hand a moment before gently pulling away. Her next words were so low that for a moment Ben was sure he misheard.
“I cannot.”

Ben blinked in incomprehension.

“What?”

“I cannot be your Queen. I cannot be your wife.”

Ben inhaled and then tried to take Rey’s hand again only this time she would not let him. “Rey, it’s okay. A dispensation will solve everything. We both know that your marriage to Han was no true marriage-”

“He publicly declared the child as his own. We cannot bring him back to swear he didn’t mean that.”

“But we know. We do! I know that child to be mine. And we will have many more. You will be mother to the next King of England.”

“I will be mother to one child and no other. I will never remarry or bare any other children. I cannot. I made Han a promise. I swore I would not.”

At this, Ben felt the first tendrils of fear rise up in him. “He made you promise not to marry me?”

“He did not. But I made it anyway. I swore to him upon the sacrament that I would take no other crown and I would not shame him with being a cuckold. I swore that I would be true to him in death as I never was in life. I swore to him and this is a vow I will keep seeing as I was incapable of keeping my wedding vows.”

Ben’s heart began to flutter not with hope but with panic. She couldn’t mean this. She couldn’t walk away from him. Not now; not when he was so close and she was going to give him a child!

Ben backed away as though slapped. “You can’t mean it.”
“I can and I do.” Rey seemed to have no pleasure in this – small comfort in that!

“You want me to abandon you to a life of widowhood and to acknowledge my own child as a sibling? You actually want that?!”

“It’s not about what I want – it’s about what’s right. I owe this to Han.”

“Han is dead!” Ben burst out. “He’s not here; he can’t be hurt by any of this!”

“His memory can.” Rey spat. “You want to have your father laughed at behind peoples’ hands for centuries to come? Because I don’t! He asked so little and he spared me humiliation and even death – surely we can do this for him?”

“I cannot deny my own child! I cannot!”

“I will never deny you to him. I will tell the truth because every child deserves to know where they come from. But the rest of the world cannot know.”

Ben felt like his world was crumbling beneath his feet so he reverted back to a tried and tested method: arrogance and threats.

“I could have it declared to the world that the child is mine. I could have it acknowledged as my blood. Everyone would know.”

To this, Rey was oddly calm. She even smiled a bit with raised eyebrows.

“You can, it’s true. But that won’t get me down the aisle. In fact, I’d be less inclined than ever to marry a man who would dirty my child’s name to get what he wants. Because that’s what you’d be doing. You’d be condemning my child to infamy. If we maintain the secret Han laid for us, the child will be a royal prince and treated with deference and respect. If you declare to the world that it is yours, the best they can hope for is a knighthood and honours for swearing loyalty to your legitimate heirs. Don’t make me choose between you and my child Ben. Because I can promise you: you will lose everytime.”
“You care about your reputation that much?”

“My reputation? Not particularly. I’ve always been a scavenger rat. But my child? You’re damn right I care. And I won’t let you or any other Prince take that away from me. I’d duel you over a crumbling gorge to stop that happening.”

In her maternal pride, she looked more like a Queen than ever. How magnificent she would be with a true crown, with a brood of his children to protect and a kingdom to command.

Ben dropped to his knees before her. His pride gone.

“Please Rey, don’t forsake me. I’ve finally got you within arm’s reach. Don’t make this harder than it needs to be.”

His head was at her lap. He wanted to cling to her like a small boy. Her hand slowly stroked his hair and for a moment he thought he had gotten through to her.

“I will always love you. Only ever you.” She whispered. “I’m not capable of this kind of love again and I will forever be yours. But this is all we can ever be. To know we love one another and to watch our child grow – that is all we can have. This is our punishment for our sins Ben. This is our purgatory.”

He buried his face in her black skirts, close enough to the child to bury his nose against where his child grew and cried. Her little hitched breaths indicated that she too had joined in on his grief.

The worst part was that he knew what she said to be true.

He had sinned against his mother, his father and even the land he now commanded.

To never marry the only Queen he had ever imagined at his side was the worst punishment he could imagine. And he knew he deserved nothing less.
The response for the last few chapters has been overwhelming and I'm so grateful. It's cheered me up so much and made life seem a bit brighter. I thank each and every one of you.

And it's not the end. I promise! I have far more ground to cover yet!
The response is overwhelming to this fic and helps me get out of bed in the morning. It's a good time to be a Reylo. *blows kisses*

Rey’s condition meant that attending the funeral was frowned upon and not advisable. The doctors had urged that she receive no excitements or anything that could cause distress at such an important time. To finally be carrying an heir to the throne was almost miraculous and she didn’t want to risk anything jeopardizing the life that it was her duty to provide.

Rey had been in half a mind to argue against this – she was the wife of the man they were burying. Surely she could hide behind a rood screen and watch unobserved? But then she remembered that Ben would be there and she relented. She wasn’t afraid of him; she just didn’t know how much more pain her promises could cause her? Staying cocooned in her chambers and seeing only her women sounded quite appealing in her present state.

She cried almost without noticing nowadays. It often occurred when she was sat within the window seat and looking out at the gardens. Spring was finally breaking through the harsh months and she could see budding flowers starting to peak through. She would remember her walks amongst the grounds and how she had kept her eyes peeled for a passing glimpse of Ben. How her heart would flutter with excitement when she saw the top of his black haired head coming from behind a maze wall or hear his tread upon the gravel when she walked her greyhounds. It was only when Jessika wordlessly handed her a kerchief to wipe her damp face that she noticed that her eyes had wept for her pains at all.

Keeping a promise was hard. Why must the most important promises hurt so much? Her parents had promised that they would come back for her and she had promised that she would wait. She couldn’t even remember what her parents looked like any more but she remembered that she had waited and they had never returned.

Would it be so bad if she broke her promise too?

Except her parents hadn’t intended to break their promise. Her father had died in battle and her mother has succumbed to disease and despair. They would have come back for her if they could. She couldn’t use that as an excuse to ruin Ben’s reign and to mar the life of her baby.
She had fallen from her chosen path. It wasn’t even Ben’s fault; if she had truly been strong enough then Ben could have pestered her every day until she was in her grave and she wouldn’t have wavered. This was now the time to rebuild. She would never stop loving Ben but his Queen she would never be.

She did not attend to his coronation either. Maz attended for her and retold the story while Rey was taking her bath beside the fire.

“All was done well. He was anointed and crowned by the Archbishop of Tattooine. Skywalker didn’t look too happy about it actually but then again he never looks too happy nowadays. He is grieving for the old King still.”

Rey took a moment to visualise Ben seated upon that ancient throne with the crown being lowered upon his head. She tried to imagine the splendour and magnificence that he would display as the new King. Instead, as always, the picture seemed fragmented and blurry in her mind and melted back into his desperate, devastated face when she told him they would never marry.

Ben did not visit her again. He sent a messenger to enquire as to the child’s health but that was all. It was during this estrangement when Rey found her will beginning to bend. During the night, she would contemplate throwing on her nightgown and running to his rooms before collapsing on her knees in front of him. She wanted to be held, to be kissed and caressed. To have someone protect her after so long of protecting herself.

Then she would press her hand to her rounding belly and would calm. No, this baby would not be recognised as anything less than a Prince of the realm. She had never understood the ambitions of men at court. So many moved their children this way and that like pawns on a chessboard for their own means. Now she felt she could understand on some level. It was a parent’s desire for their child to succeed, to be recognised as a person of great potential and to at least beget a chance at a decent future. She didn’t care what this child would grow to be but she would put no obstacles in their path. She stroked her midriff, still unnoticeable beneath her many gowns but certainly quickening and smiled.

There could be light in a dark world after all.

She just needed to find a balance.

Her yearning for Ben did not cease but slowly the miracle of her womb began to bring more joy to her life. In moments of despair when she didn’t think her heart could take much more, she’d press her hands to her stomach and hope would bloom to take place of the misery. This was what she’d
always wanted. Marriages were easily dissolved or put aside; this little person would be the product of her body and would belong utterly to her. No-one could take away the ties of blood.

Jessika, who had once been a constant reminder of all she could never have, was now a source of strength. She would be on hand if Rey felt strange or uneasy about something. She explained that her dislike and almost revulsion for fish on a Friday and her enormous craving for apples was very common.

“The baby is developing likes and dislikes. It shows strength.” Jessika was also keen to give her own advice on her body. The doctors could not properly examine her for she was still royal and her flesh was sacred but Rey had no compunction in letting her shift drop and letting Jessika examine and prod at her leisure.

“The bump is growing. You’re going to start showing more prominently soon. Indeed, it looks much like my own stomach when I was pregnant with my first boy. And he’s as lively and lusty as any of goodly man alive.”

As the weeks past, Ben seemed to change tact. Deciding that a good example was to show Rey all the earthly delights she could expect as his own Queen, he had everything at her disposal. He ordered her the finest material for new gowns (no new stomachers came, Rey was pleased to note) and sent her fresh flowers for her rooms as they began to bloom over the country. Her room was soon much like an orchard for apples and she only had to murmur a want for something before it was thrust beneath her nose on a silver plate.

But, for all his attentions, he would not give her what she asked for: freedom.

The doctors had advised, almost in passing, that time in the country and a confinement in a private house would be desirable for her own constitution and that of the child’s. Rey had thought of it with growing longing. She imagined it clearly: a little manor house with vast gardens. The privacy to walk amongst them whenever she liked. No courtiers. Picking apples in the harvest. Watching her child dash amongst the flowers on little legs.

Rey found that it took root in her head and blossomed. Yes, she wanted that. She wanted that very much.

Yet, when Ben came to her (which was about once a week for both their sanities) asking if there was anything she needed, with his eyes straying down to her straining belly, it was always the same thing she asked. He wouldn’t hear of it.
“As a Queen, even a Dowager Queen, you must give birth where you can be witnessed. Encase of some subterfuge.”

“Surely the air of the countryside will be better for both me and the child. The doctor even agreed to that.” She asked calmly.

“Are you not given every comfort? Have I not attended you the best I can?”

His temper was up and he was easily riled. Rey, for once, did not meet him snipe for snipe. Weakly, stupidly, her eyes were glad to behold him even if he was acting a mixture of courteous and obstinate. And she could even understand his refusal. She had denied him her hand in marriage and to publicly pronounce that the child was his. Surely she should be kept close to him if she could not be at his side? The idea of anything less was clearly intolerable to Ben.

“You have.” Rey agreed. “Thank you for the apples by the way. They were very tasty. But I don’t want my child raised at court. Surely the air in the trees and the sight of animals running about the estate is something better for them to see?”

“You would have me removed from both of you entirely?” He said quietly and through gritted teeth. “Is it not bad enough that you will not...” He couldn’t seem to finish without pain.

“I made a promise.” Rey whispered back. “I have not promised to stop loving you and that I will never do. But I cannot be your wife. This you already know.”

he was terrible at concealing emotion. It always ended the same. He would bow curtly, inform her that she would stay here and that was final and then stormed from the room. Rey did not lose her temper and would merely resume her reading.

She had always known she was the stronger of the two. She could survive this; she was sure she could survive anything. She would not fall to pieces without him. Yes, her heart would hurt forever and she was sure she would never let a man close ever again but it would not be her end. She wouldn’t allow that.

Men may build empires but it was women who preserved dynasties.
The flowers were beginning to bloom in earnest when there was a knock upon her door. Rey, looking up from her needlework, saw Jessika depart for the door and then scamper back in looking pink in the face.

“Milady, you have a visitor!”

Rey was about to ask who it was and why Jessika had such an excited reaction when the guest was shown in. She was wearing a good cape over her gown of red damask.

Rey dropped her needlework to the floor.

“Rose!”

The little woman gave a smile that could melt any heart and flew towards her former mistress. The hug they shared was all-consuming and so far from etiquette that it felt glorious.

“Oh Milady!” Rose cried seeming to both laugh and be on the verge of tears. “It does my heart such good to see you!”

They pulled apart and seemed to drink one another in. Rose looked well. Very well and bore no signs of any hardships in her exile. Of this, Rey was eternally glad.

“What are you doing here?” Rey demanded at once. “I thought you’d fled to Flanders.”

“We did!” Rose almost laughed. “We have been hiding there for a while but no-one ever came after us. Then a week ago I received a message from the Prince- I mean, the King.” Rose clearly was struggling to believe the man that had been so sulky and oddly kind to her was now the most powerful man in the realm. “He offered us safe passage back to England. He said that you had need of me.”

Rey couldn’t even comprehend how Ben had found her friend but she was grateful all the same for it. So very grateful. Rey clasped Rose’s hand and kissed it. Only then did she spot the ring on her finger.
“You’re married!” Rey exclaimed. She looked around wildly. “Finn?”

“It was very quiet.” Rose shrugged though clearly looking delighted. “It was about three weeks ago when we crossed the channel. It made more sense to live as man and wife.”

“Does he?” Rey’s eyes swept the room to make sure they were not overheard but Jessika was too busy ordering the pages to bring wine and sweetmeats for the Queen and her honoured guest.

“He knows.” Rose nodded. “I told him everything. At first, I’m sure he didn’t believe me. It seemed such an amazing story that I’m not surprised. He was so relieved when I told him it had all been a ruse between me and the Prince. But then I explained why it was necessary… Jesu, Rey I thought he would faint!”

Rey almost snorted. Almost.

“Is he very angry with me?” She asked feeling panic that her dear friend would look on her poorly.

“No, but he wanted to sail straight back as though he could save you. We were both so afraid for you. Then the news came that Han had died and Ben was King. I knew you were safe then. He would never harm you. Either of you.” She gestured to Rey’s belly and beamed at the sight of Rey’s petite figure beginning to bloom. “I take it he is not happy that he has to pretend it is not his?”

“Not at all. It’s been so hard Rose. I miss him. He’s only across the palace but he’s so very far away.” Rey’s prided strength began to fragment but Rose gripped her arms.

“None of that now.” She said almost like a matron. “We shall drink wine, plan embroidery for your child and talk of old times. The future can wait. Lord knows, it can wait one day at least!”

When Ben came to the Queen’s apartments that Friday as he always did, he saw a very different scene than he normally did. Normally Rey would be sat a little away from her ladies as though in another world. This time he walked into a room of chatter and life.
Rey was sat upon the chair beside the fire and was happily listening to her ladies’ gossip as she embroidered a smock. It was tiny and took Ben a while to realise that it must be for her baby. Their baby.

The Holdo daughters were sat upon the floor and many of the ladies were laughing as Breha was recounting some story for their amusement. Jessika and Maz was drinking wine and Ben spotted, with some satisfaction, Rose sat beside Rey on the other side of the fire. So, his messenger had found her? Excellent. He had also heard she was married so it wasn’t possible to resume their masque of lovers. Even better.

The sight of Rey looking so carefree caused a ripple of complex reaction inside him. He never wanted to see her miserable and had tried to make Rey as comfortable as possible but the sight of Rey looking transformed albeit briefly left him feeling betrayed and irrationally angry. She’d sworn to love him all the rest of her days even if she could never sit on the throne beside him. Was this all it really required to forget him? A goblet of wine and mindless prattle.

The herald announced his entry and all the ladies looked around before getting to their feet to dip their curtseys.

“Leave us.” He said curtly causing the ladies to scuttle out quickly. Rose took her time putting down her embroidery and sauntered rather than dashed from the room. She looked hard at him as she left as though reminding him with her eyes that she wasn’t going to be a good demure girl just because he’d invited her back.

Ben kept his eyes trained on Rey until the door latch clicked shut.

“I hope you are well.” His eyes always seemed to flick down involuntarily to her midriff. She was slowly getting bigger. It was all the more noticeable upon her petite frame. The doctors said she may give birth in September. She should go into confinement around August therefore.

“Very well.” Rey nodded. She always seemed so calm. So serene. It galled him.

“Is there anything you require? I’ve heard you’ve developed a liking for quails eggs. I can send to Calais for some.”

“Thank you but that has passed. I’m not back to disliking fish.”
“Then is there anything you desire?”

For a moment, her eyes lifted and met his. He’d always loved those hazel eyes – they were so expressive. For a moment, one truly hopeful moment, he thought she’d ask for him back. He thought she’d say that she’d give in. She’d be his Queen and all would be as it should. But then her eyes lowered and that hope died.

“You know what I desire. Where I desire to go.”

Not that again. Surely she knows that he can’t. He can’t let them go. His strength is waning with every hour. It would kill him.

“And you know my answer.”

Rey inclined her head as though to show she had heard but she would continue to ask. She would ask every day until she last drew breath.

“Is my presence in your life so repugnant to you?”

She looked at him sharply.

“Of course it isn’t.” She snapped. “But I won’t be kept prisoner here. Becoming my jailer will not make me change my mind.”

“Then what will!” He barked. “What will make you realise how foolish this is? We are two pieces. Two disparate pieces of one person. We have made a person for the love of God! Why does it have to be like this? For some promise?”

Rey gripped the handles of her winged chair and again he was struck with how magnificent a Queen she would make. But no, his bloody father had to get there first and he hadn’t wanted her in the first place!
“Breaking promises only leads to more pain.”

“I wouldn’t know. No-one in my life has ever made me a promise that I didn’t expect them to break.”

Rey’s eyes were sparkling. He knew his were too. He didn’t care.

He suddenly couldn’t be in the same room as her. If he heard a bitten off sob behind him as he stormed from the room then he pretended not to hear.

He was kneeling at his prie-dieu, thumbing through his mother’s rosary, when a page knocked his door. He was about to bark that he would see no-one when he prayed when he heard the page arguing with someone.

“Madam, please! You cannot go in there.”

A cloaked hurricane came bursting into his room. A small, well-dressed and extremely undaunted hurricane.

“Lady Teko. What can I do for you?” He said this with as little grace as he felt.

“Leave us.” She waved the page away. He looked from her to Ben and then scampered out. Rose looked at him like they were about to be engaged in combat. Considering she barely came up to his collarbone it was almost funny. “I’ve come about Rey.”

“I doubted this was a call for my health.”

“Oh stop it! Stop being all nonchalant and arrogant. We both know you’re in pain.”

Ben slammed down his rosary beads onto the table before him. His temper wasn’t improving nowadays.
“What do you want?! For me to be dancing and singing with the lute players? You know what this
has done to me!”

“That I know.” Rose conceded. “And to her. She’s doing what she believes is right – not what is
easy. She misses you. She weeps for you and for your distance to her.”

“Then why does she not come? Why?”

“Because you’ll insist on crowning her at Theed Cathedral and she doesn’t want to be Queen again.
She never wanted to be Queen. She only ever wanted freedom, a family and love.”

“I could give her love. I could give her that family!”

“That’s why I’m here. I’ve thought about it.” Rose touched his arm in what could only be a
comforting movement. “There is a way.”

Rey sewed until the daylight failed and it hurt her eyes a bit. It was growing dark and Rey was
getting rather tired when Rose strode in.

“Let go for a walk!” She said with an air of decision.

Rey looked at her friend in bemusement. “A walk? Rose, it’s getting cold and its nearly seven
o’clock.”

“A bit of fresh air will do you some good. It always clears my head. It’s far too stuffy in here.”
Rose was getting Rey’s fur lined cloak ready as she spoke. Jessika had retired to the hall for dinner
and Maz was not present that night. She was probably indulging in cards and many unwomanly
hobbies.

Rey felt rather reluctant but a walk at night might protect her from courtiers and it might be what
she needed to get a good night’s rest.
Rose practically smuggled Rey out of the palace but not into the normal flower walkways. Instead she took a diverted path around the palace. It took Rey a little while for Rey to realise they were going to her private section of garden where she used to sit with her hood off beside the fountain. A charming idea for privacy but not one Rey wanted to indulge in. It was where Ben had first seen her and she didn’t think she was strong enough to endure that kind of remembrance.

Rose closed her hand around her wrist and kept on all the same.

“Trust me.” She whispered with an earnestness that Rey could not refuse.

It was only then when they were at the fountain that Rey saw him. Ben was stood there with a cloak on and a torch to provide a little light.

“Rose? What is this?” Rey demanded feeling wrong footed.

Ben took her hand instead. It was the most gentle gesture he’d performed in weeks. “You said that you promised Han that no-one would know our secret, correct? That you would never be Queen again?”

“Yes. I promised.” Rey confirmed.

“Those were your exact words?”

“Exactly.”

For the first time the words sparked an unseen emotion in Ben’s eyes: hope.

“Then all is not lost.” Rose proclaimed.

Rey wanted to know how on earth she had come to that conclusion when Ben turned her attention back to him.
“I can’t have you as my Queen. That is my punishment. But I can have you as my wife. No, no, listen to me! If the world does not know and you were never acknowledged or suspected as my Queen. We could, couldn’t we? And you would break no vow.”

Rey blinked and tried to bully her brain into thinking. Yes, that would keep her promise though she would be pushing the terms greatly.

“Then let us swear to one another. Before a witness. Rose already knows and is trustworthy. Let us plight our troth before her and before God. Even if it is only before Him, let us be married.”

Rey blinked. “But you must one day marry. For your kingdom.”

“If it is only us and Rose, no one will need ever know. Before God, you will be my wife. I can deal with the consequences later.” Ben cupped her cheek and looked her in the eyes. “If we do this, if I know that we belong to one another despite everything and that you still love me as you did… then I will let you go to the country.”

Rey’s eyes brimmed with tears. To acknowledge him as her love and be acknowledged in turn… to be free of the court… it was all her dreams come true at once.

“You will visit us?” She whispered.

“A rebellion couldn’t stop me seeing my wife.”

Rey took his hands and smiled. “Do you want to start or shall I?”

Before God, Rose and the fountain where it all began, Rey swore to be forever faithful and loving to Ben. He too swore with all the earnestness of a God fearing man.

There was no crown, no priest and no pomp. Just a man and a woman pledging to be forever true.

Yet as Rey accepted Ben’s kiss with a little sob of joy she knew that this was a promise that it would be no hardship to keep until death.
Betrothals in medieval and tudor times were almost as binding as a legal marriage sanctioned by the church. If someone was found to be betrothed to someone before witnesses, it could deem any other betrothal or even a legal marriage invalid. Many betrothed themselves before a witness and then went on to live as man and wife quite happily (albeit in the lower classes). So to plight your troth before a witness was a big deal. Even if it was a secret, it was like a binding contract.

The country was the ideal place for women to give birth and raise children as it was away from noise and disease so Rey's desire to depart somewhere to give birth and live is understandable. Also most royal couples lived apart so I think Ben would have been willing (if not happy) to grant this so long as he could regularly visit and he had proof that Rey's love for him was as strong as ever.
Hello guys.

Thank you all so much for the feedback that this fic has generated. The amazing Buiana has created a brilliant manip of the lovely Rose which is stunning! Give her love at her page: http://buiana.tumblr.com/

A WEEK UNTIL THE LAST JEDI!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Her coffers were packed within a few days with the help of her ladies. The tapestries that she had helped to create or been gifted as Queen were carefully taken down and folded away to adorn another wall in another residence. Rey settled her accounts within Naboo Palace and began to arrange what and who to take with her to her new home.

Rose was coming without question. Her place was at Rey’s side and what awaited her at this court? Apart from infamy and intrigue yet again?

“One conspiracy is enough for me.” Rose mused over a cup of wine. Yet Rey felt oddly strange to take her away from the court that had made her the woman she now was. She had been a nobody when she first arrived. A mere daughter of a country gentleman with little fortune and no status. To look at her now the difference was nearly extraordinary. She had proved herself to be stout of heart and the most loyal of friends. She was now a gentlewoman of some means after the copious gifts of money and jewels that Ben had thrown at her, was married to a man of good reputation and whom she could see herself being very happy with and more assured and confident. You don’t outlive such scandal and intrigue and not hold yourself with more assiduity as a result.

Finn was coming too. He was much of the opinion of his wife that there was little here to detain him now. He’d knelt at Rey’s feet when they had come face-to-face again and made an oath that swore himself to her service. The implication was clear: he may not quite understand her love for the King he both reviled and feared but he would try to. And if following her to the countryside also relieved him of that King’s influence, all the better!
Maz had opted to stay at the court and with her hairy, growling husband. That had grieved Rey a little but the elderly gentlewoman promised to visit whenever she was permitted to.

Something that was a little more of a surprise was Jessika. Rey had been all too prepared for her to remain within the court that had been her only home. So when the lady knelt at her feet and requested that she follow the Queen Dowager, Rey had been taken aback.

“There is no purpose of me remaining here, Your Grace.” Jessika explained calmly. “There is no new Queen to serve and there will soon be little reason for so many ladies to remain within the court anyhow. I wish to live a quieter life with my sons. I miss my boys.”

For the first time, Rey saw beneath the veneer of the dutiful, obedient wife that Jessika presented to the world. She saw a woman that was more than an accomplished courtier and barer of many sons; she was a woman who was tired of double-dealing and never letting down your guard. Her husband had advanced well and her presence could serve little purpose now. Above all, she wanted to be able to be with her sons. They could join her new household, Rey decided, and they could all run about the orchard in their hours of play.

Poe was not joining them for which Jessika clearly did not find surprising, Rose found to be very welcome and Finn and Rey seemed to feel a sense of guilty relief. Rey still esteemed Poe highly and knew him to be a good and honourable man but if he was part of her retinue, Ben’s jealousy would forbid her leaving at all. Also with Finn and Poe separated, they could go back to their own affairs and the new marriage that had taken place in Flanders would stand some chance of success.

Rey had been offered many residences in which to partake of her laying in and eventual new home. Ben had offered her the castle of Mustafar which his grandfather had once lived and had been their residence when they had travelled on progress. He conveniently forgot that this castle was now the property of Hux and his new Duchess and Rey had little doubt he would turn them out in their petticoats if she so much as hinted at it. Luckily for Hux and his new bride, she was not inclined. It was too large and grand for only her and her staff. She was done with great big looming palaces; a small and quieter home would be much better suited. After a little thought, Mitaka suggested (with clear trepidation) the grand manor house of D’Qar Hall.

“It is not very grand but very handsome. And they have gardens for your child...” He trailed off under Ben’s stare, clearly struggling to decipher what was a stare of interest and of clear disquiet.

“Does it have an orchard?” Rey asked.
“Ummm… I believe so. The blackcurrant bushes are very good too, I hear.” Mitaka managed.

Apples and blackcurrants on hand? Rey’s heart was won instantly.

As the day of departure approached, Rey felt mounting excitement and building dread. She wanted to see her new home and live a quiet life. But she was undoubtedly melancholy about the prospect of leaving her husband behind.

That was how she thought of him now in her mind – her husband. Ben had given her a ring of plain gold which she wore on a chain around her neck. Whenever the cold metal touched the skin above her heart, the muscle would flutter. She kissed the ring every night before bed for want of kissing him. She was his wife before the eyes of God and this was something that no man would be able to deny.

The night before her journey she lay awake in bed trying to get comfortable – it was getting harder with her aching back nowadays – when there was a soft tap on her door. Calling for whoever it was to enter, she sat up in her bed when she saw Ben come forward in his night shirt and breeches with a cloak on.

They did not speak. Ben simply sat upon the bed with his back to her and calmly removed his boots. After which, he climbed into bed beside her.

It was such a domestic and ordinary thing that it left Rey more choked than if he had presumed towards something more carnal. In her condition, sex was prohibited for the sake of the baby’s health and it was clearly a fact he knew well. He did not try and remove any more of his clothing or of hers; he simply lay beside her. Slowly, Rey rested her head upon his chest which was beating a steady rhythm. There was complete silence between them. They did not need to speak. Words seemed like such a trivial waste of their time. Instead, Ben lay his hand over her stomach as though shielding her and her baby from all the hurt that the world could provide. It was the most peaceful sleep that Rey had experienced in months.

Soon the sun had come up and Rey woke alone in her bed. It was wise that no-one observed them together in any capacity but she could not stem the flow of grief that shot through her.

A litter was waiting for her outside the palace as she took her leave of the Queen’s rooms. As she looked over her shoulder at the oak panelled room with all the luxuries it could provide and felt a mixture of detachment and relief. It had never been her room; Leia was meant to dwell within it not her. She’d just been keeping it warm.
The members of the court all dipped curtsies and bows as she walked out wrapped in a fur lined cloak into the courtyard. Many of them would be happy to see her gone and would already plotting about how to get their own daughter or niece to fill the vacancy in the Queen’s rooms. Rey walked past them with the barest acknowledgement.

Lady Holdo and her daughters were near the litter and the goodbye they bid her was much more heartfelt. Lady Holdo held her hands in her own and bid her a peaceful journey and delivery of her child. Sabe looked as grave and quiet as ever, Satine had tears on her cheeks which she hastily tried to wipe away and Breha was clearly finding etiquette hard to abide by when she just wanted to envelope her old mistress in an enormous hug. Lando Calrissian also bowed his good wishes and Chewbacca made his usual indistinguishable growls that Rey thought meant that he would miss her. His tiny wife also slipped a wrapped gift to Rose for Rey’s amusement. No doubt it was a book of the most scandalous poems.

Rey was about to enter the litter when the courtiers sank back down into their bows and curtsies abruptly. She looked around; the King was approaching.

He came to stand about five feet away from her. Both of them were undoubtedly aware of the eyes of their court upon them. There was no chance of a loving goodbye.

“So you are to leave us, Your Grace?” Ben stated simply.

“I am.” Rey said a little hollowly. Despite everything, despite their promises before God, she hoped he realised that she was leaving her heart in his hands.

“You have everything that you require?”

*Apart from you coming with me.* “Yes. Everything is well prepared.”

Ben nodded. “Then I wish you a very safe journey. I wish to keep updated with any news. The birth of a royal child is after all a state event.”

Rey deciphered that he meant he wanted her to send him every detail via secret messages. Every development, every craving, every cramp – he wanted to know all. If he couldn’t be with her then he would live vicariously through her letters.
Rey curtsied deeply and Ben could not resist helping her into her litter. He wasn’t wearing gloves for which she thanked God with gusto.

Before the litter set off, she tugged at the chain around her neck. It was an innocent gesture and did not expose the rings hidden beneath her bodice but she made sure that Ben saw. She made sure he understood.

Slowly, almost casually, Ben raised his hand to his own neck as though about to scratch an itch. No one else saw him finger the gold chain around his own neck – it was hidden beneath his doublet and his own special secret.

It was the closest they could publicly come to expressing what they both meant: I love you.

Rey kept her eyes on Ben’s brown sparkling ones for as long as she could even as the litter moved away. She was obliged to draw the curtains as soon as she left the royal courtyard so no-one could witness her streaming eyes as she travelled. She placed her hand over her swelling belly and managed to regain her control. This was not farewell; it was goodbye for the present. And the present would not last forever.

The court had the indignity of refusing to cease despite Rey’s departure. The demands of Kingship were extensive and all-consuming. A long life of council meetings, trade arguments and harvest provisions had to be dealt with and the world had little to no care about how Ben would find himself wandering to the Queen’s rooms only to remember mid-step that they were now vacated.

He touched not only his rosary for guidance now but also the chain around his neck that hid his wedding band. All the rings upon his fingers seemed tawdry and of no value in comparison to the one he dared not wear in public. He would sometimes at night slip the ring on his marriage finger to simply see what it looked like. The majority of the time it lay hidden beneath his doublet and he could only touch the chain for strength.

She loved him and she was his wife. That was a fact no man could deny.

He was snapped out of his revelry by the sound of Hux’s voice behind him.
Ben turned away from the chart of the sea that he had been mindlessly gazing at for about ten minutes and slowly lifted his head to look up at his sour faced councillor.

“Have you thought any more about the potential brides I have put forward?”

“That again.

“I’ve given no consideration whatsoever.” Ben replied bluntly. He was in no mood to trade niceties with Hux of all people.

There had been a change between them since his father’s death. Hux marrying Bazine had been the catalyst that broke the terrible truth to Han and he was sure that it also helped hasten his death. He was sure that if Rey had tried to tell him gently it would not have all gone so badly. And then she would not have felt obliged to make such a promise to Han on his deathbed. He needed someone to blame other than himself and Rey and Hux seemed a delightful choice. His harlot was not far behind.

He would bide his time such as he had never done before. This was diplomacy and he finally began to understand the need for calm: it made the blow come as a surprise to enemies.

“Your Grace, your marriage is now of paramount importance.” Hux told him with barely visible respect. “You must beget an heir and the court needs a Queen.”

“The kingdom needs healthy trade routes more; otherwise there will be nothing for my heir to inherit.”

“I have sent a portrait painter to Paris. The Duchess of-”

“No!” Ben barked. “I will hear no talk of marriage at this time. Do you understand, My Lord?” He said Hux’s title like a sneering swear word. His plot of biding his time could come to an end right now if Hux wished it.
Hux looked mutinous but could not retort against his King. They both knew it and it brought Ben untold pleasure.

“Very well, Your Grace. We shall discuss this another time.” It was not a promise to drop the subject but it was as near a retreat as Ben expected to get. He watched Hux stalk off to rant to his wife.

He had to wait for better days. If only he knew whether they would ever come at all.

Rey settled into her new home at D’Qar Hall with relish and delight. It was everything she could have wished for and gave her the ability to live as she wanted to – as a quiet country gentlewoman. She took daily walks amongst the gardens and breathed in the smell of honeysuckle. She remembered her desire to keep her own bees and enthusiastically talked of it with her steward. There were trees lining the fields which gave her shade whenever she wanted to sit and rest.

Rey had been right – this was the perfect place to raise a child.

Jessika had summoned her children to join her at her mistress’ new home. The boys were as vibrant as their father and baby Han had changed remarkably in the few months he’d been away from them. The tiny baby that Rey had once held at birth was no more and a plumb, pink baby who smiled and waved his fat fists was in his place. Jessika seemed to blossom with the pleasure of being reunited with her sons and Rey marvelled how she had never noticed how subdued that Jessika was at court.

Finn and Rose also settled into their new home with delight. Married life suited them well and it was a joy to see them looking so happy. Rose had a smile that could rival Rey’s at her most happy.

Jessika and Rose used all their resources to get Rey comfortable during the pregnancy. They had therefore both been present when the child had quickened.

At first, it was such a subtle feeling that Rey was sure she had imagined it or was suffering indigestion. But then the movement happened again and Rey’s hands flew to her belly to feel the beautiful fluttering of her baby within her. Her baby was alive and clearly thriving within her. A flush of unadulterated love washed through her and the desire to see this baby born healthy and happy increased to the point of desperation. Every morning that she woke to feel her baby wiggle or give a kick was a day of pure joy.
She wrote regularly to the King as he requested. She sent an official letter to the Privy Council so they could pour over it and discuss it like it was a siege they were planning. She then sent another letter with Rose’s own seal for the King’s eyes only. No-one would dare open a letter for only a King to see; they would not risk the reprimand.

This letter told him every tiny detail that would be of no interest to councillors but worthy of every attention from the father of the babe. About how her back ached, her belly was round and high and how she whispered stories of him to her bump every night which always resulted in some answering kick.

She made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Lady Amidala to give her thanks and prayers for a safe delivery. As Rey looked up at the tomb of that sweet lady she prayed fervently.

I know I have sinned. I know I have no right to ask you for help. But this is your great-grandchild. And I would be the best mother I could possibly be. Grant me a safe delivery and a healthy child and I will spend the rest of my life showing you how worthy I am of forgiveness.

The court had proceeded on the summer progress as usual. Ben rode with the rest of his courtiers further up north to stay at the houses of his loyal subjects and rich landowners. It was his first official tour as King and he needed to show himself as magnificent to his subjects yet his mind kept straying to the previous progress. It was there that things changed forever between him and Rey. And then when he was in the present his mind strayed to D’Qar Hall where Rey was laying in for her confinement. The baby was due any day now and he made sure that the entourage were close enough to her place of confinement that any message would come to him first. He’d paid a messenger a good bag of sovereigns to lay watch at all times.

He spent the majority of his stays on his knees in private prayer. He knew he was gaining something of a reputation as a pious recluse. There was mingled disapproval and relief from the kingdom. Many had feared that he would lay waste to their crops and declared rash wars that he could not afford. Quickly they realised that their King was a God fearing man.

He didn’t think to also add that he was feeling every one of his thirty years and too tired to contemplate anything beyond the general day to day work of governing. Now that he had the power he’d craved for years he saw that it was not all it was built to be. It was a constant battle of wits to keep the power he’d inherited. There were no true friends. There was only subjects – and with subjects like Hux what hope did he have of peace?
He had established Bazine in Mustafar Castle and apparently she was making changes already. There were now French tapestries and lute players everywhere. He intended to waylay the trip there as much as possible and to spend the bare amount of time there. He’d sleep in a hay loft if he had to.

He was on his knees in the private chapel of Lando Calrissian’s residence of Cloud City Castle when there was a frantic knock upon the door. He was cut off from feeling aggrieved at having his prayers interrupted when the messenger he paid burst in.

Ben was on his feet at once.

*It was time.*

Rey moaned in pain as she gripped the ropes that had been tied to her trestle bed for her. Pulling frantically at something did little to ease the pain but it gave her a source of strength in some capacity. The contractions were becoming insistent now and she couldn’t prevent the cries of pain from escaping her. She had been prompted to walk about when the pains first started but now that was beyond her and she knew the baby would not be long.

The midwife whom the court had sent to her was a rather grim faced and stern looking woman who was determined to do her job well. That left Rose to the task of soothing her and being comforting in any way.

“You’re doing so well. It won’t be long now.” Rose urged. The midwife did not retort with any kind of argument so Rey could only guess Rose was right.

The room of her confinement was stiflingly hot. In accordance to royal custom, the room was dark and lined with tapestries to keep out evil humours. It was still warm as the month of September began to emerge and Rey had often gone to the single window to get some air. It felt like she was encased in a womb of her own.

Another contraction ripped through her and the midwife nodded grimly.

“Very well, Your Grace. It is time to push.”
So Rey pushed. And pushed. It took all her strength and many squeals of pain. She could feel the baby moving down her body and the head moving out of her body was more than she could bare. More than anyone could bare.

“One more. One more!” Rose urged.

One more. One more leap of faith. Rey threw her body forward and screamed louder than she had ever done in her life. Then there was a hot rush and a release and the agony was gone. She collapsed onto the bed panting for breath.

“It’s done! It’s done.” The midwife cried. And then there was a bawling wail of someone who had not been here before. Rey wanted to lift herself up but her body had endured enough and would not move. She just listened to the continuous cries and wails that sounded so very beautiful in a way no child’s tear should. Then she noted the midwife’s face. She looked almost concerned.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” Rey cried and even Rose sat up.

“Nothing. The baby is very well.” The midwife looked up and said softly. “It’s a girl, Your Grace.”

A girl. She had a girl. She had a daughter. Ben’s daughter.

Then why the look of forbearance?

Then she understood. The midwife regarded this a second rate birth. She was meant to deliver a prince. This had been her last chance to produce a prince of the realm. So long in getting with child and she had failed at even this. If she had brought forth a boy, the midwife would be rewarded for life. With a girl she would get a half-hearted thanks at best. What use was a girl?

Rey forced herself upright a little preparing already to defend her daughter to the world. But Rose, who had full strength, got there first.

“But she’s well?” She snapped clearly annoyed at the midwife’s attitude. “Healthy?”
“Yes, yes, very well.”

“Then there is no problem. Now clean her and give her to the Queen.”

The woman took the squalling babe to a basin to give a perfunctory wipe down but she wasn’t given straight to Rey.

“She’s with the wet nurse.” Rose soothed. “She’s not gone far. But she’s hungry.” Rey could hear the loud suckling noise from her position and she almost wanted to whimper with a feeling of loss.

“I should be feeding her. She’s my baby.”

Rose stroked Rey’s hair. “She’s still a princess. But she will be your princess. No other.”

Soon the baby was swaddled and with Rose propping her up, the little bundle was placed in her arms. The little face that was peaking out was still red but now full and content to sleep.

Rey looked at her daughter with mounting wonder and relief. She was here, she was healthy and they were together. She was her baby – her little girl. And what a dynasty that would build.

Rey had been dressed in a clean shift and put to rest in the royal bed after the birth yet she would not permit the baby to be taken to the nursery. The cradle was placed right next to her bed so she could roll over and look down at her little princess at any time she wished.

Her prayers had been answered and she had been given a safe delivery. She would have to pay another pilgrimage to Amidala’s shrine.

She thought vaguely that she would need to name her child soon. She could not presume to call her Leia after all that had transpired. Satine was a good name after her own grandmother but it did not seem right for the sleeping babe. Then she remembered that it was Amidala’s patronage that had ensured a safe delivery. Ben’s grandmother who was known by her love as Padmé.
Padmé.

She rolled it along her tongue to try it out. It sounded pure and soft. Like the little sleeping thing next to her.

There was suddenly the sound of a distant commotion in the courtyard of a fast approaching horse. Rey sat up and looked about. Was the council coming to view her daughter? Surely they should have sent word. And she in confinement! She had not been churched.

There was the sound of running steps and many raised voices. Instinctively she picked Padmé up from her cradle and held her close. Her daughter slept on unconcerned.

The door to the room banged open and Rey was about to voice her scandal at this breach of etiquette when she saw who was frame in the door.

Tall, cloaked and clearly showing signs of having ridden his horse to the ground was the King.

He strode into the room with his eyes trained on Rey and the little bundle she was clutching in her arms. Rose appeared not far behind him, having clearly tried and failed to explain that decency forbid a man entering a birthing chamber. Rey thanked the Lord that the midwife had been paid for her trouble and sent to the local inn. Rey gave Rose a little nod that she was quite well and able to deal with the King alone and Rose retreated to give them the privacy that life had deprived them.

“Come.” Rey whispered. “Come and see.”

Come and see what a beautiful little thing came of such a disaster.

Ben crept towards the bed as though trying to make no noise. A stark contrast to the tumult he had made at his entrance. Soon he was at her bedside and Rey presented the wrapped form of their daughter.

He sat down cautiously upon the bed and slowly moved the blanket a little further away so he could properly see his baby’s face. Padme’s eyes fluttered and she scrunches up her face as though experiencing a rather displeasing dream before relaxing and continuing her nap.
“It’s a girl.” Rey wasn’t sure of whether Ben had heard of the news and nervously watched his face. For the first time, she felt weary of the reaction her daughter’s sex would cause.

Ben continued to gaze at the baby and then looked at Rey. His mouth began to twitch and then suddenly broke into a bemused smile like he couldn’t believe he was here and everything had gone well.

“She’s perfect.”

Rey smiled and then continued. “I’m sorry… that she is not a son.”

At this Ben looked away from his baby for the first time. “I’m not.”

“You’re… you’re not?”

“If it were a boy, it would be a Prince of the land. It would be raised as one and may have been removed from us to learn governorship. Because she’s a girl, we can make the decisions. She can be our daughter.”

Rey felt a quivering of unspeakable gratitude and relief. He was right. A son would have belonged to the state; a girl would belong solely to her and to Ben. If not as her acknowledged father then as her King.

“I called Padmé.” Rey sniffed feeling overwhelmed with love, relief and happiness for this moment.

“Padmé.” Ben ran his huge finger along his daughter’s soft cheek. “Beautiful choice. Excellent choice.”

Rey knew it would not be easy. She knew they had much to discuss and much to plan to make this work in any capacity. She knew the battle was far from over and no doubt the council would not be as jubilant at the birth of a mere princess. But in that moment, she cared not.

In that moment, she sat back on her pillows cradling her daughter as her husband sat at her side.
A dynasty that no earthly or heavenly king could forsake.

Chapter End Notes

A lot of people have asked (quite rightly and fairly) why Rey was determined not to publicly be Ben's wife and Queen. Well in the historic time frame - she simply couldn't. A Queen had to be utterly without reproach and a symbol of all gentleness. If she came forward as pregnant out of wedlock with Ben's baby, she would never be accepted again no matter what the King imposed. Her child would never be accepted as anything other than a bastard. At least this way she can live a quiet life with her daughter and not stain Padme's whole life. Plus Rey doesn't want to be Queen again. It was never the appeal of that which made her marry Han in the first place - it was the idea of escape and a family.

If she married Ben and was publically crowned Queen, she would be breaking the last promise she made to Han. And I can see her feeling that she owed him that loyalty at least. At least this way (if only in secret) Rey can be Ben's wife, her daughter is technically legitimate in the eyes of God and she can retire to a quiet life.

Also the birth of a daughter was always seen as a disappointment - sons were what was wanted to rule. Daughters were just there to be married off.

Tudor times weren't kind to women.

The next chapter will be pretty huge and chronicles quite a bit. Hopefully it's a finale that will please everyone.
In the eighth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King Ben I

Chapter Notes

This was meant to be one long epilogue but just one section was about 7000 words so I've divided it into three parts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sun was not even peeking through the curtains of the bay window and it was not yet time to rise for Mass. To not get rest in preparation for the day ahead was a bad idea so the little girl in the big bed tried to squeeze her eyes so tightly shut that her brain may be tricked into the act of dozing off. Alas, Padme’s brain was showing no signs of sleep.

How could she sleep? The King was coming today.

This wasn’t the first time they had been honoured with a visit. Every year, sometimes twice a year, he would spend a few weeks at D’Qar Hall as well as his brief visits whenever he could leave court for a day’s ride. But this was the first time that Padmé felt aware of the excitement built around it and was familiar with her own tingling tummy. She always loved the King to call on D’Qar Hall – he always came with presents and as though she were the one honouring him by seeing him.

The King had been a presence in her life ever since she could remember. One of her earliest memories was of him chasing her around the gooseberry bush, with Padmé picking her skirts up with her shoes off and her squealing with laughter as he caught up with her. He was so tall and his legs so long he hadn’t even needed to chase her to catch her. Her little legs couldn’t outrun them. Not that she minded – she liked him catching her and picking her up high into the air. She had always been so far from the ground that she felt she would never come down again. He’d pick her up as high as he could go so she could stretch her arms up into the sky as though to touch the clouds. Padmé was too big to be swept up now and it wasn’t becoming for a Princess to be scooped up like a rag doll – apparently – but it was one of her favourite memories even now that she was growing up.

Padmé knew that she was an important child and worthy of being visited by the King. She was a Princess – the only princess the kingdom had and her mother, her dear Mama, had once been a Queen. They now called her Dowager Queen because her husband, the old King, had died before Padmé was born. Her Mama didn’t have any more children – she’d never married again and spent her time with Padmé in the country. Not that they were lonely. They had Lady Rose and her husband Finn as their beloved friends. They had a daughter too called Paige named after Rose’s sister who did not live with them and spent most of her time with Rose’s parents with a poorly
chest. The little girl who was named for her was only five years old but certainly not suffering from any ailment – she was too busy running around with Padmé to catch so much as a chill. Paige and Padmé also had their youngest friend Leia Dameron who was only two years old and couldn’t do very much yet. Yet they visited her every day in her nursery.

Both little girls were very protective of their youngest friend. Not only because she was still a baby and needed the care but because she didn’t have a mother or father to provide it now.

Padmé could remember Lady Jessika though her image was beginning to blur with time. She often heard her Mama lament that she had never commissioned a court painter to take her image. Padmé could remember her a little though – she’d been about the same height as her Mama with dark glossy hair and a gentle nature. She had been married to Captain Dameron and they had many sons together who had once all lived together at D’Qar with Paige and herself. Han had been the closest to her in age and she’d been very fond of him. But things had changed now.

Lady Jessika had gotten with child again after Captain Dameron had visited them once when she had been six years old. Her Mama had taken many pains to make sure Lady Jessika was comfortable but she’d seemed to grow more and more weak as her baby bloomed within her. She’d turned paler and a bit thinner.

Eventually the time came for the baby to be born. A girl had been born which had apparently been what Jessika had longed for. Padmé had been able to hear the baby crying from down the hall where her own room was. Then a day later she’d heard another form of sobbing. Cracking her door open to look down the hall, she was astonished and frightened to see Lady Rose with her face buried into her husband’s doublet and her shoulders shaking.

The baby had been named Leia after the old Queen that Jessika had once served and Padmé had never seen her mother’s friend again.

The baby continued to thrive even without its mother and her own Mama took it upon herself to look after the babe and her brothers. Paige and herself had taken to their roles as surrogate sisters to their Mama’s new ward quite easily. Captain Dameron came to attend to his wife’s funeral looking more stunned and winded than Padmé had ever seen him. He did not stay long after his wife was laid to rest and returned to the court. He had no love for the King like she did and to leave his place for too long was risking losing it altogether.

He had come to visit often after that. Her Mama had been very glad of it at first as she believed that his children needed a closer relationship with their father. Padmé had enjoyed his company and Sir Finn seemed to be almost happy against his better sense at the arrival of him.
But Padmé was a perceptive girl and she noticed that as Captain Dameron visited more and more, her Mama was starting to greet his visits with less enthusiasm. Her pleased smile at his announced arrival was beginning to turn into a frown of confusion. Lady Rose did not seem pleased either but then again she never had seemed as pleased to see the Captain even when his wife was alive. She didn’t understand at first; if anything the Captain was paying her more deference than ever.

Then on one visit, he requested to see her Mama alone for a walk in the gardens. Mama went but with a stiffness that was unlike her.

When she came back she called Padmé to her side and kept her close all day.

Because Padmé was petite and stealthy, she was particularly good at listening at doors. She didn’t do it much as she knew it was very wrong but she wanted to know why her Mama was looking so worried. She got snatched conversations between Lady Rose and her Mama about ‘it making sound political sense to him but no advantage to her’.

She also heard her Mama say that ‘she was not free to do so anyway and could not even if I was inclined.’” Padmé didn’t understand this: what did that mean that her Mama wasn’t free? She was a widow.

Then suddenly the bells rang out in the neighbouring villages. Padmé knew that it was never a good sign when the bells rang like that.

“‘The fool!’” Her Mama snapped practically stamping her foot in a fury. “‘The damned fool!’”

The gates to D’Qar Hall were locked and Padmé was locked inside her family home with the rest of her friends. She pulled at her mother’s skirts insistently.

“What’s happening? Mama, what’s going on?”

Her Mama held her close to her and said over and over again: Captain Dameron has gone too far. He won’t hurt us… but Lord help him when the King catches up to him.

It was a long two-days of living under siege. The farm hands and servant boys that she saw every day were given muskets and swords. When they ran out of those then they were told to take up their sieves and hold the grounds of the Queen Dowager at all costs.
No blood was drawn – Captain Dameron was taken prisoner by the King and his army less than two miles from their home.

Lady Rose sat Padmé down on the window seat after this and explained what had really happened: Captain Dameron was not a man who could serve the King was the same affinity he had served the old King and Queen. They clashed frequently and as a result Captain Dameron decided to take the initiative. He would team up with the Queen Dowager who had always been fond of and was so kind to his children. He would offer marriage, muster an army and depose the King. Then they would put Padmé on the throne and Dameron would rule until she was of age to do so herself.

“A likely story.” Lady Rose sniffed. “Men in power do not sacrifice it easily. You would have been a puppet of his will forever.”

“What happened then?” Padmé asked. “What went wrong?”

Lady Rose smiled. “Your mother. She wouldn’t be a party to any of it. She wouldn’t marry him, she wouldn’t support the rebellion, and she definitely wasn’t sacrificing you to the Privy Council.”

As Padmé got older, she could almost see the sense in the plan. The King wasn’t married and had no children. The Privy Council had been chiding him for years about taking a Queen and securing the succession. But amazingly he would not. He seemed completely unwilling to take a wife and seemed to dedicate his life to religion. He heard Mass about four times a day and, while he was clearly a seasoned warrior who kept his army in shape, he was also keen to live a pious life. His court was almost devoid of ladies – not because he didn’t like them but because without a Queen there was no need for them. So as a result, as the daughter of a King, she was the obvious choice. Especially if Dameron wanted to govern through her.

“Did she tell the King?”

“Yes. She wrote to him to warn him.”

Padmé nodded. Her mother had done the right thing and the King was safe. She felt satisfied.

But then that left Captain Dameron. He had clearly committed treason in trying to push the King off the throne. At his trial, he defended that he could not forget the sins of the past where the King was concerned. He would willingly serve the daughter of Han Solo if it meant she stood a better
chance at ruling than his son.

In this, her Mama used her Queenly right to beg for mercy. The Captain was foolish but he did not deserve a traitor’s death. It was the worst way to die. She begged for the King to show mercy.

It took much bargaining but eventually the King declared he would not die but spend the rest of his days imprisoned in the Tower. His goods were forfeit to the Crown and if he ever did escape – a feat that no man had succeeded in – then he would have nothing but his under-shirt and hose to his name. You don’t need an axe to ruin a man, the cook said sagely.

Something else that the King had done which no amount of pleading from her Mama could prevent was the removal of his boys from their house. They were the sons of a traitor and it was therefore a good idea to have them brought under the King’s protection. For their own safety and so he could keep an eye on them. It would dissuade them following their foolish father’s footsteps and ensure his prisoner’s good behaviour. Her Mama had been both furious and heartbroken to surrender the boys but she had little choice. They weren’t to be locked in a Tower though; they would be at court and treated as royal wards. No harm would come to them but effective prisoners they must remain.

The only relenting that the King would concede was that the baby, Leia, could remain with the Queen Dowager. She was a mere infant and, after all, a girl. Even Padmé who was treated better than any child in the land knew that no-one would see a baby girl as a threat. She suspected her Mama didn’t like this but did not argue if it meant she kept at least one of her wards.

So the boys had been forced to go to court. That was a few months ago and now it was Summer. Which meant the Progress of the court would be stopping at D’Qar Hall and the King would be visiting. The boys were coming too – he needed them kept close to him.

Everyone was excited about the King coming. Even her Mama. Her mother was still unhappy about the boys going and she missed them but Padmé saw her when she thought no one was looking. She fiddled with a gold chain around her neck and kept looking out to the country-road. Even though everyone knew that the court would not be coming until the following day.

Padmé wasn’t sure if she indeed got any sleep but she was up and out of bed as soon as her nurse came to get her ready to hear Mass. She didn’t feel a bit tired.

Padmé was led to Mass where she knelt beside her Mama and they heard the priest together. It was sometimes a bit boring especially first thing in the morning but she tried to be good. The King was very dedicated to God and she wanted to follow his example. She wanted to show him that she was a good princess and make him smile. She liked it when he smiled.
After breaking her fast, the real ritual of getting ready for the King began. There were odd little rules that they had to follow. They had to check all the locks on the doors in case of assassins and stable boys had to check the mattresses for sharp things that could hurt the King. But there was strange things that Padmé had to do too. There were rules for even her.

For a start, she had to cover up her hair with the hoods that ladies wore at court. She didn’t understand why she had to do this as Paige didn’t have to wear one and only married women normally had to cover their heads. Besides she liked her hair. It was very dark brown to the point of almost being black and was very curly at times. Lady Rose liked to run a comb through it to make it shine and twirl it about her fingers. Her Mama liked it too. Sometimes she would bury her head in it when she hugged Padmé and stroked it like it was spun silk.

Everyone commented that Padmé was a very pretty girl. She had her Mama’s hazel eyes and comely features. She had freckles over her nose just like her. They weren’t fashionable but her Mama would kiss her nose and tell her that she was beautiful with or without them. Padmé’s lips were bigger than her Mama’s though; she was often told off for ‘pouting’ which wasn’t very fair because that was just what she looked like when she was thinking. And her Mama had brown hair that was lighter than hers.

As soon as the court came to visit though, Padmé was forced to wear itchy hoods to cover her head. Her Mama would tell her that her lovely hair was to be treasured and protected from the eyes of the world. But Padmé didn’t quite believe her which was unusual. All the servants and stable hands had seen her already anyway. Besides when she was alone with the King, he normally asked her to take her hood off. He seemed to like her curly dark hair as much as everyone else. It was a lot like his.

There was also another strange rule that they had – Padmé was only to call him ‘Sir’ or ‘My Lord’ and only to ever refer to him as ‘the King’. That wasn’t so unusual as it was what most people did. But she wasn’t most people. They were related by blood.

Her Mama had been married to the late King, his father, and she was his daughter. Therefore the King and herself were brother and sister. But the one time she had referred to him as ‘my big brother’ he’d gone almost white to the lips and looked like he was trying not to shake. He’d left the room almost immediately without even looking at her and Padmé had nearly surrendered to tears. What had she done?

She’d gone to her Mama and cried into her skirts. Her Mama didn’t chastise her for committing an impertinence; she’d merely pulled her onto her lap and soothed her until she’d calmed down.
Padmé had been worried that the King would never like her again and never visit again even though to this day she didn’t know what she’d done wrong. Instead, the morning before he’d left, the King had called her to him and knelt down to her level.

“I can’t say more,” he’d whispered, “but one day you’ll understand. I’m not angry at you; I never could be. But can you be a good girl and promise me that you won’t refer to me as that again?”

Padmé had been all too eager to agree. “What am I to call you instead?” It was best to know what he liked to avoid upsetting him accidentally again.

The King had looked like he wanted to say something but then thought better of it. In the end he said, “Just refer to me as the King. And I’ll call you ‘My Princess’. How does that sound?”

It sounded very nice and he rode off that day with her waving her goodbyes.

Since then she had made sure to only call him the King but she couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something a bit odd about these rules.

Still the excitement was distracting and soon Padmé was dressed in her best new dress and its new hood and dashed off to take her place with her Mama at the front of the house. Her Mama smiled down at her as she took her hand and Padmé noticed that she was looking very pretty. Mama always made sure she looked pretty when the King visited.

Soon there was the sound of approaching hoof-beats. Padmé gripped her mother’s hand in mounting excitement. They were coming!

The flag bearers rode into view first followed by gentleman servers of Naboo Palace. Lando Calrissian soon came into view. He’d been the old King’s courtier and was still in admirable spirits. Lady Holdo, an old friend of the late Queen Leia, was riding pillion not far behind. She always had the most interesting pink gowns.

And then, behind them astride a mighty stead that would look like it would bite the hand off any groom that tried to feed it, rode a powerful man dressed all in black with hair the same colour, a pale countenance and an eager expression to be at their gates. He looked stern and imposing – Padmé felt sorry for any man who crossed him – yet as soon as he saw her Mama and her stood at the front of the house with all their retinue and servants, his face lit into a smile.
Padmé wanted to smile and wave back but she had to curtsey first. They all had to, even her Mama, and she was technically the only Queen the kingdom knew.

They had to keep kneeling until the King was off his horse. The sound of a man dismounting and the heavy strides of booted feet alerted Padmé that he was now almost in front of them. Padmé ventured a quick peek up.

She could see his gloved hand. He’d clearly caught her peeking too; his hand gestured her to rise.

Padmé stood straight as did her Mama. He looked from one to the other like not sure who to greet first. Her Mama seemed to know this and extended her welcome instead.

“You are most welcome here Your Grace. I trust you had a comfortable journey.”

“Thank you Madam. Your hospitality is much appreciated.”

Padme’s eyebrows furrowed a little at this. They always spoke oddly when there were people around them. Yet she knew they spoke differently when they were alone with her. When they sat in front of a fire as she played with BB8 on the rug between them, it was like they were two people who did not live apart. And their eyes always looked glad at the sight of each other like they could read each other without words. Padmé wondered sometimes if she was the only one to notice.

Then he looked away from her mother and down to her. His face seemed to gain a tender expression that she was sure didn’t happen often to anyone. The King never looked ferocious or scary to her.

“How is my princess?” He asked gently.

“Well, Sire.” Padmé said as she was trained to do but with a smile that was hardly courtly.

“I’ve bought you a present.” He carefully avoided looking at the Queen Dowager; she always thought that he gave her far too many presents. He gestured behind him and a page came forward. In his arms was a Yorkshire Terrier.
Padmé forgot her Princess status and threw her arms forward to take her new pet. The dog had a rather dour countenance but did not object to being cuddled.

“Thank you Sire!” Padmé squealed.

“He doesn’t look very happy to be gifted.” Her Mama intoned wryly. “He looks rather grumpy.”

“He’s spent too long in my company.” The King agreed. “I thought maybe a new mistress would cheer him up.”

“BB8 isn’t going to like it” was all her Mama had to say about that albeit under her breath and with an air of defeat. She clearly wasn’t up to the task of taking a new pet off her besotted daughter. For that, Padmé was grateful.

The court soon made themselves at home and they sat down to a grand feast in the Great Hall. It was large enough to house most of the gentry and smell of roast oxen made Padmé’s little tummy rumble. This was the first time that Padmé had been allowed to eat at the high table with the King and the Dowager Queen; normally she was served her meals in her room so Lady Rose could keep her away from the sweetmeats that were so bad for her teeth and her digestion. Padmé’s legs dangled from the chair she’d been placed on – she’d been propped up on a cushion so the court could see her – but she didn’t care. Not when the King was letting her have the first choice of the best dishes.

BB8 had, as her mother predicted, taken offense to her new spaniel. Padmé was both perturbed and amused that the cat now slunk around her mother’s skirts as though returning to a mistress that could be trusted to be loyal. She wanted her puppy to feel a part of the family though so chose to call him BB9. As it went, she had noticed that if she called “Niney!” the dog seemed more inclined to do as he was told. So it looked as though the pet would be gifted the name BB9-E.

Padmé looked about to inspect the courtiers that had come with the King. The two oldest Dameron boys, Kes and Wrexley, who were named for Captain Dameron’s father and fallen comrade respectively were sat at a lower table squabbling over who got the best cut of chicken. They had greeted her Mama and herself with deference that was somewhat cooler than Padmé could remember. Clearly they weren’t best pleased at her Mama for siding with the King. Han was absent with the rest of the court which left Padmé disappointed. When inquiring where her friend was, the King answered her readily enough.
“In the schoolroom. He seems keen to stay with his tutors. He’s becoming quite proficient at Greek.”

“I thought you wanted to keep the boys close. After...” Padmé let the conversation tail away. Bringing the rebellion up might cause the mood to dip.

“I am. The two eldest clearly favour their father’s cause so I thought it best to keep them under my eye. But Han has proved the most amiable and well-behaved. So I thought he could stay with his studies. I think he will appreciate the break from his brothers to be truthful.”

Padmé found this rather easy to believe. Han had always been the more studious of his brothers and the least inclined to make a fuss when he couldn’t get his own way. So she hoped that his opinion of her and her Mama hadn’t suffered from doing the right thing.

“Is he well? Does he have everything he needs?” Her Mama asked after taking a deep drink of wine.

“Of course. All their needs are met. I see they have the very best of everything.”

“Except a mother’s love.”

Her Mama had meant to say this rather quietly but Padmé still heard. Her tummy began to knot – she hoped that her Mama wasn’t going to offend him. The King in response raised his eyebrows but didn’t reply. Maybe he thought it best not to but his mouth looked a little more drawn and pressed as a result.

Padmé looked about the hall for something else to focus on. She spotted Lando Calrissian and Lady Holdo sat next to one another not far down the dais. They seemed to be caught up in conversation and barely aware of anyone else. Sir Chewbacca and Lady Katana were next to them. Padmé always liked it when Lady Katana came to visit – she always had the most interesting stories and didn’t seem to care much for courtly ways. That was surprising as she was easily the oldest lady in that room and normally the older people were more stuffy with tradition. On the contrary, Lady Katana seemed to completely lack the time or the inclination to care.

Also on the dais was someone that Padmé wasn’t happy to see: Sir Armitage Hux, the Earl of Starkiller. A sour looking man who seemed to get thinner in the cheeks every time she saw him, he was disagreeable on sight. Next to him, dressed in sumptuous clothing of deepest green was his
wife, the Countess Netal. She was a Duchess in her own right back home in France but her lands were a long way off here in England. While still very attractive, Padmé did not find her beautiful. There was something lacking in her face and demeanour that stole the idea of beauty. The fact that she never smiled rarely helped and when she did, it came out like a smirk. The Earl and the Countess seemed well matched in ambition but they did not seem happy. Sometimes Padmé felt a bit sorry for them both. While they had ‘married well’ in terms of money, they didn’t seem to garner any joy from their union.

What was unusual was that the King didn’t seem to like Hux either. While he was a powerful councillor, Padmé had heard whispers from servants that the King had been trying to get rid of his former ally for years. There was talk of him being almost keen to discover Hux’s complicity in the Dameron Rebellion but the Earl had covered his tracks too well. Until the King had real proof, the council and the general kingdom would allow him to do nothing. He may be King but the love of the people was all that kept him on that throne as Lady Rose had told her wisely. The people may have come to accept him and generally be content with his administration (taxes had been fairly consistent and there had been no unnecessary wars) but the throne was a dangerous place to venture.

So Padmé was forced to feed the Earl and the Countess from their larder stores and the King was forced to bide his time and keep his eyes sharp at every turn.

The meal soon ended and the King departed with his small retinue to walk the gardens after dinner. Padmé used this opportunity to dash off to check on Niney.

She was almost distressed when she at first couldn’t find him then discovered the private rooms of her Mama’s study was partially open. She saw her new pet sniffing at the table cloth that covered one of the tables.

Padmé hesitated for a moment – it was one of the few places that she was told by her Mama that she wasn’t to play in. But then again, she doubted her Mama wanted her spaniel to pee on the carpet either.

Padmé soon had the little dog cornered under the table and was trying to coax him out when she heard approaching voices. One sounded like her Mama.

Instinct took over and she crawled beneath the table to join her dog. She knew that she had acted on good intentions but she didn’t want to give her Mama just cause to chastise her when the King was here. If she just remained out of sight, she could make a quick escape when they were gone. Tucking her skirts around her, she cradled her dog in her lap and hoped against hope that he wouldn’t make too much noise.
The sound of the door opening met her ears and there was a swish of skirts and booted feet on the carpet. Her Mama’s voice echoed out into the room.

“Surely you can understand my concerns! Those boys have been in my care for years. I promised Jessika that I would looked after them-”

“The girl has been left with you.” The King sounded almost churlish. Like he found this conversation exasperating. “And I doubt Lady Jessika foresaw how idiotic her husband would be about their well-being.”

“They’ve changed. They seemed… colder towards me.”

“Well, that’s no fault of mine. I’ve treated them in a manner that would rival if they were my own sons. If they have decided to be martyrs to this luxury then so be it. The youngest boy seems content at the very least.”

“If they could just come here for a time I’m sure-”

“Rey! Enough!” The King snapped, sounding utterly out of patience. “I have already granted Dameron more mercy than he was due thanks to you. By rights, his head should have been spiked on Tower Bridge. Not only does he live but I’ve taken in his sons as my wards. If anything this will only encourage the poorer gentry to cause trouble for me.” He seemed to almost pace. “Are you regretting your actions now? Has the appeal of being the wife of a Protector began to look a better option?”

There was a stricken silence as though her Mama was too stunned and offended to reply. “How can you say that? You know that I would never lift a single finger to help anyone who wanted to hurt your reign. Do you think I would surrender my daughter into anyone else’s keeping when she was young? After what I endured alone as a child?”

“Then why challenge me when you know I was within my rights to be worse? Cruel even?”

“Because you’re not cruel. You’ve never been cruel.”
“That’s a lie. We both know I’m capable of great cruelty.”

“No. No.” There was more rustling and Padmé got the impression that her Mama had moved forward to be close to him. “You’re a good man Ben. You just have to see you alone with Padmé to know there’s light inside you.”

“Then why do I hear Poe’s bloody name every time I come here?” The King snapped. “Why do you-”

“I’m not defending what he did.” Her Mama cut in. “It was idiotic to the extreme. But he has a hero complex which you know. I do honestly believe that in his own mind he thought what he was doing was right.”

“Do you think that?”

There was a sigh and the sound of more rustling. It sounded as though her Mama had sat down. “No. And I know you showed him more mercy than he deserved. But… I don’t know, I miss having his boys in my care. And I miss the regard they used to show me.”

“You can’t have everyone’s love Rey. It’s not possible. For every subject that loves you, there will be another that will despise you.”

“I wish you were here more.” It was whispered in a soft voice by her Mama but Padmé was close enough to hear. Niney seemed to have nestled within her skirts and gone to sleep so it was only her own harsh breathing she had to control.

“I come as often as I can. But everytime I come… she’s growing too quickly.”

Her Mama laughed at that. “That’s true. She’s going to be tall. And beautiful. And much too clever for me. She already reads Latin better than I ever will.”

“Does… does she ever speak of me? When I’m not here?” The King sounded uncertain. Even shy.

“Talk of you? Only constantly. She’s always insufferable the week before you arrive. Then again,
we both are.”

“So you miss me too?”

There was the sound of skirts rustling. “Of course. I will always miss you when you leave. How could I not… husband?”

Pamé was sure she’d misheard and stuck her finger in her ear to clean it. But they still talked.

“I wish I could tell them.” The King breathed as though for her Mama’s ears only. “They berate me like a small child for not marrying and I wish I could tell them all that I have a wife already. And a child.”

“You cannot.” Her Mama whispered gently. “You know we have to protect her. If nothing else, she must be untarnished by this.”

“I know. Sometimes the memory of it is all that stops me. Our little Pamé.”

Pamé had stopped trying to clean her ears and seemed to have forgotten how to breathe.

“She will always be your daughter Ben.” Her Mama whispered. “I have to cover her hair whenever the court comes because, well, you’ve seen: she looks so much like you.”

“She has your eyes. And your beautiful face.”

“And she has your stubbornness and quick temper too.”

“I think we’re both a little stubborn, don’t you?” The King reasoned. There was a soft laugh. “May I come to you tonight?”

There was no answer to hear but it was obvious that a nod was exchanged.
The King and her Mama left the room to rejoin their court. Leaving Padmé to stifle her sobs into Niney’s fur beneath an ugly table.

Padmé crawled out from the table eventually and managed to totter back to her room. Once inside her room, she ripped off her hood and threw it across the room. Her looking glass was incidently within her view and she peered into it.

Now that it was pointed out, she saw it. Her hair was indeed exactly like the King’s and she saw that her lips were plump like his own too. The resemblance was now undeniable. No wonder her Mama had wanted her hair covered.

Climbing onto her bed, she buried her head into her pillow and wept so violently she thought she might be sick. Her head hurt from the new information and the hurt it caused made her tummy clench.

They’d lied to her. All her life they had been lying. Even her Mama who normally told her everything had kept this a secret. Now that Padmé could think, it made slight sense. Her Mama talked of the Old King in affectionate terms but not as though he were her father. More like a treasured relative which now she supposed he was – her grandfather. Even odder, she’d been keen to tell her the stories of the Late Queen Leia. That should have made her suspect. Oh she was a stupid little girl!

When Lady Rose came in to find her to get her ready for supper, she was astonished and worried to find Padmé curled up on her bed in evident misery. Padmé mumbled an excuse that she had a terrible headache – which wasn’t really a lie. But when Lady Rose mentioned that she would go and fetch her Mama, Padmé bolted upright.

“No!” Padmé cried. “I don’t want… just let me be!”

She was so earnest that Lady Rose agreed albeit with evident unease. Padmé lay her head back down and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, it had gone very dark.

Getting off the bed sluggishly, she listened out to any sounds. D’Qar Hall was quiet. It must be very late.
Were the King and her Mama together right now?

Hot anger suddenly surged up in Padmé. They had no idea what she was going through and she wasn’t going to permit them a pleasant evening. Still in her gown, she stalked out of her room and ran down to her Mama’s room. She wanted answers and wanted them now.

Padmé got to her Mama’s room and smacked her hand against the wood door. It didn’t matter if her Mama was still asleep – she could get up!

There was a sound from behind the door. “Who is it?” Her Mama’s voice called out trying too hard to sound casual.

“Mama! Open the door!”

There was the sliding of the bolt and her Mama’s face appeared in a crack. She did not open the door the whole way.

“Padmé? It’s nearly one o’cl-”

“I know!” Padmé spat. “I know all about it. I know you’ve lied to me for years! I know...” She lowered her voice to a hiss. “I know he’s my father.”

In any other circumstances, the reaction would have made Padmé giggle. Her Mama looked for a moment as though she might faint. Her grip on the door seemed to intensify. Then with a deep breath, she nodded.

“Okay.” Her Mama whispered. “Come in.”

Padmé was let into the room. It was not a surprise to see the King not far behind her Mama.

He was still wearing his dark clothing and had clearly not heard the conversation at the door for he greeted Padmé with a smile.
“Princess! This is late. How’s your-”

“She knows Ben.” Her Mama had shut the door quietly but had not turned to face the room. It was like she wanted to disappear into the door.

Padmé spotted two goblets of wine placed to the side table. This little act of domesticity was like another wound to her now when once it would have made her keen to join in. She looked up at the King and saw that he looked as stricken as if she’d just kicked him.

They did not try and deny it for which Padmé was grateful but the King could only voice a weak: “How?”

“I overheard. In the study. I was fetching Niney from under the table. I know everything.”

The King closed his eyes and started shaking his head. “That’s not… you weren’t meant to find out like that.” He said in almost a groan of pain.

Padmé glared at one and then the other. It was impertinent and disrespectful but she didn’t care. She didn’t care about anything anymore.

Her Mama gathered herself first and turned to face her. She looked like she’d hardened herself to blows and was willing to face musket fire if needs be.

“Very well. Then it’s time you knew everything.”

The King stepped forward. “Rey, she’s too young-”

“She’s been old enough for a long time. And besides we can’t leave it like this. If we are to be judged then she needs to know the absolute truth.”

So Padmé was sat on Rey’s chair with Rey kneeling on the floor in Padme’s normal place and the King took a shaky seat opposite her.
The story that her Mama told was a long one. Long and impassioned and full of desperate impossible situations. Padme’s frostiness thawed as she listened for, despite herself, she wanted to know what happened.

Her Mama wiped her eyes many times as she spoke of Han, the Old King, and how much she regretted her actions. She spoke of the lies it took to keep such an affair a secret and great love requires great sacrifice.

Finally it was quiet as Padmé tried to process what she’d learnt.

“So you promised not to be Queen?” Padmé asked.

“I did.”

“Was that to help the old King meet a better end?”

“Partly.” Her Mama nodded. “But there was another reason: I did not want to be Queen again.” Her Mama looked from the King who was looking more conflicted than he ever had before. “Being a Queen and having such power, it is a hard thing Padmé. And once was enough to let me know that I didn’t want it. I could be a wife in the shadows with a beautiful child and that was enough for me. But I didn’t need a coronet to know that I belonged to the King. We were never about that.”

“And are you happy?”

“Happy enough.” The King spoke for the first time. “I won’t deny it’s hard Padmé. Sometimes I feel like if I do not see you or your mother, I will go mad. It’s why I pray so much: to keep me strong. But these moments, when you are with me at this grand house, it makes everything worthwhile. I don’t know if we could have had this happiness at court. I know you would never have had peace and I couldn’t bare that.” The King rose and knelt before Padmé beside her mother so they were both on a level with her. “You are still a princess. You are still legitimate. You are still the daughter of King. The only thing that must remain a secret is which King that is. I never wanted this for you but the alternative is much worse. I may be seen to the world as… as a brother,” even saying it casually made his face contort, “but I love you as only a father can. I am your father and your blood Padmé. You loved me like one once. Now it is fact maybe one day you can learn to once again.”

Padme looked from one to other and then slowly nodded brokenly. The King, or was it her Papa
now, caught hold of her and clutched her to him. Padmé could not help but hug him back.

So much had changed and yet not very much at all. The art of royalty was to keep your own council.

This was a secret that she would protect with her very life.

Chapter End Notes

God that took a lot of effort! Please let me know what you thought. I need the feedback to keep writing.

Three days. Three days and I get to see the film. I don't know whether to scream or be sick. Maybe both. Just know that I love the Reylo community with all my heart.

After this story is done I'm going to take a hiatus from writing for a bit. I'm exhausted and need to remind myself why I love doing this I think.
In the seventeenth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King Ben I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Padmé dipped her quill in the ink-pot and looked down at the parchment that lay blank before her. She had written this letter half a hundred times in her mind and yet now that she finally had the time to put ink to paper, her hand shook and she found herself incapable to put a single word to paper. She had put this letter off for so many weeks, constantly waiting for a sign of things changing for the better and proof that she had imagined the whole thing. But now she had proof that it was not a dream; it was real and resembled a nightmare.

She must send this letter to the King, her father, and she must be tasked to break his heart.

It had been little things at first. Inconsequential things that could have gone unnoticed. Her mother, always so buoyant, had began to desire the comfort of sitting and midday naps. This wasn’t completely out of the ordinary as Lady Rose had explained. Her Mama was getting a little older than she was, having just turned thirty-seven, and she couldn’t be expected to want to go hunting or hawking with her young daughter every day. Padmé was beginning to forget the last time that they had gone hunting together.

Slowly, her mother had began to lose her famed golden skin. This might have been considered more fashionable but her new pale complexion made her look drawn and tired. She was thinner too. Having always possessed an appetite that defied her small stature, Padmé had noticed that her mother was beginning to pick at certain meats with a rather disinterested air. Her Mama’s gowns had needed to be taken in as a result and she had gone from slender to desperately thin.

She’d asked her mother if she was well half a hundred times and her mother had always smiled and replied that she was ‘quite well Sweeting’.

It was the same look in her eyes that she had once worn when she had not known the truth about the King being her natural father: the look of a woman who was holding back.

Padmé had grown accustomed to being told the truth. As penance for her earlier duplicity, Rey had always told her everything that Padmé had wanted to know. Even some things that she hadn’t wanted to know.
“You’re not stupid Padmé.” Her mother had explained gently. “And you are born into a position that demands that you must be sharp.”

Padmé knew that she was book smart; her father had seen to it that she had a sumptuous education. Her tutors had taught her Greek, Latin, French, History and had honed her penmanship to perfection. It was said that the King kept every one of her letters to the council. If he did, Padmé found that rather touching. Especially as he didn’t need to. Her true letters to him were sent along with her mother’s in strictest confidence and security.

She made a point of writing to her father in the warmest and most intimate terms. She knew he liked it that way and helped him deal with the separation from herself and her mother. They were closer than any other King and their royal subject to the point that the Privy Council found her influence almost dangerous but Padmé knew that he would delight in her living in the same palace as him. Writing her coded letters to him and referring to him as ‘Papa’ seemed to take the sting out of the estrangement.

She knew her Mama wrote most tenderly and loving to him also but Padmé was not privy to those letters. There were personal between a man and a woman. Husband and wife.

Her mother did love her father; that much was evident from the constant danger they lived in by refusing to stop loving one another. When Padme had first found out of her true parentage she had been a little wary and watched them covertly. How could two people who lived apart and were separated through circumstances and all possible fate still refuse to give up on one another? Wouldn’t it have been easier to just let go? To surrender to the inevitable and admit defeat?

Maybe it was something she would never understand or experience. She was not foolish enough to believe that her destiny lay in love. That was not the way of a lady of the royal blood and her own mother had paid a high price to keep her position, her own daughter and indeed her life to maintain something so fleeting and precious. But she knew her father enough to know that he only regretted how he could not love her more openly and have Padmé known as his own child.

Padmé had been to court quite a few times in her life with her own little entourage. Her Mama had come with her as her presence was often requested too. Padmé knew her Mama did not like the court. It bought back painful memories for her of deception and double dealing and also, although she would see the King, they did not enjoy the same freedom as they did at D’Qar Hall. Padmé found that she enjoyed the court more than she expected; there were amusements to be had such as dancing, lute playing, singing, card games and archery. The King often held grand festivities when they came although it was under the guise of celebrating holy days and Christmas.

It was also a grand occasion when Padmé and her mother came to court. With ladies of high position there, the men could bring their wives and daughters too.
The King, for all the pushing and bullying of his council, still had not tried to take a Queen to sit beside him.

That was not to say he did not sometimes let negotiations go forward. There was sometimes talk of some foreign princess being bought forward and a dowry being discussed. But it always fell apart eventually.

There was even talk of the council summoning to Lady Tico to come back to court. Her marriage could be set aside and she could then marry the King.

Lady Rose’s response was so vehement that her quill stabbed clean through the parchment when she wrote her reply and the councillors who had been stupid enough to bring it forward had been banished from the King’s presence for nearly half a year.

But there had been a time when Padmé had seen her Mama’s grief at the prospect that maybe the King’s regard was finally beginning to tire. Rumours didn’t often make it to the country but one caught the ear of even the Dowager Queen.

The King was said to enjoy the company of a lady at the court: Lady Holdo’s eldest daughter Sabe.

Padmé had met Lady Holdo and her three daughters before and had liked them. Sabe had been the most reserved and sombre, wearing gowns of dark colours and keeping her eyes lowered unless the Queen Dowager or Padmé spoke directly to her. Padmé could not remember the King paying anymore attention to Sabe than he did to Satine or Breha but the two youngest girls were married now (happily too which was a rarity) and Sabe seemed to have become closer to the King.

Padmé watched as her mother tried to hide her distress without much success. Padmé had been twelve at the time and could read the signs of her mother’s bloodshot eyes and the slight tremble in her hands when she heard more news from the court. Padmé had wanted to write to her father and demand to know what was going on but stayed her hand. His own letters were the same as always; full of details of his everyday life at court and all the gossip surrounding it. Still full of love and encouragements. He still seemed his normal self.

He came to visit that summer on progress with his court and Sabe had been with him. She’d curtsied her forbearance to the Queen Dowager who accepted it with a stiff smile that did not meet her eyes. The King had looked rather confused and had looked from one to the other. At his secret wife who was looking at Sabe in much the same manner as she might meet a thief in the night and at his favoured courtier who was looking as modest and meek as though she were making a pilgrimage of penance.
Padmé had waited until she was able to walk in the gardens with the King, arm in arm, and far enough away from the courtiers so they were not overheard to explain. But even then the King had got there first.

“What is wrong with your mother?” He asked lowly but urgently. “Why is she looking at me so coldly?”

Padmé was not yet as skilled a politician as she would have to become so decided to be upfront. “There have been rumours. From the court. About you and Lady Sabe.”

He’d stopped in their walk and looked at her as though she had made an announcement to join the Knights Templar.

“She can’t… she doesn’t honestly believe…”

“We are far removed out here.” Padmé reasoned quietly. “We only get the talk of the town. It must have been important if we heard it.”

The King was grinding his teeth so hard it looked painful. “I knew there were rumours. Of course I knew. But I never suspected… your mother knows Sabe! And she knows me! I am…” he lowered his voice “I am her husband.”

Padmé was beginning to feel rather remorseful. The King could not hide his feelings well and now his face was contorted as though he’d suffered a deadly wound. Apparently the news of her mother’s suspicions had caused him as much pain as the rumours that had brought about her Mama’s suspicions in the first place.

“She loves you. She loves you very much.”

“Then why-” The King cut himself off. He looked like he had battled with that question too many times.

“For me.” Padmé whispered. As she got older, the delicacy of her situation became more apparent to her and she had realised how different her life would be had her mother surrendered to her own
desires and broken the promise that she’d made. The King gripped her hand on his arm and looked at her tenderly.

“Yes. And for that I am glad she had more sense than I did. I am not always a rational man, my sweet.”

“But there is no truth in the rumours?”

“None whatsoever. But I will ease your mother’s mind myself. Leave it to me.”

Padmé did leave it to the King. But that didn’t prevent her listening as he did it.

Her mother’s rooms was along a hidden passage that led to Padme’s suite of rooms so it was too tempting not to sneak down with her shoes left behind and press her ear against the door.

It reminded her of when she had hid beneath the table that day and found out more than she had ever dreamed.

There was no preamble in the King getting to the point.

“Padmé told me… that you have concerns. About Sabe.”

There was a silence for a moment then the sound of her mother straightening her skirts. “It is none of my business.”

Padmé rolled her eyes. Never would her Mama be so docile in the face of potential infidelity. She would never be that kind of Queen.

“Perhaps not but you will hear anyway – I have never taken a lover nor do I wish it. Sabe is a confidante and nothing more.”

The King said this like it brokered no argument. So her Mama did the natural thing and ignored it.
“She is unmarried and it is said you support her financially. That she lives at the court.”

Padmé raised her eyebrows and pushed her ear closer to the wood.

“That is true. She will not marry as she has neither wish nor intention.”

“Some may ask why you support such a lady of standing to live away from matrimony.”

“Do you question it?” Her Mama’s silence was answer enough. “She lives like a nun. Indeed, if it were not for her books and studies then I believe she would retire to a religious life. Whenever we are together we are in company and we talk of theology primarily. She’s an intelligent woman and I find her views fascinating.”

“I see.” Her Mama seemed unsure how to proceed. The King had given a good defence and seemed happy to put his hand on the Bible to proclaim his innocence in this situation. “But the council may soon pressure you to take a Queen.”

“They have been pressuring me for twelve years. I am still King. Under my seal, my word is law.”

“You need an heir soon Ben. Otherwise civil war-”

“I have an heir in mind. Let me deal with that.”

An uneasy silence fell between them.

“I love you. Only ever you. I thought you of all people would remember that.”

“I...” Padmé listened for her Mama to argue but nothing came out. Instead she seemed to choke. “I do remember. I’m sorry.”

The King seemed to sigh. “I know. Don’t cry. I understand more than you realise. But we must
trust one another. Or otherwise what is the point?"

Her Mama was considerably warmer to Lady Sabe from that moment on.

The issue of the King’s heir was a tenuous one though. And Padmé could feel the stares of the world land upon her.

When she had been born, the world in general hadn’t paid her an excessive amount of attention. Many saw her birth as a failure and a disappointment even though she was treated as grandly as any princess living. The King had wasted no expense upon her though. She had received the finest tutors and was easily the most educated woman in the land. She could play the lute and the virginals; she was a strong singer; she was a good hunts-woman and she could even duel with ease (albeit in secret for the sake of propriety). For the longest time, Padmé had simply seen this as what a princess was expected to achieve.

But the years went on and slowly, inevitably, the truth became known.

The King would never marry or produce another child. Nor would he risk the instability of naming an heir. Which meant that the crown passed to the next member of royal blood.

Padmé herself.

This was not met with enthusiasm. Women had ruled and some of the best political women descended through Padmé’s bloodline – her namesake was lauded as a Saint and her grandmother had governed more or less alone as King Han had been happy to be a figurehead and nothing more – yet none had ruled completely on their own authority since Padmé Amidala. She had married unwisely and look what had happened when his ambition had festered!

There was also the men on the Privy Council who would not accept a woman ruler and Hux had been first and foremost.

The man whom Padmé had never liked soon showed himself as her enemy when she turned fourteen.

The attempted coup was organised with the backing of the last of the First Order survivors and disaffected noblemen who were unsatisfied with the King’s aversion to marriage. Hux had been
more of a nemesis than an ally to the King for many years but covered his tracks well.

This time his intent was clear. He wanted the King off the throne and there would be no question of Padmé ascending.

Captain Dameron may have had designs on being protector but General Hux was going in for usurpation and possibly murder.

The King had come himself in the dead of night to escort Padmé and the Queen Dowager to London at breakneck speed. The Tower was still in his possession and there was no stronger fortress to protect them. Padmé had ridden with the King and her heart had hammered the whole time. Royal status had many privileges but this was certainly a pitfall.

Padmé was lodged with her mother in the Tower not as a prisoner but they wordlessly both knew the other was thinking the same thing: would they ever be allowed to walk out again? Would their next view of the sky be as they walked to the block?

The waiting was excruciating but soon news came to them.

They would be permitted to walk out again.

The King had crushed the rebellion with a savagery that had not been seen since his days under Snoke. No prisoners were taken in this rebellion; he fought to kill. When he cornered Hux, it was said he strangled him with his bare hands.

He would show no mercy to those who threatened his family.

The Countess was not killed but imprisoned within the Tower. It was said she would end her days there. Padmé felt another flinch of pity for her until she remembered that she would have worn her mother’s crown if she’d had good enough odds.

Padmé had grown up that night. Queenship would be arduous and she must keep her wits sharp to survive.
Her mother had spent more time getting used to the idea of her child reigning in her own right. Not because she didn’t believe she could do it; she just knew it was a heavy crown that her daughter would wear.

“I should have realised.” Mama had grimaced one night before the fire, “I should have known that he would not be denied twice. I may not have been his Queen and you his acknowledged child but he would ensure that you had a sumptuous inheritance.”

His refusal to marry and produce any other heir now made sense to Padmé. He was making absolutely sure that there would be no one to succeed him but Padmé. The only way they would accept a woman ruler was if there was absolutely no other prospect. There was almost a hint of genius in it.

Padmé sometimes felt almost cold at the prospect of mounting the throne. Sometimes she felt sure she would be out of her depth. But sometimes she felt a cold determination to do the best she could. She wasn’t arrogant enough to believe she would be as successful as her grandmother but she could aspire to her success.

These were meant to be her last peaceful years, Padmé mused as she looked down at the blank parchment, before everything changes irrevocably.

But it was changing sooner than that.

Padmé had found her Mama’s kerchief.

It was stained with blood.

Suddenly the cough that her Mama hadn’t been able to shake for weeks had new meaning and her heart was cold at what it meant.

She did not hear the door open behind her or the soft footsteps.

“Padmé?”
She whirled around. Her Mama was stood behind her. Her slim frame had run to gauntness and she looked wan. How had she not seen the writing on the script? She was meant to be intelligent.

And yet some of the Dowager Queen’s sharpness had not faded. Her expression changed from concern to shock and then to sad resignation.

“Oh Padmé. I had hoped to spare you from this.”

“The doctors...”

“The doctors have done all they can. We both know that once consumption really takes the lungs there is no going back.” Padmé couldn’t prevent the tears from falling thick and fast then. Her mother nestled her Padme’s head against her beating heart. The thumps seemed to be almost taunting.

“Papa...” Padmé whispered.

A sigh. “Please, let me be the one to tell him. I’ve nearly finished in my head what I will write. I even had a speech ready for you. Not that I would have remembered.”

Padmé was happy to be spared the duty of breaking a heart. She had her own to nurse at that moment.

Her mother sent the letter. Two days later she was forced to take to her bed.

Padmé was horrified to see her beautiful mother so reduced and struggling to breathe easily. It seemed so cruel. So unnatural. And yet there was a look of peace on her mother’s face. She seemed almost accepting.

“You must understand Padmé,” Her mother whispered through laboured breaths, “I have no wish to leave this life or you or your father but I have lived well. I am approaching forty, I’ve lived quietly with you for many years and I have been loved. If God now calls me to a higher office, I am as ready as I will ever be.”
It was small comfort to Padmé. And evidently none at all to the King.

They did not receive a reply to the letter. Instead the received a small delegation on horseback who were forced to follow their mud spattered King.

Padmé came into the hall to greet their King and curtsied to his hurried entry. He barely seemed to notice. He grasped her forearms as though to steady himself.

“It’s not true. Please God tell me it’s not true.”

She was forced to break his heart after all. They stood together, father and daughter, locked in shared grief for a long moment. Then Padmé led him upstairs to where her mother lay in bed.

Her Mama was clearly shocked to see him and to receive him lying on the bed but not as shocked as he clearly was. The proof of his wife’s failing health was laid before his eyes.

“Ben...”

The King was at her mother’s side in two strides.

“Rey... how long...”

“Consumption. I’ve been failing for weeks.”

“I will send my physicians. I will send to Europe! We’ll find-”

Her Mama lay a hand on his cheek. “Ben... we both know there’s nothing that can be done.”

Padmé watched as the King seemed to grapple desperately for an argument that wasn’t hollow and then he buried his face in her mother’s skirts and his shoulders began to shake.
Padmé quietly left the room and made sure to close the door softly.

The King stayed under the guise of needing some country air and wishing to see how Padme’s progress fared. A rather redundant excuse as there was no one else of true importance with him. The days and subsequent week that followed was spent mostly at the Dowager Queen’s bedside. Some days she seemed almost to rally which made the days when she could barely sit up all the worse for everyone.

Padmé sat at her mother’s bedside, fed her soup with a spoon and stroked her mother’s hair softly in the same fashion that she had done for Padmé as a child. The King visited every day and Padmé often retired to corner of the room so they could speak alone.

It was on the tenth night of his stay that it became clear that it was nearly time. A priest was sent for.

In the end, it was both Padmé and the King at her bedside with the King holding his wife in the sitting position. Padmé took her mother’s hand.

“You are descended from great Queens. You can still be the greatest yet.” She whispered to Padmé.

“I will try. For you.”

Her Mama looked up at the King. “Thank you. For giving her to me. Our beautiful daughter. I commit her to you in my absence. Be as good a father to her as you have been.”

“Always.”

“I am a fortunate woman. I have been loved. So loved...”

Her Mama closed her eyes as though savouring the knowledge with a smile on her face. Padmé
Padmé returned with her father to the court where the Queen Dowager’s funeral was held. It was a grand affair with the people turning out in their droves to mark the passing of such a gentle lady. Her Mama had always been a popular lady with the people.

The grief kept stabbing at Padmé like a dull blade. Death was a part of life and her mother’s soul was now in eternal paradise. Yet she could not help but weep into her pillows at the loss of a mother she had loved so much and who had shown her such love in return.

The King had become a shell of a man. It was like the grief he felt was beyond tears or words. He shut himself away claiming illness and only Padmé was allowed into his presence. Sometimes he let her cry as he held her, sometimes they would talk about something, anything, unrelated to their pain. And sometimes they would sit in silence that was almost stunned.

Lady Rose had come with her to court with her husband and daughter. She seemed to need to dedicate herself to someone and the daughter of the mistress she served for nearly twenty years was an obvious answer. Finn and Rose were clearly feeling the loss of their mistress and friend deeply. Paige and Leia were gentle company but also knew when to not talk much.

Life at court was something of an education. The courtiers were tripping over themselves to pay homage to their princess and the heir apparent. Her grief seemed to be mistaken as haughty prudeness which was suitable to her role. Kes and Wrexley Dameron came forward to pay homage to her. They had all of their father’s confidence and dashing good looks. Yet it was the young man stood behind them that caught Padmé’s eye.

“Han?”

The youngest of the brothers stepped forward and bowed deeply. He too had inherited her father’s looks but Padmé saw the eyes of that sweet Lady Jessika. Eyes that she could remember as the face faded. They were intelligent eyes. Sensitive too.

“Our Grace.” His voice was honeyed but it was clear he was lacking in the swarthiness of his brothers. He wasn’t a natural courtier. It was probably why her father liked him.
“Goodness, you’ve grown. I haven’t seen you since we were seven.”

“As have you, Your Grace.” He bowed his head. “I was deeply grieved to hear of the death of the Queen Dowager.”

“Thank you.” Padmé replied quietly. “She was always fond of you. Leia is with me. I’m sure she would like to get to know her brothers.”

Han nodded and stepped back. Padmé made a note to keep an eye on his progress.

Padmé found herself watching the King closely. And she didn’t like what she saw. He was beginning to crumble around the seems. Without her mother in the world, he seemed to fading from the inside. He did everything that Padmé and the doctors bid him to. He took the tonics prescribed, he walked in the gardens with his daughter and ate his food even with evident difficulty. Yet something that had once blazed within the King was now beginning to flicker.

Padmé was faced with a difficult realisation: he couldn’t live without her mother. He could try and she saw without question he really was trying for her sake if not his but something that had sustained him for years had gone out and no amount of her fussing could make it relight.

Padmé found herself talking more and more with Han whenever she had an opportunity. The young man seemed wise beyond his years and the scholarship that the King had provided for him had evidently paid off. He was the only one of the Dameron brothers to pay court to the King simply because he wanted to. Padmé sat back and listened as they discussed the latest Greek playwright and she almost wished that Han would call to the King’s chambers more; it was a distraction to his misery that she could never provide. She looked too much like her mother to ever be that.

The other Dameron brothers paid court to her and flattered her but she couldn’t take them too seriously. She was their way to advancement and she never forgot that. When the King was gone, she would inevitably sit on the throne and a woman monarch would need advisors. Their prison would become their domain.

Han ironically seemed the only one who wished to retire from the court to the country with his books. Padmé knew that the King would let him go if it was safe to do so – the youngest brother’s only ambition was to see the land run well and without strife. He didn’t care about his own potential power; his father’s fate had curbed any appetite for that. And it was that self-awareness
that made Padmé want to keep him close.

Slowly the friendship that they had been forced to surrender re-established itself. They walked together, talked together and discussed every problem the kingdom could provide them.

Yet there was something that Padmé noticed about him. He seemed to look at her intently. Not in a fawning, courtier style that hinted at love but as though in fascination and maybe realisation. Like he saw something that no-one else could.

Padmé soon understood when they walked down a hidden gallery.

“Do you know that the royal portraits are hidden away in this corridor?” Han asked her almost abruptly.

“No, I didn’t.” Padmé answered honestly.

“They chronicle the house of Skywalker. Of their images.”

“Really?” Padmé mused, still not quite understanding why he was telling her this.

“I used to sneak in that room and look at them as a boy. I found them fascinating. The house of Skywalker have very distinctive characteristics. Not many remember clearly but the portraits keep it alive. They all had good looks. They all had a certain regal dignity. And… they all seemed to have dark hair.”

Padmé went very still. Leia and Paige were a little way off to allow them some privacy but close enough for decorum. She was grateful for that.

Han looked at her and she suddenly understood – he knew.

He’d looked at those portraits, he’d remembered the looks of the little princess that had been left behind and the grief of a King for his supposed beloved former stepmother. He’d seen the similarities of Leia Organa in the young princess and worked out how a woman of no apparent connection, apart from earlier marriage to her supposed father, had passed on her characteristics.
He knew and he was trying to communicate without words of treason that he knew. And that he would say nothing.

Padmé had continued her mother’s tradition of covering her hair with delicate French hoods and gold thread netting but her dark locks still peaked through. And Han seemed to see what many others didn’t or simply wouldn’t.

“They’ve been locked away for years.” Han continued haltingly. “Unless the King or yourself requests them to be displayed they will probably remain that way. They may even fade. With time.”

Padmé nodded once and they continued their walk down the gallery in understanding silence.

__________________________________________________________

Lady Rose escorted Padmé to the King’s rooms one cold night so she could read with him. The King had been looking rather gaunt that night and Padmé had felt a sudden urge to be with him that night.

The King greeted her warmly as per usual and even bowed low to Lady Rose.

Their relationship had been rather strained over the years. Padmé knew that Lady Rose had played a pivotal role in her mother and father’s affair and didn’t seem to have particularly enjoyed it. Yet now that her mother was dead, she seemed to have softened towards the King. Even Lady Rose and Finn (who had never been a royal favourite) could see how deeply he mourned her passing and that helped in their understanding towards him.

Maybe the King was feeling remorseful for the infamy that Lady Rose had never shaken off. Or maybe he was just too tired to fight.

They read only for a little while but Padmé noticed that the King kept staring off into the fire.

“Can I get you anything, Your Grace?” Padmé asked.
“Don’t be so formal May. It is only us.” He replied not unkindly. He often called her May when they were alone. It was a name she liked.

“Would you like me to read something else?” She asked gently.

“Put the book down. I can hardly take much in tonight. Just... talk to me.”

Padmé did as he bid and put the book aside. They sat beside the fire watching the log fall apart.

“Are you happy Padmé?” He asked this softly yet it still made Padmé jump.

“Yes. Yes I have no cause for complaint.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

Padmé looked down at her hands in her lap.

“You miss your mother.” The King put this as a simple fact; not a question.

“Of course. Every day.” Padmé looked at the King. “You miss her too.”

“Every moment without her is like a living death.” He was looking into the fire and then turned to look at her. “Do not think that I do not wish to be with you May. Your company has been all that has held me up these last few months. But I’ve always been a selfish man. A stupid man.”

“You are not.” Padmé reached out and took his massive hand in her own. “You’ve been the best father I could ask for. You’ve never forced me into a marriage I didn’t want-”

“That was selfishness again. The council wanted you at least betrothed but I wouldn’t hear of it. I couldn’t bare the idea of you being shipped off to some foreign prince you might not even like. They have long lost patience with me. I have not been the wisest King.”
“You have been a good King!” Padmé insisted. “You have bought peace to this land—”

“A tenuous peace. A peace made from fear. The people never forget your past sins. They had always feared me. I’ve always feared myself.”

“Why? I have never had reason to.”

“That is because I would die for you. As I would have died for your mother. I was meant to go first; I’m the elder. I’m nearly fifty – that’s much too old. She wasn’t even forty.”

Padmé nodded with her eyes lowered lest he see the tears in her eyes. “I’m sorry. For what I cost you both.”

“What?” The King seemed to sit up.

“If…” Padmé swallowed. This was something she had feared for many years. “If I had not been born, you could have had it all. The Pope may have been persuaded to sanction a marriage between you and my mother. It would have cost you but… you may have had a dozen children. Instead you just had—”

“Stop.” The King caught hold of her hands in a grip that was nearly painful. “Don’t finish that. Don’t even think it.”

“But I do think it. You loved my mother so much… and all you got out of it was—”

“You. We got you. And you have been the joy of my life. Your mother yearned for motherhood; she was besotted with you on sight. And so was I. I’d never felt such terrifying love. I was afraid of babies. The last baby I had looked upon and let into my heart was Jaina. And I lost her. I was prepared to go to any lengths not to lose you like I’d lost her. Like I’d lost my mother, my father, your mother. You weren’t the end of my hopes; you were the beginning of them.”

Padmé lay her head upon his hands. It felt like confession and she had been granted extreme unction.

“I love you Papa.” She whispered as he stroked her hair tenderly. “My Papa.”
The fire was burning low in the grate. Padmé had gone back to her rooms with a kiss goodnight and his blessing. Ben had watched his daughter leave with a feeling of lightness. He’d said all he needed to say.

He should go to bed. He should get some decent rest. But his body felt too heavy to move. He found it harder to get up nowadays.

The fire was guttering and images danced across the walls.

“Oh Rey.” He breathed. “Rey, I’m tired.”

“Then let yourself rest and come with me.”

His eyes fluttered open with effort.

She was dressed in her plain blue dress with her hair loose and flowing just as she had been when he had first seen her at the fountain. Not quite so young but nowhere near as old as she’d been when he’d held her as she’d passed from this life. She looked healthy and vital and here.

He could feel the aches and pains leave him. His body was not so heavy anymore.

She was here. She’d come back.

“Rey. Rey.” Then his eyes flickered to the door where their daughter had left through just a few hours ago. “Padmé...”

“We will wait for her. We will watch. And she will rule. I think she’s ready Ben. I think she was born ready.”

Ben sighed. His daughter’s inheritance. Yes, she was ready.
He got up almost without moving and went towards Rey. He knew this time that they wouldn’t be parted again.

Padmé got up early and went down the gallery towards the King’s rooms. They had said they would rise early to hear Mass. Yet he hadn’t come to her rooms to collect her. It was still early enough that a mist was still hovering over the gardens and he probably needed the rest. Yet he would be displeased if he missed Mass.

The pages were stood guard outside his door. They bowed and opened the doors to her as she approached. The King didn’t like company when it could be avoided and kept his servants at arm’s length. Therefore when the air was still when she entered the apartments she didn’t immediately think anything of it.

She opened the door to the room they had been seated by the fire just that night and almost tutted when she saw his silhouette in his chair. She’d told him a number of times to not sleep in that chair.

“Papa. Papa.” She whispered gently. “It’s time for Mass.” He didn’t move. She reached out to shake his hand and nearly baulked. It was growing cold.

She looked at him then. At his pale pallor that now looked almost luminous. At his still chest. At his paling lips. And the look of peace on his face. He’d not worn such an expression since her mother had died.

At first Padmé could only kneel and stare. And then began to shake.

She was Queen. The King was dead and she was the Queen.

So why didn’t she feel a rising destiny and only overwhelming loss and grief?

Blindly, she staggered to the window and opened the shutters. It took her three attempts to open the latch on the window. The air didn’t so much gush in as it gushed out into the open sky. Like a release. Like a bird being set free.
She looked out over the gardens and saw a stone feature. It was old now and the marble was in need of work but it was still visible from the window. A water fountain where a girl and her cat had once sat.

A new sense of purpose began to rise within Padmé.

She would write it all down in secret. She would discuss in secret with Han all she knew. She would dictate the story that the world did not know but which they should know.

About a girl in a blue dress and the Prince trapped in the Tower.

Finally together. Finally free.

Chapter End Notes

That's it. All done. God, I'm drained!

Massive huge thanks to Poet Hrotvisha who has been an absolute babe and my beloved beta as well as my wifey Jess444 and Buiana for their stunning mood boards and manips. It's been an absolute pleasure.

I sincerely need a break as I feel wrung out. My love for Reylo is as strong as ever but I feel like my depression is affecting my ability to create. I just want to sleep all the time.

Hopefully I will feel a new wave of energy in the new year. But thank you to everyone for their support

End Notes

A (1) in my inbox is all I need in life.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!