Summary

Rey is having an incredibly difficult time deciphering the Jedi texts, much less actually gaining any meaning from them. In a moment of frustration, she knocks over the final, unopened volume, discovering that someone has left some very insightful commentary—and poetry.
“Rey felt warmth travel down her spine, and her stomach tied in knots. This… this was not what she was expecting to find at all. Beneath the hurried notes, Rey found - in a much more deliberate, calligraphed script - poetry.”

“*You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.*”

- *Song of Solomon, 4:12*

Rey should have known that utilizing the Jedi texts wouldn’t be nearly as easy as it was taking them in the first place.

Of course, the theft itself had almost seemed too easy. She hadn’t even considered it, until an unbidden thought travelled through her mind as she made to depart for her ill-fated meeting with Ben - Kylo Ren, she reminded herself. *The books. Take them,* whispered the thought. Not one to need much encouragement to steal, Rey simply entered the ancient tree, grabbed what she saw, then left. No caretakers, no Luke, not even any porgs - nothing stood in her path, as though something had cleared them all away to assure that her thieving was successful.

Now, here she was, weeks later, finally trying to get something started. The remains of the Resistance had settled in a former outpost on Dantooine, which the General also assured Rey had once been a legendary Jedi enclave, and perhaps a good place for her to study. Rey had sequestered herself to a remote corner of the massive pyramid-like structure. She wanted to continue her training, and perhaps inspire the Resistance even a fraction the amount Master Skywalker had in his final moments.

Of course it wasn’t going to be easy. The books were written in some ancient script, which Rey was already having to rely on several datapads to help her translate. Even with translation, the texts were… vague. As one accustomed to technical manuals, blueprints, and raw data, she felt hopelessly lost in the dense prose of these Jedi writings, muddled even further from their awkward translation. She felt utterly childish that she was gaining far more from the occasional illustration
It had now been three days. Three days of attempting nothing more than to just *comprehend* the readings, and Rey was ready to literally beat her head against the infuriating books. She swore she had read the same paragraph five times without somehow understanding a single word of it. Frustrated, she propped one of the books open to a page filled with nothing but illustrations of meditative poses and forms.

She fell into the rhythm of the forms easily - it felt much like how she used to practice with her staff. So swept up in the motions, she felt a warmth come over her, reassuring and admiring. Now practically in a trance, her mind drifted. She saw the stars, a long hallway, a glowing path, the steel of a reinforced door, a pair of dark eyes -

Rey gasped, crashing right into the table full of books. Datapads and books had scattered across the dusty floor, much to her horror. These books were *ancient*, and she had just mindlessly thrown them to the ground. Mortified, she began gathering them in her arms, assuring that no real damage had been done.

Crawling toward the last book that fell under the table, Rey frowned as she carefully pulled it toward her. This was the smallest of the books, the only one she hadn’t done anything more than briefly thumb through. It had no pictures, and a lot of fragile, loose pages - and therefore drew her interest the least.

But now, as she sat back on her feet and leaned toward the fire for better light, she noticed something. The book indeed had no illustrations, but there were *notes*. In beautifully scripted and understandable High Galactic, no less.

In fact, the very page the book had opened to contained a translated section that read much better than anything Rey had seen so far -

> “A Jedi must take all possibilities into account. He may have the support of his comrades, understand what he is doing, and know the ramifications of his success, and he may have even planned for unexpected factors - but he has failed to understand his own capabilities. He has planned only for success, because he has concluded that there can be no failure. Every Jedi, in every task, should prepare for the possibility of failure.”

Then, written just below it, in a slightly more hurried script - but clearly by the same hand -

> *However improbable, plan for the absolute worst. Then, at least you're pleasantly surprised by whatever happens.*

Rey heard herself snort out loud at the blunt, biting comment after the far more flowery translation. Eager, she folded her legs under her, moving closer to the fire, starting at the very beginning of the book this time. There were other translations, but most of what she read were this particular writer’s own thoughts and observations on whatever he or she was reading.
This completely goes against what was stated in Volume 3. Is this the Old Republic writer, or from a later translation?

Obviously, they’d say that when a pauper’s life is all they’ve ever known. Try convincing a Queen that her child is to become a penniless Padawan without title or status.

I don’t think this person has ever had a Force Vision in their life.

Then, after an extremely dry translation about how submission and dedication to the Force was different from forming attachment-

LITERALLY, WHAT DID HE MEAN BY THIS??

That time, Rey actually laughed out loud, startling her as it echoed in the small, lonely room.

She wondered about the writer. Who knew how old these notes were - the book was clearly ancient, and hardly anyone had written anything by hand in hundreds of years. From the tone of the writing, she had a deep suspicion the writer was a “he” - and, practically in response to that thought, a page fell from the book.

At first, Rey gasped, horrified - she had done it, she had officially ruined one of the ancient texts. However, as she placed the book down and picked up the paper, she realized it was not an actual page torn from the book - it was a crisp, folded sheet of paper, clearly of a different age from the book itself. It felt... different. Rey unfolded it with trembling hands, wondering why a simple piece of paper was filling her with so much anxiety. The handwriting was familiar - it was clearly by the same person who made the notes, though this had nothing to do with Jedi texts.

The meditations didn’t work. I saw her again last night.

The thought of her is slowly driving me mad.

I do not know if it’s the future, present, or past, but I cannot get her out of my mind.

Sometimes she is a child, crying out, desperate and alone. Other times, she is a girl, ruthlessly manipulated and used. Always, she is hungry, lonely, and wanting. I feel compassion, and want to help her more than anything, as a Jedi should.

But then... Sometimes she is a woman. I see her strength and resolve as she moves with grace and beauty, and I know that these are not the feelings of a Jedi.

Rey felt warmth travel down her spine, and her stomach tied in knots. This... this was not what she was expecting to find at all. Beneath the hurried notes, Rey found - in a much more deliberate, calligraphed script - poetry.
Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant?

My love rises from the deserts, proud and strong as the steel and iron around her.

All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you.

Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom - there, I will give you my love.

The mandrakes send out their fragrance, and at our door is every delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my beloved.

I would lead you and bring you to my mother’s house - she who has taught me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates.

Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth - for your love is more delightful than wine.

Rey squirmed, her face and belly burning. This was unlike anything she had ever read in her life. She could feel… No words had ever made her feel this way.

Rey returned the folded sheet to the book, hands trembling. She thumbed through the remaining pages, seeing several other notes, and even more sheets of paper inserted among the pages. But that wasn’t what she was looking for.

She reached the colophon, then the endsheets - and found it.

What she dreaded.

What made her heart simultaneously fill and break.

Hey, kid -

We won big and early at the races in the Corellia Classic, so I had a little more time and cash than I’m used to. I found a rare books dealer who seemed to be the first person in this galaxy to know what I was talking about with all this Force business - I hope this book helps you with whatever you’re going through right now. Call your mother, tell your Uncle Luke ‘hi’ for me.

-Dad

With a broken sob, Rey dropped the book as though it had burned her, crawling away from it. Her sobs nearly drowned out a quiet, painfully familiar voice just behind her.

“So. You found it, then.”

Chapter End Notes
Oh, you’d best believe that’s not the end of angsty-Ben-Solo poetry. I’m ripping the vast majority of it straight from Song of Solomon, albeit with some slight changes. I figured the ‘ol Prince of Alderaan has a lot of flowery language up his sleeve regarding wine and fruit, since I’m pretty sure that’s what the Organa estate was famous for when it existed.

Anyway, this fanfic was entirely inspired by that little note from the visual dictionary about Ben Solo’s calligraphy set. I found it to be the strangest thing, because my other fanfic (largely based around Arrested Development quotes) that I wrote MONTHS ago had a heavy focus in its first chapter on Kylo Ren not trusting anything not written in his own hand, and that he actually kept ink and paper on him. I think a lot of us fanfic writers have had a few moments like that - I mean, there were big concepts we pretty much assumed would be canon after TLJ, but the weird, unexpected little things - like Ben and his writings - are the ones that have thrown me totally off guard.

Hope you enjoyed! Let me know what you think, and this rating is almost definitely going to skyrocket soon - I mean, I’m basing it around Song of Solomon quotes, for God’s sake - that shit is nearly as explicit as firelit handholding. I apologize for any errors, I literally hammered this out in about two hours after seeing that visual dictionary thing.
The Leader Alone

Chapter Summary

In the end, that was all they were - just glimpses. Visions just brief enough for his chest to clench - in anger? That was certainly the easiest one. After all, she was the one who left him, when she, of all people... Was it anguish? Sorrow? Those seemed closer. Regret? Best to not examine those feelings too closely.

Chapter Notes

I was FLOORED by the feedback on this yesterday! Y'all are amazing! Seriously, keep it up, please, and I might be able to keep writing at this rate.

A little backstory for those of you not familiar with the Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs, as it's sometimes known - it's from a part of the Jewish Tanakh, and the end of the Christian Old Testament. It’s a series of several fairly explicit writings celebrating erotic love - yet both traditions insist that these occasionally pornographic-for-the-time writings are simply metaphors for God’s love for Israel, or Christ and the Church, respectively. Adam Driver has mentioned in several interviews that he plays Kylo/Ben as a religious fanatic, and I think he’d definitely struggle with something as complex as love and lust while attempting to remain pious - not to mention his obvious problems with the Dark Side. To give modern context, there have been many scholarly writings celebrating and elaborating on these Songs of Solomon from many men of the cloth - makes you think, eh?

Minor edits on 8/9/18 because I need something to do while I'm on the exercise bike.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Where has your beloved gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your beloved turn, that we may look for him with you?” - Song of Solomon, 6:1

In the weeks following his assuming the title of Supreme Leader, Kylo Ren had slowly come to the realization that, for the first time in his life, his mind was entirely his own.

He should have somewhat expected this. Before, he barely even had to second-guess himself when there was a constant, blatant presence criticizing his every thought and move, a voice to consistently remind him of both his failures and potential. A voice to whisper encouragement as he
reached for more power, and eliminate any thoughts seen as out of line.

Even if the Supreme Leader - Snoke, Kylo reminded himself - was not as constant of a presence these last few years, there was so much that the man had done to mold his mind since infancy. Perhaps the reason Snoke hadn’t felt the need to constantly monitor his apprentice these last few years was because he truly felt that Kylo Ren was under his thumb - how wrong he was, Kylo thought with grim satisfaction.

So having his thoughts to himself and his mind (relatively) quieted was something he had come to be grateful for, as jarring as it was. But what he hadn’t expected was just how many things seemed... off. He would hear names, locations, and references that sparked something in his memories - sometimes brief connections he had failed to remember the significance of, or seemingly useless items in his personal quarters that suddenly had a hundred more distinct memories associated with them.

One night, he sat on his bed, his lightsaber disassembled across the sheets, and just stared at the cracked Kyber crystal for hours. Tears ran down his cheeks, and he didn’t know why.

Of course, he had to keep up appearances - his mask was firmly back in place in both a literal and metaphorical sense. As Supreme Leader, he couldn’t afford to go around the galaxy with a face that had been all over the news not even seven years ago, when his family lineage became widespread knowledge, both to the public and himself. He was incredibly grateful for the return of the mask, it helped disguise these moments where he found himself lost in memory, or struggling to remember. And it certainly helped hide whenever he saw... her.

She had been training, wherever she was. Weeks had gone by, and, evidently, she had set up enough of a mental block that she had not seen him even once - that, or she was a far better actor than Kylo could have suspected. Little did she know, their connection still went both ways; though he only had fleeting glimpses, it wasn’t uncommon to see her flit through one of his endless meetings, nose in a book. Or see her out of the corner of his eye as he worked at his desk, as studious and concentrated as he.

In the end, that was all they were - just glimpses. Visions just brief enough for his chest to clench - in anger? That was certainly the easiest one. After all, she was the one who left him, when she, of all people... Was it anguish? Sorrow? Those seemed closer. Regret? Best to not examine those feelings too closely.

But, that particular day, Kylo felt her mind laid wide open to him. Her presence was overwhelming, making his eyes widen and causing him to nearly trip - thankfully, he was already on his way to his quarters, no one had witnessed the Supreme Leader stumble over his own feet in the hallway.

As he opened his door... there she was.

She moved across his room with graceful, flowing movements. Archaic Soresu, a lost part of his mind instantly supplied when he recognized the forms. The only reason she would know how to practice such an ancient form of lightsaber combat was if-

Suddenly, she stumbled, seemingly hitting a physical object on her end. She seemed completely oblivious to his presence, and somewhat panicked. Kylo concentrated, seeing if he could extend
his vision of her just a bit…

It wasn’t much, but now he could see the golden light of candle flame, a desk, a chair, and… books, scattered all across the floor.

*Those* books.

A sharp pain tore through his head. This was unlike anything he had encountered so far. Of course he recognized the Jedi texts the second he saw them. While they seemed to be different - far more ancient copies than anything he had studied - he would know that language anywhere.

So, the girl had managed to get a hold of some truly… *antique* Jedi writings. That hardly explained what felt like a massive rupture in his head -

Until he saw the book that she reached for last.

She was careful, *so* careful; her deft scavenger fingers managing to keep the pages from turning as she rescued the book from under the table. Angling it toward the light, she squinted at the text, her face lighting up in hopeful recognition -

Kylo had to steady himself against the wall of his room, and he slowly sank to the floor. He very well could be sick right now, and that was hardly a way to make a grand entrance back into his… into Rey’s life.

He knew that book.

It was *his* book.

But why… *Why couldn’t he remember anything about it?*

*Snoke,* his mind instantly supplied. Whatever was in that book, whatever revelations he had in studying it were evidently considered far too dangerous to remember - this was the most completely *gone* memory Kylo had encountered so far. Even so, Snoke was hardly ever concerned with something as trivial as Ben Solo’s writings. This… this was something else.

Something more.

He knew it was important. He could *feel* it. But did he really want to find out *why?*

Curiosity got the better of him. Rey was angled away from him, completely focused in reading, eagerly thumbing through the pages - surely, she wouldn’t notice if he got a little closer -

She startled him by bursting into laughter, her head thrown back. It was a beautiful noise, one he wanted to hear again, and often. Kylo chanced getting even closer, just enough to make out what she was reading -

It was his own handwriting. A stupid, snarky comment carelessly written after a long translation at the bottom of an ancient page, *in his own damn script* that he would recognize anywhere. And it made her laugh.

A glimpse of a memory tore through his mind.
Ben couldn’t have been more than 19, startled awake by yet another nightmare, his mind trying to make sense of what he had seen. Both of his mentors continually told him to not put so much stock in his dreams, to ignore what he saw - but the visions were just too strong. He lit a small lamp, and pulled a fresh, crisp sheet of paper from a rather untidy stack on his bedside table.

Ben’s writing was hasty at first, the sort of quick desperation born of trying to commit your dreams to paper before they slip between your fingers. *I saw her again last night.*

Kylo shuddered through the memory, a whole wake of partial recollections brought up by *those* particular words.

Ben paused in writing and looked around furtively, as though afraid of being noticed. He leaned under his bed, and pulled a sheet of paper that looked as though it had been wrinkled up several times, the writing on it covered with scratched out words and ink blots. Ben’s ears reddened slightly as he glanced around again, making sure there were no witnesses but his books. Now, with a careful hand, he transferred the draft to a more final copy.

Kylo blinked furiously, trying to work his way out of the haze of the memory to instead concentrate on the rather appealing sight of Rey squirming before him, her hand clutching the paper. He now knew *damn* well what adolescent ramblings were on that page, and wasn’t entirely sure how he felt about Rey reading them. At least she didn’t know who-

No.

No.

Rey had quickly begun paging through the rest of the book, revealing *dozens* of other folded slips of paper, and some smaller slips as well. Kylo’s eyes widened in horror at the realization of just how much of himself - how much of *Ben Solo* she was currently holding in her hands. Maybe, *maybe* there was some justice in this galaxy, and she would just assume that these were the deranged rantings of some ancient scholar, and not *him* -

Her gasp as she reached the endsheet told him that fate would not be so kind.

Another painful, shorter memory ripped through his head; he could now remember every word of that note. *“I hope this book helps you with whatever you’re going through right now...”* It was perhaps the best thing his fath- *Han Solo* - had ever given him. Then again, how could a smuggler have possibly known he had managed to obtain one of the last known readable translations of an ancient Jedi journal?

A gasping sob tore through the silent air. Rey covered her mouth, crawling away from the book in silent horror - and, unfortunately, right towards where Kylo had slumped against the wall.

Well, no time like the present to make his presence known.

“So. You found it, then.”
Hope you enjoyed! I don't intend to keep doing the "same scene from two perspectives" thing here, but I felt that we really needed to get the whole story here, as it were. Let me know what you think!
"How did this turn around so quickly on him? How did she know exactly how to rip him apart every time? Rey was right, his ambition, his drive, his dreams - his visions of her - had distracted him yet again."

Chapter Notes

Minor edits on 8/9/18 because I need something to do while I'm on the exercise bike.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Come back, come back, O Shulammite; come back, that we may gaze on you!” - Song of Solomon, 6:13

“So. You found it, then.”

The girl froze at his words. Kylo assumed she was about to whip her head around, and really give her a piece of her mind about her perceived injustices. She would prattle on and on about her precious comrades, how happy she was with her newfound family - he was almost looking forward to the sparking rage in her eyes - but that didn’t happen. Instead, her small shoulders sank with a quiet sigh, and her head drooped down, not facing him at all.

“G-go away. I - I can’t do this right now.” she whispered, her voice sounding thick with held-back tears.

This was… Not what he expected. Where was his fiery Rey, who was so reliable in trying to murder him whenever she saw him after a dramatic event? Where was the girl who had just laughed in this quiet, lonely room at Ben Solo’s awful quips? Where was the woman who refused the galaxy?

Without his consent, Kylo felt rage boil up in him at what she had done to him, what had become of her - a rage that his old master would have gleefully encouraged - but this was not the time. Breathe. This could be your one chance to bring her back, a voice reminded him as he exhaled a rattling, mechanized breath from his mask.
Rey’s startled face whipped around to look in his direction. Tears were running down her cheeks, and something about that made Kylo’s throat clench, and an aching pit settle in his stomach. She quickly transitioned from a face of devastation to a brief flash of anger, followed by a sort of numbed resignation, wiping at her eyes, which refused to look directly at him.

“S-so that’s it then. I should have known, stars I was a fool to hope. After - after everything, you still…” Rey gestured toward his mask, hiccuping slightly, rubbing her nose with the back of her hand. Her eyes were downcast, and she held her arms to her chest tightly. “Goodbye, Kylo Ren.”

The pit in his stomach had suddenly transformed into a boulder on his chest.

Rey’s image began to blur. Kylo panicked.

“Wait! Please!” His fingers were numb and trembling as he desperately pulled at the clasps of his mask, shaking as he tore it from his face and threw it as far from Rey as he could.

The scene was nostalgic, in a way, to their first face-to-face encounter on Starkiller.

The air was oddly cold on his face, though his eyes were hot - but that didn’t matter, because Rey, still mostly blurry, was now looking into his eyes, and everything would be fine.

Kylo tried desperately to calm his mind again, blinking as the blur slowly left his eyes. He needed her to listen, he needed to get himself together, he needed to know why his journal was so thoroughly wiped from his memory, he needed to know what other horrifyingly embarrassing writings were in there, he needed a plan-

“How… how long have you been watching me?” Rey said with no small amount of disgust.

At last, the Force listened to him, and handed him an opportunity on a silver platter. She had no idea what he had seen so far - this had to be handled delicately.

“How… long enough to know you found a message at the back of that Jedi journal that seemed to greatly upset you.” He felt a sense of calm as he played his hand - now it was time to see how she responded.

She was almost adorably predictable. “You mean your journal - this, this is yours!” Rey pointed a shaking finger at the journal on the floor beside her, as though she couldn’t quite believe it herself. So, she hadn’t completely dissociated him from the one she tried to “save” - that was a good first step.

Slowly, as though approaching a wild animal, Kylo crawled slightly closer to Rey, who leaned away from him, but refused to move. He extended his hand, and he saw her tightly crossed arms loosen a fraction of a degree. She wasn’t threatened - that was what he needed to see - he quickly bent over to scoop up the journal, then sat back on the floor across from Rey.

Kylo was just as surprised as Rey was to find that he was able to interact with an object from her end of their connection, but his gambit was paying off well so far. He had created the trap, now it was time to bait it.
“This belonged to Ben Solo.” Kylo said quietly, thumbing through the pages without truly reading them, and trying to keep his face one of passive boredom. He could practically feel the journal vibrating with the Force and memory. So much of him was in here, so much he no longer knew. But in order to get this to work in his favor, he needed to act utterly disinterested, and hope that he would be able to retrieve the book once Rey inevitably abandoned this particular piece of him, as she had done before. He couldn’t let Rey know more about himself (Ben Solo, he reminded himself for the thousandth time) than he did. *Stars*, he hoped this plan worked. “The boy who wrote in this is dead and gone, Rey.”

“No!” Rey reacted almost immediately. “I mean, it’s - it’s *yours*.” She sat up a little straighter, her arms going from wrapped around her midsection to crossed in front of her chest, defiant as she met his eyes. “He’s alive because he’s right in front of me. That journal belongs to *you*, Ben Solo.” Her face lit up, clearly thinking that she had him at a disadvantage, using his name as a weapon against him. She was still bold in her newfound courage; he felt her push at the very forefront of his mind, skimming his recent recollections about the book, nodding to herself in triumph.

Her words, her rudely pushing into his mind without warning should have irritated him at the least, even *infuriated* him. Instead, he felt warmth and power erupt in his chest - *pride*, even, that she would use the Force in such a way. But still, he needed to draw her interest away, make her think that the journal was irrelevant to him -

“He’s dead, Rey. He’s as dead as my memories of everything about that book.”

Rey’s face fell a little, faltering.

“Search your feelings. You already searched *mine*, after all. You know I’m telling the truth - everything about that boy was systematically destroyed. I know as much about the contents of those pages as you do. They hold *nothing* about who I am now. Who I have become.”

“I don’t believe it. I don’t believe you for a second, Ben. *This*, what I’ve read? These comments, these writings - it’s still one-hundred-percent *you!*” Rey snarled, gesturing violently at the journal. She seemed to be thinking rapidly, forming some ill-fated plan of her own, her mind insistently tugging on his own. She cocked her head slightly, as though fascinated with what she found in his surface thoughts. “You’re - you’re just as trapped in a fantasy now as you were then. Ben Solo was fixated on his visions, even *you* admit that yourself - *you* still think that you can chase down your dreams, and now you believe you have the power to make them true! Your masters are gone, but they were right. It’s not going to go the way you think!”

Oh, so that’s what she had seen. She was going to play *that* card. Foolish girl - like his masters, she thought that his visions had made him weak. Kylo allowed a hint of a smile to cross his face as he slowly looked Rey up and down, moving closer to her. “Isn’t it?”

That threw her. She didn’t move away from him, though, as he drew closer across the floor.

“My visions have been *everything*, Rey. I saw the importance of capturing *you* - not the droid - on Takodana. I saw the beginning of our connection. I saw that you would be the one to show me the truth. I saw the earth *shatter* under our combined power. I saw you come to my side to help me strike down Snoke. I saw my rise to become the Supreme Leader - and I saw you *by my side*.” He felt triumph in those words, the truth they held. “And with that, I will achieve *everything*.”

He was now directly in front of Rey, and she looked shaken. “But Ben, those visions - they’re not…” Rey bit her lip, her face pained. Her mind was clearly racing - she didn’t want to reveal whatever she was about to say just yet, but she went for it. “Even with all the power in the world, your visions can’t come true the way you hope. You - *you* once saw a crying, hungry, lost child.”
“And now she is found, and certainly no longer a child.” Kylo took a chance, and leaned even closer, slowly pulling off his glove. “I wasn’t able to help her then, but I intend to remedy that. She belongs at my side.”

Rey looked stricken at this statement, her eyes taking on a bright shine of held-back tears that he remembered from the Supremacy. “But that... That’s wrong - because what I saw - it didn’t - you didn’t- I had hoped, but you made your intentions quite clear-“

“Rey, I did what I had to-“

“No! You don’t understand!” Rey held her arms tightly to herself, not meeting his eyes. “I risked everything for a vision. For you. And I now know that... that what I saw... it can never be. You can’t place all your faith in visions - I learned that the hard way.”

He swallowed tightly, shaking his head slowly. “No.”

”No?”

”No. I refuse to accept that. You once told me it wasn’t too late. Now I’m telling you the same.”

This was it. No turning back now. He extended his hand toward Rey, palm up, bridging the barest of inches between them. “Let me show you, Rey. Let me show you what Ben Solo knew for years - no, what I knew when we touched hands. What could never be taken from me.”

Rey gave him the smallest, saddest smile he’d ever seen. She reached toward his hand with both of hers, hesitating slightly at his fingertips. “Oh, Ben...” she sighed, and her smile broadened, a determined glint in her eye. “Everything you’ve just said - I just got you to admit that, despite everything that has happened, you know that you can turn from the Dark. You know that you are still Ben Solo.”

Ice shot down Kylo’s spine, but at the same time, she used both of her gloriously warm hands to touch him, to close his fingertips, holding onto his closed fist for just a second too long. “Ben Solo is alive. He is you, and you know it. And I think - I think knowing that... It’s about all my heart can handle for right now.”

Before she could release him, Kylo quickly clasped his gloved hand on top of where hers still held to his bare hand, not willing to let go.

“Rey, please.” How did this turn around so quickly on him? How did she know exactly how to rip him apart every time? Rey was right, his ambition, his drive, his dreams - his visions of her - had distracted him yet again. He had already gotten her to admit that she hadn’t given up on him totally, why couldn’t he just take that victory?

Oh, right. The journal. Every single forbidden thought he’d ever had, everything that had deemed dangerous enough to be totally wiped from his mind, right within her grasp - and with him left utterly in the dark. Negotiating from inside a hole was hardly where he wanted to be, but he knew how the Light thought - she wouldn’t be able to resist this opportunity if he framed it correctly.

“Oh… Let me be with you. Wait until we have another one of these… Let me be there when you read what I-” Kylo exhaled shakily, grasping her hands perhaps a hair too tight. “When you read what I wrote back then. I... I want to know. Please.”

Rey’s smile was now genuine as she met his eyes. “I... I can do that, Ben.”

Relief swept over Kylo. “Thank you.”
He blinked, and she was gone. The Force certainly was one for dramatic timing.

Kylo found himself alone in his room, kneeling, hands outstretched as if in prayer. He quickly recollected himself, mind racing. That did not go according to plan. He needed to find whatever hole the pathetic Resistance had hidden itself on, urgently. This was bigger than any minuscule military threat they could pose - what Rey had… She could use it to destroy him, more than she already had. He had no idea what secrets the journal held, and while he thought… hoped that Rey wouldn't intentionally try to decimate his very being after that conversation, he couldn't say the same of her comrades. At least he bought himself some time with that heartfelt (albeit pathetic) begging - and to feel her skin again…

No. It was not the time to dwell on that. He needed his journal, to find out what had been utterly erased from Ben Solo’s mind. He had to regain the upper hand with Rey, and get her to enthusiastically accept his vision for the future.

Kylo pulled himself to his feet, quickly locating where he had flung his helmet, and sealing it back over his face. The Supreme Leader would be taking a leave of absence to personally investigate a potentially devastating breach of information from within their own ranks - Hux didn’t need to know that the breach was in Kylo’s own head, and largely concerned a rather embarrassing collection of adolescent manifestos. The General simply needed to be reminded of his place once again before Kylo left, to assure that the First Order wouldn’t be in ruins by the time he returned triumphant - with his memories intact, his confidence back, and perhaps even Rey by his side.

It was time to hunt.

Chapter End Notes

Kylo wanted to know that Rey still had faith in him, and needs to get his hands on that damn book before some utterly mortifying - or potentially dangerous - things come to light. But he’s most definitely NOT Ben Solo, no siree. And he is TOTALLY not distracted by showing Rey his mental fanart of his OTP - I mean, his vision of their future.

Rey wanted to get Kylo to confess he’s still very much Ben, still drawn to the light - and under her thumb. So score for her there, but, unfortunately, it comes with the price of crazed-stalker-Kylo hot on her tail now. However, Rey, as we saw, is more than capable of dropping emotional dirty bombs - and this next chapter may warrant a rating hike as she tries some different tactics to distract Kylo while she finds out more about Ben Solo, angsty 19-year-old poet wannabe.

Meanwhile, the aforementioned Ben Solo sits in a corner, weeping about the fact that he got to hold Rey’s hand again, and begins writing some truly atrocious poetry (it’s been a while).

Let me know what you think! Loving the love this has gotten so far, and I seriously can’t stop writing this. Though I may have a couple drinks tonight and go work on my crackfic - I need to be in a very certain frame of mind to write bratty-drunk-Prince-Ben-Solo.
A Guardian of Hope

Chapter Summary

"Rey took a shaky step back from the podium, and right into a large, warm body. 'I've got you,' came a whisper at her ear as a black, gloved hand slowly ran its thumb down Rey's arm, leaving her shivering in its wake."

Chapter Notes

Minor edits on 8/9/18 because I need something to do while I'm on the exercise bike.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Turn your eyes away from me; they overwhelm me. Your hair falls in waves like a flock of goats winding down the slopes of Gilead.” -Song of Solomon, 6:5

Rey’s hands were still held before her, bereft and shaking, when someone tapped on the entryway of her makeshift study.

“Rey? Are you in there?”

Throat still thick with emotion, she quickly shut the Jedi journal - Ben’s journal - with a decisive snap, tucking it into the cross strap of her tunic. “Come in!” she responded weakly. Rey rearranged her legs and clothes, attempting to make it look as though she had been seated in a meditation position, and not crawling across the dusty floor, looking at books and having heart wrenching conversations with the Supreme Leader.

She could almost laugh, the situation was so absurd. No one would ever believe her, yet here she was - with a piece of the Supreme Leader’s very being that not even he fully knew, right next to her chest. Wiping at her eyes, she hoped it wasn’t too obvious that she had been crying.

It didn’t work. Poe’s smiling face came into sight, and immediately fell at the sight of Rey. “Hey, Rey - are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” Rey sniffed, wiping her nose and eyes with the back of the hands. “Allergies - it’s pretty dusty in here.”

“No kidding, this place is ancient.” Poe looked around the walls of Rey’s small study, then gave a theatrical shudder. “I don’t know how you do it, this room gives me the creeps. Want to get out of here?”

“Well, I-”

“Because the General sent me to find you - we’ve got some visitors right now who could become backers of the Resistance, but she thinks that if they see you - if they see what you can do? Then
they’ll join us for sure.” Poe smiled with confidence.

It was hard not to return his smile, but Rey felt doubtful. “But I’m - I’ve barely trained, I’m not ready for whatever they want to see, I’m sure.” Rey’s eyes went downcast, sadness settling over her. “I’m no Master Skywalker.”

“But Rey - you’re the last Jedi! The whole galaxy - hardly anyone has seen anything like what you can do in almost a century. Trust me, if you do anything like what you did on Crait, they’ll be on our side in no time.”

“But I’m not a Jedi! Not yet, anyway.” Rey gestured around her. “I mean, I’m trying. But… It’s hard. It’s so hard.”

“Cheer up, kid. You’re a natural - I’m sure you’ll dazzle them.” Poe grinned, and offered his hand to Rey, who obligingly accepted, brushing some of the dirt off her front as she stood. “Now, come on - we need all the help we can get!”

Rey could barely concentrate on what Poe was saying as he led her through the winding corridors of the enclave. Something about former members of the Confederacy of Independent Systems - most of it politics, and utterly lost on her anyway. She smiled and nodded along, her mind still fully occupied with what had just transpired with Ben.

She could practically feel the journal burning a hole in her chest where she had hastily tucked it into her tunic - there was no way she was leaving it unattended, ever. Even though she could tell that Ben clearly had some larger scheme in play, she believed him when he said that he had no memory of the contents of the journal; he wouldn’t have been so desperate to acquiesce and negotiate with her, otherwise. And she felt... oddly protective of the journal. It wasn't a feeling she particularly wanted to think about too hard, it seemed unnatural.

Poe continued rattling off names of individuals and groups who had gathered here, something about a Muun banking clan, something something Wren something, something about a Techno Union… With each step, Rey became increasingly aware of just how little she knew of the galaxy outside of Jakku, and how quickly she had been dumped into what was evidently a pivotal role in shaping the future of the galaxy.

And you could have been in an even more powerful position, you could have had everything, her mind whispered. Rey couldn’t stop the brief look of disgust that crossed her face that she even had a thought like that occur to her. She didn’t want power, she just wanted-

“Ok, here we are, Rey. I’m going to introduce you, and you just tell these folks a little something about yourself. You’re going to do great!” Poe gave Rey a thumbs-up as he jogged into a packed conference hall with a singular podium far to the front, emblazoned with the older Rebel Alliance starbird.

Rey froze in the doorway, numb. She was going to do what?

Someone had just wrapped up giving a speech, and was quickly shuffled away from the podium and away from the spotlight. Poe jogged to the front, clearly in his element as he gave a winning smile to the gathered crowd.
“Thank you folks for being so patient, we’ve got a real treat for you today, to see what this Resistance is capable of. Ladies, gentlemen, droids - Rey, the last Jedi!” an audible gasp went through the crowd, and the whispers began. “Come on up here, Rey!”

Her legs felt like they were made of pure duracrete. She moved around the massive, seated audience from the back of the room, awkwardly shuffling along the side of the rows of chairs, hoping no one saw her - but of course they did.

The whispers grew in volume and intensity. Some wondering who she was, some disparaging her ragged appearance, others trading rumors. Rey just concentrated on breathing. She never thought she’d long for being in silence among the Jedi texts, but stars, if she could just go back there right now.

She didn’t realize that the podium was on a slightly elevated platform, and immediately stumbled over the first step on her way up. Poe crossed the stage, catching her hand before she could fall. He gracefully pulled her back up to dramatically kiss the back of her hand, making it look as though nothing had happened at all.

Rey felt herself pushed to stand just behind the podium, nearly blinded by the singular fixed beam of light on the stage. She was alone now. The audience was nothing but a dark shadow and a murmur. She held her hand up to block some of the light out until her eyes adjusted, trying to fight down the cold, pounding fear in her stomach.

“Um… Hi, I’m Rey…” she mumbled toward the audience.

“Speak up!” shouted an anonymous voice from the back of the audience.

“I’m Rey.” she repeated with slightly more conviction. “And I’m… I’m training to be a Jedi.”

A whistle came from somewhere in the crowd, and a smattering of applause as well.

“Um…” She had no idea what to say! She wasn’t Poe, she certainly wasn’t General Leia - Rey had no experience with giving heartfelt speeches - or speeches of any kind. “I’m from J-Jakku. I’m - I’m just an ordinary person, really. I didn’t know I had this power… I didn’t know until my first conflict with the First Order.”

Another round of polite applause. “Is it true you beat Kylo Ren with a lightsaber?” a random audience member yelled out.

“Well, um, yes, I did, but-” Rey’s words were drowned out with whooping and yet more applause.

“Did you really kill Supreme Leader Snoke?” asked another from the void.

Rey faltered. She knew that was the official story going around, evidently started by Kylo Ren himself. Obviously it wasn’t what happened, but if the Resistance needed these people to think that she represented something… “Um, yes, but-”

The roar of the crowd was deafening. Rey flinched back, adrenaline rushing at the sudden noise that just went on and on. Her knees started shaking involuntarily, and her hand went to the journal hidden in her tunic, running her thumb along the corner, just to give her something to ground herself in this moment. Help me.

“Show us your lightsaber!” someone shouted, a cry taken up by many others.
“I-I can’t.” Rey realized they couldn’t hear her. “I can’t.” she shouted with a quaver, hoping they would quiet down, which thankfully they did. “It - it was destroyed during my fight with Kylo Ren.” she continued in a much quieter voice. “I only have the pieces now.”

Rey felt like she was on the verge of tears now. This was too much. This was too much for a scavenger nobody to handle, she shouldn’t be here, she wanted to run-

She felt a warmth in her chest, and a thought blossomed in her mind. You’ve got this. It doesn’t matter what you say - think of what they want to hear. “I have some of the pieces, and I’m learning. I’m learning how to put them together, and I’ll remake the blade better than it ever was.” Rey stood a little straighter, a spark of confidence in her. “But I don’t have everything I need. I still need pieces and parts from all over the galaxy to truly bring this blade to its full potential - its potential to bring peace to the galaxy. Who will help me?”

There was a fraction of a second of silence, and then the crowd erupted, standing to their feet as they shouted and clapped. At first, Rey was encouraged, but she felt something darker in that moment -

“Destroy the First Order!”

“Burn down the system!”

“Death to Supreme Leader Kylo Ren!”

Rey’s heart was now hammering out of control. She could feel the power of these words, and the intent behind them - it certainly wasn’t what the Jedi would want to inspire, this wasn’t the Light at all. This - this was all wrong. Fear shot through her veins, potent and powerful.

Then it got worse. Another rallying cry went up - “SHOW US THE FORCE!”

Rey took a shaky step back from the podium, and right into a large, warm body.

“I’ve got you.” came a whisper at her ear as a black, gloved hand slowly ran its thumb down Rey’s arm, leaving her shivering in its wake. The hand grasped Rey’s right wrist, raising it parallel with her head.

“Concentrate, Rey. Use that fear, show them what you’re capable of. That you’re more than just some magic trick.” Another gloved hand came to rest on her opposite shoulder, warm and stabilizing. She tried to block out the chaos all around her, but she still felt the fear as she focused-

“Good, good. Now use it.” his lips were at her ear, and a flood of heat burned through Rey-

Power surged from her hand across the entire hall. The crowd was silenced with pinpoint precision, as their minds were all touched simultaneously. Rey’s hand was guided slightly to force the mass of people to part precisely down the middle, creating a place for her to walk. Another gesture, and the stairs came to the front of the stage, as the podium was shoved aside to make way for her exit. Her arm trembled with effort, she could feel the hundreds of minds she held under her power-

“Beautiful. That was very good, Rey. Now let’s get you out of here.” One hand went to the small of her back as her arm dropped. She was gently guided forward, her dark companion applying pressure in exactly the right place on her back to force her posture into giving her a regal exit.
The doors to the hall shut behind her, someone in the closed hall was desperately trying to announce the next speaker over the din, and Rey was finally able to breathe freely. She spun to face her unexpected assistant - the face not even surprising her.

“What - what were you thinking? That - that was the Dark, I shouldn’t have - they’re going to think I’m insane!”

Ben’s lips tightened in what Rey had come to recognize was as close as he got to smiling. “No, they’ll respect you. They can’t just use you as… as some tool.”

Rey didn’t know what to say to that - because she agreed. The feeling she got from all those people in the room… “Still, you - I used my fear, Ben. That’s… That’s not the Jedi way.”

“The Dark has its purposes, Rey. Did you hurt anyone? Did it change who you are as a person? Because, from my point of view, there was only one person who was in pain in that room, who felt threatened - and she used the Dark to save herself.”

Rey crossed her arms, hugging her small frame. “You helped - you helped even though this was for the Resistance. I suppose you want me to thank you.” she huffed.

His eyes crinkled slightly as he stepped closer to her. “I helped you, and it was my pleasure. How could I have resisted such a desperate plea?”

Rey’s brows furrowed in confusion. “What?”

“How do you think I knew you needed me? You’ll figure it out soon enough. But until then…” he grasped her hand, and pulled her forward. Rey’s heart raced as he bent his head forward, as though he was going to kiss the back of it as Poe had-

Then he disappeared just as he looked up into Rey’s eyes with a ghost of a smirk playing about his lips.

“Rey? What was - who were you talking to?”

Oh, no. This… this could get awkward. General Leia Organa had just come around the corner, and had obviously heard Rey, though fortunately, she managed to get her hands in a somewhat normal position before she was noticed.

“Hello, General. I - I was just talking to myself, you know, post-speech jitters-” Rey babbled.

“Please, I’ve asked you a hundred times now to call me Leia.” she waved her hand with a flourish. “I was looking for you, but I see Dameron found you first - and now I must apologize.”

Rey blinked rapidly, not understanding. “Huh?” she replied ineloquently.

“I had mentioned it earlier today, that showing these backers that we have the support of the last Jedi could really work in our favor... But I had no intention of putting you in front of a crowd like that, especially without preparation. Dameron’s the kind of ass who assumes everyone’s like him, and just loves a spotlight.”

“I’m - I’m so sorry, did I ruin this whole… Whatever this is?”
“No, quite frankly, you did the opposite, Rey. You scared the pants off some folks, sure - but your words, you inspired everyone in there, and that’s what we need right now.” Leia sighed with a faraway look in her eyes. “And that’s what makes what I’m about to ask of you so difficult. I know that being from Jakku, you’re not used to dealing with this many people. I could certainly tell that the stage is no place for you, if I’m not mistaken?”

Rey shook her head vigorously. She could go the rest of her life without making a public speech and die a happy woman.

Leia nodded. “I suspected as much. You reminded me…” she shook her head sadly. “What would you say if I asked you to attend an event? You wouldn’t have to give speeches, you wouldn’t have to throw people around with the Force - though I certainly wouldn’t stop you.”

“What would you have me do?”

“Not much - mingle, be seen, get people talking about the last Jedi and what she stands for. It’s an event on Coruscant, a benefit fundraiser.” Leia gave a great roll of her eyes. “They call themselves the ‘Orphans of War Trust,’ but their events are well-known gatherings of the whole galaxy’s arms dealers. They’re getting desperate, Rey. The domination of the First Order means they’re not making money. They’ll be eager to start negotiations with us if they know we have the strength to fight - and you’re exactly what they need to see.”

Leia sighed. “I used to go to these awful events all the time, but I’m getting too old - they need fresh, new faces, to know that we have a chance. Would you consider it, Rey?”

“I would be happy to, but my studies-”

“Bring them with you - you’re going to have a long flight, since the Falcon’s not here right now. All we’ve got are the old rust buckets we left here last time. There’s no place to study like a Republic-era prison ship - trust me, I know.” Leia responded with a smirk.

Rey considered the offer. “No speeches?”

“I swear. I’ll try to get you coached up on how to act around these assholes, and you’ll blow them away. Well, on a second thought - maybe let’s avoid doing that literally this time.”

The thrill of going to the legendary Coruscant was more than Rey’s curious mind could resist. “I - I can do that. I accept.”

“Great. You leave in the morning. Pack up what you’re taking, and then meet me in my quarters. You’ll have the galaxy under your thumb by the time I’m done with you.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Leia. You really don’t think too differently from your son at all - she’s a regular Lucille Bluth, y’all.

I originally was going to have the rating hike this chapter, but Rey’s stage fright gave a wonderful opportunity for Life Coach Kylo Ren to step in and help out - and let him plant some seeds (GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE GUTTER) to help him with his Master Plan™.
Poor Rey. Trapped between two scheming Skywalkers/Organas/Solos. She’s really just getting a sense of what she’s gotten herself into, but she’s trying to keep up. She does need a teacher, doesn’t she? (wink)

Anyway, I continue to be astounded by the response to this fanfic. Please, keep the comments coming, they really are fuel for writing.
The Ghosts of Yavin IV

Chapter Summary

"Call it attending a fundraiser, call it giving a speech - Kylo knew what was happening here. They wanted her to be a rallying cry. They wanted to turn her into a weapon. They wanted her as an attack dog. They wanted her face as the one people associated with the power of the Resistance. They wanted to do to her exactly what Snoke had done to him."

Chapter Notes

Minor edits on 8/9/18 because I need something to do while I'm on the exercise bike.

My beloved spoke and said to me “Arise, my darling, my beautiful one - come with me.” - Song of Solomon, 2:10

If there was one thing Kylo Ren thought he could rely on concerning the Resistance, it was their utter lack of creativity.

Yet, seven ex-Rebellion encampments later, he had turned up with no results concerning their current location, or even a recent one. He searched from Hoth to Endor, Bespin to Lothal, and still had found nothing but empty shells of bases, long abandoned.

Frustrating as it was, Kylo was grateful for the quiet solitude that came with commanding his own ship on his search for the “security breach,” as he dubbed his search for the journal currently in Rey’s hands.

That had been a massive headache. General Hux had initially been insistent that Kylo bring with him a full security detail, and a proper retinue for this, his first personal mission as the new Supreme Leader. Hux immediately began listing the various heralds, guards, personnel that were necessary for such a momentous occasion, the planning and lists to be attended to-

Several seconds of strangulation later, Kylo had managed to impress upon Hux the urgency of the mission and the need for secrecy - which would be impossible with an entire cadre of Stormtroopers noisily following him everywhere and wasting precious time. He was fully aware that Hux was probably trying to keep constant tabs on him, and much as he was loathe to leave the General unsupervised for any length of time, finding Rey took priority.

Without having to tend to such a massive crowd, Kylo was ruthlessly efficient; within the space of two days, he had managed to search seven systems, and eliminate the possibility of several others
in the process. Even the distraction of Rey didn’t stop him, as she’d occasionally flit in and out of his vision. Kylo wasn’t at all concerned with what the blasted Resistance was putting her up to now, and what was causing her face to look so confused and lost when he caught glimpses of her. He was well on his way to an eighth possible Resistance base when he came to the realization that he hadn’t slept since the last time he interacted with Rey the day before yesterday - it didn’t matter. He didn’t need sleep. In this moment, nothing mattered but getting his hands on that damn journal.

He leaned back in the pilot’s chair of his ship, allowing himself to relax slightly as he made a mental note of the time until he’d come out of hyperspace over Yavin IV. Sleep wasn’t necessary, but surely he could just shut his eyes for a second.

Allowing his mind to drift, his thoughts took a predictable direction - Rey. She had him just about panicked when he felt her urgent plea over their bond not even an hour after their extensive interaction. He had been right in the middle of lecturing Hux about not constructing any superweapons while he was away when he suddenly heard Help me. He had to sprint right back to his quarters and tear off his helmet, concentrating all of his power to desperately reach out in the Force to find Rey - and there she was.

The absolute fury that Kylo had felt upon seeing her shaking, put upon a stage, like something for the proles to ogle - rage had clouded his vision. They should tremble, scrape, bow before her - not gawk at her like some sort of circus act. But he had managed to restrain himself. He knew that this was not what she needed from him right now, and that there was a golden opportunity here.

Connecting with her as he did, guiding her, touching her, feeling her power as she channeled the Dark - Kylo felt the pleasure rush through his body as though it were happening all over again. She became his all the more in that moment, and he knew he had left her wanting for more. Working together, it felt... right. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, cracking a tired eye to glance bemusedly at the bulge in his pants - well, that just happened.

A rapid beeping distracted Kylo from deciding how to address that particular problem (which had been coming up more and more - stars, he felt like a blasted teenager again). The craft had just come out of hyperspace, and was over Yavin IV. While the radar indicated there was no present ship activity on the moon, there was, for once, a significant reading on the comm chatter.

That was good enough for him. He punched in the coordinates for the base, ones he knew well - he had come here many times with Uncle-

Stop. No distractions, he had to remind himself, a sort of hollow feeling settling in him that rapidly took care of his previous concern.

In no time at all, his ship made its landing at the clearly long-abandoned Rebellion base. The comm chatter was still coming across strong and clear, albeit scrambled. Kylo stretched as he made his way out of the cockpit, back aching from sitting so long.

Stars, it had been ages since he had come to this place. The massive Massassi temple still had that peculiar feeling in the Force. It was here that he and Uncle Luke had discovered-

A pang ripped through his mind as he encountered yet another one of these… gaps. They found…
Someone here. Someone who later joined them at the Academy. She had… She, for Kylo was now certain it was a she, she had some command of the Force, but was… Like trying to remember a dream, the tattered remains of the memory slipped away.

Rubbing at his temples, he trudged on into the base, all the more determined. He and Luke had come here multiple times in their travels, he was sure that he would have written about anything of significance that had happened - and hopefully, for the love of the Force, not write any more mortifying poetry about it.

The source of the comm chatter was immediately evident, thankfully. Rows of abandoned and deactivated data terminals had accumulated decades of dust, vines, and filth - but, amazingly, one still gave a weak glow, its switchboard blinking off and on.

Kylo crouched before the terminal, digging up the amazingly-still-operational headset. The chatter was still scrambled on this end, but… His hands flew over the controls as he pressed the earpiece to his head, long-forgotten Rebel codes coming back to him as he made what he hoped to be the changes he needed-

“Keshleyt univelt pre - rival over Coruscant in 24 hours, General, given our current speed.”

“Good. Is our little Jedi feeling any better?”

Kylo’s heart seized. He didn’t hear what else was being said; his vision focused to a pinpoint surrounded by white. Mother. Knees weak, he barely managed to catch himself as he dropped to the stone floor. He’d know that voice anywhere. She… She was alive?!

The communication between his moth- the General - and the yet unnamed party continued. Kylo’s heart still hammered, and hoped that he hadn’t missed any key information during his brief episode.

“You had better make good with her, Dameron, you really hurt her at the rally. It’s a miracle she even agreed to go after that stunt you pulled.”

“I know, General, I feel awful - I just assumed-”

“Never assume anything, Poe! You’ve gotten better about not charging headfirst into a war, but for someone like Rey, that stage was more terrifying than any battlefield.”

Damn right, Kylo agreed privately, feeling some relief that Rey wouldn’t be used by the pathetic Resistance the way he witnessed-

“So you had better do something special for her. No crowds, nothing - I don’t know, take her out to dinner after the benefit, or whatever it is you kids do these days.”

Kylo saw red. Rey? With... No way, there was no way he was going to let Rey be led around by that pathetic, small man who used her-

“I asked, she said she’d think about it. I dunno, she seems pretty distracted, General, like she’s always focused on something else. And she’s just so - so quiet, do you really think she’ll be able to handle the OWT tomorrow?”

“In my experience, that’s just how Jedi are. She’s quiet, but she’s got a spine of steel, Dameron. Just make sure she feels safe, and she’ll have everyone there eating out of the palm of her hand
In that moment, Kylo had crushed the receiver, not caring that plastic bits cut his face, or that he destroyed any chance of continuing to listen in on what had perhaps been the most productive bit of spying the First Order had dug up in some time. In this moment, it didn’t matter. He couldn’t handle hearing any more of his mother’s and Dameron’s machinations concerning Rey, it made him sick.

Call it attending a fundraiser, call it giving a speech - Kylo knew what was happening here. They wanted her to be a rallying cry. They wanted to turn her into a weapon. They wanted her as an attack dog. They wanted her face as the one people associated with the power of the Resistance. They wanted to do to her exactly what Snoke had done to him.

He stormed back to his ship, a plan rapidly coming together in his mind. Leia Organa was alive. Rey would be attending a gala on Coruscant tomorrow with the Orphans of War Trust. He could feel the darkness rising in him as he fantasized about what, exactly, he was going to do to Poe Dameron when he saw him -

Brightness, literal Light seared through his mind. A fraction of a memory, a powerful one - what had triggered it?

He scanned the area around his ship, eyes focusing on a small, easily overlooked altar, covered in vines and moss. He approached it warily, echoes of whispers intensifying in his mind the closer he got.

Kneeling, Kylo reached out his hand to brush off the dirt, his fingers just barely touching the worn stone-

Ben Solo was young, perhaps only fifteen or so. This was their first visit to Yavin, a sort of Uncle/nephew bonding trip as they investigated ancient ruins together. Ben Solo was young, untrained - and Luke had never seen power like this in his life.

All he did was meditate the way he had seen his Uncle do. He found a convenient slab of rock, crossed his legs, and tried to concentrate. This jungle was quiet, and something had called to him, something different from the usual voices in his head. Maybe meditating here would quiet his mind, the constant pressure and self-doubt that plagued him - maybe it would help him the way this blasted archaeology trip hadn’t, despite his mother’s promises. He just breathed and let everything go, and let everything in-

“Ben? Ben, what are you doing?”

Time was meaningless, he was inexorably drawn to the light, his soul seeking out what it so desperately craved -

“BEN! YOU’VE GOT TO COME OUT OF THIS!”

Ben Solo’s body seemed weightless, his left hand upon the altar the only thing grounding him, as his body hovered just inches above the rock. Behind his eyelids, his eyes were moving rapidly, as though in a nightmare, but his face was one of bliss. His right hand reached up, as though trying to
grasp at something Luke couldn’t see-

“But Uncle, don’t you see it? The Light, it’s everywhere. She’s calling me, it’s my destiny - all I have to do is let go-”

“Ben, PLEASE!”

Ben’s head lolled forward, his neck practically boneless. His face was serene as his eyes opened, clouded over in a pure blue. “It’s fine, Uncle. She says it’s fine. I just have to give in, and everything will be as it should-”


“She says you wouldn’t do it. I must finish what Anakin started. The Force is out of balance-”

“Yeah, well they can keep their damn family drama out of mine.”

Luke pressed on Ben’s mind until the call of Mortis faded to a whisper - but not before a surge of red light issued from Ben’s hand, scarring the altar.

Ben’s gangly body collapsed in a heap of arms and legs, the presence gone. Panicked, Luke felt for him in the Force, and quickly ascertained that he was still alive and well. He breathed a sigh of relief, dragging his nephew’s long form away from the altar. He peered at the still smoking stone-

“You look like a man in need of someone who knows how to erase memories.” whispered a voice just behind him-

For apparently the second time in his life, Kylo found himself collapsed before the altar on Yavin IV.

What… What was that? This… this was a mystery well beyond anything he had anticipated uncovering. He - Ben Solo - had once been almost completely taken - by the Light? Something about finishing what Anakin started - that was something Kylo was familiar with, but there was so much more unexplained. And, someone else had been there -

Kylo’s hand quickly brushed aside the remaining dirt on the altar, revealing what had been scarred into the rock almost fifteen years ago. He didn’t recognize it, but there was something familiar about the curving lines nestled together in a circle, two teardrops radiating from the center.

It was now more urgent than ever that he get the journal. For the first time in years, Kylo was grateful for Ben Solo, the meticulous writer and researcher, the scholar. Ben Solo, who trusted nothing that wasn’t written in his own hand upon paper - perhaps a fear instilled in him by the Force itself.

But there could be another source, if these gaps in his mind were any indicator of just how much had been lost. Kylo, exhausted, shuffled his way toward his ship, hoping that his personal effects were undisturbed.

He needed his journal from right after he joined the First Order.
Fortunately, the journal didn’t take too long to locate. Within minutes of charting a course to Coruscant, Kylo found the journal in a well-hidden compartment beneath the floor grates. He couldn’t bring himself to read it just yet. Unlike the Jedi text that Ben Solo converted into a confessional, Kylo knew exactly what was in this book - for the most part. It was going to be painful, far more painful than Ben Solo’s journal, and he’d rather have Rey-

He felt warmth in the bond, for the first time in nearly a day. Was it going to open up? Would he get to see more than a glimpse of her-

Oh.

Oh.

This was an unexpected treat.

Initially, Kylo was hurt - there she sat, blazenly reading his journal, when she had promised to wait. But her face… Her beautiful face was crimson, and her breaths heavy. Her eyes were moving rapidly across the page as she squirmed, rubbing her thighs together. Kylo supposed she could be forgiven.

He was about to clear his throat, or do something to subtly announce his presence - but she lowered the book slightly as her eyes traveled right over him, as though she couldn’t see him, even though she was clearly scanning the area for listeners. She bit her lip as her fingers traveled to brush across her breast, then down her slim belly-

She didn’t see him. Was the Force so kind? Was it so cruel? To allow him this vision of pure temptation, especially after some of his more recent imaginings of Rey. Kylo found himself staring openmouthedly for a full second before he remembered himself - this, this was wrong. It was beneath him. Not to mention it was incredibly violating to her - no, he knew better. It was one thing to fantasize about her, this was - Force, was she panting? He dutifully shut his eyes, and tried his damnedest to focus, to get out of this incredibly private moment -

“Oh Master, Master Ben, please-”

Kriff. He now had a very good idea of what, exactly, she had been reading. Young Ben Solo was… well, quite frankly, he was a young man trapped in a school full of celibate Jedi trainees. He developed coping mechanisms that were perhaps a bit unusual. The Force was just not going to let him get away from this as a gentleman, was it?

“I’ve been so good, won’t you please show me? I - I don’t know what to do…”

Stars, neither do I.

“But you’re such a good teacher, Master, surely-”

Was she - did she hear his thoughts? That was a simultaneously horrifying and intriguing concept. Surely not, though - she must have just been caught up in her own imaginings, and he was… Well, he was -it was impossible to think clearly, a lusty haze clouding his thoughts as his mind raced, imagining the possibilities of this encounter. He really, really should have taken care of himself sooner; his judgment was thoroughly clouded. Put the book down, Rey.

Amazingly, Kylo heard the dull thump of the tome hitting the ground. She heard him. She obeyed. This might be more than coincidence. He probably shouldn't risk it, but the possibilities were just so... intriguing. He swallowed thickly, refusing to open his eyes. He would have the upper hand, dammit - and she was not getting away with reading his journal without him that easily. He reached
out tentatively, probing her mind to see what, exactly, she was reading-

Force help him, it was a terrible one. A small excerpt from an awful short story that pretty much served only one purpose. Even more embarrassingly, in retrospect, it appeared to star a hazy version of Rey from Ben Solo's dreams. But in his current state of mind... Well, he was hardly one to be picky. He would play along, and hopefully come away with some of his dignity intact. He knew the lines. He had written them, after all.

Tell me, are you cold?

“N-no, Master, I’m burning up…” Rey gasped.

Take off your pants.

“But what if someone sees us, Ben?”

What did you just call me?

“I’m sorry, Master, please… Just help me.”

Maker, he was going to burn for this. But if she couldn't see him... Eyes still shut, Kylo loosened his incredibly uncomfortable trousers, drawing out his embarrassingly hard cock. He palmed it a couple of times, just to ground himself as he heard Rey slowly shuffling out of her pants.

Show me. Show me how you pleasure yourself when I’m not there.

“But… But I’ve never - like this, with someone else watching…”

Well, to be quite honest, Apprentice, this is pretty new to me, too. Show me. Now.

The temptation was too much. If he was going to burn, he was going to at least come away from this with something. He cracked an eyelid open-

-to find Rey on her hands and knees, right in front of him in nothing but her underwear - grinning ear to ear as she stared straight into his eyes-

“Hello, Ben. Goodbye, Ben.” She touched his forehead -

Kylo Ren found himself back on his ship, alone, with a literal mess on his hands. In the cold, harsh air of his cockpit, mortification at what just transpired set in. His ears burned, and guilt twisted in his stomach. He should have never seen - but he craved so much more; she was clearly affected by his juvenile, near-pornographic writings. How was he going to face her again after... after that?

But then he remembered her actions, that devious little smile at the end - she did it. Again. She kept gaining the upper hand in this… Whatever this relationship was. Kylo wasn’t sure if he should be more furious or turned on by the constant manipulation; inwardly, he knew he was just as guilty. But one thing was for certain - he was going to assure he’d hold all the cards on Coruscant.

With a defeated sigh, he cleaned himself up, and started rifling through his personal items once again. He realized that Rey already had a small victory she didn’t even know about yet - but Kylo was willing to lose this battle to win the war.

Prince Ben Solo was going to have to put on an appearance at this gala.
Welp, I had a lot of things I needed to get done this chapter, sorry if you experienced some whiplash - Kylo needed to figure out mom’s still alive, where Rey’s going, that a certain Clone Wars plotline tried to meddle with his destiny early on, and that there’s someone who explicitly messes with memories.

Oh, and of course, Rey unveils the galaxy’s most feared weapon - seduction. Don’t worry, we’re going to get to see what exactly… inspired her next chapter.

We won’t be venturing into E territory just yet. I’ve found this wonderful thing called “making you beg for it,” which, ironically, is what these poor virgins are going to be doing for a while. Rey’s in over her head, and Kylo has nothing but Ben’s sad old fapfics to go by - and we all know just how accurate the writings of a 19-to-26-year-old-virgin are. They’re both pretty pathetic at this point, really.

I’m absolutely LOVING all the feedback guys, keep it up! Hoping this didn’t get dirtier than what you wanted, but I’m sorry, I can’t keep it in. There’s just too much to work with here - who says you can’t have plot AND smut?
Forbidden Insights and Stolen Thoughts

Chapter Summary

"These were not the flowery, fanciful words of Ben Solo. This was not a boy extolling the beauty of the world around him, longing for the girl in his dreams. This... this was him becoming someone else altogether, Rey realized, her heart in her throat."

Chapter Notes

Minor edits on 8/9/18 because I need something to do while I'm on the exercise bike.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires." -Song of Solomon, 2:7

Rey had just over a day before her “public debut,” as Leia put it.

She knew she should be sleeping right now, to adjust to the time on Coruscant, but she was restless. So far, she had spent most of her journey in a literal cell. “Everyone take a room or three, there’s only space for two on the bridge, and we’re going to be here awhile,” she remembered Poe warning the ten of them who were going on this trip. “At least the doors lock from the inside now!” he had offered chirpily.

There was no way around it - her room was a literal jail cell, one of hundreds on this massive, lumbering Republic-era transport. By the time Rey had spread out her books and datapads, nearly the entire floor space was occupied, leaving her to cautiously toe around the Jedi journals whenever she needed to leave the room.

Studying had been difficult before, but now... it was impossible. Rey was a gifted linguist, but even she had her limits in making sense of such thick, allegorical writings by the time they were translated - whole, unending paragraph-long sentences of things like:

“A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition; that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, nay, even of the sum total of all inclinations - even if it should happen, that, owing to special disfavor of fortune, or the withholding provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should wholly lack power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing and there should remain only the good will (not, to be sure, a mere wish, but the summoning of all means in our power), then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself...”

Rey had to slog through page upon page of meandering syntax and prattling prose, trying her
damnedest to focus and make sense of the needlessly verbose writing.

As it had done many times since her acquiring it, Ben’s journal burned a hole in her mind. There it sat, on the shelf next to her cot - untouched, small, and unassuming.

So much knowledge sat right there. So much Rey could know, so much she could use - in discovering more about the Jedi, more about the Force, more about Ben - all of it just waiting - but no, she promised-

Maybe just a peek?

Because, of course - Rey reminded herself as she carefully traipsed her way to the bed - it certainly wouldn’t be my fault if the journal just slipped- she very deliberately pushed the book off the shelf - and just happened to open up, right?

She went so far as to fake her own surprise that the book had landed face-up, open to the very middle. Oh no, what a disaster- she practically giggled to herself, greedily kneeling before the book, seeing what knowledge it had to offer -

“Oh Master, Master Ben, please- ” the apprentice breathed, biting her finger as her robes fell from her small shoulders, surrounded by her chestnut locks, free from their typical tight buns-

What.

What.

This had to be a mistake. Rey shook her head, sure that she hadn’t just read those words. Surely, if she looked at what was open before her, there would be some more dry, witty commentary on Jedi knowledge-

“I’ve been so good, won’t you please show me? I - I don’t know what to do-” she couldn’t seem to control her own body as it surged toward him, so affected was his apprentice by the spores-

Well, this is what she got for leaving this up to blind chance.

Rey wasn’t one to look a gift horse in the mouth, though - she lifted the sheet the book had opened on, squinting at the small text. It was clearly a piece of a slightly longer writing, with as many words jammed on the page as possible.

He hadn’t been affected by the spores the way his apprentice had, but he now knew it was only a matter of time before he was taken in as well. She writhed before him, shameless and debased as she rubbed her shapely thighs together, hoping to bring some sort of release.

“Get yourself together, Apprentice! We are Jedi, we are above this sort of carnal influence! Lust is the way of the Dark side!” his words were strong, but his will weak as he found himself enraptured by the beautiful girl before him.
“It’s so hot - I’m burning up, Master! Please, help me!” She now pulled her robe completely off her shoulders, revealing her lithe, beautiful form to him, only him.

In that moment, he felt something take over his body, as though some dark, beastly instinct had control of his body. “Take off your pants. Now.” he growled, pulling his own tunic from his broad, muscled shoulders.

She obliged without the slightest hesitation, now laid bare before him, panting and eager.

“Good, good girl. You’re such a good Apprentice, don’t you now that?” he crooned, his Apprentice basking in the pleasure of his praise.

She crawled toward him on all fours, unashamed. “Please, I’ve been so good, Ben-”

“What did you just call me?”

The apprentice bit her lip in a grin, her brown eyes sparkling in defiance.

“You know what this means, Apprentice. Now, I have to punish you.”

She whimpered in delight as she crawled over his body, pinning his arms down. “My strong, noble Jedi Master - please forgive me…” she pleaded, kissing his throat, his chest, his abdomen - “I’ll be so good…” she whispered as one of her hands inexorably pulled down his pants-

Rey could feel her face bleeding crimson. Sure, she had caught some glimpses of naughty holoshows in her years, and seen some rather unfortunate pinups in old Stormtrooper quarters - but all of that paled in comparison to the writings of one Ben Solo - starring, evidently, her. How - when had he written this? Her reaction alone let her work out the why pretty quickly, as she clensed her thighs together.

She flipped over the sheet, eager for more - but it was blank! Nothing more than where the ink had bled through from the front. Quickly looking back at the book, there were no other sheets this size or color caught between its many pages - just this one. The fact that she wanted more, was eagerly anticipating more...

Breathing heavily, Rey considered her options. She could take care of this… problem, or she could calm down, and figure out how to work this in her favor. That’s what the General had told her, after all - “Men will give you all sorts of tells and clues, Rey. Just know that they’re never half as subtle or smart as they like to think they are, and what they usually want is staring you right in the face. Use it.”

Well, according to this, Ben Solo had a deeply-seated longing for a very certain kind of apprentice - and, evidently, the desert girl from his visions was there to fill that role.

This was hardly surprising. After all, Kylo Ren seemed insistent, even in his most desperate moments, that Rey needed a teacher - though she hardly anticipated how he saw himself in that role. There was certainly material here to work with.

What could she do here? Ben had said something a couple days ago - that she’d “Figure it out soon enough-” did he mean activating the connection to him? He certainly seemed to have figured it out, so it couldn’t be that hard.
She looked around the room, considering how to play this. More than anything, she needed to
distract him, get him as far from Kylo Ren as possible - if anything, their last interaction revealed
that he was willing to up the ante, thinking that she would be completely taken off-guard by his
more… flirtatious antics. If he even knew how much her heart had pounded at the feel of him
behind her, the pressure of his fingers on her wrist… If he needed to be literally seduced by the
Light, he certainly seemed to have given her a playbook on how to pull it off in the form of this...
homemade porn.

Rey grabbed the journal, nestling the loose page back between the pages it fell from. She sat upon
the cot in the cell, and concentrated, holding the book before her as though she was immersed in
reading it, reaching out in the Force as hard as she could-

She felt what she now recognized as a telltale warmth sliding down her back - he was here. It was
dark in her cell, but she knew he was there somewhere - she just simply couldn’t let him know that
she knew.

Feigning as though she was looking out for intruders, she let her gaze slide right over him hiding in
the corner, fighting down the urge to giggle at his dumbfounded expression. She didn’t even need
to worry, as the next time she chanced a glance in his direction, he had screwed his eyes shut,
giving a slight moan.

It was so easy from there. All she did was read out loud along with his own writings, his thought-
rather-than-spoken responses coming in time with the quotes she pulled from the page. A few
layers of clothing had been shed - but it was all part of the act - not in the heat of the moment, Rey
assured herself. He fell into her words so easily - she was not in over her head, she was not letting
her hormones take over, and this sense of power over him was in no way was both thrilling and
terrifying.

She now watched him brazenly as he pulled himself from his pants, transfixed at the sight before
her - Maker, she didn’t exactly have a basis of comparison, but he was huge. She bit her lip, and, in
an honest moment, confessed to him that she had never… satisfied herself like this, spread bare and
open. After all, on Jakku, everything she did to herself was decidedly over-her-clothes - she
couldn’t risk expending moisture on something as indulgent as self-pleasure.

She decided to pull the trigger when she felt him open a single eye, before this got out of hand.
Literally. Just like in his writing, she had crawled toward him - “Hello, Ben. Goodbye, Ben-” and
then promptly locked down the connection, exactly as she’d witnessed him do to her after he
helped her on the Resistance base.

And now… Now she was left aching. Well, maybe she could indulge just a another couple of
peeks into the journal, Rey thought as she casually flipped to another page-

Though this is adapted from an earlier translation, I can't imagine the Jedi reversed their position
on such a critical point in such a short period of time, especially after they had suffered so many
losses. This needs to be cross-referenced with volume five, which had a more explicit definition-

Whoops, the book moved, how did that happen, Rey flipped the page again...

"While a Jedi should strive to accomplish much, critical thinking and decision-making should be
approached slowly, with frequent meditations on possible outcomes and consequences deriving
Well, these were the sort of useful notes that she had been *initially* looking for - but now that she knew what kinds of… intriguing things Ben Solo had hidden away in this journal, she wanted more. *More material to use against him,* Rey assured herself.

"When a Jedi behaves badly in public, an observer might think, 'If this Jedi is a representative of the whole Order, then plainly no Jedi is worth respect.' On meeting a second Jedi, who behaves better than the first, that same person might think, 'Does this say that half the Jedi are good, and half bad?' On meeting a third Jedi, who behaves as well as the second, the person thinks, 'Was the first Jedi an exception, then?' In this way, only by the good behavior of several Jedi can the public be certain that the poor behavior of one Jedi was unusual. Thus, it takes many Jedi to undo the mistakes of one."

It was as though the journal was doing its very best job to turn her off.

She flipped closer toward the back of the book, where the cleanest sheet of paper so far stuck out at her like a white flag. This was clearly the least aged thing in this journal. At first, Rey thought it may have been someone else’s writing altogether - instead of the beautiful script she had now grown used to and looked forward to reading, this was done with a shaking, almost childlike hand, though a handful of Ben Solo’s flourishes were still evident. It didn't make sense - what had happened for him to become so careless in his penmanship, clearly something he took pride in?

Then Rey took in the words. These were not the flowery, fanciful words of Ben Solo. This was not a boy extolling the beauty of the world around him, longing for the girl in his dreams. This… this was him becoming someone else altogether, Rey realized, her heart in her throat.

*I'm becoming less defined as days go by, fading away*

*Losing focus, drifting into the abstract in terms of how I see myself.*

*Someday, I thought you saw right through me.*

*I'm alone, but then again, I always was, as far back as I can tell*

*I think maybe it's because you were never really real to begin with.*

*I just made you up to hurt myself.*

*And it worked.*

“Hey, Rey? Your light’s on, you awake in there?” a voice called from just outside her door.

*Kriff!* For the second time in as many days, Rey felt herself wiping away tears as someone interrupted her reading, now with the embarrassing addition of also having to scramble to put her clothes back on. She closed Ben’s journal, and stuffed it under her pillow. “Hold on!” she said breathlessly, opening the door.

Thank the Force, it was Finn. She wasn’t quite sure how to handle herself around Poe - who seemed to be tripping over himself apologizing to her now, and even asked her if she wanted to get dinner- “*We’ve got portions in our quarters, right? I’ll be ok,*” she had responded, leaving Poe looking thoroughly puzzled for some reason.
She opened the door to Finn’s smiling face. “Hey. Just checking in on you - you ready for this... *thing* tomorrow?”

Rey sighed, leaning in the doorframe. “Honestly... I’m not sure, Finn. The General gave me a lot of advice - *stars*, Finn, she’s even sending me to her penthouse, and having someone come in to do my kriffing *hair...*”

“Woah, you get to stay in the General’s penthouse? Sounds pretty cushy, Rey - the rest of us are crashing at Snap’s folks’ place.” Finn chuckled. “Of course, from the way it sounds, most of them are ‘catching up’ while they’re on Coruscant, so we may not see them much after the gala.”

“Yeah, I guess there’s a lot of that going around...” Rey sighed. “Finn - do you ever... Do you ever feel like you’re out of place in all of this? Like... Like everyone else just knows a thousand more things than you, and you’re just struggling to keep up with how to even talk to people?”

Finn gave a sympathetic smile. “Of course, Rey. I felt that a lot at the beginning - but I’ve always liked *people*. I always wanted to help - I think that’s part of the reason I was such a terrible Stormtrooper. There’s no room for those kinds of feelings on the battlefield, you know?” He scratched his head, thinking. “I’m sure it’s different for you, though - scary, even. You’ve got all these people expecting things from you, and for you it’s barely been a few months since you were on Jakku.” Finn shrugged, grinning. “Well, I know what always worked for me when things didn’t seem quite right, even when I was a Stormtrooper - wanna spar?”

A massive smile spread across Rey’s face, relieved at her friend’s ability to tell her exactly what she needed to hear. “I would love that.”

After four hours of intense, widely-spectated sparring, and about eighteen hours of recovering and sleeping later, Rey woke absolutely *wrecked*. She told Finn not to take it easy on her, and he wasn’t one to hold back - whatever training program those Stormtroopers went through was *insane*.

Her knuckles were cracked, her fingernails scuffed, and there probably wasn’t a square inch of her body without some kind of bruising on it from being repeatedly slammed into the training mats and walls of the “yard,” the large open space in the middle of one of the pods of cells. But Rey felt... *better*. She worked out her frustrations at everything that had been happening in a decidedly constructive way, and had gotten a *literal* workout in the process.

That didn’t mean she wanted to be blasted awake by the intercom, announcing that they would arrive on Coruscant within twenty minutes, and they should be ready to disembark in five.

Rey packed the journals, datapads, and her notes. She only trusted Ben’s journal to the safety of her tunic, and had even gone so far as to secure it shut with a small belt, so afraid was she of losing even a scrap of it.

After a long walk through winding corridors of cells, she joined the other members of the Resistance, grouped together by the drop deck. There were so few of them - the tiny group sent out to do what they could for the Resistance, their youngest and brightest.

She saw Rose Tico talking with Finn, who was sporting a few bacta patches on his shoulders, Rey noted with a hint of pride. Poe and a handful of the surviving pilots stood in another group, while Lieutenant Connix and Snap Wexley had gathered with the rest. It was such a small group - but Rey still managed to feel like... like she didn’t quite belong.
“There she is, the woman of the hour!”

Statements like that didn’t help.

Poe Dameron had a datapad in front of him with what looked like a massive checklist from the General. “So, here’s the plan - Rey, the General requested that you go to her apartments, apparently there’s some extremely specific outfits she wants you to wear, and I’m not even going to pretend like I understand what her plan is here. There should be a couple folks from New Alderaan at the docks there for you - they’ll take care of everything. Everyone else - we’re getting together at the Wexleys. Anyone who doesn’t know their suit or dress size is coming with me, everyone else is staying with Kaydel, and we’ll figure out who’s wearing what and who’s talking to who from there. Understood?”

A resounding “Yes sir!” came up from the small group gathered, settling the matter.

Already, Rey felt lost. She felt even more lost when the ship finally made groundfall, and the drop deck finally lowered-

It was unlike anything she had ever imagined.

Coruscant was laid out before her - and above her, and below her, and all around her. Lights, sounds, an overwhelming cacophony slowly surrounded her. The Force was so loud here, as though there were thousands of voices all talking over each other at the same time, and the buildings so massive; Rey felt vertigo settle in as she attempted to look up, up, up- and stumbled - this was too much, this was too much-

Her hand had somehow found the journal in her tunic again, and a brief heat traveled down her arm. Calm down. Focus. She breathed slowly, shutting her eyes, centering herself. There were no threats. She could handle this. It was just a lot of people - a lot of people.

“Miss Rey? Excuse me, are you Miss Rey?”

She opened her eyes to find two impeccably dressed women who were not too much older than her, perhaps in their early thirties. Their long, dark hair was gathered back into a series of intricate braids, partially covered by veils that went well past their hips. These must have been the representatives from New Alderaan, Rey realized, as she saw her companions slowly shuffling away from the docks.

“Um, yes. ‘Rey’ is just fine though, thank you.” Rey re-shouldered her backpack full of books awkwardly, not sure how to act in front of these women.

They giggled, though at least their eyes lit up in genuine humor. “Oh, that would be incredibly rude of us, Miss Rey - after all, you are an honored guest of the Queen!” the taller of the two responded.

“Well then, shall we get you ready for tonight?” the shorter and deeper-voiced of the two questioned. “We have so much to get done, and so little time.”

“But you’re in good hands, trust us.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your names…?”

“I’m Meghana.”

“I’m Divyya.”
“We’re the Queen’s nieces.” the taller one, evidently Meghana, propelled Rey toward a sleek shuttle at the end of the dock.

“Well, cousins, technically.”

“Something like three times removed.”

“But she’s always been Auntie Leia to us.” Divyya said dreamily.

“Now, let’s get you to the Queen’s quarters - I can’t wait to get started on you.” Meghana had a Lothcat-like smile to her, wide and predatory as she eyed Rey’s hair.

The door to the shuttle sealed shut, silently proceeding high into the dense layers of Coruscanti traffic, and Rey wondered just what kind of family drama she had gotten herself into.

Chapter End Notes

Shoutout to Immanuel Kant’s Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals for that particular paragraph-long sentence at the beginning there - and that’s not even one of the worst ones, just one I found fitting for this story. If you’re ever in a position where you can take an aesthetics class, I strongly advise against it - looking back at my notes from grad school makes me want to cry in a very Flowers for Algernon way - much like Kylo, I can’t understand a damn word of my own writing, it’s so needlessly up its own ass.

Also shoutout to OG Ben Solo with his by-the-numbers sex pollen friendfic. That was an absolute ball to write. One should imagine Hayden Christensen delivering those solid gold lines about lust being the dark side.

Punished Ben Solo’s poem was adapted from Nine Inch Nails’ Only, which seemed appropriate. Rey is starting to find the pieces of the Flowers for Algernon-ing that happened to Ben over time, leading up to when Luke thought he had gone too far off the deep end.

Y’all, I have written about ten pages of this impending gala waaaayy in advance, because I CANNOT for the life of me get enough of Bossy-Asshole-Prince-Ben-Solo. Can’t wait for you to read it. As someone who is a complete social recluse with a “public” face that lets me pass in the most stuffy of Southern parties and weddings, I’m well aware of what you can do in that kind of persona - and GOD, he’s fun to write, because he is such a MAGNIFICENT BASTARD.

Someday, I’ll write the full Princess Diaries in Space that Rey in the hands of Leia and her remaining extended family deserves. Then, the references will have come full circle, seeing as Carrie Fisher’s most recent memoirs was titled The Princess Diarist.

Thank you all again SO much for all the kudos, comments, and support - I’m slowly working my way through all the comments, but my cup overfloweth - and I like it that way. Keep it coming!
"For so long, it had been Kylo Ren who had protected him. Kylo Ren, who shielded the tattered remains of the boy who had been Ben Solo. But here, surrounded by opulence and aristocracy - the crusader, the warrior was useless. He needed to be the Prince."

It took a while to get into the proper frame of mind.

The arrival on Coruscant, bare-faced for the first time in almost a decade - that had already thrown him off. Last time he was here at all, he was a masked slave to Snoke, groveling and looking for any scrap of praise during a ceasefire agreement.

Now, he was... He breathed deeply, having to center himself. He was Ben Solo. He had to be Ben Solo. It was necessary to get what he needed. If he played this right, he could have everything.

For so long, it had been Kylo Ren who had protected him. Kylo Ren, who shielded the tattered remains of the boy who had been Ben Solo, but here, surrounded by opulence and aristocracy - the crusader, the warrior was useless. He needed to be the prince.

Thankfully, he had good intel to work from while he was here. While General Hux was delighted with the extremely valuable intel the Supreme Leader had gathered so far, he had insisted on some form of security in a place as open as Coruscant. And, finally, Ben was able to slightly agree - he would certainly be exposed here, in more ways than one.

A stormtrooper brigade was of no use - he needed to be Prince Ben Solo, after all. He couldn’t look as though he had any ties to the First Order whatsoever, or he’d scare away half the attendees of the Orphans of War Trust gala. Kylo Ren would frighten away the galaxy - but Ben Solo? He was royalty of the best kind - mysterious. Ben had done plenty to make his name known as a youth, for
better or worse, and then the rumors circulating around his disappearance seven years ago made him all the more intriguing in the public eye. He had enough allure and influence to draw the attention of anyone.

*Kriff*, he hated it.

He hated that his security consisted of the three Knights of Ren he knew well, but was on awkward terms with, not having spoken with them in some years. He insisted they keep their distance, only monitoring him in public areas. Most of the Knights had continued their roles as Inquisitors after his rise as Supreme Leader, carefully monitoring any signs of Force sensitivity awakening in the galaxy. Ben didn’t know why he hadn’t called them off at this point – it was Snoke’s assignment to them, not his; he couldn’t give less of a damn if some kid figured out how to make his toys float. But it was easier to maintain the status quo until something needed to be changed - thus how he ended up with Shartom Ren, Obaan Ren, and Enoch Ren, the three Knights he had known the longest, tailing him.

He hated the feeling from Coruscant - just the *feeling* in general. He hated this place even as a kid, so overwhelming it was in the Force. It was like being trapped in a conversation with someone who didn’t know when to stop talking, except it was every mind, everywhere, all the time. This many minds were never meant to exist in one place, Ben was sure of it. It made him long for quiet, peace - hell, it made him long for a *drink*.

He hated the sinking feeling in his stomach as he entered his portion of his mother’s expansive apartments she kept as the Queen and Viceroy of New Alderaan - *kriff*, if something in his chest didn’t turn to stone when he realized that his passcode still worked. His rooms, thankfully, had their own entrance - or there would have been some awkward interactions in his teens.

He hated that everything was exactly as he left it. The last time he was here… *Stars*, relatively speaking, it wasn’t even that long ago, less than ten years now. It was the 30th anniversary of the destruction of Alderaan; a somber ceremony, but a hopeful one. The citizens of New Alderaan celebrated how far they had come in their new settlement, toasting with the first wine made on New Alderaan, grown from seeds that produced the very same vines that once covered the Organa estate. It was the last time he saw his mother, before... Well, everything.

Ben opened closet upon closet of relics from his past, hoping to find something appropriate for this impending event. He quickly realized, with a grimace, that he’d have no such luck – the Ben Solo who wore these clothes was gangly and almost impossibly thin, even in his early twenties. Another memory passed through his head, connecting some previously disparate pieces. Last time he stood here… He now distinctly remembered his mother tutting over him, her eyes shining with worry -

“*Ben, you look so - so tired*. And you’re just wasting away…” she had reached up to his thin neck, tracing her fingers over his protruded collarbone. She had been, as always, among politicians for most of the day, this being their first time alone together in so long, Ben couldn’t remember. He was only attending this event because it was on his way back from yet another loose end Master Luke was having him track down, seemingly in an effort to keep him busy. He was tired. So very tired, but when he slept… he shuddered, causing his mother to quickly pull her hand away, not knowing that the tremble was brought on by the mere memory of what he saw in his dreams these days, not her very much welcome touch. He was wasting away. He no longer even felt hunger, food had been like ash in his mouth for some time now. At this point, there was hardly any of him left.

Ben slowly exhaled, centering himself. He knew that coming here was going to be… hazardous, as
far as recalled memories, but he hadn't quite been prepared for that one. *That* Ben Solo, the gaunt, haunted one who attended the ceremony with his mother, rumors circulating wildly among the Noble Houses about him falling into a spice habit - in less than a year, that boy would discover his legacy, find out just how long his family had *lied* to him, be betrayed by his uncle, and join his other master.

Well, one thing was for certain - the man he had become since then was certainly not going to be able to fit into any of this skinny boy’s finery.

Warily, Ben opened his door to the long hallway that connected the Queen of Alderaan’s various rooms and chambers. He couldn't bring himself to go into her rooms - besides, what he needed wasn't in her penthouse.

He opened the opulent doors to his grandfather’s study - his *adoptive* grandfather. Bail Organa had perished along with the planet he had been Viceroy of, but Leia had kept his personal quarters exactly as they had been when he was alive. Ben had come here many times as a child to read, liking the quiet peace offered by this room - but he also enjoyed, as children tend to, *spying*. It was because of that childish snooping that Ben knew he'd find what he needed.

Bail Organa may not have been Ben’s grandfather by blood, but, thankfully, he was quite tall, had a similarly large frame. Ben found several carefully preserved sets of his ceremonial clothes, and quickly deemed them both long enough for his legs and wide enough for his shoulders, while still displaying a distinctly Alderaani style. These would do.

He pulled on the clothes, something difficult he had never had to do for himself with such thick fabrics, complicated with multiple folds - *maybe this is why royalty have so many attendants*, Ben thought begrudgingly.

Finally done, he caught sight of himself in a mirror on his way out, causing him to swallow tightly. This… This was what his mother always wanted, wasn’t it? He looked every bit the Prince he was supposed to be, though he hardly felt it. Ben didn’t know if he’d ever be able to pull it off convincingly after what had happened-

Then he spied the brandy in the foyer. Oh. *That* would work, too.

The journey to the fundraiser was blissfully uneventful. He had a comm to contact his Knights if things went south, but Ben was becoming less and less convinced that an attack was a possibility - after all, he was just another member of the Elder Houses showing up to a fundraiser, and the OWT certainly would have no problems funding decent security. He’d be one of dozens of nobles, hardly worth singling out.

He was more grateful for the now-empty bottle of brandy than ever as he approached the gala, people already being set upon him. “*Prince Ben Solo is here!*” went the whispers. With a slight buzz on, it was almost easy to go through the motions his mother had drilled into him since childhood - shake this person’s hand, bow here, ignore these people, smile, look concerned, laugh here.

It took a while to work his way through the crowd to overlook the main event space, a massive, open room below, where the most important members were announced upon arrival. They’d then descend the grand staircase to mingle with the proletariat - but it wasn’t time yet.
Paying off the herald was its own reward almost immediately. From up here on the balcony, Ben was able to scan the room below, sorting through hundreds of faces -

And then he found hers.

She was… Beautiful was a weak word here. Stunning. Mind-numbing. He looked at her, and everything took on a comfortable silence in the Force, allowing him to only focus on her. She was with FN-2187 and Poe Dameron, not surprising Ben in the least, as he swallowed down the slightest bit of repressed rage. Rey’s cheeks were stuffed with presumably the same deep-red berries she had a handful of - those berries quite possibly came from what was supposed to be a decorative display. Somehow, to Ben, this was charming.

Clearly, someone had taken Rey under their wing, for this… Creature to emerge. Ben had reason to suspect that his mother was at least partially responsible from her dress alone.

He recognized the bare-shouldered, floor-length gown immediately, its distinctive fade from golden yellow at the top to deep lavender by the train marking it as a dress that was one Padme Amidala’s favorites, featuring in many of her portraits - and one Queen Organa kept lovingly preserved. The dress was… Ben gulped. Not one he would have chosen for her, with its completely exposed back that left her looking vulnerable, though perhaps that was the purpose. She moved in it slowly, clearly afraid of ripping the layers upon layers of gossamer-thin fabric pooled by her feet. Ben caught her scooping up the bottom of the train multiple times in order to move faster, a small smile crossing his face - that’s for her escort to do.

She was a little too far away for him to truly appreciate her full beauty, but as his eyes wandered to her hair, his heart stopped.

Her hair - her hair. This was… He must have been compromised. Somehow, someone knew he was coming. This had to be a message. This was a blatant challenge to him. For who at this gathering, other than him, would so quickly interpret the meaning?

It would be lost on anyone not raised in high society - in fact, it could possibly even go unnoticed by anyone not raised among Alderaani customs, so specific was the style. However, this particular crown of braids had been replicated enough in society that some other blue-bloods would most likely pick up on the meaning. But Ben Solo saw the particular part of Rey’s hair, the specific position of the braids, her head unveiled, her neck bare, knowing exactly its meaning - this was the hair of a young noblewoman freely courting, searching for suitors.

It made him livid. Here she was, surrounded by all these unworthy men ogling and pawing at her, not knowing that her hair was clearly sending a message only to the most well-to-do of them, announcing her availability. In all the ways that were important, Rey was spoken for. Kylo Ren clawed at the surface, begging to be set loose and claim Rey like the animal he was - but this was not the place. Rey clearly was oblivious, and she didn’t ask for this. Ben centered himself, knowing that he had to approach this in the most repulsive of ways - the politician’s path.

He breathed, focusing again, before finally nodding to the herald.

It was time to make his entrance.
The OWT gala was unlike anything Rey knew could even exist in the galaxy.

She should have known from just how long she was in prep for this event that it was going to be… different. For the first time in her life, she had been plunged into a bathtub full of clean water - and then Divyya and Meghana proceeded to put her through a lot of other firsts as well.

They bemoaned the damage left behind by the previous days’ sparring, tutting about the state of Rey’s skin. By the end of it, they had probably slathered her with more bacta than they did cosmetics or lotion, deeming that she needed a “youthful” look for tonight.

“Tonight, an innocent seduction. Tomorrow, at the ball - a deliberate seduction. No one will forget you, and everyone will want to support you.” Meghana had declared as she pulled the gauzy dress on to Rey - though if this was “innocent,” Rey feared what they defined as “deliberate.” With her upbringing, Rey was hardly one with a traditional sense of modesty, but still… Her shoulders and back were completely bare, though at least the voluminous layers amply obscured her body, giving Rey plenty of room to holster a blaster on one thigh garter and Ben’s journal on the other.

There had been a considerable amount of argumentative whispering between the women as they worked on her makeup, hair, skin - apparently Leia had left extremely specific instructions. At this point, Rey had learned it was just best to wait until this was all over, and be grateful for the fact that it seemed as though she may have finally rid herself of the last grains of sand from Jakku.

Finally, they had attempted to get Rey to wear some truly horrifying-looking shoes, which, upon Rey immediately proving that she couldn’t walk a single step in them unassisted, were exchanged for some far more practical flats. Why there was such a bother for something no one would even see through all the layers of dress was a mystery to Rey, who was already terrified of ripping the clearly precious dress.

Rey did not actually get a full look at the ensemble until the gala itself, when she arrived and met up with the other members of the Resistance in a small hallway separate from the main entrance she saw other attendees approaching. She saw them first, and her face just about split open in a grin - they all looked great! She had been so worried about how seemingly over-the-top her own outfit was, but seeing the other women in similar, pooling-on-the ground gowns and the men in extremely stiff-looking, but handsome suits made Rey feel much better.

Approaching them, she finally passed a floor-length mirror - and was completely stunned. This… this was her? She looked… Rey had never looked like this in her life. She slowly approached the mirror, stupefied. Well, she certainly looked… nice, she’d admit that - the dress complimented her tanned skin beautifully, and whatever Divyaa and Meghana did to her hair gave her an almost ethereal look with the crown of braids framing her face delicately. She looked like something out of one of her fairy tales, some sort of wispy, fairy-like thing. Rey wasn’t sure how she felt about that.

She caught up with the rest of the group, where all four of the women squealed over the dress Rey was wearing, Rose Tico actually covered her mouth, gasping “Queen Amidala’s gown!” They settled in quickly, though, everyone grouped around Poe’s datapad, where he was scrolling through company headshots.

“These are the main groups we want to approach, as well as any of these individuals - they’re dealers, and not necessarily representatives of companies, so they should be easier to work with. It
should go without saying that anyone from Czerka should be a top priority to make contact with. Remember, tonight is all about meetings and first impressions, guys - don’t seem overly eager, because no one will even start any negotiations until tomorrow. We want to get our faces out there, make our cause known, and show our strength - understood?”

A murmur of agreement went through the group. Poe nodded before continuing. “All right, this whole fundraiser song and dance is old hat for some of you, but anyone who’s never done one of these needs to find and stick with someone who has. You two…” Poe very deliberately pointed at Finn and Rey “You’re sticking with me. As the ex-Stormtrooper and the last Jedi, you’re both our most critical people that these folks will want to meet and the least experienced at this kind of thing.”

Poe scratched at his chin. “In fact… Rose, you better come with us, too. I have a feeling that these two are in for some culture shock, and I’ll need someone to help me field what I’m sure are going to be about a million questions.”

Rey and Finn exchanged affronted looks as the group approached the massive doors separating them and the event-

Well, maybe Poe was right to worry.

Immediately, Rey became aware that this was more food than she had ever seen in her life. Never mind the towering, cathedral-like ceilings, the hundreds of impeccably dressed attendees, the sparkling chandeliers, the wide, sweeping staircase that seemed to dominate the room - Rey’s eyes were focused only on the tables full of food.

This… This was a fundraiser? How… How could they expect to make money when it was clear how much they spent?

“Come on, you two - ogle and mingle.” Poe pushed Rey and Finn forward into the crowd, Rey grateful to see a similar look of stunned disbelief on Finn’s face.

“The food - this is all… Just free?” Rey asked timidly.

“Well, it was paid for by the OWT, so that depends on your definition of ‘free.’” muttered Rose, who had apparently already found something to drink.

The evening began to pass in a blur. Rey was led around to various groups of people, Poe always making introductions, not giving her much more to do than smile and nod, which she was grateful for. Some would shake her hand, some bowed, curtsied, and a few even kissed the back of her hand like Poe once had. One thing was consistent, though - it never failed to stun a single individual to learn that Rey was the last Jedi. Every time, the person or group would go from polite interest to genuine intrigue, appraising Rey with new eyes.

The eyes, the noise, the general feeling of this place - Rey began to see why Rose had started drinking. There was a screamingly loud herald that went up seemingly every other minute, announcing yet another wealthy noble, here to add another mind to this already overwhelming room. The next time a caterer went by with a tray full of wine, she asked for a glass, hoping that it would be better than the coolant tank moonshine she had sampled a few times back on Jakku-Stars, this was better.

The glass of wine went quickly, and was followed by another. Now, the room seemed warmer, the
herald not as piercing, the swarm of minds in the Force more tolerable. Poe stopped her midway from grabbing a third, encouraging Rey to go get some food before having any more to drink. Rey did not need to be told twice to eat - her eyes had been fixated on a particular display from the moment they entered the gala.

A towering showstopper of tropical fruits was all the temptation Rey needed. With an efficiency borne of years of starving, she circulated around the table, trying one of everything she saw, oblivious to the few attendees who attempted to engage her. She liked a carved display of bloodred berries the most, which she proceeded to load up into her hand and eat as she shuffled awkwardly back to her friends. *Kriff* this nonsensical dress, it was as though she wasn’t supposed to move at all. The handful of particularly delightful berries only lasted her from the trip to the table back to her comrades, who, for once, didn’t have any prospective arms dealers in their midst.

Well, she had eaten now. Time for more wine. She grabbed the last glass from a passing waiter, draining half of it as she caught Rose’s eye.

“I’m moving on to the heavier stuff, but I like your style!” Rose grinned, then whispered theatrically as she left, “The bar’s over by the windows!”

Rey was halfway listening to Poe describing the next target they needed to track down in this massive space when the herald went up again, as cacophanus as it had been the other dozen times. Rey was fully prepared to tune it out as she sipped from her glass-

“Presenting His Highness, Prince Ben Solo of New Alderaan!”

*PFFFFBT*

In an incredibly un-ladylike manner, Rey managed to simultaneously choke on and spray her drink, gasping for air wildly. She was still coughing, red-faced, as she turned toward the stairs-

There he was. The. Absolute. *Nerve* of him, what was he *thinking*? Was this whole event a trap? Would the First Order surround the building, and gun down what was effectively half the core members of the Resistance? He must have spied on her when she hadn’t noticed, to know that she’d be here. The *basta*- well, that was hardly flattering to Leia.

Wiping wine from her mouth and setting her glass on a table, Rey stared at Ben. She hardly recognized him in clothes that weren’t black, and with a swagger she never would have expected him to be able to affect. He looked every but the prince he was announced as.

He wore a navy tunic that accentuated his broad shoulders, trimmed in burgundy and gold. His pants were tucked into knee-high brown leather boots that gave him the casual look of someone who had just arrived from attending some multimillion-credit steeplechase. He had a *cape* on, for *kriff*’s sake. All along the edges of everything he wore were a series of complicated swirls and knots, an elegant, clearly hand-stitched golden brocade. His hair fell in beautiful, perfect raven waves, and his face didn’t look remotely drawn or exhausted, as Rey had seen him last in the flesh. A wide smile utterly unfamiliar to Rey was across his face as he enthusiastically shook hands with an eager crowd gathered around him, his movements comfortable and practiced.

It should have looked ridiculous. *He* should have looked ridiculous. But *kriff*, if a thrill didn’t
shoot through Rey’s spine at the sight of him.

“Is - what - are - are you kidding me!?” Finn whisper-shouted.

Poe was speechless, mouth hanging wide open as he stared straight at Kylo - or, rather, Ben Solo. Rey wasn't sure Poe knew until she saw his face. This was clearly a man aware that they were in the presence of Leia's son - the Supreme Leader.

Rey shook her head rapidly, having to ground herself in the moment.

Finn was the first to come to his full senses. “Poe? Poe! Snap out of it - what do we do here? Do we - does anyone else know?”

Poe tipped back the remainder of his drink, eyes still locked on Ben Solo. “I - I don’t know. I don’t know.” he seemed to be trying to think very quickly. “The General didn’t - most people think Ben Solo died at the Academy, or went off on some sort of sabbatical or something-”

“The Barash Vow.” Rey whispered, also still staring at Ben moving the gathered throng, looking every bit in his element.

“Yeah - that one…” Poe blindly groped toward Finn, stealing his drink, tipping it back as well. “Finn, when you were with the First Order - what did you know?”

“Nothing. The rank and file - we didn’t know anything about who Kylo Ren was. No one saw his face. Ben Solo was just that guy who was in the media all the time, before the whole Darth Vader thing. I think most people thought Kylo Ren was some sort of droid-”

“Good. That’s good…” Poe ran his fingers through his hair, seemingly trying to think as quickly as he could. “What about the rest of the galaxy? Surely-”

“Did you guys see? It’s Ben Solo! Can you believe it? The General’s son is back! This is fantastic!”

Poe, Finn, and Rey all turned, ashen-faced, to see the blushing Rose, who had evidently returned from getting a stronger drink.

“Woah, who died?” Rose questioned, sipping on her martini.

“No one! Just… Coming up with a plan.” Finn quickly intervened.

“Yeah, this is just - you know, the General didn’t tell us about… Ben.” Poe supplied lamely, now grasping for Rose’s drink as well, which she held out of reach.

“Right! She sure surprised us there. Good ‘ol General Organa.” Finn instead snatched Rose’s drink, finishing it in one gulp. “Hey, Rose, quick Stormtrooper question here - what did you hear happened to Ben Solo, anyway?”

Rose pursed her lips at Finn’s behavior, but grinned as she responded. “Well, that’s just the thing, right? He trained to be a Jedi, but then he vanished! People said they saw him everywhere - setting out to explore the Unknown Regions, stealing treasure from Sith temples - Rey, come on - you lived on Jakku, I know you heard stories about the Pirate Prince!”

Rey felt like her eyes were about to fall out of her head. “P-Pirate Prince? You mean-?”
“Of course! And now he’s here, Leia must have asked him to come and support us!” Rose gushed. Ben Solo was working his way through the crowd - and decidedly in their direction. Poe and Finn met eyes, panicked, while Rey was still just trying to get her bearings in this situation.

“Hey, Rose? Do you mind getting me a drink? I’d usually never ask a lady, but my back is just killing me-” Finn implored.

“I guess I can do that for you, Finn - it’s not like you just stole my drink or anything!” Rose replied with a huff, heading back toward the bar. The three of them watched her, making sure she was a good distance away before reconvening-

“Stars, what are we supposed to do here?”

“Well, we can’t exactly just yell ‘Ben Solo is the Supreme Leader of the Galaxy’ - that would destroy everything-”

“Exactly, people already accused Leia of gaming the system seven years ago, trying to continue the Skywalker dynasty-”

“Okay, we need a game plan, guys. Maybe he hasn’t seen us yet, and we can just-”

“Ah, and here they are, Mother’s little… soldiers.”

Prince Ben Solo had arrived.

Rey whipped her head around to see Ben in front of her - in person - for the first time since she had left him aboard the Supremacy, his presence in the Force absolutely overwhelming.

He had a whole entourage at this point, tittering at his comment as they whispered amongst themselves. But his eyes were focused only on Rey, that odd, tight-lipped near-smile playing about his mouth as he swirled his wine glass.

Without breaking eye contact with Rey, he lazily raised his hand toward the onlookers. “Leave us, I’m afraid this is going to be… Confidential.” he turned toward the group, flashing a winning smile that didn't quite meet his eyes. “Resistance business, need-to-know basis only. Though I’m sure they’d be thrilled to count you among their supporters, when you’re ready to make the commitment.” he raised his glass to the crowd as they shrank away with delighted laughter, still whispering to each other.

His gaze followed them until he had evidently deemed that they were an acceptable distance away. He turned his attention to the three in front of him, looking down his nose as his face shifted into a wholly different smirk.

“Well, isn’t this… cozy.” he drawled, taking a long drink from his glass. “I must admit, you’re looking well, Traitor - how’s the back?”

If he gave Finn a cruel smirk, nothing but cold hatred was reserved for Poe. “And you’re a fair sight better than last I saw you in the flesh, pilot. Feel better after pushing some women around to do your recruiting for you? Should I interrogate for myself?” Ben bit out with particular derisiveness. Poe managed to look both terrified and completely dumbfounded at the eerily specific accusation.
Then, his eyes then genuinely warmed- “And Rey…” he took her hand in his, Rey feeling as though a shock passed through her body from the skin-to-skin contact. Ben gave the smallest of deferential bows over her hand. “Breathtaking, as always. As stunning as Queen Amidala herself was in that very gown.”

He didn’t let go of her hand, pulling her closer to him and bracing her arm, as though he were her escort. Rey’s fingers trembled in his warm hand, which gave a somehow reassuring squeeze.

“You’ve got a lot of nerve showing up here-” Finn looked around, ensuring no one could hear him - “Ren.”

Ben’s lip curled in distaste. “No one calls me that.”

“Whatever, Solo-”

“Yeah, no one even called my father that.” Ben rolled his eyes, taking another dramatic sip of his wine as he repeatedly ran his thumb over where he held Rey’s hand.

“Fine, then how exactly are we supposed to address - this bantha in the room?” Finn questioned. Rey saw determination in his eyes - which was good, since Poe was still evidently shocked into silence. She wasn't faring much better, her mind racing to come up with… something.

“Your Majesty’ is the typical form of address, but I suppose… Ben will do for my very dear friends right here.”

“Okay, then, Ben. What exactly are you playing at here?” Finn was able to keep far better pace with these social changes than Rey ever hoped, since she, like Poe, still found herself dumbstruck by whatever she was witnessing.

“Playing? That’s what these companies are doing here, FN-2187. I hope you realize this is just a game to them, just trading in on promises to stockholders, keeping everyone fat and happy. Like livestock.” he took a final sip of his wine, casually handing it off to an unseen attendant. Glass gone, he seemed to drop some of the prince persona. “You’re a real warrior, like I am. This is no place for us, we’re just assets to them, mindless numbers on a page. Look around you - none of these people care if you live or die, it’s just a bottom line to them.”

Finn seemed genuinely stunned at this brutally honest statement, but shook himself out of it. “It’s not as if you’re not any better when it comes to throwing away lives, Supreme Leader - why are you here?” he whispered urgently.

“Supreme Leader? Oh, it does warm my heart to hear you call me that, FN-2187 - but I’m merely present as a concerned private citizen. Rumor has it…” Ben tugged on Rey’s hand again, pulling her to stand in front of him, facing her back. He now held her left hand with his, using his right hand to slowly run his fingers up her bare arm toward her neck, tracing swirls as he went. “Rumor has it that the last Jedi is here. And as a former scholar of their… archaic ways, I found it prudent to investigate for myself.”

“Get your hands off of her-” Finn snarled-

“Oh, gladly, traitor.” Ben pulled Rey against his warm body, his words hot on her ear - “Wait for me outside- ” before he propelled her toward the balcony door.

Rey stumbled forward, trying to gather her gown, and hesitated long enough to see Ben pull Finn and Poe into his arms, as though they were old friends-
“Do not disturb us. And if either of you want to live to fight me another day, you'll keep her away from these horrible 'events.'” Ben bit out, a practically tangible Dark giving his words a very real threat. “Every time you expose her in the public, every time a new pair of unworthy eyes gazes upon her, you create a thousand new threats - you should be grateful that I at least have her best interests at heart.”

He clapped them on their backs, nearly knocking them over as his fingers clearly gripped their collarbones in a painful manner. “Give the General my warmest regards-” Ben rounded on Rey, eyes glowering. “-and I thought I told you to meet me outside.” he growled, pushing Rey forward. His long fingers managed to singlehandedly grab two glasses of wine from a passing server, letting him use his other hand to gracefully snag the bustle of Rey’s dress without missing a step.

It was certainly easier to move around this way as they walked outside, though Rey couldn't shake the feeling that Ben carrying her dress, following her was rather like being led about on a leash -

“Much as that is an appealing image, Rey, we have business.” Ben dropped the bustle with a flourish now that they were alone on the balcony, letting it flutter all around her. He offered his hand to guide her to sit on a bench overlooking the skies of Coruscant, but Rey stubbornly stood, glaring right into his eyes as she felt indignation build in her.

Ben shrugged. “Suit yourself.” he handed Rey the other glass of wine, which she readily accepted. Ben drank from his deeply without taking his eyes off of her.

“What - Ben - what is - what are you doing here?”

Sighing, Ben took a moment before responding. “I’m here to offer a proposal.”

Chapter End Notes

Why yes, this is a two-day gala. We have not even finished night one. Day two has dancing. SOUND THE ALARM.

Just a note here, when I was looking up Bail Organa’s outfits, I noticed his belt was a bit… odd. So, yeah, the Crest of Alderaan 100% looks like an anatomical picture of a vagina, uterus, and ovaries. If you don’t believe me, look it up, because I’m not posting that sort of filth here. Text-based smut, only.

Keep those reviews coming, guys! I know you all were looking forward to Prince Ben Solo, hope he and all of his assholishness didn't disappoint. This is a man used to getting what he wants - he's only going to get drunker and more arrogant as the night goes on...
Inebriated Negotiations

Chapter Summary

“You know I’m not going to agree to... whatever it is you have in mind. You’re clearly trying to set something up here for you to win.”

Ben allowed a small smile to cross his face as he twirled her shoe on his finger.
“You’d think that. But for you, Rey, I’m willing to give you everything.”

Chapter Notes

Perspective swap-a-doo again this chapter, back and forth, then back again, marked again with ~~~~~~~s. We’re staying with Ben longer this time, since I believe in equality. Also, just as a warning, our heroes are going to get more and more drunk as this chapter goes on. Emotions will run high. Decisions will be made. Regrets will most certainly come the morning after. You know, usual drinking-with-your-SO-when-they-don’t-know-they’re-your-SO behavior.

Minor edits on 8/9/18 because I need something to do while I'm on the exercise bike.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others, that you so charge us?” -Song of Solomon, 5:9

She was standing right in front of him.

She was standing. Right in front of him.

Kriff, breathe, Ben reminded himself.

Never mind the fact that she had been in his immediate presence for almost a quarter hour now. It wholly didn’t matter that he had managed to hold her hand for almost that entire time, and treasured practically every second of it. At least Ben had bought himself some dramatic timing with the cool statement “I’m here to offer a proposal,” but the moment had officially stretched from dramatic tension to cringing awkwardness.

Karabast, he was supposed to be Prince Ben Solo here. But if there wasn’t something about the (admittedly smoldering - with anger) woman in front of him that rendered him incapable of comprehensive thought in the absence of onlookers… Ben drained the rest of his wine, setting the glass upon a planter. He needed to go for the kill before he completely lost all sense of what he even needed in the first place.

“I have never lied to you, Rey. I’ve been completely honest in everything I’ve told you, even from
our first encounter on Takodana.” Why wasn’t there more wine? “So before I offer you anything, I’m going to ask you to answer me with equal honesty - why did you break your promise to me?”

Rey, whose face was already flushed with indignity, took on an even redder hue. “I - I don’t have to answer that, Ben. In fact-” Rey tipped back an impressive gulp of her own wine- “After this - this whole stunt you’re pulling right now, I don’t owe you anything, let alone honesty!”

Ben felt the change come over him, as perhaps yet more wine went into his system - he was now able to affect the tone he wanted to use (Stars, he hoped he sounded confident). “Oh, I’d say I’m owed plenty, Rey.” he rounded on her, his ever-closing presence now finally forcing her to sit on the bench he had been directing her toward from the beginning.

“I’m owed insight on whatever passages you’ve read since last I saw you. I’m owed the private thoughts of Ben Solo that you saw fit to indulge in without me. I’m owed…” Ben now kneeled before Rey upon the bench, taking her foot in his hand. He slid off her shoe without a second thought, his thumbs seeking out the heel of her foot, soothing where he knew she must be experiencing discomfort from standing all evening. “I’m owed wherever your thoughts took you after I saw you last, in that moment. Because despite what you may have told yourself, those were my words that brought you there.” he whispered, still rubbing her foot.

Ben chanced a glance up toward her eyes as he continued his ministrations. Her eyes had softened somewhat… But her face was still crimson - and livid.

“I - I don’t owe you a thing, you pompous ass!” Rey snatched her bare foot back from him, breathing heavily. “I assumed we had some sort of… some unspoken agreement to not mention the last time we saw each other, and that hardly helps your case. After what you’ve done, after what you said to - to my friends, I don’t owe you anything, Ben Solo!”

Clearly, he had misstepped somewhere - but seeing her so flustered was charming. Not one to be deterred so easily, Ben tried a different tack, maintaining his kneeled position. He didn't want to scare her off.

“What if I told you that you could have everything you wanted? That all of the visions of the future you’ve seen could come to be as you’ve hoped?”

Rey sneered, clearly disbelieving - but there was a small look of hope, as well. “I’d know you’re lying. Or-not, not lying, but at least withholding some of the truth - you’ve taught me well, Master.”

Kriff, he knew she meant it sarcastically, but if hearing her say that in the flesh didn’t work for him on so many levels… Now is not the time! “I’m not lying, and I never have. And I’m being completely upfront with you - we should both know at this point that deception is useless between us.” He gave her a meaningful look, and, amazingly, Rey finally had the grace to look somewhat ashamed.

“I know as well as you do that you kept reading my journal after you promised you wouldn’t. I can hardly blame you - literal insight straight from the enemy’s head, all within your grasp? I would’ve done the same in your position, but then again…” He smirked, watching how her face was affected- “I don't deny my connection to the Dark. Using your enemy's memories - their very person - against them? That isn't anything you learned from those Jedi writings, Rey.”

She pointedly looked at her feet, her shoulders hunched and shifting. He knew she at least felt
guilty, now. Though he was still inwardly terrified at what, exactly, she had managed to read without his knowledge. “I’m willing to overlook this - this trespass upon my person, if you’d hear out my proposal.”

She glared down at him, still looking somewhat abashed. “You know I’m not going to agree to... whatever it is you have in mind. You’re clearly trying to set something up here for you to win.”

Ben allowed a small smile to cross his face as he twirled her shoe on his finger. “You’d think that. But for you, Rey, I’m willing to give you everything.”

He could hear Rey’s breath hitch as she stared straight at him, then darted her eyes away. Keep talking, you idiot! “As you know, I’m well aware that you’ve come across some, ah, antiques of Jedi knowledge. I’m also aware that those are particularly… frustrating volumes, are they not?”

As he spoke and had her distracted, he had gone about stealing her other shoe to resume massaging her foot. Inwardly, Ben was 100% aware that this was the wine giving him this sort of bravado, but he wasn’t doing anything to prevent himself from touching her.

And she wasn’t exactly stopping him.

Rey looked torn between remaining mad at him or finally finding someone to sympathize with. She took a liberal swig of her wine, then unleashed hell. “Yes, they’re just so… So obtuse, and just - just dry as all get out! Kriff, I thought I was a moron at first, I’ve never had problems translating anything, but these books… It’s like - I know they never actually spoke out loud like that, or else they’d hear how kriffing dull and long-winded they are!”

Ben snorted. “You’d be surprised.”

Evidently not done with her rant, Rey continued. “Stars, I truly thought I was going mad there. I was - I was reduced to looking at the pictures. I was getting more wisdom and knowledge from illustrations than I was anything else, until-”

“Until you found the one with my notes.” Ben finished quietly, pressing his thumbs one last time into the heel of her foot, then putting her left shoe back on.

Eyes shining, Rey looked down at Ben, fully meeting his eyes for more than a few seconds for the first time. “Ben, I’m - I’m sorry. It was wrong of me to go back on my promise-”

Ben waved his hand dismissively. “Like I already said, I hardly blame you. When I was in your position, I would have done the exact same thing. But I can offer you better.”

Rey leaned forward, intrigued. Kriff, kriff, kriff, stay calm. Clearing his throat, Ben continued. “As Supreme Leader-” Rey squirmed slightly, but didn’t lean away - “I now have access to untold amounts of information, specifically about the Jedi, the Sith, and the Force itself. The Jedi Archives are long lost, but my esteemed former Master kept an entire library of records of his own. Including…” Pause for drama here. Ben reminded himself “… holocrons.”

Rey’s face was utterly blank. Crushed, Ben’s shoulders sagged. “You know, holocrons? The most valid source of Jedi knowledge and lessons, recordings straight from the sources themselves?”
“Blinking rapidly, comprehension seemed to dawn on Rey. “Oh! Well, those do sound very useful.”

Ben ran his fingers through his hair, frustrated. It was difficult to bargain when your target had absolutely no sense of the value of what you were offering. “Yes, Rey, they’re incredibly informative. Useless to me, but for you, the last Jedi…” he darted his eyes toward her face to gauge her reaction. “Infinitely more useful than, say, my notes in that journal.”

She looked - confused? Hurt? That couldn’t be right. “But - but I like what you wrote.”

*Kriff. His heart.*

“What I’m offering you is so much more, Rey. You can’t grasp how important these holocrons are - *all* of them could be yours if you’d just simply give me my journal back.”

Her indignity returned with a vengeance. “What makes you think I’d do something *that* stupid? Those, those *holocrons* or whatever might be useful, but obviously, whatever’s in this journal is way more important to you. I know how to bargain - *why* would I ever give up your journal?”

He was losing her. Back to the foot massage. “Because I know that having the journal without reading it is eating you up on the inside - you’re too curious and too noble. What I just said to you, about how dark it is to use your enemy’s memories against them? I know it makes you feel as though you’re being driven to the Dark.”

Rey looked *very* taken aback - he knew she had felt guilty, but he hadn’t expected *that* much remorse. Perhaps she really *did* feel a pull to the dark.

He went for the kill, resuming rubbing her foot with one hand as his other trailed up her calf - “Honestly, I’d be doing you a favor, taking it away. I’m offering you so much more here - you don’t *need* my journal to understand the Jedi, you just *want* it. And I know that you’re still protective of your find, *Scavenger*. In fact, I’d wager you have it on you right now -” it was almost too easy, as her eyes darted to her right leg, where his hands were already creeping up her calf, soothing her sore muscles as he went - “Because you don’t trust its safety anywhere else. I admire that.”

Ben realized, in this moment, that Rey was utterly vulnerable - her mind was not focused enough to resist him, both from the drinks and from how swept up in the moment she was; honestly, he was not in too different a state. Not too long ago, a voice in his head would have been right there for him- *‘Do it. Take what is yours, she’s exposed and trusting, just a few more inches up her leg and you can claim your prize-’*

But that voice was no longer with him. He had loftier goals than simple *control* now. This whole situation proved that he was on the right track toward… something. Besides, wouldn’t it be more *fun* when it was willingly given?

Ben brought his hands back to rest at the delicate arch of her foot, giving one final press - “I realize that I have stolen you away from your comrades. I apologize. If you’ll consider it…” He picked her shoe back up, delicately bringing it back over her foot, tying the straps as he went - “Go back inside, and tell your friends that you’re safe. Tell them that I truly want nothing more from you than to discuss the Jedi journal. And then you can come back here…” He returned her foot to the ground, still kneeling before her.

“Well, quite honestly, you can come back here with some more wine as a starter, and then we’ll
discuss how you can come away from this night with *everything* you want.”

Rey’s pupils had blown wide at some point; despite all her finery, she looked utterly feral in this moment. Somewhere, Kylo Ren was threatening to burst forward and take what was so clearly right before him - but Ben Solo was patient. Ben Solo also knew damn well that he was making this up as he went along. Unblinking, Rey nodded, and made a motion to stand. Ben, still kneeling, gracefully took her hand, guiding her up and back toward the gala as she walked on seemingly unsteady legs, looking back at him more than once as she went.

Inwardly, Rey knew she was drunk.

Of course, by coming to terms with that so easily, she knew that she must be *quite* drunk - but *stars*, if Ben Solo didn’t have his charms - and know how to get under her skin. ‘Everything she wanted,’ eh? That boy was about to eat his words.

Clearly, he had some sort of plan, and thought they could reach a compromise. And as intriguing as Ben’s offer of Jedi *holo-whatevers* was, Rey knew that there was more to be gained here if he truly wanted her to *give up* the journal - only an idiot offered his best asset at the beginning of a negotiation. He was withholding something, something that he was sure would make her give him the journal (which was *not* happening, Rey reminded herself - she just wanted to know what he had up his sleeve). She either needed to be stone sober or more drunk for this kind of bargaining. A tray of wine passed her, and the answer was immediately obvious. She snagged two glasses, and was about to head right back out to the balcony-

“Rey! You’re - you’re okay, thank the Maker…”

A bedraggled looking Poe and Finn had clearly just sprinted to catch up with her, with a blithe and amiable-looking Rose distantly behind them, armed with a particularly ludicrous, fruit-encrusted drink.

“Of course I’m okay.” Rey’s brow furrowed, confused.

“You - you went with-” Finn glanced around, dropping his voice to a whisper before Rose got there- “-Kylo Ren! We thought for sure that he would have done something horrible!”

“Rey, I - I know what he’s capable of. We *all* do, in our own way. We can get you out of here, you don’t have to keep us safe.” Poe supplied somberly.

Rose finally caught up with the group. “Rey! I can’t believe you - you *scoundrel*, you’ve made every single lady from the Elder Houses *furious!* Just scooping up Ben Solo like it’s nothing, making him follow you like a puppy…” Rose cackled, then took on a slightly more serious face. “You’d better look out though, Rey - some of these women are *scary.*”

Poe patted Rose on the shoulder, seemingly glad to have found support where he didn't expect it. “She’s right. You should be *careful*. You should stay here with *us.*” Poe implored, looking desperate. “You shouldn’t go *looking for trouble* when you can stay safe right here.”

“Poe’s absolutely right.” Finn rounded on her, glancing quickly toward Rose. His next words were
very deliberate. “I know this must seem like an… *opportunity*, but you don’t need to sacrifice yourself. You’re too important.”

“Yes, yes - it’s not worth the risk, Rey. Stay here, with us, where it’s *safe*.” Poe agreed.

Though clearly inebriated, Rose managed the most skeptical eyebrow Rey had ever seen. “Woah, guys, calm down. Maybe the lady just wants to get to know the Prince better. I *cannot* say I blame her.”

Rey nodded emphatically, pointing at Rose with a glass. “See, *she* gets it. I *know* what I’m doing. We’re discussing… It’s Jedi business, you wouldn’t understand. It has *nothing* to do with—” Rey attempted to gesture at the entire event, wine sloshing somewhat - “*This*. I’ll comm you all later when I’m back at the penthouse. We all have to be *civilized* here, including *Ben Solo*. I’ll. Be. Perfectly. *Safe*.” Rey bit out with more confidence than she actually had.

Rose shouldered her way to stand in front of Poe and Finn, pinning them back from stopping Rey while still sipping at her massive cocktail. “That’s right, Rey! You go *get* that boy to fight on our side!”

Inexplicably, Rey felt tears come to her eyes. “Dammit, Rose, I *will*. Thank you.” Rey sniffled, armed with her two wine glasses as she waddled back out toward the balcony, becoming less steady on her feet with each step.

She had nearly made it to the door when she spied a whole bottle of wine abandoned on a table absolutely filled with delicious-looking sandwiches that were clearly meant to be cut up into small, finger-sized servings. Rey looked at her full hands, the door she would need to kick open, and the dress she was wearing - there was a *clear* solution here.

As soon as Rey stumbled back inside, Ben let out a long exhale, seating himself on the bench. He knew he was taking a risk here, sending her back to her friends - but the only way she was ever going to agree to his offer was if she felt that she held some power in the situation.

He had been as noble in this pursuit as he could be, and the compromise he was about to offer was equally noble. No threats, no kidnappings: just brutal, honest truth, and an offer of untold riches of Jedi knowledge. He had already amended the deal several times in his head, and hoped that he found a middle ground she wouldn’t be able to say no to. He was going to do this the right way - she’d come to him, willingly, and in the end, she’d thank him. At least, that’s what his inebriated thoughts told him.

Ben started vividly imagining just what Rey’s *thanking* could look like when he heard his comm go off in his jacket. Irritated, he lifted it to his ear. “*What*?”

“*Supreme Leader, we’ve been stuck here for three hours now. That whole balcony has a shield over it that could block hits from Star Destroyers. If someone wanted to kill you, they’re not doing it from out here. Can we go until you actually leave*?”

Of course it was Enoch Ren, with that flanging whine of his. “I wouldn’t think you so eager in abandoning the protection of your Supreme Leader, Enoch Ren. I expected more from you.”
“Kriff, Kylo, I’m stuck here with Shartom and Obaan. Shartom hasn’t shut up since we got here, and Obaan is… Well, you know how she is. It’s creepy.”

Ben sighed. He could sympathize, Shartom Ren was incredibly talkative, and the youngest of his Knights, barely beyond a youngling when he followed Ben out of the Academy. And ‘creepy’ was a massive understatement when it came to Obaan Ren, by far the oldest among them, and the last person Ben had expected to join him. Ben supposed he could be convinced, for Enoch’s sake.

“Fine. Take your leave, but you three had better be available the second I send for you later - is that understood?”

“Yes, Supreme Leader.”

Ben pocketed the communicator, his fingers brushing against his journal - Kylo Ren’s journal. Giving the balcony another glance to make sure he was truly alone, he pulled it out, thumbing through the pages.

Unlike Ben Solo’s journal, the contents of this book were known to him; no one had tried to erase his memories of its creation. But knowing didn’t make seeing it again any less painful. It was so obvious to him now, looking at these pages - the desperate writings of a man trying to cling to something - just how much of a stranglehold Snoke had over his life then.

Ben closed the book, exhaling deeply. How much of his life had already been laid out and decided for him? He knew that Snoke had been part of his existence as long as he could remember - and clearly part of a lot of things he couldn’t remember. What did Snoke stand to gain from such absolute control over him? What did the Force itself have planned in its incomprehensible logic that apparently dictated his entire life?

Well, obviously he didn’t have as much control as he thought, Ben reminded himself with a grim smile. Because from the moment there was someone else in his head - someone who wasn’t Snoke, someone who looked at him and saw him-

Like she was doing right now.

Ben quickly stowed the journal away, walking over to help Rey. His naughty little scavenger had just sloppily used the Force to open the door, since she was weighed down with two very full glasses of wine, an entire unopened bottle tucked under arm, and a massive sandwich stuffed in her mouth.

She should have looked ludicrous. But Ben met her glance, and kriff, if his heart didn’t beat faster as he could practically see the smile in her eyes.

“Found what you needed?” He took everything but the sandwich, leaving her to figure that one out on her own.

Rey, hands free, gave an enthusiastic nod as she proceeded to absolutely inhale the sandwich in her hands. Ben wasn’t sure if he had ever seen anyone eat so fast in his entire life - she had finished the
whole thing before they even made it all the way to sit at the bench.

“So.” Rey snatched a glass from Ben’s hand, taking a long gulp. “You seem to think that you’ve got some - some deal where I get everything I want. Let’s hear it.”

He hadn’t expected her to be so blunt, but was grateful for the opportunity. “All I’m asking is for you to join me.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Kriff, Rey, you have to let me finish talking!” Ben shot back half his glass of wine in one go.

“Not when you start with that!”

Ben slowly counted to three, breathing deeply. “I’m asking you to join me in a neutral location. Away from the Resistance, away from the First Order - just you and me, like we are right now.”

She looked deeply suspicious. “And why would I agree to this?”

“I would give you access to everything I have about the Jedi. You would give me access to my journal. As one of the last people in this galaxy trained in their ways, I’d be there to help with any questions you have concerning the Jedi. When we’ve gotten everything we want, we part ways. Simple as that.”

Rey leaned forward, closer to Ben’s face than she had ever been. He could feel a very inebriated attempt to probe his mind in the Force, which he let her do. She seemed taken aback at first, but fumbled through the thoughts in the forefront of his mind. Ben tried very hard to stay completely still, letting her come closer and closer to him.

“The holocrons, a translator, a teacher. I seem to be getting a lot in this deal of yours. So what…” She swallowed, her cheeks growing pinker. “What would you be expecting to get out of this, Ben?”

\[\text{CRACK}\]

Rey yelped, clutching her arm in pain. “What - what the-?” She lifted her hand away, revealing a deep gash across her upper arm.

\[\text{CRACK}\]

This time, Ben was prepared. The second he heard the noise, he pulled Rey close to him, pushing out all around them in the Force. He heard a small, metallic clang of something hitting the pavement in front of them. Still shielding Rey, he pulled the object toward him - it was a cruel, sharpened metal barb. It was tiny, but had it found its mark, Rey would be dead.

Ben was livid. He reached out around them, seeking where the shooter was -

A short flurry of blaster fire rang out instead. Snarling, Ben was ready for this. He fully swept Rey behind him, freezing the three shots midair, all three aimed directly at Rey’s chest. Concentrating
on the direction the shots came from, he *pulled*.

There was a pained screaming that slowly got louder as he continued to pull. *Good*. But when the target finally came into view - evidently, the shooter had been hiding among the rafters of the building, judging by the wooden shrapnel now sticking out of him - the shooter was wholly not what Ben had expected.

It was an older man, his clothing revealing him as a member of the Church of the Force, his eyes glazed over and unfocused as Ben held him aloft. Ben stepped aside, letting Rey stand next to him to see the man. A few drops of rain had begun to fall, the man flinching every time one hit his many open wounds caused by pulling him through apparently more than a few pieces of wood.

“Are you familiar with this… this person?”

Rey, eyes wide, shook her head as she clutched at her arm. Casually as he could while holding a person and three blaster shots with the Force, he handed her a handkerchief from his pocket, which she immediately wrapped around where her arm continued to bleed.

“All right, Rey. This is as good a time for a lesson as any.” Ben winced, realizing this might not be the best time for this part of his plan. Rey didn’t seem to notice his slip, so he continued. “Reach out to him. Concentrate. *Use* that pain and fear, and *make* him talk.”

She faltered, still trembling both in fear and from the now steady, cold rain. “I - I shouldn’t-”

“Rey, this man just tried to *kill* you in cold blood. Are you honestly saying that you’re not *justified* in making him reveal *why*?”

A flash of anger went over Rey’s face, but she still looked unsure.

Ben was getting impatient. “Would you rather *I* do it? I don’t think you want to see how I would handle this - this *filth*.” Ben bit out.

“No! I’ll - I’ll do it.” She sounded more confident now - or perhaps she just didn’t want to entrust this man to Ben’s… *delicate* touch.

Rey breathed, centering herself. Eyes closed, she reached her hand out toward the man’s face, concentrating. “*Who are you?*” Ben practically shuddered at the power he felt in her voice, but could feel that she was still holding back.

“I’m - I’m no one-” the man choked out - perhaps not helped by where Ben was cutting off his air.

“*Why did you try to kill me?*” Rey’s gaze now bore directly into the man in front of her. She had never looked more beautiful than she had in this moment, soaked in the rain, with the Force surrounding her like a divine aura. Her voice seemed to come from deep within her, drawing upon her fear and hurt - but in a way wholly unlike anything Ben had seen before. When he interrogated, he turned that fear upon his target until they’d confess, but Rey’s voice… *implored*, and would surely beguile even the most jaded man to tell her anything.

“You will corrupt everything the Jedi stood for! Your very existence is an abomination in the Force! You do not deserve to even *touch* the sacred texts-” the man squawked, his face turning purple.

“*Ben!*”
“Sorry,” he growled through gritted teeth, easing up some pressure on the man’s windpipe.

Ben suddenly became aware that this was no longer a private confrontation - seemingly dozens of gala attendees had now gathered by the windows, probably able to piece together what had happened from the frozen blaster shots and Prince Ben Solo holding a man in midair. Predictably, two of Rey’s companions burst out the doors and into the rain.

“Rey!” FN-2187 shouted.

“Stay back, I’ve got this,” Rey called out to them, not breaking eye contact with the man still held in midair, his body dripping both water and blood. She stepped closer, fingers now gently grazing the man’s forehead. She was clearly rifling through this man’s thoughts when she blinked, cocking her head at something. “These… These are not your words, are they. Someone told you…” Rey now practically caressed his face, understanding in her eyes. “Who did this to you?”

The man’s eyes seemed to lose their dull glaze, blinking rapidly as he wept. “Please- ”

CRACK

The man’s head slumped forward, and Ben felt his life immediately slip away in the Force.

“NO!” Rey shouted, grasping the man’s shoulders. Blood seeped down his head from where a very obvious barb had traveled straight through his temples.

Ben looked up, infuriated. The angle of the wound made it clear that someone had shot straight through the open door from inside the gala itself, but with hundreds of onlookers, it would make it impossible to find the shooter. The brilliance of such an archaic weapon now struck Ben - the sound was one that would dissipate, making it difficult to tell where it came from, and a weapon with no charges in it wouldn’t tip off even the most advanced of security scans.

Lowering the man’s body to the ground, Ben concentrated on the blaster bolts - they were in Coruscant, he couldn’t exactly just let them fly. He breathed to calm himself, shutting his eyes as he focused on using a technique he hadn’t used in… Well, it had been a while. He pulled the raw energy of the blaster fire toward himself, letting the power travel through him, harmlessly dissipating it as it went.

He opened his eyes to see Rey standing right before him, drenched, but with a look of wonder on her face. “Ben, you - you just…”

“I know.”

Everything around them fell quiet. If all it took was using just a little of the Light for her to look at him like that… Ben swallowed thickly. He could do better. He could do more. “Let me see your arm.”

Puzzled, she angled her wounded arm toward him. He gently took her hand in his, using his other hand to slowly trace its way up her arm.

“Focus on me, Rey.” he quietly commanded.

She stared straight into his eyes, biting her lip. “Feel this, and remember it. Focus on your target…”
he pulled her even closer, shielding her from where he could feel hundreds of eyes watching them. “Focus on the feeling - not just compassion, Rey. Emotions are not the poison the Jedi want you to believe. Emotions let us do… this.” he breathed deeply, and let the Force flow from him and into the source of her pain, taking it away in a hitched breath.

He pulled away the cloth from her arm, revealing smooth, unblemished skin, the rain quickly washing away the blood.

It could have been the rain, but Ben swore he saw tears in her eyes - “Ben…”

“Rey! Are you all right?”

As if he needed more reasons to have homicidal tendencies toward her friends...

Rey blinked rapidly, facing FN-2187 - but didn’t leave Ben’s grasp. “I’m fine, Finn. I’m - Ben… Ben helped me.”

The ex-Stormtrooper looked bewildered. “What happened?”

“There was a security breach. Someone tried to assassinate Rey.” Ben bit out, furious. “I told you to keep her away from these events, and this is exactly why. I will take her to safety.” Ben bent to scoop up Rey into his arms, carrying her back inside.

FN-2187 and Poe Dameron followed as the crowd parted for Prince Ben Solo carrying the Jedi girl, a constant buzz of whispers around them. The pilot actually held a door open for them that took them down a hallway away from the prying eyes of the crowd, a look of shock seemingly stuck on his face.

“Dammit, Ben, put me down, I can walk-”

“No.” He was making a straight line for the exit, doormen clearly already hailing a cab for them as he approached.

“If you really just think we’re going to let you carry her away-”

Ben glanced down at the two men, incredulous. “And you’re going to do what, exactly, to stop me?” He could feel indignant anger rise from where he held Rey in his arms. He supposed, for her sake, he could be… civil. “I will escort her back to wherever your Resistance deemed adequate for her, and determine if it’s safe. You have my word.”

“Your word? And why should we trust that?”

“Because, FN-2187, it’s as good as you’re going to get.” Ben lowered Rey to the ground, assisting her inside of the waiting airspeeder. He turned to face her companions, his expression stony. “Tonight has proven that your… Your lot does not understand just how important the last Jedi is. She has enemies you could have never anticipated - I should be the least of your concerns. You can’t keep her safe. You are not worthy of her.” Stars, he was definitely drunk. None of this was anything that should have ever left his head.

For once, the pilot spoke up. “There’s no way we could have anticipated - hell, you didn’t even anticipate what happened tonight.”

“Well I suppose it’s a good thing I’m here, isn’t it? We have found a common enemy tonight. They
Ben let out a cruel laugh. “I will keep her safe tomorrow; I’ve already proven to be the only one capable. You can go off and make your little deals, while I will be helping assure the legacy of the Force. Tonight has proven that enemies of the Force are already among this group. We will root out the source, and crush it.”

“Ben? Can we leave? I’m really cold.” Rey called out from the cab.

“Of course, Rey.” Ben took one last threatening step toward FN-2187 and Poe Dameron. “I expect your full cooperation tomorrow in assuring Rey’s security. I will be escorting her. We will eliminate this threat. Is this clear?”

Dumbstruck, they nodded. Ben returned a curt dip of his head before ducking into the airspeeder with Rey.

Rey had evidently already told the driver where to go, because the speeder took off as soon as Ben shut the door. Finally able to breathe a sigh of relief, Ben allowed himself to relax a little-

“Ben? My scalp is killing me - can you unbraided my hair?”

...Kriff.

Chapter End Notes

Well, me and all 10 other people who read Leia: Princess of Alderaan are sharing ourselves a nice, perverted cackle at Rey’s last line there, though I’m sure y’all can venture what, exactly, that means to Mr. Prince of Alderaan.

Total drink count: Rey, 5 glasses of wine, Ben, about six shots of very nice brandy, and easily a bottle and a half of wine at this point. And now they’re in a cab, soaking wet, and Ben is blissfully unaware that they’re effectively heading straight back to ‘his place,’ while Rey just unknowingly dropped a massive pickup line.

Whew, this one took a little longer, and was my longest chapter yet. I had to rewrite their haggling several times, because it’s hard to get these two to agree on ANYTHING without Rey losing her temper or Ben losing all confidence. Still not 100% satisfied with it, but they got where they needed to go.

And then BAM! PLOT! Because if there wasn’t one more thing Ben needed on his side, it was being proven 100% right about Rey’s security.

Rey, however, is already influencing him more than he’s ever going to admit. And she’s barely even started...

Lastly, in case you needed a visual on Rey horking that sandwich - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jO5U7-_zks&t=1m35s right down to the panicked “I can have it all!!”
"Ben Solo currently had the literal girl of his dreams strewn across his lap, he had just confessed more to her about how he felt than he would have ever admitted sober, and instead of her recoiling in horror, she felt compelled to seize his shirt and bite his lip. He was quite convinced that he had never, in his entire life, had so many things go right."

Chapter Notes

I’M BACK. Sorry it took so long. I apologize that I am apparently posting this while rather tipsy, there may be edits coming by 12:00 EST tomorrow. Enjoy?

Minor edits on 8/10/18 because I started editing formatting weirdness and some minor syntax issues and it's now after midnight and I can't stop please help.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.” -Song of Solomon, 4:11

Rey’s temples throbbed.

She wasn’t sure if her headache was more brought on by how much she had to drink, or the fact that she had just so extensively used the Force in unknown ways this evening, or perhaps simply that her soaking wet, heavy hair felt like it was pulling her scalp in all directions. There was no going back on the drinking at this point, and if her use of the Force was to blame would remain a mystery - there was one clear solution she could try right now. Groping blindly, Rey immediately became aware that she could not tell where this particular arrangement of braids began or ended, much less how to go about dismantling it.

Giving a defeated sigh, she took a swig from the bottle of wine that managed to find its way into the cab with her. “Ben? My scalp is killing me - can you unbraided my hair?”

There was an awkward silence - Rey turned to face Ben, who stared back at her, cheeks flushed and eyes wide. She had seen many sides of him this night - the haughty Prince, a thoroughly terrifying Supreme Leader Kylo Ren, and even a trace of the Jedi he had once been.

But here was Ben Solo - dishevelled, wet, blushing, staring at her with an intensity she had never quite seen in a man, much less directed at her. Squirming a little, she had to admit it was…
intriguing.

“Um.” He offered charismatically.

“Seriously, could you please help me? I don’t know what your cousins did here, but I feel like I’m going to rip my hair out if I try.”

“Cousins?” Ben’s voice cracked slightly. It truly was hard to believe that this was the Supreme Leader, who, only moments ago, had wielded the Force with such precision and power. “Cousins. You - you mean…” he gulped, looking incredibly uncomfortable as he scratched his head. “It was Divyya and Meghana, wasn’t it?”

“Um, yes? They did the braids, that is.”

An inexplicable look of fury seemed to cross Ben’s face for a moment, before he swallowed hard. “Did - ah - did they explain any of... Anything about your, um, hair?”

Rey was genuinely confused. “No - I know they had a whole list of specifics from the General…” she mumbled, knowing that Ben was still understandably sensitive on that issue.

Ben seemed to actually wince at that statement, his fingers moving to pinch at the bridge of his nose, squinting his eyes shut. “Stars, Rey, I shouldn’t… I mean, someone should have explained-my damn cousins, they knew what they were doing…”

Completely lost and unable to bring herself to care, Rey took another swig of wine. “Kriff, it’s just hair, Ben. All I wanted was for you to unbraid it.”

She could have sworn she heard a muffled moan out of Ben.

“Well, I suppose I’ll do it myself- OW!” Rey immediately regretted her instinct of grabbing the first length of hair her fingers found and yanking, the pain spreading across her whole scalp, since evidently the braid contained pieces of hair from all across her head. Her vision blurred with tears from the unexpected pain.

“Don’t do that…” A long-suffering sigh came from the seat next to her. Ben gently pulled her fingers from where they had tangled themselves mid-braid. “Rey - do… Do you trust me?”

“Huh? Yes?” Rey blinked away tears, finding herself automatically responding without even considering another answer.

*Did* she trust him? Her response was so quick, it was clearly instinctual.

In these last few days, she had already relied on Ben more times than she’d want to admit, and he had been there for her. And even long before, in a dark, damp hut, he had been there for her when she was at her lowest. His journal had already revealed so much about the boy he was, helping explain the man he had become. Sure, when it came to matters concerning the Resistance, Rey trusted him about as far as she could throw him - *without* the Force.

But with *her*?

Well, much like the many, *many* alcoholic drinks throughout the night, the answer had spilled right
out of her, it was so obvious.

Rey locked eyes with Ben, whose face was absolutely crimson. “Turn - turn around,” he said in a somewhat choked voice.

Privately, she reminded herself to ask Divyya and Meghana what, exactly, was the deal with people from Alderaan and hair. She was about to ask Ben, when an indelicate moan escaped from her-

“Stars that feels better,” Rey groaned as she felt him draw out a series of sharp hairpins she didn’t even know were in there.

Ben remained quiet as he ran his long, precise fingers along the parts in Rey’s hair, using a delicate grip to loosen the hair somewhat. Though she couldn’t see what he was doing, she was able to feel the quick movements of his hands unbraiding as the pressure on her scalp lessened more and more. His hands were warm and reassuring, and made her feel… Safe. It was insane, it was illogical - some distant part of Rey not warm with drink and attention reminded her that these are the hands of a killer, they shouldn’t make you feel this way! But the much larger, touch-starved part of her countered darkly - these are the hands of Ben Solo, and I don’t care.

There was a brief moment where she felt all of her wet hair loose around her shoulders - she was about to turn to face Ben and thank him, but his oddly shaking hands held her shoulders firm.

“No,” was his only quiet explanation. His hands became busy once again as he quickly gathered all of Rey’s hair into a loose, singular braid, tying it off at the end and resting it over her shoulder.

Finally permitted to face him, Rey ran a hand over the deceptively intricate braid - “Well, um, thank you? You didn’t have to do this, you could have just left it down.”

Still red-faced, Ben was very deliberately avoiding Rey’s eyes as he stole the bottle of wine, tipping it back dramatically. Between long swigs, Ben mumbled some mostly incomprehensible words, but Rey decidedly caught “wouldn’t be proper.”

Emboldened, Rey scooched down the seat to lean directly over Ben, grasping for the bottle of wine in his hand. “Well, I wouldn’t know the first thing about proper,’ I’m just a Scavenger, after all - oh!” Rey squeaked as the skycab suddenly rounded a sharp corner, knocking her over in a tangled pile of limbs and voluminous dress.

She didn’t even know how it happened - somehow in the fall, Rey went from leaning heavily over Ben to being caught in his arms, staring up into his eyes.

“I - I seem to be having a lot of problems with staying upright around you.”

Ben had a cocky, genuine grin Rey had never seen. “Lucky I’m always here to help.” He braced her to sit upright, but held her so that she was now sitting across his lap, forcing them to look directly into each other’s eyes.

Something about his smile made her heart pang, and her breaths came heavier as her thoughts turned somber. “How long, Ben? Tonight has been... We can’t keep this up forever, something has to change - you can’t help me when we’re… I mean, how long can we pretend that we’re…” She
couldn’t bring herself to say it aloud - how long could he pretend to care about her when they were on opposite sides of this war?

He seemed baffled by the question. “I’ll always help you, Rey. And there’s nothing ‘pretend’ about what’s between us.”

A thrill shot through Rey at those words. “And what - what *is* between us?”

He bit the inside of his lip, clearly considering his next words with care. “You read my journal, you know that I saw… That you’ve always been there. I may have forgotten a lot, but I’ve always known there was something between us, even if it was just in my dreams. I - I just never imagined that it would... That we would - actually find each other.”

He kept chewing on his lip, and held Rey a little closer, who was making a very conscious effort not to tremble for reasons she didn’t quite wish to investigate too closely. “I don’t want you to feel… I don’t want to be a burden to you, but the reality is that I’ll always be with you no matter what side of the war we’re on, the Force saw to that.”

Inwardly, she knew that this outpouring of confessions was almost certainly due to how much Ben had to drink - but she certainly wasn’t going to stop him at this point. “I know this… *situation* isn’t ideal. That’s why I offered you what I did, and I suppose I have to accept your answer for now. If just glimpses of each other’s lives is all you ever want from this, then I have to accept that as well.”

He locked eyes with her, his stare intense and burning. “But... Rey - *I* want more.”

Her ears felt like they were on fire, her pulse was racing, and her mind was now only occupied with a single, mad thought: *I should be the one biting that lip.*

So she did.

There were many, many ways that Ben Solo had imagined this night going. Ever the pessimist, most of them ended with variations on him being found out and getting blown to bits. He even allowed himself the indulgence of a few scenarios where he managed to do the right things and get his journal back, but the night would invariably end with Rey furious at him, somehow managing to sever their connection entirely, leaving him a broken man.

He had never allowed himself to fantasize about anything going *well*, and perhaps he should have - that way, he could have been a little better prepared.

Ben Solo currently had the literal girl of his dreams strewn across his lap, he had just confessed more to her about how he felt than he would have ever admitted sober, and instead of her recoiling in horror, she felt compelled to seize his shirt and bite his lip. He was quite convinced that he had never, in his entire life, had so many things go *right*.

Rey had finally released his thoroughly bitten lip, a sharp look in her eyes and a pleased grin across her face. She had still not relinquished his shirt, fingers twisting in the neckline.

Still shocked, Ben only managed to stutter out - “What - what, exactly, was *that*?”

She shrugged, a spark in her eyes. “You said you wanted more. I figured that was a start.”
“Was… Was that supposed to be a kiss?”

Her smile was now absolutely predatory. “I told you, I’m just a scavenger. I don’t know the first thing about being proper. I suppose…” Rey now bit her own lip, flushing brightly as her eyes met his. “I suppose you’ll have to teach me.”

In the space of a moment, Ben had a million thoughts. He should be noble and restrained - despite his confession, he knew Rey was young and naive, and it was hardly princely (or Supreme Leader-y, for that matter) to give into this… temptation. At the same time, Ben’s mind argued, he wasn’t exactly… Worldly in anything like this, either. He was going to mess this up. No matter what, this was going to go wrong. Panic began to set in as he realized some ‘Master’ you are - you don’t know what the hell you’re doing, either!

It was with this thought that Kylo Ren came roaring back to the forefront of his mind, quashing any lack of assurance - Kriff it, you are the Supreme Leader and you have waited 29 years for anything like this, figure it out!

With far more confidence than he actually had, Ben traced his fingers slowly along Rey’s jaw, angling her face toward his. “Very well, Apprentice. Consider this your first lesson.” Hesitating, he gently kissed her on the cheek, pulling back to assess her reaction.

She was practically pouting. Kriff, kriff, kriff, I really did ruin everything.

Rey sank her fingers deep into his hair, yanked his head toward her to stare directly into his eyes. She moved her knees and layers of her dress to straddle his lap, ducking her head to prevent it from hitting the roof of the cab. Ben wasn’t entirely certain how much longer he was going to be able to keep this civil. His hands remained resolutely on her hips, trying to avoid the temptation that was the expanse of her bare back.

“More.” Rey practically growled, echoing his earlier statement.

He couldn’t be held responsible for the moan that escaped him with that word. Ben, still trying desperately to maintain his composure through the haze of alcohol and lust, angled himself to hesitantly kiss Rey on the lips-

For a few blissful moments, she returned the gentle caress with hesitating, firm kisses that gradually softened as they figured things out - then she bit his damn lip again.

“Please.” she whined. There was a sudden, devilish glint in her eye as she continued running her fingers through his hair. “Please, Master-”

Well, apparently that was the line. He couldn’t hold back anymore. Ben caught her mid-word with her mouth still open, sealing her mouth to his. Now her lip bites were positively delightful, as she licked and traced the inside of his mouth with hers. His fingers seemingly had their own plans as they trailed up Rey’s hips, his hands easily encircling her tiny waist. He ran his thumbs down her ribs and toward her navel-

Her hips surged forward, moaning as she ground against him-
“That’ll be 15 credits.” a businesslike voice interrupted over the comm channel within the cab.

Evidently, the skycab had stopped. Ben, however, had no plans to stop what had begun in there. Without breaking contact with Rey, he flung a credit chit worth far more than the fare owed at the discrete tray that had opened, and began blindly grasping for the door handle. He eventually managed to get it open, and Rey made a move to stand up.

“No.” Ben stated firmly.

Rey, pupils blown wide and panting, still managed to look puzzled. “No?”

Ben scooped Rey into his arms as he stepped out of the cab, utilizing her massive dress as a much-needed cover for an increasingly impolite situation in his pants. She continued kissing and biting at his neck as he positively bolted for the entrance to the building.

They managed to make it into the blissfully empty elevator, Rey finally back on her feet as they continued working out the finer points of putting their tongues in each other’s mouths. Several floors passed by before a distant part of Ben’s brain assessed where, exactly, they were - this… This was the elevator to his place.

He went very still, mind racing at the implications as he braced Rey in his arms, pulling her back slightly.

“Rey, much as this is, what I mean to say is, you - ah -” she stood on her toes to bite him on his ear, evidently as punishment for talking instead of kissing. “That is, I don’t want you to feel pressured.”

She stumbled backwards, looking thoroughly confused. “Pressured? Into what?”

Kriff, of course she looked a perfect image of debauched innocence in this moment, with her kiss-stung cheeks and wide, questioning eyes. Ben now knew that they needed to stop, before one of them did something they regretted the next morning. He was 29 years old, dammit - if he could wait for a more opportune moment to get his journal, he could wait and do this right. Ben had to take several deep breaths to center himself. “I don’t want you to feel like you have to do anything here, Rey. I said I’d see you back to where you’re staying safely, and I’m going to do that.”

Her lip trembled, and she swayed on her feet slightly. “D-did I - did I do something wrong?”

“No!” He was desperate to keep this night from ending in tears. “It’s - it’s just - I want to make sure we’re not - I mean, stars, Rey, first you ask me to unbrai your hair, then you take me back to my room-”

“Your room?”

The ding of the elevator arriving at the floor for the Organa apartments seemed to punctuate the awkwardness of the moment.

Ben was grateful that Rey seemed as red-faced as he imagined he was.
"You - you're staying here?"

"I - I should have never assumed."

"Wait, what did you think?"

"This wasn’t what I thought."

"Kriff, Ben, I assumed you were just walking me home!"

"So did I!"

They had been progressing along the hallway, finding themselves at a quiet impasse, caught between the door leading to Leia Organa’s main quarters, and Ben Solo’s separate entrance.

Sniff...

Ben’s shoulders sagged as he braced himself for the sight before him - Rey, clearly distressed, tears streaming down her face.

"I- I always knew I’d get this all wrong, that’s why I never-"

"Rey, you didn’t get anything wrong.‘ Ben breathed deeply as he braced her arms. “I want… Kriff, Rey, I want more than anything to continue what we were just doing. But we’ve been drinking. Someone tried to kill you just now. We’re in this whole… situation. I think that we might just need to take it a bit… slower.”

"S-slower.” Rey gave a dramatic, phlegmy sniff. “Is - is that what you want?”

He felt a pained groan escape from him. “What I want isn’t what matters right now. I need you safe. I need us to make sure we’re doing the right things. I need you to feel like whatever is between us isn’t… That I’m not… a burden.”

“Oh.” was all she could softly respond with.

Ben looked at the doors beside him. They seemed to be slowly drifting away and toward each other - and he finally realized that he truly had too much to drink to make any kind of rational decisions.

He shook his head, attempting to regain some semblance of sobriety. “Rey, you’re going to go to… whatever room you’re staying in. You’ll contact your friends, and tell them you’re fine, and everything is safe. And then I’ll see you tomorrow - is that okay?”

Rey looked downward, and her shoulders slumped in sad resignation as she shifted her weight uncomfortably. “I - I guess that’s fine.”

Ben couldn’t hold himself back. He pulled Rey into his arms, enveloping her small form completely, and resting his chin on her head.

“Rey, I want… I want more than anything to have this all figured out between us. I want to know everything I’ve forgotten, I want to guide you in learning the Force, I want us to understand each other - but that’s just not something that’s going to get so easily done, and… Well, quite frankly, not something we can do when we’ve had this much to drink.”

Ben tilted Rey’s head to face him, wanting to meet her eyes. “But I want you to know that - despite the war, despite everything that’s happened - we are going to figure something out for us.”
He sighed as he stroked her cheek. “Rey, I -”

She stood high on her toes to meet him in a slow, sweet kiss. “That’s - you don’t have to - that’s all I needed to know for right now, Ben. Like you said - when we're sober. Tell me... Tell me then. Because I want to remember.”

She shuffled back awkwardly, keying herself into the main entrance of his mother’s apartments. Ben was still sure he had managed to ruin everything, until he saw Rey bite her lip with a deliberate smile-

“Good night - Master.”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the fact that it’s been so long. I apologize for the fact that the last few paragraphs were written 100% drunk and tired, but there was a certain thread pressuring me into releasing this ASAP. Edits may be coming around 12PM EST.

However, I refuse to apologize for the fact that 90% of this chapter was awkward, virginal interactions in the backseat of a cab - THAT was completely deliberate, despite any level of intoxication. I will assure you that there is 100% an outlined plot with structure, deliberate foreshadowing, red herrings, etc. - this has just been the week from hell that is having in-laws visit at the same time as going back to teaching high school. Hopefully, with the holidays calming down, I’ll be able to go back to semi-regular updates.

Also, major, major shoutout to my husband, who is undergoing his medical residency, so is essentially a zombie at home. Y’all ought to appreciate that he only just read the entirety this hot mess of a fanfiction in a single sitting a couple days ago, and has, since then, dropped my computer into my lap multiple times, insisting - “Finish the damn chapter! I need to know what happens!”
Repercussions and Resolutions

Chapter Summary

"As much as Rey found honesty in his declarations last night of only wanting to ‘figure things out’ between them, and claiming that he was only here to discuss terms of ownership with his journal, she knew that it was ludicrous to assume Poe and Finn would trust his intentions.

And now they were all planning on showing up here at the same time."

Chapter Notes

Minor edits on 8/10/18 because I started editing formatting weirdness and some minor syntax issues yesterday, and now I may as well finish what I started... Who else hates AO3’s insistence on putting a space after every time you use italics?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women.” - Song of Solomon, 2:2

Rey felt like death warmed over.

The first thing she was aware of was how dry her mouth was. Next, how bright the room was. Then, the absolutely pounding headache.

Having squinted her eyes shut against the light, Rey blindly groped around her. Being in such a massive, squishy bed was already disorienting enough, and the hangover was not helping matters. Her hand eventually found her private comm, which she brought close to her face, squinting one eye open.

Oh. Oh, dear.
Well, that could have been… worse. Rey blushed as fragments of last night started coming back to her; no, Ben didn’t stay in her room, but he certainly did more than lay a finger on her.

Not that I minded, Rey recalled with a shiver.

She punched past the group message to find that there was another message from an unknown sender. Curious, she pulled it open.

6:42 [unknown] - Water and painkillers on the table outside your room, though a little hair of the hound might not hurt either. Stay where you are, will be back at 5 to get you. -B

6:43 [unknown] - Also you looked stunning last night, and I hope you didn’t think me too forward. I don’t regret a thing. Put that dress somewhere safe.

Rey felt a girlish flutter in her chest at those words - blunt as they were, she had never had someone…

She wasn’t quite sure how to respond to that particular message just yet, but acknowledged that her last drunken exchange with her friends was probably not ideal.
yesterday, D + M are supposed to come start getting me ready at 1? Is that right? I thought this thing wasn’t until tonight.

11:20 P - Good to hear you’re fine. There’s usually dinner and drinks before these bigger events. We’ll come there early to plan this out.

11:22 F - Yeah, where you are is closer to where this thing is tonight, so we figured everyone would meet up there around 5.

Social arrangements were something new to Rey. People, times, meetings - there was a unique feeling of ice sliding down her insides as her mind slowly realized that this was setting up to be a potentially catastrophic series of events - again.

Only Poe and Finn knew that Ben Solo was, in fact, Kylo Ren. So far as Rey could tell from last night, everyone else, including all of the members of the Resistance who were here, remained blissfully oblivious that the General’s would-be prodigal son also happened to be the Supreme Leader. His Force-sensitivity was at least public knowledge, and not necessarily something that explicitly tied him to Kylo Ren. People like Rose only knew him as a sort of urban legend. As much as Rey found honesty in his declarations last night of only wanting to ‘figure things out’ between them, and claiming that he was only here to discuss terms of ownership with his journal, she knew that it was ludicrous to assume Poe and Finn would trust his intentions.

And now they were all planning on showing up here at the same time.

Draping her arm across her eyes, Rey tried to piece together what she knew so far from the beginning in cold, hard facts that left no room for interpretation. There would be no other way to explain this to Poe and Finn.

She had found an ancient Jedi text that belonged to Ben Solo, which was filled with his personal thoughts, observations, and writings.

The Supreme Leader, Kylo Ren, had evidently deemed its contents important enough that he diverted the entirety of his time and talents to track down… Her. This was already verging on the border of unbelievability.

At this point, he had dozens of easy opportunities to take advantage of her and get what he wanted. He could have taken the journal last night when he had her in any number of compromising positions, but… he didn’t.

He could have eliminated effectively half of the Resistance and the last Jedi, but… he didn’t.

He could have even avoided doing a great many things last night - being (relatively) civil to her friends, rescuing her, using the Light, escorting her to safety the way he did...

Objectively, Rey knew this would all look highly suspicious to her friends. But the one thing that would explain so much was the one thing she really didn’t want to fully reveal - the nature, duration, and depth of the connection between her and Ben.

A painful throb in her head made Rey realize that she was in no condition to be thinking on this just
yet. She sat up suddenly - a decision she immediately regretted as she swayed on unsteady feet. Taking assessment of what she was wearing, Rey concluded that at least she managed to take off the dress and her blaster when she went to bed. Apparently she slept in only her slip, Ben’s journal still strapped to her thigh - which, after the events of last night, now seemed incredibly intimate.

She staggered toward the door that lead to the hallway, hoping against hope that Ben’s message was accurate, and painkillers were waiting for her on the other side of the door-

He did one better.

An absolutely beautiful, crystal-clear pitcher of water shone like a beacon in the nearly-afternoon sunlight streaming down the hall. Rey completely ignored the empty glass next to the pitcher, opting to instead greedily drink straight from it. The painkillers got thrown in her mouth between gulps, and Rey practically choked upon noticing a beautiful pile of fruit-covered pastries, which she immediately began to devour.

Mid-mouthful, Rey noticed a small, handwritten note. Her heart panged at the familiarity of the writing - the last thing she had read of his was in the shaking, deteriorating scrawl of the man who would become Kylo Ren - but this note, despite being written casually, had the confidence and flourishes of Ben Solo.

*To my nosy Scavenger -*

*I meant every word I said last night about figuring something out for us. However, until we’ve come to an agreement, please attempt to refrain from reading any more of the journal - I’d like to be able to account for some of my more… Imaginative entries. If you found my writing - if you found me too tempting to resist, I’ve left something a bit more recent that may lend some more insight, if that’s still what you’re actually looking for.*

*Yours,*

*B*

Rey was caught between being flattered at the sweeter words, and wanting to roll her eyes at his apparent confidence. Either way, she was mildly offended at his lack of confidence in her self-restraint - though perhaps that was not without precedent. She may have been a bit… ambitious in her “research.”

It was his own damn fault for writing such interesting things, though.

Rey unfolded the sheet beneath the note. It was on thick paper, and was something carefully scripted - she already felt guilty for touching it with a crumb-covered thumb. As she licked off her fingers, she began to read, eyes widening as she slowly realized that this was very much written by Kylo Ren.

*Only change is unavoidable,*

*A brave new chapter is getting closer again,*

*Without a shroud of doubt he walked the road so long.*
One dream, now gone.

Nightmares return again,
There’s no way to make amends.
His heart and the battlefield are alike,
Silent and empty.

The one who is now forgotten
Carries the weight of a mountain.
No one can see how solemn
Is the burden of the fallen.

Memories, ruthless like old guilt
Accept the choices or be haunted.
The past means nothing.
This very moment is all there is.

What are you more afraid to find:
Something to live or something to die for?
Why do you withhold the pain, but need those scars?
Is it courage to let go or drown with a sword?
In the end, how will you fall:
As a hero or a warrior without a war?
How will you face your final dawn?
As a hero or a warrior without a war?

Well, then.
That was… Eye-opening.
Rey carefully re-folded the paper with the note, and slowly shuffled her feet on her way back to the
bedroom. All of this called for a long soak - an indulgence she had only learned about yesterday. She started shucking her slip off on her way to the bathroom, finally ending up with nothing on except where Ben’s journal was still strapped to her thigh. She unclasped the garter, and weighed it in her hand. Such a small thing, yet so much had occurred because of it.

With everything that had happened, it had become so easy for Rey to see the Ben Solo from her vision of the future - the Ben Solo she wanted so badly to bring back. But the fact was that she could not neglect that he had spent many years (and was still seen by the rest of the galaxy) as Kylo Ren.

But now that she knew Ben Solo a little better… She could still see him even here, in what was clearly a writing from an extremely conflicted point in Kylo Ren’s life. Rey wasn’t sure she wanted to know when, exactly, this was written - she had a feeling it was… recent.

Still, though - she hadn’t expected to find that Kylo Ren-

-was staring right at her.

Rey froze.

Ben’s eyes widened to a comical degree. He didn’t look away, though - his gaze very blatantly traveled the length of her body before snapping back to meet her eyes.

“S-sorry!”

“I was just-”

“I didn’t mean to-”

“Are you-”

Ben apparently chose this moment to both physically obstruct his gaze with his own hand and turn away from her.

Rey wasn’t sure if she should feel relieved or offended.

“I - I’m so-”

“It’s alright, I know we don’t have any control-”

“I mean, stars, I couldn’t stop myself, but there you were-”

“It’s - it’s fine. Just - give me a minute, here.” Rey grumbled as she started running the water in the tub. Ben still had his gaze resolutely obstructed with his own arm, but his crimson blush was evident all the way to the tips of his ears.

He wasn’t clad in the garb of Prince Ben Solo anymore - these were very much the clothes of the Supreme Leader Kylo Ren, black from head to toe. Whatever he had been doing, apparently it required that he looked the part. Rey’s concern grew. They may have had heartfelt connections and interactions the previous night, but by the cold light of - well, mid-afternoon - she was still a Jedi with the Resistance, and he was still resolutely the Supreme Leader of the First Order.
“Is - is everything… Kriff, Ben, what are we even doing?”

“Well, quite frankly, Rey, right now I’m concentrating on not making an ass of myself.” Ben’s voice was somewhat muffled when coming from behind his arm.

“I got your note.” Rey mumbled, shuffling her feet awkwardly as she willed the tub to fill up faster.

“Oh… good.” Ben replied without enthusiasm. “I may have still been drunk when I wrote that… sorry?”

“No! No, it was - it was fine. More than fine. Thank you for your help.”

Ben scoffed. “I don’t know how much you’ll want to thank me. You know, I’ve had to give up a lot information to cover our asses here.”

“What - what do you mean?”

“…You do realize how suspicious all of this looks, right? The leader of the First Order can’t just disappear without having something to show for it.”

Rey’s heart dropped - of course, she had been so stupid, so naive to expect otherwise, but still, she had hoped...

Ben was apparently able to follow her thoughts. He turned to completely face away from her, running a hand through his hair as he gave a frustrated sigh.

“Dammit, Rey, what did you expect? That the First Order would just stand idly by while the Resistance is so blatantly gathering military forces? Even if I hadn’t found out you would be here, it was only a matter of time before word got around - at least my presence here has spared you for now. The only reason that you and every single one of your friends haven’t been put down like animals is because I was able to give my officers the names of the double-dealing weapons manufacturers. You should be grateful that’s all I’ve told them.”

Hiding in the bath was now forgotten. Rey stalked directly toward where Ben still faced away from her, crossing her arms over her breasts. “Grateful? I should be grateful that we haven’t been executed?”

Ben glanced over his shoulder, meeting Rey’s eyes directly. “You should be grateful that I’m foolish enough to prioritize you over a swift victory.”

A thrill ran through Rey again. There it was, so blatantly put - and something Rey was never going to be able to explain to the Resistance. But he had just admitted that their… particular situation wasn’t one so easily explained to the First Order, either. Maybe he had a better way of reasoning this out in his head?

Rey hesitantly reached toward his shoulder, turning him to face her as his eyes never left hers.

“And - and why is that, Ben? What do you tell your people? Why would the Supreme Leader risk so much to protect the last Jedi?”

A small, sad smile came across Ben’s face. “Well, that certainly wasn’t always the case. Let’s just say…” Ben reached toward Rey, tucking a stray hair behind her ear. “I’m assuring the legacy of the Force.”

Rey felt a blush spread down her whole body. Ben’s fingers traced the shell of her ear, continuing along her jaw as he gently lifted her chin to face him. “Rey, I-”
And then he promptly vanished.

Rey staggered forward slightly. Well, that was... incredibly frustrating. On many fronts. Kriff, and she hadn’t even managed to tell him about the impending disaster of both him and the Resistance all apparently planning on showing up at the same time...

Glancing wearily at the nearly-full tub, Rey was at least thankful she had this to look forward to. She placed Ben’s journal by the counter, and slowly sank into the blissful, warm depths of the water.

The headache seemed to be receding. She’d rest her eyes - just for a bit-

“Rey? Rey!”

Rey sat up, wide-eyed with a shuddering gasp. Kriff, she was freezing, where - what?

Oh. Apparently she fell asleep. In the tub. Some time ago, if the water temperature was anything to go by.

“I - I’m in here!” she replied to the voice shakily, teeth chattering.

A concerned-looking Meghana burst into the bathroom. Her face quickly turned to relief, followed by a wide smirk. “Found her, Divyya. Looks like she fell asleep in the tub.” she called out, shaking her head as she approached Rey. “You had us worried for a minute there!”

“S-s-s-sorry.” Rey shivered.

Meghana rolled her eyes, turning the tub back on. “Let the water out, now we’ve got to start from scratch. You look absolutely pruned.” She quickly set to work dunking Rey’s hair under the beautifully warm stream of water as Rey felt the cold start draining away.

Meghana was brutally efficient, filling Rey in on what was going on as she scrubbed her hair, yanked her out of the tub, and wrapped her in a towel. From what Rey could gather, Meghana and Divyya had only been given very basic information about what happened last night - and they had no idea that Ben Solo had shown up. This was probably for the best, Rey concluded - the fewer people involved in this increasingly difficult predicament, the better.

Apparently, Divyya was off searching Leia’s closets for what promised to be the “perfect” outfit for the evening, after the impression Rey left at the gala last night.

“Your friends were pretty tight-lipped about whatever happened, but it sounds like you stunned those manufacturers, that’s for sure! Tonight, you’ll be able to get whatever you want.” Meghana assured Rey as she towel-dried her hair.

Rey wasn’t sure what to make of that, but something from last night occurred to her that she could ask about - especially as she felt Meghana’s hands begin meticulously parting and separating her hair. “I - I actually had a question - about my hair?”
“Oh?” Meghana replied loftily with a raised brow. Rey watched her carefully in the mirror, trying to gauge just how much she could reveal here.

“Just that someone - someone I met last night - implied there was something… something about my hair? I couldn’t quite tell what he was suggesting—”

“Ahh, ’he?’ is it?” A Lothcat-like grin spread across her face. “Divyya owes me 50 credits.” Meghana slowly pulled a comb through Rey’s hair, her brows knitting together slightly as she clearly chose her next words carefully. “To an Alderaani, hair is… significant. And a lot of the traditions we uphold are shared by other noble families, but for us, it means a little more. Still, though - I wouldn’t be surprised if someone from one of the Elder Houses approached you about it last night.”

“So what does it mean?”

“Oh, just that you’re courting and single, it’s traditional for a woman your age. So you’ve found yourself a nice nobleman, have you? Is he cute?”

Rey had the acutely embarrassing experience of actually seeing her cheeks turn pink in the mirror. “Um, yes, I suppose - um…” Rey squirmed, reddening further. “I - I don’t imagine there’s something you could do…”

*Why* was this so embarrassing? *Just ask!*

“Something with my hair… that conveys - I, um… have…someone?”

Chapter End Notes

Next time. 5:00. SHIT IS ABOUT TO GO DOWN.

Sorry this took a bit longer than usual, but the morning after is always an awkward time - particularly when you realize that apparently you’ve got to explain this entire ludicrous predicament to your comrades - and soon. Rey has still got some figuring out to do, and really needs to come to terms with the fact that Kylo Ren is very much a part of Ben Solo, no matter what she wishes.

Speaking of, Kylo’s poem is directly lifted from Ensiferum’s *Warrior Without a War* (with a stanza of “Burden of the Fallen” thrown in there as well), with only a couple tweaks to remove some Scandinavian grammar, an awkward set of three lines when everything else was in fours, and of course the repetition of the bridge and chorus. So many Reylo fics out there use these fluffy, romantic lyrics - NO. KYLO IS FOR TAKING-IT-EXTREMELY-SERIOUSLY METAL. I may be a nearly 30-year-old woman, but I’m pretty sure that song is the very definition of the sort of masculine struggle and angst of Kylo.

Also, my husband left this literal footnote to Footnotes on my screen when I was writing the *Naked Exchange*. Evidently, he wants this whole thing to physically move along a lot more quickly, and wishes Rey was a bit more of a yandere…

“Oh i didnt notice you there”
“Oh i didnt notice your breasts”
“Well I didnt notice your dick because its so shit”, Rey said blushing furiously
Kylo/Ben bristled but his erection did not - how can someone so small make his dick
so large?
Last night’s ploughing session had left Rey sore as all the Coruscant style brandy had
left kylo/ben with the perfect amount of Coruscant style brandy-dick so it had taken an
unusual amount of time-

-and there is where we shall cut him off before he makes this fic “E” before it gets the
rating in earnest.

Thank you all so much for all of the wonderful comments, kudos, questions -
everything. I’m incredibly humbled by the response to this fic, and am so glad you all
seem to be enjoying it.
The Prince in Disguise

Chapter Summary

“That’s - that’s the rest of the Resistance! They can’t see you here!”

“Why not? It’s my damn apartment!”

“It’s - it’s too hard to explain right now, and it’s the General’s-”

“Got my name on it.”

“Kriff, Ben, this is not the time for a lesson in property ownership!”

“I’ll give you a lesson in property ownership.”

Chapter Notes

AAAAAAAAAAAA sorry this took so long. I’m drunk-posting once again, and I probably ended up completely deleting something like seven pages worth of material, because I wanted this chapter to move along faster, and end in a very particular spot. Enjoy?! Minor edits on 8/11/18 because I started editing formatting weirdness and some minor syntax issues the other day, and now I’m finishing what I started.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Dark am I, yet lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon.” - Song of Solomon 1:5

Ben’s day had started out strange, and only got weirder from there.

There was a certain disorienting effect that comes with sleeping in a room you’ve known since childhood, even when you’re well into adulthood. Waking up somewhere so painfully familiar, yet so very far removed from everything that had happened in the last decade - Ben was amazed he managed to make it out of that room at all. There were echoes of lost memories here, a lot of them ones he wasn’t sure if he’d ever be fully ready to face.

So many sleepless nights in this bed. So many hours spent waiting, hoping in desperation for his mind to be quiet. So many slammed doors, fights - though Ben supposed that was normal in the house of any adolescent. But most teenagers don’t start telepathically exploding priceless antiques when they’re breaking down. He had been just so… alone.

Ben was never in the penthouse apartments on Coruscant for very long at once - his mother’s position brought them back here frequently, but never for more than a few nights back-to-back. Then again, that was most of Ben Solo’s life - shuffled along with the always-mobile New Republic from planet to planet, nanny to nanny, tutor to tutor. Never long enough to make any real friends, but just long enough to get comfortable before he was inevitably moved along to yet
another capital planet.

It was no wonder that the voice in his head - Snoke - had managed to gain so much traction as one of the few constants in Ben’s life. After all, he had been right all along. About the Dark in him. How his family had lied. How no one else would ever understand him, and certainly no one would ever love him who didn’t feel obligated-

Stop. He’s gone. It’s just you now. Just you…

And Rey.

Rey. Stars, last night she had been… Everything. She was sharp. She was furious. She was beautiful. She was so strong. She was… well, she had been fairly drunk at the end of the night there, to be quite honest.

Eventually, it was worrying about Rey that finally pulled Ben from remaining mired in thought and broken recollections. She - well, really, they - had been an absolute mess last night. Ben wasn’t sure how much experience Rey had in waking up after that kind of night, but it wasn’t a first he’d wish on anyone.

He finally managed to extract himself from a bed that managed to be both too small and too comfortable. Yes, he was so drunk the previous night, he had gone and done the one thing he’d sworn not to do the moment he landed on Coruscant, and slept in his old room - right down the hallway from Rey. He staggered his way through cleaning himself up, putting out some things to help Rey (she’d figure out that he stayed there soon enough), and, in a last-minute decision he’d fret about for the next several hours, leave her a note and a page from his old journal.

He had a lot to get done before 5:00. But everything just felt… off - and it wasn’t just the hangover.

Maintaining the persona of Ben Solo, along with still being Kylo Ren and all that entailed - it was getting to be a bit difficult, not to mention exhausting, with all that he needed to get accomplished. Rey was the only person for whom he didn’t have to constantly keep up a facade of increasingly complex lies - and he still had to withhold certain… thoughts from her.

Such as the fact that she had been, at the ripe age of 29, his first real kiss last night.

And - of course - what, exactly, had been going through his mind when he saw her completely naked earlier.

Kriff, he needed to withhold those thoughts from himself if he wanted to keep being productive. Seeing - well, everything - and so blatantly! Ben had honestly tried to do the right thing, but that brief second where he had indulged in a glance at her bared form looped over and over in his head. His gaze had traveled down from her delicate clavicle directly to her small but beautifully shaped breasts, then along her slim waist that flared to her wonderfully wide hips… Rey hadn’t even seemed ashamed of her utter lack of clothes, just startled at best.
Something about that unabashed nature, her honest beauty, was just... startlingly attractive.

But then, she became so crushed when he revealed what he had to do to keep them protected. Ben didn’t particularly enjoy facing the fact that Rey was being turned into the very symbol of opposition to everything he represented... The cold, hard fact was that they were on opposite sides of this very much ongoing war. But then, that absurd, enchanting, wonderful look of hope in her eyes returned when he touched her... He had been so close. So close to telling her...

Well, it didn’t matter now. The right time would come, and everything would be right. He had already gotten most of his goals for the day accomplished - he had even written a running checklist for what each of his personae needed to get done.

It had been a sane thing to do.

Completely not weird.

✓ Buy something for R (B)
   Flowers? ✓ Food.
   ✓ Pick up at bakery
✓ Message R (B)
✓ Check in w/FO, buy more time (K)
✓ Bribe OWT security (B)
✓ Threaten OWT security (K)
✓ Replace OWT security (K)
✓ Inform S/E/O that they are now OWT security (K)
✓ Find something suitable to wear (B)
   Pick up R (B)

All in all, it had been a productive, but strange day. Certainly not one he had ever anticipated experiencing in his entire life. But he had set up things for tonight about as well as he could, all things considered.

Hux, while initially furious when his Supreme Leader announced that he’d be running around Coruscant unchecked for a fourth day, had been not just pacified, but delighted when he was given a list of the double-dealing weapons manufacturers - along with the prices they were offering the Resistance. Hell, he practically begged for Ben Solo to continue putting on these public appearances, since this particular bit of espionage had already proved far more productive than any counterintelligence gathered by the First Order in months. Ben assumed that any moles or leaks
they had once had within the ranks of the Resistance had been lost when their number was effectively cut down to a dozen.

When the Orphans of War Trust proved to have far less than satisfactory security, his Knights were more than happy to be promoted from covert protection to an outright hired security detail. They didn’t need to know that he reassigned them for Rey’s safety, and not his own. Obaan Ren alone would be able to sense out the slightest of murderous intent of any kind at the event well before anything was acted on, and Shartom and Enoch were more than capable of eliminating anything that escalated into a real threat. They would still have to keep their distance, none of them were particularly suitable looking for an event like this one. Besides, Ben didn’t need them catching on to the fact that he was more or less... Colluding with known members of the Resistance for the sake of Rey’s safety, rather than spying on them as was his stated intent.

That was his story, and he was going to have to stick to it - after all, his Knights had some Force sensitivity to them - they’d sniff out a bad lie instantly. Ben would have to make the Knights truly believed that the Resistance members were utterly clueless as to his dual identity, and that the Resistance only knew him as Ben Solo. That this was something to be handled delicately, and that the war could be ended swiftly with the information he obtained here.

Well, at least it was a half truth. Those were always easier to keep up.

Sighing, Ben checked his comm. It was a little before 5:00 - he didn’t want to seem overly eager, but at the same time, his feet had already automatically brought him back to the main entrance to the Organa penthouse. He could enter through his own room, but figured that Rey at least deserved the opportunity to invite him in, rather than him rudely just showing up - though it was tempting, just to see how off-guard he could catch her.

He cleared his throat nervously, straightening the lapels of his jacket, feeling sweat already forming pretty much everywhere. Kriff, why did he have to wear something with a cravat? Double-breasted and white, no less, though the black and gold Alderaani accents did wonders. The tailor had assured that it was perfect for Prince Ben Solo, and he had to agree that the effect was dramatic - dramatic enough that Ben had opted for a calf-length grey coat to cover most of it up for now. No need to put the princely attire on full display just yet.

...but maybe for Rey…?

It was already too late to change his mind.

The door opened suddenly, and Rey’s beautiful face peeked out from the shadows inside. Her expression quickly transitioned from puzzlement to delight, then immediately into panic. She slammed the door shut. Ben’s heart sank to his feet in the space of a half-second before he heard Rey calling back out down the hall that connected all the rooms of the Organa apartments - ‘It’s just someone with a message from Divyya and Meghana, I’ll settle it!’

This time, the door opened slowly. Rey’s eyes were wide as she carefully stepped over the threshold, quietly closing the door behind her. And now that Ben could see all of her...
He wondered if there would ever be a time that her very appearance wouldn’t stun him speechless. Again, she had clearly been masterfully prepared for the evening, but this night’s look was far… darker. She was clad in all black, and while her dress had a high neck and long sleeves, all lines of the dress drew the eye to a completely bare waist, sternum to hips! As she moved closer to him, her kohl-lined eyes looking inexplicably irritated (Ben’s brain couldn’t quite function at full capacity just yet), he noticed… Stars, her legs! They looked like they went on for miles, with the utterly obscene slit in the dress letting him see halfway up her thigh.

This was a deliberate ensemble, and his very reaction was living, breathing, throbbing proof of the effect she’d have at the ball tonight. She’d get whatever she wanted in any negotiations the Resistance hoped to make tonight. Every male eye would be on her (and maybe a few female gazes as well), the thought already causing a smoldering rage to start building in Ben’s mind…

Then he saw her hair. The smoldering anger exploded to an inferno; Ben didn’t care if Rey almost seemed to flinch for a second, the Resistance was going to pay, for this offense he’d become Kylo Ren again, dammit-

STOP IT! YOU’RE SCARING HER!

Now that was startling. Never in all of his life did Ben think that Kylo Ren would be his voice of reason. The anger vanished, and rapidly fell to a soul-crushing, hollow sadness. He knew what he had to do. What he had to say. His hand slowly reached toward her loose hair curled around her shoulders, only pinned back by a single braid acting as a headband - he couldn’t quite bring himself to touch her.

After all, she was someone else’s now.

“So, who is it? I understand, this is war, we all make… Choices. I - I won’t get in the way…” He ran his fingers through his hair, still fighting down the anger. “Kriff Rey, I thought we had…” Ben swallowed thickly as his eyes burned, finding himself unable to form words. He continued in a quiet, quavering voice- “I hope you get everything the Resistance wanted from whoever you’re promised to, maybe this war will end quickly. Stars, you may as well just-”

Rey apparently decided to cut him off with a kiss.

Well this was an unexpected turn of events. Ben stared wide-eyed and motionless for a good five seconds as Rey’s kisses turned more desperate; he couldn’t help but be persuaded to join in the heady, breathless embrace. She didn’t seem to be letting up, surely she understood-?

He had to pull her away as he struggled to find sanity in the tumult of emotions - he had gone from utter fury to crippling despair to surging arousal in the space of a minute.

“Rey, I - I don’t understand… You - surely you asked at this point, your - your braid - or someone
explained when the deal went through - or did they not even tell you?”

“Ben, there isn’t any deal with anyone.”

“No, it’s okay, those absolute scum haven’t even told you what they’re planning, but I can explain - Rey, on Alderaan, a woman would only wear her hair like that.”

“for her intended?” Rey finished softly, her fingers grasping at the lapels of his jacket as her twinkling eyes met his. She had that same predatory smile from the cab, the smile that did things to Ben. He was having problems formulating… words.

“Oh.” he finally replied dumbly. “So… so what you mean to say - erm - that is.”

“There is no one else, Ben. I - I asked your cousins…” Now even Rey seemed almost embarrassed, though the slight flush of her cheeks was nothing compared to the brilliant red that Ben was sure reached from his ears to his neck. “I asked them what I should do if I didn’t want to be seen as - ah - courting. I didn’t want anyone at this… thing tonight to assume anything, or to come between... “ Rey cleared her throat a little, looking away. “Us.”

She was perfect. Rey was perfect, and Ben was a moron. Much as he feared the Resistance wanted to use her for their own gain, he neglected to recognize that she had her own motives, desires, and wishes here - and if her actions so far proved anything, it was that she was very much invested in - well, them.

Ben couldn’t stop the presumably stupid grin that slowly came across his face. “So, you-you meanMMMMF-”

Rey had rather rudely clamped her hand over Ben’s mouth, and roughly shoved him beside the door, her eyes wide and worried. It made sense almost immediately, as the door to the apartments suddenly opened - fortunately it opened facing opposite the wall where Rey had pushed him. Ben had been so fixated on Rey, he was completely unaware that someone from inside was approaching.

“Rey? Everything all right out here?” It was that horrid pilot, Ben could tell from his overly-casual manner with Rey.

“Yes! Everything totally fine, here. Completely normal, nothing unexpected. I, um, I just wanted to get this message back to Divyya and Meghana.”

“Huh. Where did the messenger go?”

“Uhh-”

Nothing’s out of the ordinary. He should go back inside. Ben helpfully supplied.

“It’s fine, Poe. Nothing’s wrong. You should head back inside, maybe grab me a drink?” There it was again, Rey’s soft, coaxing persuasion with just the slightest touch of the Force. Ben shuddered at the thought of just what she could convince him to do with that power in her words.

Of course her charms worked wonders on the weak-minded fool. “Sure thing, Rey - don’t be too long, okay?”
“All right - be right there!”

The door mercifully closed, revealing a weary-looking Rey. Ben approached her with a grin as his hands found her waist, eager to continue where they left off before they were so rudely interrupted. Rey appeared to give herself a shake, then positively *rounded* on Ben.

“You - kriff, this is *exactly* why - *what* are you *doing* here, *didn’t* you *get* my *messages*?!” She spluttered, pointing an accusatory finger right in his face from the embrace of his arms.

Well. Maybe *this* was why she looked so mad at first. Ben pulled her a little closer so she’d stop pointing in his face, a single one of his fingers going to twirl a loose strand of her hair. “I’m sorry?”

“I got your message on my comm, and I replied! I told you *not to come here until later*!” Rey held her arms stiffly at her sides, clenching her fists.

“You - you replied. To a message from an unknown sender.” Ben deadpanned, continuing to twist a lock of Rey’s hair through his long fingers.

“Yes, Ben, it’s not like I didn’t know it was you!”

It was so easy to forget that Rey never had the experience of what Ben assumed every adolescent went through - including knowing how to send covert messages to your ostensible crush. Or enemy. Or both. Whatever. Ben smiled gently and pulled Rey even closer to him, who was at least looking less cross at him now.

“Rey, that’s… That’s not how comms work. I never got your message, I sent mine from a proxy - I can hardly leave evidence that the Supreme Leader’s got access to the last Jedi’s personal comm channel, can I?”

“No, I - I suppose not…” Rey muttered, her head hanging somewhat sheepishly. “Wait, just *how* did you-“

”*Shh!*” Ben interrupted, listening intently. There were distinct voices echoing up from the nearby elevator - they could come out at any second.

Rey’s eyes widened in panic once again, pulling away from Ben’s arms to hear better. “That’s - that’s the rest of the Resistance! They can’t see you here!”

“Why not? It’s my damn apartment!”

“It’s - it’s too hard to explain right now, and it’s the *General’s-“

“Got my name on it.”

“Kriff, Ben, this is *not* the time for a lesson in property ownership!”

“I’ll give you a lesson in property ownership.”

Rey flushed at the blatant suggestion in his tone. “That’s - it’s not-“

“I’m not leaving.” Ben crossed his arms stubbornly.
Rey cracked open the door to the apartments, quickly peering inside. Her arm reached behind her to grasp the sleeve of Ben’s jacket, and Ben found himself yanked forward as Rey hauled him into the hallway behind her. Ben followed along without a fight - since he got what he wanted anyway - smiling at the surprising strength of the small woman in front of him.

Stopping suddenly, Rey looked around desperately before pinning Ben against a door with a glare. “Do not make a sound until I come and get you. Got it?”

Without even giving him a chance to respond, Rey opened the door and shoved Ben right inside. He actually stumbled a bit, and by the time he had recovered, the door was already shut, and he could hear Rey greeting what was presumably the rest of the Resistance at the front door.

"Weirder and weirder," Ben reiterated his earlier thought about how this day was going.

Of course, he had no intention of standing by idly for long while the Resistance cooked up whatever ill-fated plans they had for tonight - not after that practically-outright declaration Rey had given him earlier. His head had pretty much stayed in the clouds after she said the word “us...” Regardless, the Resistance could only remain under the delusion that they had control over tonight’s events for so much longer. Or control over anything, for that matter. He would be with her tonight, he would assure her safety, he would come out the victor.

He’d give them the benefit of the doubt for a few more minutes, before Prince Ben Solo would make a dramatic appearance. As always. For now… Ben took stock of the room Rey had shoved him into - evidently, there was snooping to be done.

Ben wondered if Rey was aware that she’d shoved him into her room.

She hadn’t even been here a whole day, and already, the previously pristine, tastefully decorated guest bedroom of the Organa complex had been distinctly… scavenged. Ben’s attention was immediately drawn to where the desk was covered in the ancient Jedi texts that he had seen her reading - stars, it seemed so long ago, with all that had happened, but in reality, it had only been five days. The bed’s sheets, blankets, and pillows had all been tangled and gathered into a small, twisted ball directly in the middle of the mattress - apparently, Rey had some… interesting sleeping habits. Clothes, datapads, bits of what appeared to be lightsaber parts were strewn everywhere. It was an utter mess.

It suits her, Ben thought as he took off his coat, dropping it on the bed. But what caught his attention more than anything was by the vanity - clearly, where his cousins had been helping her get ready.

She had kept his note from the morning - the page from Kylo Ren’s journal was gone, but the quick note he had jotted down was left out. But what he found far more interesting was that she had added on to it.
Apparently, Rey had taken a charcoal pencil meant for mascara and turned it into a writing tool. At the bottom of his note, there were several beginnings of sentences, all scratched out beyond legibility. It was hard to tell if she was trying to write a reply, or composing something of her own - after all, the scratched out lines appeared to be in stanzas. Whatever she was writing, it was evidently not what she was trying to communicate.

Instead, she had drawn. And, apparently, Rey drew beautifully.

Several small, confident sketches of hands ran across the bottom of the page. Folded hands, limp hands, grasping hands - but what shook Ben to his core was the largest, most detailed sketch of an outstretched, imploring hand, reaching toward the viewer. Ben’s knees went slightly weak, as he sank to sit on the bed. This drawing, this hand, it was clearly-

“P-Prince Ben Solo?!?” a voice squeaked from the doorway.

Ben quickly pocketed the piece of paper, rising to his feet in an instant.

Standing in the doorway, shellshocked, was the girl from the Resistance Ben had seen Rey with briefly the previous night. Just like then, she had a glass of wine firmly grasped in her hand, and, judging from her reaction, had no idea who he actually was.

Caught alone in Rey’s bedroom, sitting on her bed - his name may have been on the deed to the property, but the optics were… Not good. How was he supposed to play this?

Apparently, this woman thought similarly. “I - I’m so incredibly sorry, I was - um, bathroom, Rey said hers - uh, I mean-”

So Rey didn’t realize what room she tossing him in after all. Interesting. He strode over to meet her at the door, turning on Prince Ben Solo as hard as he could - judging by this woman’s flustered reaction, this could prove… advantageous.

“Forgive me, I didn’t mean to startle you, Miss…?” He took her hand, bowing slightly over it - this immediately had the intended effect, as she gave a nervous giggle. Ben barely even had to brush her mind with the Force - between the wine, being startled, and being an apparently very honest and unusually not-horrible person (for a member of the Resistance), Ben was able to get what he needed almost immediately.

“R-Rose! Rose Tico, uh - you- your highness.”

“Please, ‘Ben’ is just fine for any friend of Rey’s.”

“Oh, I could never - are - are you a, ah, friend of Rey’s as well?”

“Well.” Ben gave what he hoped was a winning, mysterious smile. “I certainly hope that she considers me as more than a friend.”

Rose practically squeaked. “I knew it! You - you two, you were just perfect last night, so awesome,
so strong, the way you guys just stopped that crazy man-

“Ah, yes, that. I think we drew a little more attention to ourselves than Rey wanted to. In fact…” Ben tried very hard to let a look of concern cross his face, instead of the smug grin that so desperately wanted to come out - this really was working out beautifully. “I think Rey really doesn’t want anyone making assumptions, or really to know about, ah, us, but I know you’re her friend-

“Of course! Of course I won’t tell anyone I found you here, your secret is safe with me. But I’ve got to know - you two already knew each other, right? She was freaking out when she first saw you last night, how long have you two been…?”

The smug grin could no longer be contained as Ben circled Rose, who was clearly hanging on to his every word. He was glad she appeared to be slightly tipsy, she’d ask fewer questions and see fewer gaps in the story - she had now become critical to his plan.

“Together? Not too long, and the last time we saw each other in person, we had a… bit of a disagreement. But we’ve known each other for months. My family was... well, it’s been a sore spot between us, I won’t bore you with the details. I’m sure you know that I - ah - went off the radar for a while, so to speak?”

She nodded eagerly, moving closer to him, enraptured by the performance. Ben was thoroughly enjoying spinning this mostly-true tale - from a certain point of view.

“I wasn’t in a good place. When we met, I - I wasn’t the man she needed me to be. Rey thought that I’d never come to her side - but truly, I’ve been hers longer than she will ever realize.” he finished wistfully - he didn’t even need to oversell his emotions there.

Rose actually clutched at her heart, eyes shimmering. “Oh… wow… It’s - it’s so beautiful, it’s like destiny - like the Force brought you two together!”

Ben’s eyebrows raised slightly at that particularly insightful comment. “Well, you’re not wrong.”

Rose suddenly grabbed Ben’s arm, eyes wide in desperation. “You’re coming tonight, right? To - to the horrible thing?”

“T”If by ‘horrible thing’ you mean the OWT ball, yes, unfortunately.” Ben gave a long-suffering sigh that was only partially exaggerated. “Last night proved that Rey needs better protection, and I won’t be risking her safety. She’s too important to lose to something as idiotic as attending a dance.”

She nodded in emphatic agreement. “Yes, I completely agree, I hate - I hate all of this, it’s just…” she let her hand drop, her face now somber. She glanced around, as though afraid of someone listening in. “I understand why we’re here, why we have to do this - but it all just seems so wrong, it’s just the same horrible people doing horrible things to each other over and over.” Giving Ben a long look, Rose smiled, then tipped back the rest of her wine. “At least we get to eat and drink pretty well for a couple of days.”

It was now decided - Rey needed to become much, much better friends with this woman. Rose clearly understood what was important, and could give Rey some perspective. And then, as though she couldn’t be any better in this moment-

“Ben! I mean, Prince - your Highness - you should come with us tonight!”
Ben raised what he hoped came across as a skeptical brow. “Oh?”

“Yes - it’s - it's perfect!” Rose exclaimed, gesturing wildly with her empty glass. “I’ll bring you upstairs - no one will ever know what-“ she issued a drunken giggle before recomposing herself- “What you two were up to, I’ll just tell them you were dropping by - I mean, this is your place, isn't it? It'll be so normal, no one will suspect a thing. And then, tonight -tonight, you can show everyone what you two can be!”

Immediately, Ben was too drunk on visions of this beautiful, shining, golden future to realize that he wasn’t the only one to have long-term designs on its outcomes.

“Come on!!” Rose pulled Ben toward her and out of the room eagerly. “Don’t worry, I’ll be the one to suggest it - then you - you and Rey -” she covered her mouth, giving a delighted squeak - “You two can have a proper date! And then, at the ball-” she sighed dreamily, looking heavenward.

“You’ll show everyone - they’ll all see - what matters.”

Chapter End Notes

EVERYONE SCHEMES. No one wins. Well, except, perhaps, the Force itself.

Who here has watched BBC’s Coupling? Or season 5 of Friends? We are about to enter full-out “one conversation, two interpretations” territory here at this dinner/drinks/dance thingamajig. It's like I'm deliberately crippling myself - I can crank out writing dialogue very quickly, but making sure everyone interprets it the way they want? Strap yourselves in, folks. The outcome of the galaxy is in the hands of two bumbling, socially awkward virgin who have been forced into a very public, social situation.

I apologize for the long wait, but these were a couple of “establishing motives” chapters that needed to happen before the real - ah - meat, so to speak. Needless to say, we’re probably going to hit an E in the next couple chapters here. Sorry, I’ve tried my best to hold it in so far.

Also, adding this about an hour after the initial posting - I forgot that everyone here tends to be style/aesthetic whores, and wants to know what everyone looks like. I admit to that guilt myself, and it certainly helps in writing.

HERE is Rey
https://i.pinimg.com/originals/15/63/fd/1563fdd79bc7e7560d8a5cef41b48b00.jpg

(I remain loyal to my oldest fanfic-inspiring fandom, dammit)

I regret NOTHING!
The comments, kudos, messages - everything - has been amazing. I’m not a person who really puts myself out there (well, I hang out in one particular, notorious place, as I have for the last 11 years - those who know, know), but know that I love and appreciate every bit of recognition this little fic has gotten. Keep it up, y’all!
Chapter Summary

“Clearly,” Ben hissed, glaring down at Poe as the shard moved closer to his skin “-we have different views of last night’s events. I saw a very real, and very capable threat. I saw a man who had obviously been manipulated with the Force. I saw Rey inches and milliseconds from dying. And I will not allow them a second chance.”

Chapter Notes

Hopefully, the absurd length of this chapter will make up for how long it’s been. I couldn’t find a great place to cut it off, and just kept writing… Until we hit a sweet spot. Line break marks perspective change. Enjoy!

Minor edits on 8/11/18 because I started editing formatting weirdness and some minor syntax issues the other day, and now I'm finishing what I started.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"My beloved thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him." -Song of Solomon, 5:4

To Rey, the moment all hell broke loose was when a beatific, practically glowing Rose Tico re-entered the main sitting room of the Organa penthouse, accompanied by an incredibly-pleased-with-himself Ben Solo, whose smile was decidedly more sinister than Rose’s.

Rey thought that she might need to go into a dark, quiet room and yell at something for a while. Maybe break a few things. Because this situation was now officially out of hand - and it was already bad enough.

Even before Prince Ben showed up, it was a mess.

Earlier, Rey had undergone even more prodding, plucking, and painting from Divyya and Meghana, and then had been strapped into an utterly obscene dress. They had also found some downright torturous, tall heels that Rey somehow was actually able to walk in, much to her
Then, most of the loud, rowdy Resistance group who had come to Coruscant gathered in the sitting room, already enjoying more wine than they probably should.

Moments ago, an incredibly handsome near-disaster by the name of Prince Ben Solo had already been averted and neatly tucked away just seconds before the rest of the Resistance arrived.

However, even before all of that, a soberingly necessary, painfully awkward, and seemingly never-ending secret conversation had taken place.

As soon as they had arrived, Finn and Poe had finally cornered Rey about Ben. And she told them what she knew.

Sort of.

Not really.

In fact, the more Rey thought about it, the more nervous she got as she realized just how much she didn’t tell them.

Their questions were completely valid, and only highlighted the insanity of the position Rey was in.

“What is Kylo Ren not trying to murder you?”

“How are we not all dead right now?”

“What is Kylo Ren even here?”

“What is he bothering with the whole ‘Ben Solo’ thing?”

“What was Kylo Ren so insistent on helping you?”

“What was Kylo Ren protecting you?”

“Did Kylo Ren, in fact, pick you up and haul you away, and you, for some reason, didn’t slap him?”

Rey had stuck to facts:

- She had something incredibly, personally important to Kylo Ren that was of no interest to the Resistance at large. This was true, his journal really held nothing of use to the Resistance, but certainly had plenty of... valuable information for Rey.
- Kylo Ren, in turn, had unique knowledge and resources about the Jedi that she desperately needed in order to continue her training. While Rey still had no real idea what holocrons were, her casual mentioning of them made Poe’s eyes practically bug out - clearly, this was the kind of reaction Ben was initially looking for.
- Rey truly had no idea how exactly Ben knew to find her on Coruscant. However, to her, it was obviously something he worked out from their bond - and hardly something she could
reveal.

- Each of them had something the other was in dire need of, and they agreed to work together to accomplish their individual goals.
- They were in the process of negotiating an exchange when someone attempted to assassinate her.

As to why Ben was so eager to protect her, and help her grow stronger… Rey gave what she knew to be an incredibly lame answer, but it was the best she could do, given that she was trying to keep the bond a secret. “Uh - I think... It’s like something Luke said - it’s about balance? B-Kylo mentioned ‘assuring the legacy of the Force,’ that has to be what he meant. But I can tell... I can sense - he definitely doesn’t plan to kill me.”

Poe and Finn had exchanged a Significant Look. It was worrisome. Rey barely had to skim their thoughts to find out that Ben had used the exact same phrasing when he spoke to them last night, and it greatly alarmed them then.

Finn apparently just found the statement extremely creepy, but Poe had a little more insight that had Rey panicking - ‘Of course he doesn’t plan to kill her with the looks he was giving her… ‘Legacy of the Force’ my ass, if that means what I think it means - it’s a good thing Rey’s so naive. Once we find out who’s trying to kill her, we are getting Rey away from him before he-’

“I had a vision!” Rey had blurted in desperation.

Poe’s thoughts finally cracked her. She needed to distract him with something before he finished that particular thought. Rey clung to the hope that a Force Vision was just mysterious and inexplicable enough to buy her out of this horribly awkward situation.

Rey told a very edited, but true version of her vision that she had (what felt like a lifetime ago) on Ach-To. That Ben Solo was still within Kylo Ren, and that she was the only one who could help him turn. Waving off Poe and Finn’s immediate skepticism, Rey assured them that while the vision may not completely come to be, enough of it had come true that she was certain Kylo Ren wouldn’t harm her. That she truly believed he was only here to trade valuable, non-First Order/Resistance-related information with her - and that the more he was distracted from running the First Order, the better.

They were clearly still unsure, but had let the subject drop for the moment. Poe had muttered something about contacting the General, and Finn just continued looking somewhat shocked. Rey was just glad that it hadn’t gone worse.

Then, almost right afterwards, Ben showed up without any kind of warning - because of course he did. After a near-disaster with Poe, Rey had hid him away until she could be sure the coast cleared. With that confrontation taken care of, Rey was sure she had things under control for now.

She should have known better than to make such wild assumptions.
“And just look at who I found, knocking at the door of his own place! I think we all owe this guy a big thank-you for saving our Jedi and drinking his family’s liquor cabinet dry!”

A huge laugh erupted in the room as Rose raised a cheeky toast to Ben, an action mirrored by most of the Resistance. Prince Ben gave a cocky grin, sort of half-bowing his head with a princely flourish as he was guided into the room. For a woman so small, Rose somehow managed to effortlessly herd Ben over toward Rey.

*That* was the moment Rey feared the glass in her hand might explode. She needed to go tear some ridiculous decorative pillows at the seams. Most certainly, Ben Solo needed to be thoroughly shaken and asked just why he was out in the open when she so deliberately hid him away? Maybe she should punch a wall - *where were these thoughts coming from??* - because this evening was already completely out of control, and it hadn’t even started yet.

*I was only explicitly told not to make a sound. I haven’t said a word.*

Rey knew she had to look a little manic, eyes wide and staring straight at Ben as her hand trembled with the effort of not breaking her wine glass. Right. Great. He could read her mind. She would give him something to chew on.

*What the HELL are you thinking?! You were supposed to stay-*

*In your room? Where you put me? Where you apparently also sent your friend here?*

“Kriff!” Rey actually blurted out loud as she lost control of both her temper and the Force. The wine glass absolutely *shattered* in her hand, which was fortunately far enough from her dress to not drench her. The floor wasn’t as lucky.

Rey bent to clean up the mess, mind racing to catch up with how this happened. Earlier, Rose had asked Rey where the nearest washroom was. Rey, completely distracted by seeking out a way to drink away her problems (most of which went by the name of Ben Solo), offhandedly told Rose to just use her room, down the hall toward the entrance, second door on the left.

Rey assured herself that she put Ben in the second door on the right… When she was facing the other way. *Kriff*, she still wasn’t used to navigating indoor spaces!!

“Oh no! Here, let me help-” Rose immediately bent to ostensibly help Rey, but then quickly whispered in her ear “Okay, *I have got to go to the bathroom for real this time - but way to go, Rey!*” She gave Rey a giddy thumbs-up, then hurried away, calling over her shoulder “I’ll bring a towel!”

*What.*

While still trying to process what Rose meant by *that*, Rey found herself distracted by the tiny shards of glass floating gently in front of her.

“So. You have some interesting friends.” Ben stated casually as he loomed over Rey. He gave a lazy twitch of his fingers, and the crushed glass swirled up and around his hand. He bent to offer his opposite hand to Rey, who very deliberately ignored it to stand upright on her own power. *Kriff,* these shoes hurt her feet, but she was thankful for every extra inch they afforded her - she was by no means short to begin with, but she was now almost eye level with Ben Solo.
Sadly, he seemed utterly undeterred by her new height. In fact, Ben seemed quite happy to be taking a long, slow look up her partially-exposed leg.

“You - you and - Rose saw you... In my bedroom.” Rey stammered out.

“Obviously.” Ben drew out the word as he continued lazily twirling the shards of glass in a sparkling trail winding between his fingers. His eyes kept darting to their unwanted audience in the form of the rest of the Resistance stealing glances of the two Force-users.

“Does she - what does she know?” Rey just hoped there weren’t any lip readers in the room.

“Enough. Certainly not who I am, but seeing as where she found me - where you put me - she was able to figure out us pretty quickly. She may have even read a bit more into it, not that I particularly mind. It seems like she can keep a secret, though, if it really concerns you that much.”

“Of course it concerns me, Ben! Kriff, if Finn and Poe find out-”

“If Poe finds out what?”

Of course. Of course that’s exactly when an extremely concerned-looking Poe Dameron chose to insert himself into the conversation.

“Nothing.” Rey bit out through gritted teeth, glaring daggers at Ben, who clearly had seen Poe on his way over and chose to say nothing.

“I wouldn’t consider your safety tonight to be ‘nothing,’ Rey.” Ben smoothly admonished, redirecting without missing a beat. He turned to face Poe, genuine concern on his face. “We discussed this last night, Dameron. There is an obvious threat which we know nothing about - I will be accompanying Rey tonight.”

“I don’t recall much of a discussion.” Poe snapped back. He glanced around the room, making sure they weren’t being watched too closely. “We have things under control, and we don’t need your help. Rey will be perfectly safe with m-”

What was previously nothing more than the shrapnel and glitter of crushed glass slowly moving in midair suddenly solidified into a jagged glass shiv pointed directly at Poe’s throat. Ben had managed to stand in such a way that his broad shoulders blocked the view of this particularly aggressive threat out to anyone else in the room.

“Clearly,” Ben hissed, glaring down at Poe as the shard moved closer to his skin “-we have different views of last night’s events. I saw a very real, and very capable threat. I saw a man who had obviously been manipulated with the Force. I saw Rey inches and milliseconds from dying. And I will not allow them a second chance.”

“Ben!” Rey whispered furiously.

Apparently, that was all she needed to say. Ben actually looked somewhat admonished as the dagger of glass dissolved back into a harmless powder and returned to his hand.
Poe glanced back and forth between Ben and Rey, obviously trying to figure out what, exactly, was going on here. Not a man to mince words, he came right out and said it - “Don’t assume I disagree with you about how real this threat is- but if you think I’m going to just let you take Rey away after what I’ve seen…” Poe shook his head in disbelief. “Tell me, ’Ben Solo’ - just what, exactly, are you after with concerning Rey?”

“Oh, she’s just part of my great, big, evil plan, don’t you know?” Ben rolled his eyes. “Rey and I have business, and it doesn’t concern you. Look, Dameron, don’t take it for granted that our interests align right now. You, Rey, and the Resistance only stand to benefit from the gift of my protection.”

“If I might possibly have a word in all of this? Seeing as it concerns me?” Rey cut in icily.

These two, particularly Ben, were just getting ridiculous; she half expected the fate of the Resistance versus the First Order to be decided right here in a testosterone-fueled fistfight. At least both men had the grace to look cowed.

“I’m still not trained enough to deal with a lot of - well, all of this. I think it’s best if Ben came with us-” Rey could practically feel a blast of smug, vindicated energy from Ben - “-with all of us as a group.” Rey clarified, hoping that would put him in his place. Now she was slightly concerned - Ben did not seem at all deterred by this proposition.

Which probably meant he had been planning on this outcome all along. Kriff.

Poe frowned, scratching at his chin. “That’s… I guess it could work - we could all-”

“Oh good, so you told them about the plan for tonight, Ben?”

Rose had apparently returned from the bathroom, handing Rey a towel for her still wine-drenched hand as she grinned ear-to-ear - a smile that seemed to be earnestly shared by Ben.

“Prince Ben and I had a little chat earlier - I brought it up, and I think it’s a great idea to have him along with us tonight! He and Rey were all anyone could talk about last night, anyway - it’s got to help us for recruiting, right?”

“Of - of course.” Poe replied slowly. He glanced between Rey and Ben a few more times, a small smile coming to his face. “Rose, you’re absolutely right. This is just the sort of boost the Resistance needs right now. And of course, the General is going to be thrilled when she hears about this - the prodigal son home at last, right?” Poe leveled a long glance at Ben, clearly gauging a reaction.

Not even a twitch from Ben. Rey was stunned. He just smiled placidly, giving a shrug. “I’m happy to help tonight, but then I’ve got some… personal matters to take care of. Before I’m ready to face her.”

Rose nodded sympathetically. “General Leia can be a little… intimidating at the best of times, can’t she?”

“Try having her as a mother.” muttered Ben.
“So! It’s settled then, right? We should get going pretty soon - it’s just a bar, but we’ve still got a table reserved. It shouldn’t be a problem to add on a fifth person, right?”

“Not a problem at all. You should go find Finn, update him on the situation. I’ll get everyone else cleared out of here, and I’ll get our plan together for tonight.” Poe advised.

Rose casually saluted him with a wine glass as she left. Poe gave Ben and Rey another long, odd look, before shaking his head slightly, heading off to address the rest of the Resistance.

“Alone at last.” said Ben softly. Without an audience, his entire demeanor changed, and Rey already found herself less irritated now that she wasn’t stuck with *Prince* Ben Solo - this was just… Ben.

“*Stars*, Ben, what have I gotten myself into?” Rey gave him an awkward, sidelong look. “I’m sorry that you had to cover for me with Rose earlier, but *kriff*, you haven’t exactly been making things any easier with Poe.”

“If it’s any consolation, I *do* have things under control. By the end of tonight, we should be able to figure out who tried to kill you, eliminate the threat, and come to an agreement about what we’re going to do.”

“How can you say that after - after all *that*?” Rey gestured toward the rest of the room where, thankfully, Poe had everyone distracted with a plan outlining which arms dealers they’d be negotiating with tonight. “*Kriff*, I don’t even know how we’re going to get through dinner, much less this *ball* without you or Poe killing each other.”

Ben snorted. It was not a noise Rey ever expected to hear out of him.

“Sorry, it’s just - something my dad told me once.” Ben’s eyes had a faraway look to them, and he had a sad smile. “They - they weren’t together around me often, but he always told so many stories where Mom would roll her eyes, or call him out on exaggerating. But there was one story…” he actually chuckled now.

“*Even Mom* said it was true - she was *there* after all. If my parents managed to survive dinner with Boba Fett and *Darth Vader*, I think we can make it out of this all right.”

Shots weren’t fired, and blasters weren’t stolen with the Force. While it may not have been the most awkward dinner and drinks in the history of the galaxy, it certainly was a frontrunner, at least on par with a certain dinner involving quite a few Organas, a Tarkin, and far too much Alderaani wine.

Ben was simply thankful that the bar had been incredibly loud, and full of others who would also be attending the OWT ball - the stilted, awkward conversation was at least excusable, given the noise. He was also glad, for Rey’s sake, that they went somewhere as casual as a bar. Every time a new plate of food came out for the group to share, she was visibly restraining herself from grabbing at the food immediately. She had also been taking very careful notice of how everyone around her was grasping her utensils, and looking flustered as she attempted to emulate them.
He was painfully reminded of the visions he had of her as a starving child, and swore then and there that he’d make sure she never felt ashamed when she had struggled so much.

Now, all trapped together in a skycab on the way to the ball, things were… tense.

Rey’s friend Rose chose by far the most fun solution to the tension - to get drunk enough that she was completely oblivious to it. She was at least one bottle of wine in after dinner, and clearly having a fantastic time. Rose had pushed Rey and Ben to sit together in the back of the cab, dropping a massive wink before turning around to face her companions - Ben really had to wonder how much she was able to figure out on her own versus what Rey had may have told her. Between this and her comment about the Force bringing him and Rey together, the woman was scarily intuitive.

Ben wasn’t sure as to the exact nature of Rose’s relationship with FN-2187, but Rose’s casual comfort around Ben clearly irked the former stormtrooper. It probably didn’t help that she had kept whispering incredibly licentious comments about Rey to him throughout dinner - Ben was fairly positive that his ears were now permanently red after she assured him that he and Rey were going to have the most beautiful children.

While FN-2187 was fuming, Poe Dameron was oddly reserved and contemplative, given his earlier reactions - Ben had his suspicions that perhaps Dameron had made some sort of contact with his mother. He wasn’t going to risk reading his mind with Rey there, and from the looks Dameron kept giving him, he was fully aware of Ben’s restraint. After all, Dameron knew better than anyone except Rey just how easy it would be for him to breach his mind.

By the time they finally arrived, everyone seemed fairly desperate to get out of the crowded skycab, with the possible exception of the blissfully-oblivious-to-the-tension Rose. In a gesture that was second nature to him, Ben escorted Rey from the cab, taking her arm in his as they followed Dameron.

“I didn’t need the help…” Rey mumbled in a blatant lie. She was already struggling with the stairs leading to the entrance; Ben made sure to walk quite slowly as Rey took tentative steps in her ridiculous shoes, leaning on his arm heavily more than once. At least she now had a coat to shield her from the chilly winds of Coruscant, though he wasn’t looking forward to yet more gazes upon her once they got inside, especially with the dress she was wearing.

Ben briefly wondered if Rey even understood the concept of something as ridiculous as a coat check, and almost laughed.

“See? I told you!” Ben heard Rose whisper slightly behind him, and glanced over his shoulder. She had been elbowing FN - Finn (kriff, he could not slip on that one out loud), who stared wide-eyed at Ben and Rey before quickly collecting himself, taking Rose’s arm in a similar gesture.

He really had to stop himself from smiling at the sight. Maybe it was something about being around Rey, or perhaps being away from the First Order as long as he had been now - Ben hadn’t felt this… jovial in - kriff, maybe in his entire life. That was a sobering thought.

The massive, ornate golden doors leading into the event space for the night were not so much
impressive to Ben as they felt foreboding - even with all his planning, he couldn’t help but feel as though they were walking into a death trap. Ben felt inside his jacket for both his comm and Kylo Ren’s journal - he should have everything he needed, but it was best to make sure.

There was a wait inside the doors, and Ben was quite pleased to see that his extremely specific instructions (threats) to the OWT about security checks did not go ignored - there were metal detectors and very public pat-downs occurring, much to the horror and indignation of many of the more “aristocratic” guests who thought themselves above such treatment.

As predicted, Rey was completely baffled by the thought that she had to leave a personal possession in the care of someone else for the night at the coat check. Ben didn’t exactly relish the thought of her being so exposed either, but took comfort in the fact that she would be arriving on his arm, her very appearance declaring to anyone who knew to look - she is taken.

He better stay beside me, so they know he’s with me.

Ben shot Rey a somewhat startled glance - he was almost positive that she didn’t mean to let that particular thought out. They made their way into the main ballroom, and Rey seemed completely distracted. Somehow, she had already gotten a hold of what looked like a glass of straight bourbon (Ben immediately suspected Rose’s involvement), but her mind was positively buzzing with something decidedly not alcoholic. Rey drained her drink by an appreciable amount, glaring ahead of her.

Apparently, Rey wasn’t aware that she had been broadcasting her thoughts, and Ben was glad that the focus of her apparent rage wasn’t him, or at all Force-sensitive - he followed her murderous stare to a group of young noblewomen from the Elder Houses, who all had similar looks of fury plastered across their faces as they glared back at Rey.

Ben decided then and there that jealousy was a very good look on Rey. He had doubts about how Rey would react to what he fully realized were often overprotective feelings (that only increased the longer they spend in each other’s company), but now… Not that he ever intended to be the cause of it, but to know that someone was so fiercely territorial of him...

He glanced around. Rey’s friends were distracted, and seemed to be moving away from them. The noblewomen were still watching, and Ben noticed that they had now caught the eye of quite a few other members of the Elder Houses, wearing faces that ranged from bafflement to downright disgust at the sight of Prince Ben Solo of House Organa with a lowly, nameless girl.

Well, there was no time like the present for a nice scandal.

Ben pulled Rey to stand in front of him, facing away from him and toward the other women. He slowly pulled her loose, unbraided hair off of her shoulders and behind her back, stroking the singular braid with relish. Rey was apparently still too distracted to notice what Ben was up to - that wouldn’t do. He started by bending forward to kiss the very top of her head, using the opportunity to look straight down at the group of women with a cold smile. Ben let his fingers trail down Rey’s sides, coming to rest at her waist. He pulled her even closer, kissing her neck, then her ear.

“Care to dance?”

The heat in Rey had precipitously shifted from rage to downright lust - there was his girl from last night. But then, hesitancy-

“But, Ben - I - I have no idea what I’m doing.” Rey whispered breathily.
“Don’t you worry, it’s my job to make you look good.” He placed his hand at the small of her back, guiding her toward an open parquet dance floor currently only utilized by the usual suspects this early in a ball - old couples, and people who knew how to dance.

Ben definitely counted himself among that number. It had been… A very long time, but there were certain things he practiced endlessly a lifetime ago that he’d never forget. Besides, if nothing else, this was an excellent excuse to get her alone.

“Wait! Seriously, I have no - what are you doing - no , no-no-no- no - Ben!” Rey frantically whispered in protest as Ben positioned her hand on his shoulder, and took the other in his.

“Hush, and just let me guide you.”

Rey practically squeaked as Ben wrapped his other arm around her back and pulled her against his body, securing her tiny waist in his hand.

“This - this can’t p-possibly be appropriate.” Rey stammered out, blushing.

“Look around, Rey. It’s fine, it’s expected.” She was so incredibly lightweight, it took almost no effort at all to get her to move the way he needed. More than a few times, he could feel the beginnings of a trip, a hesitancy, or a just plain missed step - he never let her stumble, never let anyone see anything less than her perfection.

After all of the times he felt so full of doubt, so awkward being, well, anything around Rey, it was freeing to be in a position where he had poise and confidence. Not only that, but to be able to so publicly hold her close to him, while she had to rely on his guidance and expertise? It was… thrilling, empowering - arousing; best focus on the situation at hand.

“Now then, Rey, I didn’t just want to show you off in front of all the Elder Houses. We have business to discuss.”

Rey nodded slowly, her eyes clearly fixated on her feet, where she seemed to be concentrating very hard.

“Look at me. I’m not going to let you fall.”

Her eyes slowly rose to meet his, and she held onto him a little tighter. Good.

“I want you to look very carefully. I’m going to show you a few people, and you need to make sure you’re within eyesight of at least one of them all night, all right?”

Ben dipped Rey slightly, then spun her so that they faced out the same way as him, ostensibly showing her off to the onlookers, while giving him the same vantage point as hers.

“Look up to the second floor, that overhanging balcony. There’s a shorter man with blonde hair, wearing a black tunic. The only one here with a rifle.”

“A rifle? I - I mean, I see him, but-”

“The OWT made a few… Concessions on my behalf, as far as security. That’s Shartom Ren, he’s our eyes in the sky tonight. Give him a wave.”

Rey meekly made a tiny waving gesture, which Shartom returned with a slight bow, then a casual
salute toward Ben as he skulked around the perimeter of the balcony.

“All right, let’s see…” Ben pulled Rey back toward him and scanned the room, navigating the floor with casual ease while still managing to make it look like they were dancing. “Over there, the Weequay talking with one of your friends - that’s Enoch Ren. He’s our plainclothes security, since he’s the most… normal. And that’s still a stretch.” Ben exchanged a nod with Enoch over the heads of the Resistance, a knowing smirk spreading across Enoch’s face at the sight of Rey - who he winked at.

Ben had to let on a little bit more to his Knights concerning Rey, more than he’d ever tell anyone in the First Order proper. He only had to exaggerate slightly in telling them he sensed the attempt on Rey was a threat toward all Force users - themselves included. It had to be phrased very carefully, so the Knights simply thought Ben was using Rey to draw out the would-be assassins, as well as gain information about the Resistance from her.

He even told them a half-truth - that he felt Rey could be turned, a prospect that definitely seemed to spark interest from all of them. Enoch, much like Rose Tico, clearly read a little more into what Ben meant when he said that. That could be… problematic.

“Lastly… She’s going to be hard to find, she’s definitely out of place here, and we had to make sure she was somewhere central, but hard to see…” Ben practically had to squint to discern her. “There. Near that hallway, sitting in the shadows. That’s Obaan Ren. You probably won’t see her move around too much, she’s not young, as she has enjoyed reminding all of us for the last decade. She should be able to sense out any threats toward you before anything even happens, possibly before even you or I sense anything.”

“Ben - who - who are these people?”

“They’re my Knights. They were originally here as my security, but that protection has now been extended to you.”

“What exactly did you tell them about me?”

“That you’re the last Jedi, and currently very misguided in the ways of the universe. That by protecting you, we protect the future of the Force. That you need a teacher. That I’m very well on the way to seducing you to my wicked ways.” Ben grinned.

She blushed, looking away. “They can’t possibly believe that after they’ve seen me with the Resistance. Kriff, I’m practically their mascot.”

Ben gazed down at her, his eyes dark and brow furrowed. “If your people had any sense, any concept of history and its implications, they wouldn’t be using you the way they are. You wouldn’t be on their side at all. You shouldn’t be.”

Rey looked back up at him, shocked.

“Oh, yes. I know, Rey.” He pulled her closer to whisper directly in her ear - this was definitely something that he couldn’t risk being overheard. “I know even what even Luke discovered and came to know - if you’re truly the last Jedi, you would learn from their failures. The Jedi should never take sides in anything, particularly warfare on a galactic scale. They should have remained as they were for generations - advisors, protectors, counselors - never warriors.”
Rey pulled away slightly, glancing all around them to make sure no one was listening. This dance had taken a turn for the dramatic, apparently. “Look Ben - I’m not going to pretend that I have some great wisdom or knowledge about our current situation. But what I do know is that what you - what the First Order represents and upholds? It's wrong.”

“Yes.” Ben breathed, delighted at her brilliance. He dipped her, his gaze never wandering from her eyes. “The New Republic, the Resistance, the First Order - they’re all wrong, Rey. Even the Republic, the Empire, the Jedi and the Sith - all of it has only led to more war and suffering on larger scales with every generation. No one’s ever gotten it right. But, you and me? We can. I've seen it.”

Now Rey looked completely lost. This was much closer to what he had tried to tell her back on the Supremacy so long ago… Maybe he finally found the right words. Still, he didn't want to overwhelm her. A thought occurred to him-

“You should talk to your friend Rose about this sometime. Ask her what she thinks about the direction the Resistance is taking, and what this galaxy needs right now. We don’t need more organizations and people burned to ground - we need to build. Leave behind what hasn’t worked, and forge anew. Together.”

“But Ben, I - I can’t just - kriff, you’re the Supreme Leader of the First Order, neither of us is exactly in a position where we can just - just take off and - and do whatever this is you’re suggesting!”

“You’re right, we’re not. And we won’t be able to until we’ve both done our part, and gotten enough people on both of our sides to listen to reason, and understand that we have to stop this cycle. Let alone figuring out how we're going to get anyone to listen in the first place.”

Ben looked into Rey’s wide, dumbfounded eyes - perhaps he had revealed a bit too much here, but at least she wasn’t trying to run away this time. Yet. He sighed. “I don’t expect you to make any galaxy-altering decisions now, Rey, I just want you… I just want you to keep your eyes open. Always.”

Finally escorting her away from the dance floor, Ben guided Rey toward the Resistance. “I’ve kept you away from your friends for too long. But just listen to the language they use tonight - or better yet, just consider the company they’re keeping. Every one of these people has sold weapons to the First Order, and will probably continue doing so for as long as war continues to be profitable. Anything that happens here tonight will only result in more suffering.”

He kissed the back of her hand before releasing her, gently guiding her toward a positively delighted-looking Rose Tico.

Ben sank back into the crowd, keeping an eye on Rey from afar. Apparently, Rey had taken him up on his suggestion, because she immediately had pulled aside Rose, who now looked quite concerned.

Snagging a glass of wine, he resorted to his oldest method of avoiding socialization by messing with his comm, all the while watching where Rose and Rey were apparently having a very deep, alcohol-fueled heart-to-heart. He responded to a few messages from the First Order command while barely paying attention, then fired off messages to his Knights to make sure they hadn’t
noticed anything yet. Shartom and Enoch responded immediately, but there was nothing from Obaan yet.

Glancing around, Ben saw that Rose and Rey were actually heading in Obaan Ren’s direction, so perhaps she was just keeping an eye on them. Shrugging, Ben returned to his comm, where Hux had already managed to send a needlessly long reply that Ben just did not have the patience to deal with at the moment. He was just about to pocket the comm and resort to - shudder - *small talk* - when the comm buzzed in his hand-

*O: Possible trouble. Get over here.*

Ben’s head snapped to attention, looking around wildly. He concentrated, sensing all around him - Obaan was apparently picking up on more than him, but he definitely felt something… Off. He moved over to her location as quickly as he could without raising too much attention.

He was mostly successful - but the ever diligent FN-2187 had picked up on his sudden movement, glaring at him. “I don’t like the looks of this, what’s going-”

“Shut up, Finn, and follow me. Something is wrong.”

There was a brief second that Ben was able to appreciate the completely shocked look on the former stormtrooper’s face when he was called by his new name.

Obaan Ren had emerged from the shadows, and looked *furious.* “It just happened - I should have caught it sooner, but I sensed… Someone was just taken against their will. And it *wasn’t* the Jedi, she just went down that hall.”

Almost simultaneously, a thought practically panicked its way into Ben’s head.

*Someone just took Rose. They took her into a room and now I don’t know-*

*Stay where you are, I’m coming as fast as I can.*

*There’s no time, I’m so scared, they had a knife - stars, this is all my fault…*

*Just stay calm, Rey, I’m coming to you right now.*

*I think I know where they took her, I’m going in-*

*No, REY!*

It all happened so quickly. Ben felt a surge in the Force, then… Nothing. The place where his connection with Rey usually held a calm, reassuring presence in his mind was now just... *empty.* It was as though someone had torn at his mind and ripped at his heart - but it wasn’t broken.

There was no time for fury or calm. All Ben knew was to *run,* as fast as he could, to where he felt
Rey last. Shouts of surprise and alarm followed him, it seemed that FN-2187 and Obaan Ren were tailing after him in a group that must have looked incredibly strange to any onlookers.

Ben knew the Force was guiding him as he ripped a door open, following a narrow corridor through a few turns, then opening yet another door. He was not prepared for the sight before him.

Two cloaked men were bent over Rey’s prone, limp form on the floor. One held her wrist and a syringe, the other a ceramic knife positioned just below her vulnerable, bare shoulder blade, where two tranquilizer darts were lodged. Whatever happened in here had obviously made extensive use of the wickedly jagged knife that did not need metal to be lethal; the air smelled of panic and blood. *Kriff,* ceramic blades - if well-concealed, even the best security in the world would never have caught these. Ben was able to numbly register several long slashes along Rey’s wrists and hands, all of them bleeding freely.

Rose Tico was being restrained by a third cloaked figure who had a similarly lethal-looking blade to her throat, tears streaming down her face. She looked relatively unharmed, but clearly not completely unscathed.

Ben had entered just in time to hear one of the men exclaim “*It’s not enough, she’s coming out of it! Get another dose!*”

Lashing out on pure instinct, Ben pushed the two men as far from Rey as he could, freezing the one restraining Rose.

“*Rose, get behind me.*” Ben managed to growl out, a powerful, black *fury* finally building in him as he managed to free himself from running on pure adrenaline.

One of the men idiotically made a motion to throw his dagger - not at Ben, but directly at where Finn had just burst in the room. Ben didn’t even have to think, he immediately flung the dagger away from Finn, shattering it into a thousand tiny shards of porcelain. Finn looked at him in amazement, then-

It was as though all of his hatred, power, and *Dark* ebbed out of him in a painful pull. He almost doubled over, trying to figure out what the hell had just happened-

Before he saw the most glorious sight of his entire life.

Rey was awake. She was alive, and she was *livid.* Dark swirled around her beautifully, the pain of her wounds effortlessly becoming power in her body as she rose from the floor. Her right hand shot out before her, twisting cruelly as she dragged the three assailants across the floor toward her, crushing them to the floor with her power.

“*Which of you was it. Who hurt her. Tell me.*” A powerful, commanding voice issued from Rey - Ben swore he heard in its echo… Kylo Ren.
This was it, what he always suspected - she was drawing power straight from him, from his Dark. For now, it was exceptionally effective, but Rey wasn’t trained enough to know how to temper the power. Ben just hoped that he would be able to draw on her Light, if it came down to that. He hoped it didn’t.

Rey’s head snapped to one of the three men - apparently, his thoughts betrayed him.

“You. Confess.”

The man trembled. Rey’s patience had apparently already run out as the man was suddenly held aloft, scrabbling at his throat. She staggered toward him, dripping blood as she pushed harder, the Dark around her practically palpable.

Rey was shaking with the effort of pushing through the assailant’s mind. She had let up on his throat enough to allow a series of pleading babbles through, which Rey cut off immediately.

“Do not beg. Tell me, are there any more here?”

He shook his head wildly. “It’s - it’s just us here, no more, no more-”

“Who sent you?”

She was going too far, the man’s mind would break, and she would never forgive herself if she kept pushing like this. He intimately knew that, in this moment, all it would take was the slightest push from someone to douse her Light completely. Ben exhaled slowly, centering himself - he knew he had to step in.

The man’s eyes had rolled to the back of his head, he was clearly almost gone. “Mortis… Mother, please!”

He couldn’t concentrate on those chilling words for now. Rey was in danger. Ben reached out, placing his hands on her shoulders as he spoke softly, as though calming a wild animal. With a twitch of his hand, he rendered the man unconscious, so he could fully concentrate on Rey.

“Rey, it’s all right. Everyone is safe. You’ve done so well - now let me take over.”

Rey trembled, tears running down her face. “I - I almost - I can do it-”

“Shh, Rey. It’s all right.” Ben ran his hands down her arms, pushing Light back toward her. He captured her hands in his, healing the deepest cuts where she had apparently grabbed a knife by the blade.

Now it was Ben’s turn to shudder, a blissful sensation passing through him as he quietly held Rey. Her Dark into him, his Light into her - Rey gasped slightly, eyelids fluttering as she came back into herself.

“B-Ben?”

“Rey,” he replied with a smile.

“Finn?” Rose asked shakily.

“Look out!” Finn shouted.
One of the guards on the ground apparently chose this moment to wake up and finish his mission - Ben had been too distracted to see the man crawling toward Rey, knife poised and ready to slash at her calf-

Finn tackled the man to the ground, immediately putting a knee to his back and restraining his arm at a painful angle.

“All right, I don’t know how the Force works, but someone needs to get these guys better secured.” Finn muttered, straining to keep the struggling man down.

“Obaan. Make sure they’re all completely out, then get Shartom and Enoch to restrain them and put them on my shuttle. They’re coming back with us for further interrogation.”

Obaan Ren gave a casual wave of her hand that made the only conscious man drop like a stone.

“They’re already on the way.”

“Good.” Without letting go of Rey, Ben turned to face Finn, who had moved back to hold the shaken-looking Rose, who was clearly stunned by what she had just happened both to her and around her. “Finn - you saved - you - thank you. Just - thank you and… I’m sorry.”

Finn nodded slowly, not saying a word as an understanding passed between them. Ben returned the nod jerkily, watching them as they slowly made their way out of the room, presumably to tell the rest of the Resistance what had just happened. Ben refocused his attention on Rey.

Well. With the look she was giving him… Perhaps she still hadn’t quite balanced it all out yet, the Dark was still clearly with her. Ben supposed he was still feeling a bit more forgiving than usual, and-

“Ben I - I want - I need-” Rey practically whined, grasping at his jacket, pressing against him.

“What’s - what’s wrong with me?”

Kriff. Ben assumed it was only his weakness, that seeing Rey using the Dark was… Well, it worked for him. Perhaps the inverse was true as well?

He took Rey’s hand in his, running his fingers over the shallower, less dire cuts that ran down her wrists as he called the Light to heal. It was an experiment, that was all-

The moan that issued from Rey shot right down his spine, yet it was her hips that jerked forward. Her fingers caressed his face, and he felt her mind invade his as he practically panted at the beauty of the Dark as she used it on him.

*We are leaving. You are going to - to help me. With - this… thing.*

It was almost cute, the way she had such power in the Dark, but utterly no confidence. He’d teach her how to use it properly, but for now, she needed… A firmer hand.

Or mouth.
Ben held her chin, smiling gently, but turning the Dark back on her as she groaned, melting into his arms. This steeped in the Dark, he knew what she wanted - what she needed to hear.

*Oh, Rey. I'm going to do more than help you. I'm going to ruin you, and you're going to thank me.*

Chapter End Notes

Ahem. Rating hike next chapter. 'Nuff said.

If you're someone who likes shorter chapters... Sorry? Either y'all would get a nothing but exposition chapter followed by a nothing but action chapter, or this - I think it paced out better, despite it being almost 3k words longer than my typical chapters. Apparently I'm all or nothing when it comes to these events.

Keep those comments and kudos coming, guys! Y'all have been so amazing and supportive, and have given me some fantastic inspiration over these last couple of months.
“Come on, Rey. I won’t have you any other way.” He seemed to falter a little in his bravado, leaning forward to brush their foreheads together; he then added quietly—“Please, Rey. Let me know that I’m - I’m not alone in this. That it’s not just the Force, that it's not just our bond - that it’s us - that there’s actually something - something more here.”

Chapter Notes

OH MY GOD I'M SORRY THIS TOOK SO LONG. Enjoy!

Oh yeah, and NOTE THE RATING HIKE. Not that I think any of you pervs are going to care at this point, y'all have been hounding me for smut since like chapter 5. You've earned it.

Well, a little. Heh.

Minor edits on 8/11/18 because I started editing formatting weirdness and some minor syntax issues the other day, and now I'm finishing what I started.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking: ‘Open to me, my love, my dove, my undefiled. My head is drenched with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.’” Song of Solomon, 5:2

In some distant, foggy part of her brain, Rey was well aware that she was not entirely herself.

But that didn’t matter. Nothing mattered but the burning hunger in her, and the person who had claimed he would be able to help her.

Something extremely important had happened. Someone tried to kill her again? Kidnap her? Rey couldn’t quite remember what at the moment. It didn’t matter. Ben was here, and he had used an absolutely delicious voice in her head to make some very promising threats that spoke to every secret, dark (Dark?) thought Rey had ever had.

Yet, somehow, every time she tried to get his attention as he debriefed his Knights (clinging to his arm, biting down on his neck), he would only say boring, useless things like “Hold on,” “Wait,” and “Kriff, Rey, not here!”

There was a dam of Dark about to burst in her, and it needed to get out somehow. Whatever happened had left Rey short-sighted and frustrated, especially after hearing that particularly
talating offer. Ben, however, was now basically ignoring her, apparently handling things related to what had seemed like a very important series of events moments ago, but now paled in comparison to this selfish, yearning hunger. Rey reached out to Ben, gently pulling at the threads of his mind, hoping to find some passing thought of his that would help him get his priorities straight.

The feeling of Rey’s mouth on his - not a real kiss, but one he’d never forget as she absolutely brutalized his lip in her mouth. He tried to keep it chaste, so terrified was he of scaring her off, giving her a gentle kiss on the cheek... The frustrated moan she responded with was more than he could respond to politely, as he angled her face for a first real kiss-

This wasn’t useful - it just happened last night, and, while distractingly heartwarming to see from a different perspective, was hardly reflective of the sort of burning passion Rey had seen in Ben just moments ago. She needed something different, some other time she had perhaps driven him to distraction without her knowledge. Rey probed again, this time deeper-

He was fixated on her lips again. It was rude to stare, but that beautiful mouth was saying such wonderful, traitorous things. Though there was nothing but the elevator lights on her, she was practically glowing in his mind.

He knew what needed to be done. He knew the second he felt her arrive. He needed to show her-

No, this wasn’t the sort of thing she needed right now. Besides, these were all just memories - surely, he had some fantasies deeply buried in there… Rey concentrated even harder, channeling her pent-up frustration as she much more forcefully pushed her way into his head, seeking out the source of how, exactly, he planned to “ruin” her-

It was the throne room on the Supremacy… But different. There was no urgency here, nothing on fire, no bodies littering the floor or the throne. Their lightsabers had been thrown aside and deemed meaningless. The room had taken a sort of hazy blur to it that let Rey know that this was indeed not a real memory, but some sort of oft-revisited, imagined scenario.

While the room had a decidedly a cleaner, less corpse-ridden look, Ben and Rey looked the same as they did after their fateful encounter, sweaty, battle-worn and slightly singed. But in this fantasy, Ben had somehow said everything Rey needed to hear. His hand was outstretched, and her tears were those of joy. Slowly, she reached for him, a genuine smile slowly teasing the corners of her mouth up. Ben swallowed hard, knowing that this was it - this was everything he hoped it would be.

She timidly made to grasp his hand, but frowned as she hesitated, looking down. Ben felt momentary panic - no, this was his fantasy, she wouldn’t change her mind here, unless he really felt self flagellatory - but this version of Rey wouldn’t do that to him. Instead, she grasped at the very tip of his glove, slowly pulling the leather from his skin, her eyes going back to his to make sure this was all right.

He’d let her strip him bare, if that’s what she wanted. Stars, he hoped that’s what she wanted.
With the glove off, Rey now reached for him in earnest, barely grazing her fingertips across his hand. She rested her hand in his wide, warm palm as his considerably longer fingers carefully enveloped her hand. The spark, the heat, their undeniable connection was just as shocking in this encounter as it was the very first time they touched. But Ben wanted more.

Tears were still freely falling down her face. Worried, but not wanting to let go of her hand for even a second, he brought his other hand to his mouth, using his teeth to quickly peel his other glove off. Carefully, so as not to frighten her, he pulled her even closer to him, using his left hand to tuck a loose strand of hair behind her ear before brushing away her tears with his thumb.

Mirroring his movement, she reached toward his face with her free hand, her lip trembling as she used the most featherlight touch to trace the long trail of where she had scarred him. Every place she touched sent shockwaves through his nerves, but he practically groaned as he leaned into her touch, desperate for even this.

“Ben, I - I’m so sorry... I wish we - I wish I-”

“It doesn’t matter. I’d let you cut me down a thousand times more if it meant you’d stay by my side.”

“I’m right here, Ben. And I’m not going anywhere - I’m not leaving you.”

He staggered forward, leaning further into where her hand caressed his scar. He grasped her other hand even tighter, pulling their clasped fingers directly against his chest. “S-say it again. Please.”

Rey nodded - she was truly his kindred spirit, since she, of all people, completely understood the need for this reassurance. The connection between them throbbed, as desperate to be recognized as Rey and Ben themselves. “Ben. I’m not going anywhere. I would never leave you. I’ll stay by your side, and I’m going to help you.”

“Thank you.” He gasped, his eyes closing. “Thank you. I - I don’t deserve you - stars, Rey, you - you’re - I - I-”

She allowed herself a small smile, threading her fingers through his hair. Pulling him forward, she stemmed his stuttering with a slow, passionate kiss. “I know.”

Ben blinked at her as they parted lips, shocked. He thought it would be ages until - kriff, there she went again, now kissing him with heated, reckless abandon.

It seemed impossible to get her any closer to him, or at least as close as his body was now demanding. Thankfully, Rey seemed of a similar mind, acquiescing immediately when he made to lift her. He intended to carry her gracefully in his arms, the way she deserved - but the minx immediately wrapped her strong legs around his waist, pulling at his hair as she kissed him desperately, her tongue tracing the seam of his lips. Ben very much wished to reciprocate the intensity of the kiss, but was busy concentrating on staggering forward while trying not to think too hard about how perfectly her hips and ass fit in his hands.

He had a destination in mind for them, after all.

Breathless, he finally collapsed in the huge, mercifully-empty-in-this-fantasy throne. Rey, still straddling him, ground against his body, kissing her way down his neck, pulling at his clothes. Ben tipped his head back, stifling a groan as he clutched the armrests of the chair, trying to center himself.
She was not letting up in her hungry pursuit, as kisses down his neck slowly evolved into playful nips of his sternum, then outright bites of his pectorals. Sliding her hands further down his form, she held his eyes with hers as she reached between her own legs to palm the prominent bulge in his pants.

It didn’t matter that it was through layers of fabric, or that it was just her hand, he practically keened at the sensation. Rey was a quick learner, trailing her fingers lightly at the base and increasing the pressure as she traced the outline of his shaft, nibbling her way back up his neck.

“Ben, please…” she moaned, her breath hot on his ear.

That was it. She had hardly done anything, and yet he couldn’t take much more of this teasing before completely losing control - but there was no reason for this to end so quickly. They had all the time in the world, after all.

“Rey…” Ben warned, grasping her wrist to move it away from where his cock was now straining against the fabric of his clothes in an incredibly uncomfortable fashion. “If you keep that up, this is going to be over before it starts…”

She bit her lip mischievously. “Oh?”

He returned the smile. “I have a better idea, anyway.”

All at once, he seized her about the waist, lifting her off his lap as he quickly swapped their positions - she upon the throne, him standing before her.

Practical matters had to be taken care of first. Ben reached beneath his tunic, and was immediately relieved upon being able to unbutton his pants and lessen the pressure on his cock, stroking it briefly to ease some of the incredible tension. Rey stared up at him, biting at her bottom lip hungrily. She looked so small upon the throne, grinding her knees together as she twisted her hair around a finger nervously, refusing to look away from him for even a second. She didn’t know where he was going with this, and expected that he wanted her to do something - but that was for another fantasy.

Instead, Ben knelt before her, grasping her hips to pull her forward to sit at the very edge of the great throne. Worshipfully, he slowly ran his hands from where they gripped her hips down her legs, splaying his fingers as he went. Her knees were at first tightly together, but as his thumbs rubbed small circles along her inner thighs, he gently coaxed them apart.

Rey gave the softest of moans. He chanced looking up at her from between her thighs, finding himself utterly transfixed by her hooded eyes and the slight trail of saliva from where she was biting down on the side of her finger. Though she still wore her leggings, he saw this as an opportunity to really draw this out. He kissed her leg while his left hand continued slowly tracing along the hem of the cloth to the juncture of her thighs. A whine escaped from her as his right hand moved the bottom of her tunic aside, fully exposing where the thin, light leggings had already become stained with her arousal.

“Oh, Rey, you’re so wet for me, aren’t you?” Ben whispered, barely skimming his finger along the surface of the damp fabric. She tried to grind against his finger, but was met with no pressure as he withdrew his hand - her whine was now downright frustrated. She ran her fingers through his hair, scratching at his scalp quite delightfully.

He kissed her thighs, now moving both of his hands to grip at the waistband of her leggings, slowly pulling them down as his kisses grew more wet and heated. “I’m going to take such good care of
“Enjoying yourself?” growled a voice from just behind Rey’s shoulder. A gloved hand firmly gripped about her neck, stroking her throat briefly before tensing, pulling her back-

Oh.

That wasn’t supposed to happen.

Rey had been unceremoniously dumped from what was turning out to be an enormously enjoyable fantasy, and was now facing a rather miffed-looking Ben Solo, who was slightly pink about the cheeks and ears. His arms were crossed and defensive, but his pupils were blown black, accompanied by somewhat heavy breathing. He seemed very much at a crossroads between being angry and turned on, and was clearly deciding how best to handle the situation.

The room was mercifully empty now; evidently, whatever Ben had ordered had gotten done while Rey… Explored his mind.

“Um,” she supplied helpfully. Though she was very much still needing, the brief lapse into Ben’s mind had helped clear her mind somewhat. She slowly started to realize the implications of what she had just done, simultaneously filling her with horror and… arousal??

No. That couldn’t be right. She would never be seduced by using the Dark, turned on while burrowing her way into another’s mind, by forcing herself on an unsuspecting-

“You can’t force the willing.” Ben seemed to reply to the thought with a shrug, his mind apparently made up as far as if he was more furious than he was aroused.

He lifted her up, then quickly deposited her in a chair far smaller and less austere than the throne from the fantasy. But that didn’t matter - Rey swallowed tightly, shivering in delight as Ben sank to his knees before her. Was - was this really happening?

Ben looked up at her, quirking a brow and a smirk. He ran his thumbs over the tops of her feet with no small amount of pressure, kissing at her ankle as he unstrapped her shoes. Unlike the disturbingly-realistic fantasy, no deadening, protective layer of fabric separated his lips from the skin of her leg as he nipped and kissed his way up her calf. There was a bloom of heat from every place his mouth touched; when he reached the back of her knee, Rey downright shivered, clasping her hand over her mouth to stifle her moan.

He hardly even had to touch her. Everywhere his fingers skimmed set her skin aflame, barely having to make any contact to make her shudder and yearn. Rey was not one unfamiliar with the touch of her own hands, the feeling of satiation, of completion she could reach on her own - yet these sensations taunted and teased, quickly driving her to nothing but mindless hunger.

Hot and wet, his tongue licked a stripe up her femoral while his nose brushed against where her thigh muscles were tense and trembling in anticipation. His right thumb followed, skimming the edge of her panties, teasing at the hem. Rey couldn’t stop herself, giving into the heat of the
moment, her hips canting forward and into his touch-

-in the exact moment that she failed to realize that his left hand reached its destination.

Rey found herself frozen as, in the briefest of seconds, he swiped his tongue across her - even through the scant fabric of her underwear, she could feel *almost* everything - but not nearly enough. It was only once he worked his way down her leg in a series of small kisses that Rey realized she was *actually* completely immobilized - just in time for him to bite down on her thigh, sucking at the skin greedily.

When he met her eyes, his were cocksure and hungry. She didn’t quite realize how one could look so smug when kneeling until-

*Until she saw what he held in his damn hand.*

Ben Solo stood triumphant, his journal in hand as Rey laid before him, open-legged and panting.

“Oh, Rey. I did say I’d ruin you.”

Ben turned the journal over in his palm, his gaze fixed upon it. Rey struggled, still completely trapped by his will in the Force, her mind too disconnected and confused to give her the focus she’d need to break free of his bonds. Would he - *would he really, after everything* they had done, said, *admitted to each other?* Rey’s heart plunged - *how could* she be so stupid, so gullible, such an idiot-

Ben chuckled darkly, clearly catching the gist of her thoughts.

“It’s good to know that you appreciate the weight of this situation, Rey. *Everything* could change right now. You’ve just given me *everything* I needed, everything I said I was here for. And yet…”

He exhaled slowly, seeming to consider his next words carefully. Reaching toward Rey’s face, Ben held her chin to force her to look right into his imploring eyes. “Yet it’s not remotely all I *want.* And it’s *definitely* not what you deserve. I’ve told you this before, but I truly mean every word. I just want to work something out for us, but I still don’t want you to feel… Obligated. *Guilted,* even, into being with me. All of this is for nothing if you’re not a willing part of it, Rey - if you don’t want this as much as I do.”

Relief swept through Rey at the sincerity of his words. Was that all this was? Did he really lack that much confidence that he was so sure she’d only… *help him* out of guilt or obligation? If all he needed was reassurance that she was - *that she wanted* - “But I - *I do-”

“You do *what,* Rey? *Say* it.”

Rey squirmed, red-faced as she blinked away from his intense stare. It was easy to come to terms
with it in her head, but to give voice to it, to say the words out loud… Ben traced his finger along her jaw, tipping her face back toward him. He knelt before her, leaning forward to look directly into her eyes.

“Come on, Rey. I won’t have you any other way.” He seemed to falter a little in his bravado, leaning forward to brush their foreheads together; he then added quietly- “Please, Rey. Let me know that I’m - I’m not alone in this. That it’s not just the Force, that it’s not just our bond - that it’s us - that there’s actually something - something more here.”

Swallowing tightly, Rey stared right back at him, regaining her confidence. “There is definitely more to us than the Force. I - I do want you. I mean, kriff, Ben... I was the one just digging through your head for - things - to get you to pay attention to me. How much more of a signal do you need?” she mumbled, blushing even more.

Ben raised an eyebrow, shifting his weight back to his feet as he reappraised Rey. “It was hard to ignore that. In fact…” Ben returned his attention to the journal, thumbing through the pages. “Some might consider what you were doing a bit rude, Rey.”

She reddened even further, indignant. “‘Rude?’ I’ll remind you that the only reason I even knew how to do that is because you’ve done it to me!”

Glancing up at Rey from the journal, Ben gave her an odd look. “That was entirely different. Though I certainly could have searched your mind for your darkest fantasies, it would have hardly been appropriate. Besides…” He straightened his back, his expression holding a definite air of superiority. “There are certain ‘things’ I could bring up, that I could show you right now that you’d probably wish-” Ben pulled a blue, folded slip of paper from the pages of the journal, his face lighting up in triumph. “Ah. I knew it.”

Evidently, he was distracted - Rey was no longer pinned back by the Force, leaving her hands free to grasp for the journal. “What is it? Let me see-”

“No. You can get this back once you’ve earned it.” Ben chided casually, holding the journal out of Rey’s reach as his eyes skimmed the blue paper. Whatever was on the page was clearly what he had been looking for, a savage sort of grin spreading across his face as he read. Nodding, he refolded the paper, returning it to the journal as he looked down at Rey, considering her.

“You know, Rey, there was a point in my life when all I wanted was to be a good Jedi; to be what everyone else wanted from me. For a time, I was successful - I was every bit the restrained, emotionless vanguard that one expected. On the surface.” He pocketed the journal, a dark smirk crossing his face. “But I was plagued. Haunted, tormented - and not just by Snoke.”

Once again, Ben sank to his knees before her. “I suspected, but what I just read confirmed it. You think you’ve got the upper hand, finding out my fantasies of you? I’ve been seeing your dreams for years, Rey.”

With a featherlight touch, Ben brushed his fingers across Rey’s temple, and everything went black.
The setting was incredibly familiar to Rey, but seeing it through the lens of Ben’s recollection was like experiencing it for the first time. Niima Outpost, in all its filthy, dusty glory, was spread out before her. She had imagined this more times than she could count. When this was her fantasy, it would just be an ordinary day, until a mysterious stranger came to tell her everything would be ok, that her parents were coming back for her, that they’d find her parents, that she’d get away from this horrible place.

Of course, as Rey got older, the mysterious stranger had a lot more to offer than simply transport away from Jakku. Rey would imagine him in any number of situations - that he was a Resistance soldier here to recruit, a passing pilot who fell madly in love with her - and, in her darker fantasies, a slaver who would buy her, showing her everything about her body that she never knew. At first, the stranger was a sort of amorphous, indescribable figure in black, his looks unimportant… But with the more vivid, fantasies, with the stranger taking a more… active role, his features became more defined, more - Rey shivered at the thought as she realized the implications - much more obviously Ben.

She had those dreams for years. And now, apparently, she was finally going to see the other side of the story.

Rey was there, exactly as she had been for as long as she could remember. She kept her gaze down, concentrating on cleaning her finds so as to avoid another reprimand, or another bruising rap across her knuckles.

Little did she know, she had, however briefly, captured the attention of a hooded, mysterious figure.

He could feel her importance, the Force practically screaming at him - notice this girl!

Even in the vision, Rey gave an involuntary shudder. Wait, this was Ben’s memory, then - he had seen this? He knew about - oh. Oh, dear. This was not a fantasy Rey had ever expected to have drawn out in the open, and now here she was, reliving it in a more visceral way than she had ever thought possible.

And, just as Ben had experienced when she was in his head, Rey would be powerless to let anything happen other than let the dream play out the way it had hundreds of times before. Rey gave a shudder of an entirely different kind - she wondered which version this would be - would he be the pilot? The archaeologist? ...the slaver?

The corpulent Unkar Plutt cowered behind his counter, sweating profusely. He was behind on his payments, and the smuggler he had been relying on for some time had finally come to personally collect payment. There were rumors about this particular pirate - it was said he had unnatural strength, and was capable of making even the most hardened of criminals tremble at his sheer power-

-just like Unkar Plutt was doing now.

“This is the third cycle now, Plutt. Either I leave with my payment, or I go directly to the First Order to inform them that this area is no longer under my protection.” The man growled out, crossing his arms impatiently. “You know damn well that to kill you would be a mercy compared to what they have waiting for you.”
“N-no, my boy, don’t you see there’s no need? One more cycle is all I need, you’re walking away from a fortune - I’ll pay you back double-”

“What kind of idiot do you take me for, Plutt? You know I’ve heard every excuse in the galaxy. Pay up, or suffer the consequences.”

Unkar Plutt wrung his hands tightly, sweating all the more. “I - I have the credits, but I won’t be able to get my hands on them for another half cycle-”

“So you admit you’re wasting my time. I’m off, then.” He turned on his heel to leave-

“Wait! Perhaps we can come to some sort of agreement. I have - I have assets, worth far more than what you’re owed!”

The figure barely looked over his shoulder. “In this dump? What are you going to do, give me the deed to the outpost? I hardly have any interest in things that aren’t credits.”

“The girl!” Plutt gasped out in desperation.

He now turned all the way around to face him. “What girl?”

Sensing his opportunity, Plutt wiped at his forehead, a greasy smile spreading across his wide face. “Don’t think I didn’t notice you looking at my Rey. She’s a good girl, whip-smart and obedient. Even if you don’t want her, she’d sell high offworld - she’s untouched.”

“The girl - she’s… She’s-?”

“She’s mine is what she is. Parents sold her to me years ago, but I’ve made sure to keep her safe. I wasn’t going to wait much longer, thought she’d make for a nice treat for her Uncle Unk-AGHH!”

Unkar Plutt grasped at his throat, tongue lolling out of his mouth as he choked on seemingly nothing.

“I’m no skin trader, Plutt. And don’t you dare confuse me with one,” the man bit out with unusual vindictiveness, his fist clutched at his side as the Crolute’s face rapidly flushed purple. “However…” he turned his hooded face toward where the girl still worked diligently, utterly unaware of what was transpiring in the shadows of the portion dealer’s stall. “Tell me about the girl.”

Wheezing, Unkar Plutt was dropped to his feet heavily, glaring up at the man who so easily held him aloft with those freakish powers. “There’s not much to say. Her name’s Rey, I’ve had her since she was five. Parents sold her to me - she was better off with me anyway, they were deep in the spice. I kept her alive, kept the other men away from her - though she’s gotten pretty good at taking care of herself these last few years. But she’s gotten to that age, now she can make me a lot more money than she ever could scavenging-GCKKKK-”

The stranger seemed almost bored as he waved his hand, causing Unkar Plutt’s throat to constrict once again. “If that’s all she’ll ever amount to here… I’ll take her. But I still expect full repayment within the next cycle. Do I make myself clear?”

Plutt nodded desperately, cowering away. He watched warily as the cloaked figure stalked toward where Rey was sitting.

“Get up. You’re coming with me.”
Rey spun in her seat to face him, blinking in confusion when she was met with nothing but a hooded face. “I - I’m sorry? Who - what-?”

He glanced around, gesturing at her surroundings. “Do you really want to stay? I’m getting you away from here.”

“I don’t understand - you’ll have to speak with Unkar Plutt, he’s my-” she swallowed, looking at her feet in shame. “Well, you’ll have to talk to him.”

“Plutt owes me. We bargained, and he gave me... You.”

Rey’s eyes widened as she fumbled with the hem of her threadbare shirt. “Oh.” She nodded numbly, wiping her grease-stained hands on her front, shaking as she stood. “V-very well, Master...?”

The man swallowed tightly, shifting his weight uncomfortably. “Call me Kylo.”

Rey nodded again, her eyes still on the ground. “Master Kylo.”

Kylo shook his head slightly as he slowly extended his hand toward her, exercising as much caution as he would approaching a wild animal. “Please, Rey. There’s no need for that. When I came here, I saw you, and I felt something - something special. Come with me, and I’ll get you away from all of this. I don’t expect-”

Yes, even here, utterly at the mercy of the man who now literally owned her, fantasy-Rey was, as always, the one to make the first move. It didn’t matter that he wore a cloak that still obscured the vast majority of his face, or that she was at his mercy in ways that she hadn’t even begun to comprehend. Rey launched herself at the man, kissing him desperately upon hearing the words she had begged to hear for so long.

He shouldn’t allow for this, it was hardly appropriate - but this man wasn’t Ben Solo, the one who would fret about treating this girl properly. This was Kylo Ren.

But even so...

He gripped the back of her neck, pulling her from him, forcing her head to tilt up and face him. “Rey,” he growled out, breathing heavily. He wouldn’t be able to control himself for much longer. Even in the shadow of his hood, she could see the gleam of his eyes. “You don’t have to-”

“I want to. Please, Master-”

Kylo groaned as Rey pawed at him, desperate and hungry. He glanced around the outpost - every eye was upon them, all of them watching the white-clad, innocent Rey claw her way up the strange man who had clearly gotten the better of Unkar Plutt.

He scooped her into his arms, her cleaning tools falling to the sandy ground in a series of dull thumps. Kylo hurried toward his ship, eager to get her away, to prove to her that he truly meant what he said.

In the blink of an eye that could only be afforded by the pacing of a fantasy, they were on his shuttle, which was just making the jump to hyperspace, coordinates plugged into some watery green world far from Jakku. Kylo allowed himself to relax in the pilot’s seat, knowing that he was doing the right thing by her-

But dammit, if Rey wasn’t going to make it difficult for him.
Like some sort of lithe, predatory creature, she crawled into his lap and straddled his thighs, eyes sharp and full of promise as she looked down at him. She pushed his hood back from his face, at last looking him directly in the eyes. Reason was rapidly leaving him. He was only left with instinct and desire.

“Thank you, Master Kylo. I would have never - I could have never - it’s all thanks to you-” She bit and licked her way down his neck, pulling his loose cloak from his skin. Before he could even fully appreciate what was happening, she had fallen to her knees before him in the pilot’s chair, pulling his robes aside as she pursued her goal.

Kylo Ren was not Ben Solo. This was her last chance. His eyes blackened, his pupils overtaking the iris as he ran an appreciative hand over the back of Rey’s head.

“I’ve given you every opportunity, Rey. I’ve tried to be the gentleman. But you’re choosing-” he gripped her chin, meeting her hungry gaze fully. “I’ll remind you that you’re choosing to be mine here, Rey. My woman. My whore. My apprentice. My- KRIFF!”

Rey had abandoned all pretense, ripping all of Kylo’s clothing fully aside. He was laid bare before her, his cock erect and throbbing. It didn’t matter that he had been mid-sentence, that she found his every word intoxicating and distracting - all she wanted was to taste him, to lay some sort of claim to him as he had so decisively to her.

Tentatively, she lapped at the base of him, where she saw every vein straining, his skin tight in a way that almost looked painful. But the groan she pulled from him was anything but pained; a low, appreciative sound that practically begged her to continue.

She slowly ran her tongue along the dark vein that pulsed out from the underside of his cock, savoring every twitch he made as she progressed, taking note of where his fingers grasped the arms of the pilot’s chair to the point that the leather cracked and strained from the pressure. His hand on the back of her head may have been the one loosely guiding her progress, but he was the one utterly at her mercy in this moment.

All she did was flex her lips over his tip, her tongue darting out to prepare herself for sinking her mouth deep down his cock-

When he suddenly yanked her away with a grunt, tilting her head back.

“Rey. This is hardly behavior becoming of a Jedi.”

She looked up at him, confused. “What?”

Kylo seized her about the arms, pushing her aside as he slid down to the floor of the cockpit beside her. Suddenly, Rey was aware of small, telling details that were previously absent from the blur of the fantasy - the scar down his face, the length of his hair.

“Oh, Rey. Come on, you should have realized this ages ago - this is only pieces of our fantasies - both of our fantasies - twining together. Like a shared memory - but I didn’t know it was shared until I saw the journal just now. Besides, I just did this to distract you until I got you where I wanted.”
Rey blinked rapidly, coming back to herself. She was laid out on a bed in a room utterly unfamiliar to her. Leaning into a corner, an arm’s length from where she was, Ben stood vigil, swirling a glass of wine in a manner far more casual than the burning intensity of his eyes suggested.

“You’re safe, Rey. Your friends know you’re safe, and you’re completely on-schedule for returning to your base tomorrow, no one knowing any the wiser where you’ve been - or who you’ve been with.” Ben drained the remainder of his glass, eyes still fixed on Rey as he walked toward her.

She had seen his fantasies. He had seen hers. They were utterly at each other’s mercies, yet neither had been willing to voice it aloud until now, when everything was becoming exposed in the flesh, so to speak.

“Now, we need to address that incredibly violating intrusion into my mind earlier Rey. Not to mention the fact that, apparently, you’ve been dreaming about me owning you for at least as long as I have-” Ben sank onto the bed beside her, running an appreciative hand down her side.

“I think it’s long past time that I taught you a lesson, Rey.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, I never meant it to take this long to update, and I apologize sincerely.

First off - obviously, we are nowhere near done with the smut here. They have each delved into one another’s fantasies, and now it is time for things to happen in the flesh. It will get messy. It will get mortifying. But we’re all going to have a good time.

Updates should be much more regular soon - between anonymous shooting threats being written in the bathroom stalls (because that totally happens when you work in public schools every damn time there’s a major shooting. It’s always attention seeking morons, but still clearly concerning… sigh) and the fact that we’re on the final deadline for yearbook, work has been absolute hell these last couple of weeks - and now we have 1500+ kids using a single bathroom! Yay!

Finally, y’all have Mr. Camucia to thank for this getting posted. He has been relentless in his pursuit of this chapter, constantly hounding on me to write whenever he’s been home - not to mention that his very person was borrowed for a few moments here (with his permission!). Much as Ben Solo was probably an outcast in his uncle’s Jedi school, my husband, as a brown guy with a very foreign-sounding name who grew up in an extremely conservative Christian school in the south, was able to loan me some insight on feeling wholly out of place while being surrounded by dogmatic, stuffy ideals and traditions - and just how much that clashes with being a hormone-addled young man.

As always, thank you ALL for the amazing comments, kudos, bookmarks - and now, apparently recs on tumblr? I really only lurk on there (ms-camucia), but thank you to everyone who knows what they’re doing on there for recommending this fic around!
The Leader's Possession

Chapter Summary

"He had already begun getting back at her by mercilessly teasing her earlier - kriff, he could still practically taste her skin from where he bit into her thigh… But Ben would have died a happy man without Rey discovering that, in his weakest moments, all he could fantasize about was her absolute acceptance of him, and her sincerity in promising to never leave. Why couldn’t he just imagine simple, baseless sex like a normal person?"

Chapter Notes

Oh good lord, it’s been forever. Here’s over 8,000 words of highly plot-relevant porn. The next chapters should come out faster, this was a bear to write for reasons that will become evident.

Minor edits on 8/12/18 because I started editing formatting weirdness and some minor syntax issues the other day, and now I'm finishing what I started.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.” -Song of Solomon, 5:5

Ben didn’t expect that he was going to have to play dirty, but Rey left him with no other choice.

He watched her as she shifted in her sleep, her eyes moving rapidly beneath their lids. If he wanted to, he could take a more active role in what she was seeing, but for now, he preferred to wait. After all, it was a dream he had revisited many times - and, evidently, one she had been having since adolescence.

Rolling his shoulder, Ben reflected on just how lucky he’d been. So much had happened over the last couple of days that could have gone wildly wrong, yet here he was - his mysterious Jedi text brimming with lost memories returned to him, the conspiring assassins in his custody, and the last Jedi utterly at his mercy.

Somewhere in his mind, Kylo Ren was fully aroused by just the thought of this situation.
Shifting his hips uncomfortably, he glanced down - apparently, Ben Solo wasn’t a much better man. After all, Rey was unknowingly fulfilling some distant, perverse juvenile fantasy of having a gorgeous woman in his childhood bedroom.

Because of course that’s where they had ended up. He hardly trusted anywhere to be secure after what happened. It was incredibly late, and he was relying on whatever good intentions he had managed to convey toward her friends that Ben Solo would keep Rey safe. Of course, he had told them he’d take her to a hospital, but Ben knew they needed somewhere more… Private, for what he had planned.

Adjusting himself with a somewhat ashamed sigh, Ben mulled over what needed to be done. The journal weighed heavily on his mind. He had done nothing more than flip through it earlier, merely glance at a handful of his writings as he found proof of his and Rey’s shared dreams - and he was already shaken by what he saw.

The young, scholarly Ben Solo had been on the verge of figuring something out. Something huge. Kylo - Ben - whoever he was - had no idea what, exactly, it was, or what it all implied, but he could practically feel the weight of it in the Force when he held his book.

He always knew, somewhere in the back of his mind, where even Snoke had been unable to completely destroy him, that it was possible - that Ben Solo had figured something out that could eliminate the constant conflict that seemed to define the very existence of the galaxy. It was part of why Kylo Ren assumed everything needed to be burned down and started anew.

But it was more than that. It was beyond his current capacity to even begin to understand, given how much of his previous life had been systematically destroyed, but with the resources he had access to as Supreme Leader… With Rey at his side… Together, they could-

Rey chose that exact moment to interrupt his thoughts with a desperate, heated moan.

Ben felt himself flush as he watched her writhe, twisting herself upon the sheets with an almost pained expression on her face. Good, he thought with a smirk. At least he was getting some form of petty vengeance for her earlier intrusion into his mind. He had already begun getting back at her by mercilessly teasing her earlier - kriiff, he could still practically taste her skin from where he bit into her thigh… But Ben would have died a happy man without Rey discovering that, in his weakest moments, all he could fantasize about was her absolute acceptance of him, and her sincerity in promising to never leave. Why couldn’t he just imagine simple, baseless sex like a normal person?

Because you’ve never had sex, idiot. Of course you have to imagine some ludicrous scenario where someone actually cares about you to even get off-

No.

Practically growling at himself, Ben stormed out of his bedroom, opening the door that connected it to the rest of the Organa apartments. Stomping up the stairs to the main sitting area, he snatched one of the abandoned, half-finished bottles of wine from when the Resistance had been here earlier.
He had hoped he wouldn’t need it tonight, but apparently, he still wasn’t able to get out of his own pathetic, self-destructive head for more than a few moments at a time.

Rey deserved better than that tonight.

*I deserve better,* Ben allowed himself to realize as he forced himself to actually grab a clean glass instead of drinking straight from the bottle like a savage.

Trudging back to his room, Ben tried very hard to focus on filling his glass, and not on the fact that, with every step closer to his bedroom, Rey’s lurid gasps only became louder and more distracting.

Well, he had the liquid encouragement now. Time to figure out just how he was going to disappoint Rey in the bedroom-

*Shut UP!*

Ben leaned into the corner of his bedroom heavily, tipping back his wine. This was ridiculous. He was 29 years old - he had pretty much resigned himself to a celibate life the moment he realized that he shared his mind with an ancient being who had been in his head practically since conception, as Snoke had been so fond of reminding him. But that was no longer the case, his mind had been his own for some time now. If anything, he should see this as an opportunity - after all, it wasn’t like Rey had any real experience either-

Choking on a sip, Ben coughed wildly. Of course, of course - he had seen her memories, felt the way she reacted to his awkward fumbling earlier; if anything, she was even more inexperienced than he was. At least he had access to better holoporn than whatever she managed to scavenge from Stormtrooper quarters, as he was well aware was the source of most of her carnal knowledge. *She won’t even know if you’re terrible!*

Emboldened, Ben skimmed the surface of Rey’s mind-

*The sensation of her mouth stretched around his cock was almost more than he could stand, but what actually nearly made him come then and there was when he met Rey’s eyes, her hooded gaze hungry and knowing as he could practically feel her grin, her tongue stretching out past her lips as she sank deeper-*

-and after lingering perhaps a second or so longer than was wholly appropriate, Ben yanked both himself and Rey from the vision of complete, debased lewdness, in what he could only hope was a preview of where this night could go-

Wait - was that too presumptive? Would she think he was some sort of sex pervert? *You are.* The things he had imagined doing to Rey over these last few months, the things he had seen her imagine - it was hardly like either of them were entirely innocent in terms of how they had fantasized about one another.

Except the fact that, in terms of any actual experience, they *were* innocent. *Laughably so. Kriff,* there were so many ways this night could go wrong. May as well just go in headfirst. Ben took a bracing sip of wine as he saw Rey stir back into consciousness, ready to reassure her.
“You’re safe, Rey. Your friends know you’re safe, and you’re completely on-schedule for returning to your base tomorrow, no one knowing any the wiser where you’ve been - or who you’ve been with.”

He chose the words carefully. Sure, he’d make sure she got returned to her precious Resistance by the rapidly-approaching morning, but her friends were currently under the impression that Rey had been taken to a hospital to recover from her multiple lacerations. There was no need to worry her about that, and he had a better plan for her wounds anyway.

“Now, we need to address that incredibly violating intrusion into my mind earlier. Not to mention the fact that, apparently, you’ve been dreaming about me owning you for at least as long as I have—” Ben approached her with far more confidence than he actually had, sinking onto his bed beside her. At least he now had a plan. Sort of. Kriff, he hoped this worked.

“I think it’s long past time that I taught you a lesson, Rey.”

He glanced down at her with trepidation in his gut, fully prepared for her to be confused, insulted, or, at worst, laughing him off.

Instead, he found her wide-eyed and blushing positively crimson. She bit her bottom lip, leaning toward him with a twist of her hips.

“And just what do you plan to teach me, Master?” Rey breathed eagerly.

Giving a small, tight-lipped smile, Ben moved toward the middle of the bed. Without warning, he seized Rey by the armpits, dragging her toward him. She yelped, startled as her legs flailed uselessly. He braced his knees on either side of her body, pulling her to sit between his legs, facing away from him.

“What - what are you doing?” She wiggled, quickly figuring out just how powerless she was in this position, surrounded and caged by his torso and legs. While he would prefer a position where he could fully see her, perhaps an angle where he could more easily bend to kiss her, but this position offered the unique advantage of Rey being utterly in his control. “I can’t see-”

“Hush. I’m going to take care of you.” Ben whispered in her ear, unfastening the top of her dress at the collar.

She practically whined at his words. He had to stop himself from chuckling at his needy girl - the way she was writhing her rear against his groin was distracting, but entirely welcome. Encouraged, he slowly pulled her dress away from her neck, leaving the front just barely clinging to her breasts. Her whole bare back was still littered with dozens of cuts and open knife wounds from earlier, and the sleeves of her once-elegant gown were left in shreds, but the wounds weren’t as dire due to his quick actions. He felt rage bubble up in him at the thought of those who had dared do this to her - but rage was not what he needed right now. Centering himself, Ben concentrated on her, lightly running his fingers over her delicate shoulder blades.

“Rey, I want you to try something. Can you do that for me?”

“Yes, anything.” she replied eagerly.
“Good girl.” He could practically feel her flush at the praise. That was worth investigating further, but later. “I want you to try to enter my thoughts - but not like you did earlier, where you ended up all the way inside. Think back to Starkiller.”

“When you - when we...?”

“Yes, when we were in each other’s minds. Go just deep enough to stay on the surface, you’ll feel me - or at least my immediate actions and feelings. But be careful, it’s easy to fall too far with a willing mind, and I’m not going to fight you.”

There was a moment’s breath, then Ben could fully sense her. She was almost entirely back to her usual shining beacon of Light, but a streak of lust and passion now colored her beautifully. Her touch with the Force was eager, but filled with trepidation as her consciousness bloomed across his mind.

“That’s it Rey. I’m going to help you.”

Confusion colored her presence - she obviously thought this was going somewhere else entirely; somewhere more base and carnal. But her safety was foremost in Ben’s mind, then he’d take care of her in every way she wanted. They’d get there, but first-

“Oh!” She gasped softly as he traced around the largest of the wounds on her back.

“Stay with me. I’m going to heal you, and I want you really paying attention this time, so you’ll know how to do this. Do you understand?”

“Y-yes,” she stuttered, her skin flinching in obvious pain.

Ben wrapped himself around Rey in his mind, feeling her Light seeking out his. With her there, this was so incredibly easy; calling on the Light wasn’t the monumental, painful task it used to be for him. Guiding the Force gently, he allowed it to pass through him directly into the gaping wound, just as he had instructed her the previous day. He hoped that, minds linked like this, healing with the Force would come naturally to her, as it should for one so easily connected to the Light. Rey groaned appreciatively as her skin slowly knitted together with the ebb and flow of the Force around it.

“S-stars, Ben, it’s - that was…”

“Now you try it. See if you can close that cut on your wrist.” Ben began to gently push her back out of his mind, knowing that she had more than enough empathy with the Light in her to manage this on her own-

“Wait! Don’t…” she pulled at his mind, squirming as she hugged her arms to herself, making her seem even smaller. “Can you stay? In - in my head, I mean.”

“Of course,” he replied immediately, puzzled.

“And, um… Can you - can you do the same to me? I want to… Check something.”

“The same - you want me to…?”
Ben reached out to her mind, inquisitive. He found it laid open bare to him, welcoming as she practically yanked him in. It was more tempting than he could bear, his greedy soul immediately taking root.

A quiet, comforting presence surrounded him. She was still within him, and now he had reached into her. It really was almost like Starkiller all over again, their feelings and thoughts flowing and meshing back and forth.

Slowly, Rey peeled back the sleeve of her dress, letting the tattered cloth fall to the bed, revealing the length of the cut on her wrist. She gave it a tentative touch—

Pain shot up her arm - and Ben could feel it too. Just the echo of it, but the sensation was unmistakable. What - what did this mean?

“Rey! This - I didn’t-”

“Wait, Ben. That’s not all. Please, do what you did again.”

Their minds linked, it was even easier to focus on her wound, let the Light wash over him—

They gasped together at the shared sensation. It was blissful, burning hot, teasing, almost—

“S-stars, Rey, that’s what it feels like?” Ben stuttered, mortified. Just yesterday, he had so freely called on the Light to heal her in front of all those people, having no idea what, exactly, it was like for her. No wonder she reacted the way she did, he practically edged her to an orgasm. Now that he knew...

“Please,” she begged, blushing all the way to the tips of her ears. She couldn’t bring herself to say it, but the thought floated across the connection. Don’t stop.

Ben could hardly deny her, now that he was aware of the potential this blessing in disguise the Force had given them. Afraid of hurting her further, he gently pulled her dress sleeves forward, causing the flimsy top to finally fall completely from her chest. Though he tried valiantly to concentrate only on healing her cuts, he couldn’t help but be very aware of Rey’s bare breasts.

His hands sought out hers, twining their fingers together. He bowed his head forward until his forehead met the crown of her head. A shudder passed through both of them as Ben inhaled deeply, concentrating on their connection, pushing the Light and healing back toward her, the Force wrapping along Rey’s multiple smaller lacerations as they closed up one by one. As each cut disappeared to a thin, fine scar, something was building between the two of them that begged to be fulfilled.

Rey sighed, her fingers clutching in Ben’s grip. She released his hands, her arms reaching behind her to allow her fingers to card through his hair. Tilting her head back, she sought out his eyes. “Ben… please.” She slowly took his hands, guiding them to her waist. Touch me.
Ben smiled, kissing her forehead as his massive hands encircled her waist entirely. “Sweet girl, you’ve been so good, and I’ll do whatever you want. But you’re going to have to tell me what, exactly, you want me to do. Out loud.”

“I - I want... I want you to - ahh!” Rey squeaked as Ben allowed his fingers to slowly trail up her sides, coming so close to touching her breasts, but resolutely remaining along her ribs. “Ben, please just touch me.”

“I am touching you, Rey. You’re going to have to be more specific,” he reprimanded softly. He was not entirely sure where this confidence was coming from; something about having a beautiful girl in his arms responding to his every touch made him feel kingly.

With a small growl, Rey released his hair from her fingers, then seized his left hand and placed it on her breast. His hand automatically closed around its small, soft weight, his thumb seeking out her nipple. Her right hand went to her dress, pulling fruitlessly at the cloth bundled around her hips. Sensing her frustration and taking pity on his poor girl, Ben leaned forward and yanked the dress from her legs in a dramatic flourish, leaving Rey clad only in her underwear.

Rey’s fingers immediately went to the waistband of her underwear, trying to pull it off as well. Ben grabbed her wrist, returning her hand to where it had previously been scratching at his scalp quite wonderfully. She glanced up at him, confused. Ben smirked, giving her nipple a small pinch that made Rey’s hips surge forward.

“If you’re not going to specify how you want me to touch you, Rey, I get to decide.”

Of course, Ben had another reason. Still in Rey’s head, the experience of touching her, having even the echo of every sensation she felt - he knew that feeling her bare skin might be more than he could handle at the moment. He’d use this opportunity to learn her body, figure out just how she wanted to be touched, what she liked - then he’d have to break the connection to actually bring her to completion. He was not going to ruin this.

His right hand slowly teased at the soft skin of her thighs, staying just along the hem of her underwear. He let his hand drift further, stroking down toward her bent knees. Rey whined and twisted in his grip - clearly, that was not the direction she wanted him going. But she was still trapped between his legs, with his left hand teasing her nipple all the more mercilessly - her helpless struggle was doing her no good.

“Stars, Ben I - I want...” she gave another pitiful sound, then hung her head as she blushed in shame. “Touch me until I come,” she whispered.

Ben felt triumph in hearing those words fall from her desperate lips, pride surging through him - he had barely even touched her, and she was already begging. “Good girl, Rey. That’s all you needed to say.”

Still refusing to bare her completely, Ben skimmed his fingers across Rey’s incredibly damp panties. She was so sensitive - she throbbed from even this scarest of contact. Ben was only going to be able to stay connected to her for so long if he wanted this to last, but it was incredibly addictive. He pulled her closer to him, his left hand still slowly tracing and teasing at her breasts.
He peppered her neck with kisses and bites, making her cry out for more.

Finally, his right hand dipped just below the hem of her underwear. His fingers teased at the curls, still avoiding where she wanted him most desperately. Ben was more grateful than ever for their connection, since he’d be utterly lost without it in this moment. Carefully, he finally let a single digit seek out the center of her heat. They gasped together, Rey’s body surging toward his hand for more contact. She was… impossibly wet, her entire pussy an utter mess from having been denied so long. Had she been like this since yesterday? Ben swirled his finger slowly to spread the moisture, using the most featherlight of touches to skim back up toward the apex, barely touching at what he hoped was-

“Kriff!” Rey squeaked, jumping at the sensation, clearly overstimulated. Ben practically saw white, and had to stop himself from reacting as well - he had no idea it was possible to be this sensitive; clearly, directly touching her clit was not the right move - he would have to try something different.

Ben took two of his fingers, cupping them directly over her whole mound. Immediately, he could feel a difference - Rey’s hips lifted once again, but this time, the pressure was indirect, and let her grind on his fingers as sensation throbbed through both of them. She moaned as he pushed against her, starting a slow, teasing pace, his fingertips pressing into her, occasionally dipping down just inside her pussy. Her hips swayed eagerly, falling into the rhythm.

“There we go… Stars, Rey, you should see yourself right now. You’re so beautiful.”

“Ben - p-please… inside.”

He couldn’t deny her any longer, she was being so good - and he was burning with the desire just to feel her. Ben let his middle finger dip just slightly more inside her, her nether lips immediately fluttering upon his fingertip. Kriff, she was tight - even with copious lubrication, he had to use no small amount of pressure as he gently edged his finger into her.

With just the tip fully inside, she whined- “Please!”

Rey tilted her hips violently, pulling the entirety of Ben’s finger into her. The feeling was indescribable - if Ben let himself think too much right now, he was going to start imagining how she would feel around his cock, how wet, soft, hot, tight-

“Stars, Rey, you feel so fucking good.” Ben couldn’t stop himself from cursing out, biting down on the side of her neck as he involuntarily ground into her back.

Making an animalistic noise of agreement, Rey began swaying her hips again, trying to re-establish the rhythm they set earlier. Sensing her need, Ben pushed into her until the base of his palm was able to grind up against her core, giving her that indirect pressure again with his finger still deep within her. These repetitive, small motions didn’t seem like they would be enough to bring her to the edge, but her gasps and panting - not to mention the sensations they shared through their connection - said otherwise.

“Kriff! Ben - I - please, kriff, don’t stop doing that, please, please , pleaseplease please-”
This was too much - this was entirely too much. Between hearing her beg, his name on her lips, the feelings traveling between them - he had to completely withdraw from Rey’s head before he went over the edge with her. She moaned at the loss of him from her mind, but her body was too far gone to bring her out of it.

“That’s it Rey. I’m still right here-”

“Ben! Please, I - I-”

He would never tire of hearing her say his name like that. Relentless in the rhythm they had established, he continued pushing her along, watching her move to match his every stroke. Even without their connection active, he could feel her desperation as her thigh muscles trembled and shook.

Feeling generous, Ben leaned forward to whisper in her ear. “You don’t need to beg, Rey. Just come for me.”

Apparently that was all she needed. Rey’s mouth opened in a wordless scream, bearing down on his hand and finger as hard as she could, before her incredibly strong thighs managed to buck away from his hand, too overstimulated. He didn’t need to feel her in the connection to tell she was still throbbing, but now her body was clenching on nothing - that wouldn’t do.

Filled with far more confidence from what he had managed so far, Ben quickly reversed their positions, pulling Rey up and over him to push her back into the mattress, shoving her toward the headboard. She was practically boneless, and decidedly helpless to prevent what he had planned.

‘Planned’ was a strong term. It was more like Ben was so overwhelmed by every feeling - noise, sight, smell - all he had left was to taste.

He hoisted Rey’s ankles over him to rest on either side of his neck, the broadness of his shoulders assuring that her thighs were spread quite far apart. Not even taking the time to truly appreciate the view, Ben pushed up on her taut stomach, then slowly dragged his tongue across her lower lips.

“BEN!”

Rey actually screamed, her hips trying to buck away wildly, but this time - his right hand over her abdomen and left clutching onto her inner thigh - Ben held her in place. Beginning to realize the degree of control he had here, he gave a few experimental licks of varying breadth and pressure, testing out which ones seemed like too much versus ones that had her moaning for more.

Not even connected to her, Ben found the sensations… indescribable. Even his slightest movements caused practically violent reactions from Rey, who seemed to be rendered utterly incapable of comprehensible words as she fell into his torturous rhythm. He wasn’t much better off
- already fairly fargone, too drunk on the power he held over her to even care if some of her more abrupt movements were putting him at risk of breaking his nose. He was also deeply enmeshed in pure sensation, surrounded by her smell, kriff, her taste-

Suddenly - apparently he found a desirable angle - Rey reached down to hold his head in place, her power of speech mysteriously restored.

“Kriff, Ben, I’m - don’t stop, please, just - ohhh…” she babbled, hips rocking as much as Ben would allow.

Snorting, he flicked his tongue harshly against her enough to startle her hands away from where they were rather painfully pulling at his hair. He grasped both of her wrists in one hand, and pushed his shoulders further into her thighs, hoisting up her hips and exposing her even more. Ben was now truly appreciative of just how flexible Rey was - he could now gaze directly into her eyes as he did this.

He never knew how much he wanted that until this moment.

“Look at me.” he growled out, flattening his tongue against her.

Rey’s eyes immediately met his, tear-filled and desperate. Kriff, at this angle, he could feel the effect of his words on her, she was practically gushing. Was that really all she needed? He pulled back a little, letting two of his fingers from his free hand press against her.

“Are you going to come for me again, Rey? I need you to answer me.”

Whimpering, she nodded frantically, rocking against his fingers eagerly. Narrowing his eyes, he nipped on her inner thigh as a reprimand. She flinched with a muffled squeal, but never broke eye contact.

“Is that what I asked you to do? I’m being very patient, Rey. Say it.”

She broke.

“Gods, Ben, please, I’ll do anything, anything, please just make me come again.”

Distantly, Ben was well aware that he was still making this up as he went along. He was by no means a man who remotely knew what he was doing, let alone a sex god - but Rey was doing her damndest to make him feel like one.

He was also painfully aware that this heady, dark sensation of power over her - this was the closest he had felt to being Kylo Ren in days.

Not that Rey seemed to mind.

“Please! Anything you want, kriff, I’m all yours- BEN!”
Rey broke off in a long, ulating scream. Those words were apparently more than he could handle; Ben pushed two fingers deep inside her, pressing them up and toward where his tongue circled around her clit. She didn’t try to fight off the sensations this time, greedily pressing against his face as she rode out every throb, her pussy practically *crushing* his fingers. Rey had nothing more to say than the few gasping sobs that sounded mysteriously like “*Thank you,*” still riding out the very last of her orgasm.

At the end of it all, he expected her to collapse, panting and exhausted. It’s what happened in holoporn, after all. He was *wholly* not prepared for her to grasp his shoulders, pushing him to his back with surprising strength.

Now straddling him, Rey began tearing at his clothes like the savage she was. For all that she was completely nude, he was still in a button-down shirt and dress pants. Granted, the shirt was now missing more than a few buttons, and the pants were apparently similarly doomed as she pawed at them with similar determinedness and purpose.

Under her like this, all of his singleminded bravado faltered - though he was *incredibly* aroused at her enthusiasm, his nagging doubt managed to resurface.

“Rey, you don’t - I don’t expect - really, it’s not something-”

She cut him off by sealing her mouth to his, moaning as she licked along his lips. Ben couldn’t help but be very aware that his mouth was covered in - well, *her* - but she certainly didn’t seem to mind. In fact, her kisses led her to trail down his chin and jaw, where she had been *dripping* just moments ago.

Rearing up, she yanked at his fly as she went. Ben’s cock was still restrained by his underwear, something Rey decided to remedy by once again using that surprising strength to remove his pants and briefs in one decisive movement.

Well, this was it - she had him completely laid bare now. She crawled up his body, bracing his knees between her thighs as she straddled him. Ben glanced up at her through his hair, fully prepared for her to be disgusted, or shying away from him-

Certainly, he wasn’t ready for the wide-eyed, openmouthed stare he received instead, her eyes traveling his body as she looked upon him with undisguised thirst. Apparently, his painfully erect cock shared none of Ben’s crippling self-esteem problems, straining toward Rey in a wholly revealing and embarrassing sort of way that only your body can achieve when it’s betraying your intentions.

“Well… Here I am,” he muttered nervously. “Seriously, Rey, you don’t have to-” his cock gave another revealing twitch- “I don’t want you to feel obligated- *ahhh*…”

Rey apparently had no reservations or seductive tact; she immediately ran a curious finger along the bottom of his cock, pressing up ever so slightly. Her small fingers only exuded the slightest amount of pressure, clearly regarding him with the same gentle touches he had to learn to use on her.

It was almost adorable, if Ben wasn’t so certain he was going to terrify her.
“Show me,” she ordered, sitting back on her feet, still straddling his knees.

“Wh-what?” he breathed, once again riding that horrible line between fear and arousal.

“Show me how you-” Rey faltered a little, some of her previous confidence draining out of her.

“Yourself. I don’t - with me, you were so-”

“Stars, Rey, I had no idea what I was doing. You showed me everything.”

She momentarily looked confused, then realization dawned over her. Carefully, as though afraid of scaring him off, Ben felt her probing at the very edge of his mind. Ben was very unsure here - it was one thing, what he did for her, but her in his mind as he…? He supposed it would be unfair to not allow her the same courtesy he so gleefully used to learn her body. But he was afraid of what she’d see - thoughts and feelings even he hadn’t fully reconciled with regarding how he felt about her-

“Kriff!” he bit out as Rey wrapped her hand around him fully, sinking her fist down.

She gave a small gasp, clearly feeling that strange echoing sensation Ben had so thoroughly enjoyed when doing the same to her. Much like he did, she experimented, trying different touches and amounts of pressure.

She was adorable, puzzling over him like this was something complex. Ben found himself entirely distracted from his earlier reservations as he leaned back and watched her lightly stroke him. Her brow furrowed in concentration as perhaps she began to realize just how different their bodies were. Finally taking pity on her, Ben closed his hand around hers, where she had been holding him as though he would shatter in her grip.

“Look at me, Rey.”

He held her gaze, grasped her hand around him tightly, and moved her thumb to rest on the back of his head.

“Oh. Oh!” Rey gasped as Ben bucked up into their hands. Clearly, she was startled by the violence of their movements, but was enjoying the effect over the connection.

Giving a few lazy thrusts, he quickly realized this was not going to last - the only way he could draw this out was to not look at Rey’s beautifully expressive face, but that wasn’t an option.

“Is this okay?” He asked with a hoarse voice, using their hands to give a few more quick, small strokes.

“Uh… Uh-huh…” Rey replied dazedly, her eyes sinking to where his cock was now smooth from the few droplets that had leaked out. Her hips were giving small, responsive sways to their movements.

“Did I tell you to stop looking at me?”

Her eyes snapped back to his, and she bit her lip slightly in a small grin. “No... *Master.*”

A throb tore through him at her face, those words- “Kriff, Rey, you’re…” He groaned at the sight
of her eyelids fluttering as she felt the same sensation. He couldn’t hold out any longer. “Rey, I’m close - you - are you sure-?”

She released his cock, and he felt his stomach drop a little, assuming he finally scared her off - until she used both of her hands to suddenly grasp him with the strength and intention he had showed her. His hips thrust up automatically, and she matched his stroke perfectly.

“Rey… Please, just… I… I…” He continued bucking up into her hands, overwhelmed that this was Rey, that this was happening. It was too much to take - he suddenly leaned forward, his thrusts more violent as he captured her lips, still keeping his eyes open - afraid to miss even a second of her panting, beautiful face.

“Ben,” Rey breathed as she pulled away, her eyes practically rolling to the back of her head as her strokes grew more short and intense. “Ben, please, I’m all yours-”

“Rey!”

His vision practically went white, his hearing just focused enough to hear Rey get dragged over the edge with him in the connection. Leaning up, Ben immediately found her mouth again, needing to taste and smell her, assure that she was really there.

A few more throbs passed between them before she loosened her grip. Ben pulled away from the kiss, panting. Rey giggled at what he was sure must have been a strange sensation for her, these particular aftershocks. Still in disbelief over what just happened, he collapsed beside her on the bed, breathing heavily as he stared up at her. “Stars, Rey, that was…”

“I know.” Rey smiled wickedly, inspecting her hand, stretching her moisture-covered fingers, meeting and holding his gaze. And then - Ben wouldn’t believe it if it didn’t happen before his very eyes - her tongue darted out, licking at the seed still there. Ben felt his mouth hang open as his cock tried valiantly to go rigid once again, but he wasn’t as young as he used to be.

“R-Rey! That’s…” he stuttered - he could feel that he had flushed wildly red from his ears to his neck.

“It’s what?” Rey asked innocently, though the look in her eyes said otherwise.

“Lewd…” Ben muttered under his breath before he could stop himself.

She giggled, covering her mouth with her hand. “You’re so proper, even after what we just did. What you did to me.”

“Well, that’s different. It’s fine when I do it to you.” Ben retorted huffily, refusing to meet Rey’s eyes as he realized that he might be a bit hypocritical in this particular mode of thinking. Well, it was fine what he was doing to her - he’d do anything for her. She was the one positively corrupting him in a way he could have never anticipated.

Rey dissolved into peals of laughter, falling back on the bed beside him. “Oh, Ben. I think you might have a bit higher an opinion of me than I deserve. I’m not like you, I’m just…” -she gestured vaguely at herself- “Me. You’re the one who’s all proper and princely.”
Ben scoffed. “I’ve hardly been ‘princely’ in years. And you deserve everything, Rey.” He gave her a long look, chewing the inside of his lip as he thought rapidly. Nodding to himself, he stood, pulling his underwear back on as he shuffled across the room.

He could sense her vague confusion as he opened and shut several drawers, seeking something out that was doing a damn good job evading him. Ben felt her eyes on him as he moved around the room, then she gave the mental equivalent of a shrug as she wrapped herself in the bedsheets, toying with the hem.

Rey seemed preoccupied - Ben stepped out of his room, crossing the hall to his mother’s chambers. Just get what you need, don’t get distracted - but already, memories stirred and woke upon seeing the contents of this room, how much had changed, and just how much was exactly as he remembered. He was quickly able to find what he needed in a drawer - his mother was a creature of habit, apparently. Don’t think about her, just focus, don’t think, don’t think, don’t think-

Ben’s eyes drifted to the sitting area, where a good dozen or so elaborate dresses had been draped across the furniture. Some he recognized from official portraits of his late grandmother Padme Amidala, some were utterly foreign to him. Apparently, this is where his cousins had been staging for getting Rey ready.

On a whim, he grabbed a loose, beige dress that looked not entirely dissimilar to the sheet Rey was currently wearing - he could hardly send her back in the shredded, bloodied gown in what would perhaps be the most awkward walk of shame in the history of the galaxy.

Finally armed with everything he needed, Ben returned to his room to sit directly behind Rey on the bed. She seemed startled - evidently, she had been in a world of her own thoughts - and tried to turn around, but Ben held her shoulder. “Stay there.” he commanded softly. A thrill ran through their connection, and she eagerly sat up with perfect posture. Another note to file away for later.

He gathered her bedraggled hair, carefully carding through the very knotted ends with his fingers. The elegant braid from earlier was in utter disrepair, and anyone with half a brain would see the state of her and immediately know what she’d been up to - that wasn’t what Ben wanted anyone to think of her. In fact, he had a very specific message, for a very specific audience.

Confusion clouded Rey’s thoughts as she felt a brush pull through her hair. “Ben, what are you…?”

“You’re a mess, I can hardly send you back to your comrades like this. Just because you refuse to act properly doesn’t mean you can’t look the part,” he replied with mock haughtiness.

Rey mumbled something accusatory under her breath, but allowed him to continue unimpeded. He was as gentle as he could be in untangling her hair, starting from the ends and slowly working his way to pulling from her scalp. As he sectioned off her hair in several places, she shifted beneath him uncomfortably.

“Yes?” Ben replied in response to her unasked question.

“It’s nothing. It’s just…” Rey bowed her head forward slightly, and from behind her, Ben could see her ears tinge pink. “Where did you learn to - why did you-” she huffed angrily, then rephrased her query. “Divyya and Meghana didn’t tell me much. What, exactly, is it with you and hair?”
Ben quirked a brow, not entirely sure how much information he wanted to divulge here. She might, quite possibly, think him even weirder than he already feared. “Well, it’s not just me. Hair is a major tradition from Alderaan, and many other planets that form the Elder Houses.”

Letting his hands go to work, his fingers began a fast, practiced, twisting dance across her scalp, regathering the strands of hair as he went. “Braids, in particular, are an Alderaani practice. There’s significance to the styles, and who braids them for you…”

Ben swallowed thickly, feeling his neck go hot. How could this be so intimate and embarrassing after what they just did?

“...And unbraids them.” he finally added in a whisper.

Giving a small nod, Rey seemed to mull over her next words carefully.

“When, no, why did you learn this?”

Ben definitely felt his blush deepen. How much should he tell her here? She deserved honesty, but at the same time...

“Well, I had longer hair, once. Though I definitely would have never used this style for myself. I was taught how to do this when it was thought - when I was - my mother…” Ben gave a frustrated exhale, then regathered himself. “There were certain traditions that I was expected to uphold. As the prince of Alderaan. For whomever…”

It was not possible that his face could grow any redder in this moment. Why couldn’t he just lie? He could have said that he knew how to braid hair from some previous clandestine lover (hah!). Why did he have to go and ruin everything like he always did? This all started as some half-assed attempt to make Rey feel as special and worthy as she was in his eyes, declare what she meant to him in a very specific way. He may as well just get this over with so he could die of embarrassment in peace.

“...for whomever the princess would be,” he finished softly, wincing.

“...oh.” Was all Rey could manage, an incredibly intense blush across her face as well.

There were a few more silent seconds of braiding, then Ben gave a slight tug to Rey’s hair, making sure the pressure was perfectly distributed across her entire scalp. It was a loose crown of braids, with two smaller braids looping down just past her ears, a style Ben knew how to create with nothing but a pair of hairpins and elastics.

“T-thank you?” Rey stuttered out.

“It was my pleasure.”

Ben glanced at the bedside chronometer. It was so late, it was early; he needed to get her to the docks soon. “When you get back, tell my mother…” Looking Rey up and down, still clad in
nothing but his bed sheet - he was really glad he grabbed the dress - Ben hoped he was doing the right thing here. “Tell her I need time. We need time. If my old notes in the Jedi journal are even half as… As incendiary as I suspect - this could change everything, Rey.”

She looked crestfallen, her face rapidly turning stony as the weight of the galaxy outside this bedroom seemed to fall on her shoulders all at once. “But Ben, that’s… It’s impossible. We can’t just… You’re the Supreme Leader of the First Order, we’re at war, in case you forgot.”

“I didn’t-” Ben replied vehemently, but stopped himself short of going on a rant. This wasn’t Rey’s fault - except it kind of is, she could have joined me ages ago, we could have figured everything out and we’d be together - Ben shook away the bitter accusation - it wasn’t fair. He was well aware of the situation they were in, and just how close they were to possibly losing everything.

But, played right - they could have everything.

Breathing deeply to calm himself down again, Ben really hoped this was what he needed to do.

He went to his desk, picked up his journal, and wrapped it in one of the shreds of black fabric that had completely detached from Rey’s gown. Carefully, he gathered the beige dress he took from his mother’s room, placing the wrapped book on top. Kneeling before the still gloriously mostly-nude Rey, he presented her with the small, strange pile, looking directly up into her eyes.

“Two days, Rey. In two days, I want you to join me on Scipio, just you and me. For right now, I’m going to escort you back to the docks and send you back to the Resistance. I don’t care what you tell them, but Scipio is a neutral world and home of the InterGalactic Banking Clan, so it should hardly be odd that a member of the Resistance would need to go there after this OWT event.”

She had a deeply suspicious look in her eyes, but wasn’t stopping him so far. Nodding to himself, Ben continued.

“My - Snoke had a vault on Scipio, a vault that is now solely mine. I went there many times as his apprentice when I was tracking down Jedi artifacts - the holocrons I promised are all there. All I ask is that you join me there, and give me time.”

“How long?”

Ben’s heart raced - he had really expected her to fight him on this.

“As long as you’ll give me.” he whispered, not even trying to disguise the desperation in his voice.

Rey gave a slow blink, reaching forward to accept the dress and journal. She set the journal aside, and pulled the dress over her head, tying it at the waist. He had to stop himself from reaching over to help her - he didn’t want her to feel pressured in any way.

“Ok, Ben. Just…” She sighed, looking lost. “I’ll have to - Leia deserves to know. I’ll lie to everyone else as much as you need me to, but I’m not doing this until I talk to her.”
Relief surged through Ben - he couldn’t believe this was working. From the gala to the cab ride to the braids he put in Rey’s hair, he was more grateful than ever that somehow, everything he set up over these last two days seemed to be coming together so magnificently. In fact, with his particular brand of aggressive pessimism, it almost scared him, but he’d fret and worry later.

“Of course, Rey. Tell - tell the General whatever you want. In fact, I’ll get you on your way back there right now, I’m not letting you go to the docks unescorted.”

Rey looked confused. “Now? I thought…” She blushed, glancing toward the bed. “What time is it, anyway?”

“Almost 0600.”

“Kriff! That’s when we leave!” she snatched up the journal, sprinting barefoot out of his room. Before he could even fully register that she left, he heard several dull thumps come from the room she was staying in as she quite literally threw her possessions together. Ben shrugged, finished his wine, pulled his shirt and pants back on, and scooped up Rey’s shoes.

Looking somewhat manic, she burst back into his room with a bag over her shoulder and an armful of books. “Let’s go!” she urged.

Ben walked right up to Rey, smiling down at her as he dangled her shoes before her face. “Forgetting something?”

He chuckled at her wide-eyed panic. “Rey, they’re not going to leave without you.” Ben gently pushed her back toward the bed to sit, which was far easier to do with her heavy bag throwing off her balance, as he knelt before her.

He always found himself on his knees in front of her, didn’t he? Not that he minded in the slightest. There really wasn’t time to linger, though, so he gently slid her shoes back on her feet, tying the delicate straps around her ankles. He bent to kiss the top of her foot, looking into her eyes imploringly.

“Two days, Rey. Scipio. Please.”

“Yeah, ok, sure - let’s go, Ben!”

Rey extended her hand to him, an offer to pull him to his feet that he gratefully accepted - though she threw him off when she pecked him on the cheek, a small, private smile on her face. They had come so far in such a short amount of time - she was so incredibly trusting of Ben. She trusted him with her body, her mind, her future - and maybe even her heart.

A twinge of guilt went through Ben as she practically dragged him out of the apartment. It wasn’t a huge deal - if she kept her word, she wouldn’t even notice. But at the end of the day, he was still not an entirely good man no matter what Rey hoped, and liked to have insurance. He had been betrayed too many times to not act this way.

The journal he gave Rey was not Ben Solo’s, but Kylo Ren’s.
General Leia Organa had many hopes for how her loyal Resistance members would fare at the OWT gala. Several messages from Poe Dameron had been concerning, but hardly unexpected. Not with what she hoped to accomplish, anyway - the General always had several schemes up her sleeve, and a lot of fingers in numerous pots. When she saw the group arrive in a brand-new Corellian destroyer, she was satisfied, and eager to hear more about what negotiations they had managed to secure.

Watching them disembark from the ship - some of them quite clearly still hung over, others arm in arm exchanging knowing glances, others still regaling wild stories - Leia was reminded for the thousandth time just how young so many of these fighters were. Her heart ached at the sight of them, and she pled desperately to anything that would listen that she was on the correct path, that she had made the correct choices, that she was not sending yet more children to their certain demise-

Then Leia’s heart very nearly gave out as the last of them made their way down the gangway.

Closing up the rear in a long, flowing dress befitting a princess, her arms full of books and her eyes with a faraway look, was Rey. The knowing smile on her practically glowing face would have been enough to give the General all the hope she needed - but Rey’s hair shook Leia to her core.

Her hair was in a beautiful crown of braids, set in a very specific way. There was only one other person who would know what it meant. Who would even know how to do it.

The would-be prince of Alderaan was sending her a message loud and clear. And, for the first time in years, Leia Organa allowed herself to feel true hope for her beloved, wayward son.

“Luke, you were right about him. You were right.”

Chapter End Notes

Would you like a little plot with your porn?

Hoo boy, hope you all haven’t given up on me, and that this mega-long chapter of smut has been worth the wait. Because there ain’t no smut like plot relevant smut, and I really wanted to make sure that this chapter ended where it did.

I gave myself three challenges this chapter - E rated not-actual-sex, a male perspective, and crippling anxiety. I only have experience with two of those, so it was interesting.

For anyone wondering - yes, I do have this whole thing planned. All I’m going to say is that I had it roughly outlined since December 17, and with pretty much every piece of new canon information, I have only felt more justified in where I’m taking this. I’d estimate Footnotes is about halfway done, and I hope you all are in for a wild ride - we’re approaching the climax, and shit is about to go down.
Also, I did the Naughty Fanfiction Writer Thing and started writing something else. It’s called Fulcrum, and that’s all I’m going to say for those of you who are probably able to read just that word alone and know where I’m going with that one.

As always, thank you all so much for your wonderfully insightful and encouraging comments, and all the kudos. I’ll be replying back to comments on the last couple of chapters once I’m not on internet that costs 75 cents a minute - yes, this update is coming from Spring Break (woo hoo!), and I just simply don’t have that kind of money.
Chapter Summary

“The way everyone looks at me, talks about me - it’s like I’m some legendary… thing that I’m really not. Not yet, at least, I need to learn more. And from what I’ve read so far… I’m not sure... I... want to be a Jedi?”

An ashen look came over Leia’s face, suddenly making her look years older. Shakily, she took another long drink from her tea, the silence filling the air between the General and the would-be Jedi.

“That’s… That’s not the first time I’ve heard - you sound just like Ben.”

Chapter Notes

I AM A PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER AND IT IS MAY. Forgive me.

Minor edits on 8/12/18 because I started editing formatting weirdness and some minor syntax issues the other day, and now I'm finishing what I started.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I would lead you and bring you to my mother's house – she who has taught me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates." -Song of Solomon, 8:2

General Leia Organa was not a woman one would accuse of being anything less than forward and direct.

That, combined with her frightening reputation of being incredibly intuitive, meant that she was not someone one wanted to encounter off-guard. Certainly not a person to approach anything less than full preparation, and with nothing to hide.

So when Rey, deep in a hazy, sleep-deprived daydream, practically walked over the diminutive General Organa on her way off the docks on Dantooine, her clouded mind was jarred into awareness, like touching an exposed circuit. There was no escape here. She had so much to hide. The Bluntness was coming. Her thoughts were rapidfire, and increasingly horrifying.

It’s General Organa.
Leia Organa.

Ben Solo’s mom.

Supreme Leader Kylo Ren’s… mother.

Ben Solo, who you just… kissed.

Kriff, you did a hell of a lot more than kiss him - you can practically still taste him.

Maybe she doesn’t know he was even there - no, Poe told her. But she has no idea what we...

“Rey. Aside from all the excitement with the assassination attempts, I trust you had a pleasurable journey?”

Leia’s smile was genuine, reaching her sparkling eyes - but Rey couldn’t help but cower before the tiny woman. ‘Pleasurable journey’ repeated through Rey’s head over and over, accompanied by positively debauched images of exactly the sort of journey she had been taking with Ben. In this moment, she was incredibly glad that Leia didn’t have the full-on mind-reading powers of her son-

What if she does.

Leia reached toward Rey’s presumably panicked face, gently cupping her chin as she tucked an errant strand of hair back behind her ear, and into her braids.

“I would love for the two of us to sit down and have a nice, long chat over the next few days. But... I’m getting the impression that time is on neither of our sides.” Her hand lingered, trailing down Rey’s intricately twined hair. “What was his offer?”

“Two days, then I meet him on Scipio - wait, what?”

An eerily familiar smirk of triumph spread across Leia’s face, her eyes alight. Rey didn’t know how she did it, but the damning words just spilled out of her - kriff, this woman truly was Kylo Ren’s mother, the daughter of Darth Vader, after all.

“Uh - I meant to say - what it really-”

With a sympathetic smile, Leia patted Rey’s shoulder, not-so-subtly guiding her forward. “I know. Come on, this is no place to discuss this. Too many ears.”

Rey staggered forward, mind racing as she was led toward the main building of the Dantooine enclave.

Just how much does this woman know??
By the time Rey was seated in the secluded room acting as the General’s office, she was practically trembling in her chair, shaking fingers holding the cup of tea Leia had pressed into her hand.

*She knows. She knows. Kriff, she knows what you did with Ben. She’s going to think you’ve betrayed everything the Resistance stands for-*

“You’re wondering what I know. Or is it how? Doesn’t matter.” Leia stated casually, reaching into a desk drawer to procure a half-full bottle of amber liquid, which she pointed toward Rey with an inquisitive brow. She shook her head rapidly, still very much in recovery from the previous 48 hours’ drinking. Shrugging, Leia poured an appreciable amount into her own tea, placing the bottle between herself and Rey.

“I figured I might need this. There are things that no mother…” Leia sighed, meeting Rey’s eyes directly. “I can have my hopes, but I can’t discount what I’ve heard and what I know. But I won’t believe anything until I hear it from you. *Please* tell me that Ben - Poe seemed to think that my son… Coerced you, at best.” Swallowing tightly, Rey could tell that these next words pained the General to even consider. “That he may have used the Force, made you think - taken you against your-”

“No!”

Even Rey was taken aback by the strength of her own response. Did she really believe that Ben had…? She didn’t even want to consider it. It was absurdly wrong, to think of the slightly awkward, unfailingly well-mannered, voracious virgin she had gotten to know better in private over the last few days doing… *that.* But Leia didn’t have the benefit of seeing Ben Solo the way Rey did. For months, she had only known that her son had become Kylo Ren - the man who murdered her husband.

“Um, no. It wasn’t like that at all. Ben really was - *very* nice. A gentleman.”

Sinking into her chair with visible relief, Leia let out a breath it seemed she had been holding for some time. “It’s not something anyone ever wants to even consider, but with everything he’s done, his father…” she drank deeply from her tea, shaking her head. “I was certain he was totally gone. Nothing would have surprised me. But, between Luke, you-” Leia gave Rey’s hair a meaningful glance over the rim of her cup, a smile in her eyes. “- I had reason to hope again.”

Self-consciously, Rey reached toward her braids. “I - I think you’re giving me too much credit, Ge-Leia.”

“You don’t get *enough* credit, Rey. I’ve put an incredible amount of pressure on you, and you’ve given me back more than I ever dreamed possible.” She set down her tea, slowly running her finger around the rim of the cup. “I think it’s past time someone asked what you want.”


“Yes, what I want? I think you’ve been with the Resistance for the last few months, but I know better than anyone that the individual goals of a Jedi and what the Rebellion, the Republic - the Resistance needs can be two very different things.”

“I - I want…” she worried the hem of her dress, mind racing. This was her chance to come clean with Leia, but it was incredibly nerve-wracking. She needed to soften the blow of what was going to be nearly-unbelievable information. “I want to continue my studies.”

Leia nodded, encouraging her to continue.
“The way everyone looks at me, talks about me - it’s like I’m some legendary... thing that I’m really not. Not yet, at least, I need to learn more. And from what I’ve read so far... I’m not sure... I... want to be a Jedi?”

An ashen look came over Leia’s face, suddenly making her look years older. Shakily, she took another long drink from her tea, the silence filling the air between the General and the would-be Jedi.

“That’s... That’s not the first time I’ve heard - you sound just like Ben.”

Rey’s stomach sank, desperate to turn this around - “Wait, it’s - that’s not what I meant-”

“No, Rey, please listen. I’ve heard those words before, and I should have listened then. Before I...” She breathed slowly, bolstering herself as the worn look melted from her face. “It’s not enough to undo what happened, but I’m listening now.”

This was her chance. She couldn’t delay telling Leia the truth anymore - the whole truth.

With a numb hand, Rey’s fingers rucked up the side of her dress, exposing her thigh. Leia’s blasé expression of a single, lazily raised eyebrow was unexpected, but welcome as Rey unbuckled the belt keeping the journal strapped to her thigh. It was still wrapped in the black gauze of the previous night’s ruined dress, and felt unusually heavy in her hand as she slid it across the desk toward Leia.

“I want him.”

Leia’s eyebrows positively shot into her hairline.

“I - I mean - I want him on my - on our side.” Rey exhaled shortly, frustrated and incredibly embarrassed. ‘I want him,’ and so blatant! Kriff, if Ben ever found out... It’s not like it wasn’t accurate - but to his own mother? Why was she so bad at this?

“Ben - Kylo-” Rey immediately regretted letting that name slip, as Leia visibly flinched. “-he and I have... a connection in the Force.” Steeling herself, Rey continued. “We don’t know how or why, but it’s there. We’ve been using it to... communicate.”

Leia nodded slowly. “My brother and I we - had something similar. I could sometimes hear him, and he could sense me, even over great distances.”

Rey felt guilt bubble up in her. “This is... a bit more than sensing and hearing each other. Ben - I can see him when we’re connected. We talked to each other. We can touch. He can see me, and recently...”

She didn’t have the nerve. Leaning forward, Rey seized the bottle still between her and Leia, pouring a generous amount into her tea, which she immediately tipped back.

“Ben can see my surroundings in the connection. And he’s been... Helping me.”
“When - how did this happen?”

“I’m not sure. Snoke said that he was the one to connect our minds but…” Rey trailed off, taking another fortifying sip of extraordinarily boozy tea. “That was before Ben killed him.”

Leia rapidly rose to her feet, standing at her desk with her arms braced on the surface before her.

“Ben - he - he did it.” she whispered, staring ahead blankly.

Nodding numbly, Rey continued. “Before, when we had been talking through the connection, I had a vision that he would turn. I went to him, and he had me brought to Snoke - but I was confident in my vision. The moment he killed Snoke, I was sure it would come true, I thought I would be enough. We fought side by side, and I felt more connected than I ever have in my whole life. In the end, I tried to get him - but then he just - he wouldn’t…”

Rey felt her eyes get hot, as a mist of tears overcame her vision. As much as she and Ben had come so far in genuinely understanding each other, the utter hurt of him not knowing what she wanted, what she needed from him in that moment… It was her greatest moment of failure; she should have realized that killing his longtime tormentor wasn’t going to be enough to make him turn. She had so much faith in him, but he just… For the thousandth time, her mind turned the moment and his words over and over. Maybe if she had said something better, done something differently, maybe if she thought she was worth it, maybe if the circumstances had been literally anything else, maybe, maybe, maybe-

Leia leaned forward to take Rey’s hand with a firm grip. “You couldn’t have done anything more, Rey. And I don’t expect you to be able to turn him now, either. Snoke had been influencing him before he was even born, he’s too far into the Dark-”

“No!” Rey vehemently proclaimed, defending Ben once again as she took Leia’s hand in both of hers. She had to get her to understand, to see the Ben she had gotten to know. “He just wasn’t ready then - I know there’s light in him, and there always has been.”

“I know that too, Rey. I’ll admit, for a while, I thought he was totally lost. On Crait…” Leia sighed, sinking back into her chair as she released Rey’s hand. “I had lost all faith. But it was never your duty to make him turn back. That’s a decision he has to make for himself, and from what I can tell, he’s on that path.” Leia stated with conviction.

“Maybe…” mumbled Rey, running her fingers through a braid.

“You have to understand, Rey - I may not have seen my son for almost a decade now, but if I know anything about the boy he was to guess at the man he has become… He has bigger goals than anything Snoke ever set out for him. And they definitely involve you. It may not be your job to turn him, but you - your influence, your charms-” Leia punctuated the word with a wry smirk- “- absolutely can help guide him.” Her fingers ran across the journal where it laid on the desk between the two women. “I also have a feeling that this has something to do with all of what’s happened?”

Rey’s spine stiffened. Kriff, she had nearly forgotten that she even put the journal there in the first place. There was a point she was trying to make with the journal - she was trying to get Leia to see
that Ben truly was more than Kylo Ren. She hardly expected Leia to come to terms with this so quickly, so easily accept that her husband’s murderer could be swayed to the Light - but perhaps Rey had underestimated the faith and hope of a mother’s connection to her son. It’s not as though she had any familiarity with the concept.

But how was she going to explain something as complicated as the journal, and everything that had happened because of it? The beginning seemed like the best place to start. Rey drained the remainder of the tea, ready to put all of her cards on the table.

“When Snoke died, our connection… didn’t. For a time, I hoped it would die - after what he did, I didn’t want to see him, to be reminded... And it would prove that our connection was nothing more than something Snoke created and used to manipulate us. But it wasn’t. I saw him everywhere; it was as though the more I tried to ignore the connection, the more I would see him.”

Sighing, Rey twisted a thread from the fabric binding the book shut. This was about to get… intimate.

“This was among the Jedi texts I brought from Ach-To. When I was here at the base, I was just having so many problems just trying to translate the other texts, much less understand any of it. Maybe it was the Force, maybe it was dumb luck... I pretty much ignored this book until last week. From what I know, the other books are the originals, and this is just a rare translation of a lost Jedi text - but that’s not why it’s important.”

Rey met and held Leia’s gaze. “This belonged to Ben. He left notes.”

Leia slowly closed her eyes, and a soft smile spread across her face. “Of course he did.”

“No, it’s true - there’s translations, comments - kriff, there’s poetry - here, I’ll show you-”

As Rey made to unwrap the journal, Leia’s hand once again enveloped her own. The General’s eyes were watery, but she almost looked as though she was holding back laughter.

“I believe you, Rey. That boy has been covering every scrap of paper in writing since he could hold a pen - it was almost worrisome at times. All I want to know is what you found out that gave you such faith in my son.”

“Well, he did write down a lot.” Rey squirmed uncomfortably - this was really the part she had been dreading. Breathing quickly, she poured more whiskey straight into her teacup.

“At first, he said that he had nothing to do with this journal anymore, but he was desperate to get it back. And it’s because he didn’t remember it - any of it. The more I read, the more we read - the more he remembered, and the more I got to see Ben Solo. His thoughts, his writings, his dreams.”

Rey took another bracing sip. “Ben - he thinks that he discovered something that Snoke didn’t want him remembering. Something that could change everything - something so huge that he had every thought connected to it, every memory about the journal wiped away. Ben offered to help me with my training if I join him on Scipio, so we can try to figure this all out.”

Rey felt Leia on the edge of her seat, clearly with a million questions. “Wait - that’s not all.”
“I want you to know I didn’t trust him at first. At all. I was sure that he was just trying to get the journal back so that I wouldn’t have any power over him, but then… Then he helped me when I gave that speech to the Resistance. Then showed up at the OWT event. Then he saved my life - twice.”

Her heart was racing. This was it. She couldn’t look Leia in the eye.

“Then we… we kissed.” Rey whispered, staring resolutely at her hands.

She moved on quickly, hoping that somehow Leia didn’t hear or register what she just said.

“Ben had a thousand opportunities to take the journal and leave me - kill me. He could have had every member of the Resistance assassinated at that gala. There was every chance to take advantage - of the situation, of - of me, but he didn’t. He was - well, at the event, he was arrogant, mean to my friends, and a complete snob - but with me, he was kind, considerate, and just… Ben seemed… desperate. Like he wants nothing more than for me to just… Understand him. And I think I’m starting to.”

She had almost confessed everything. Just a little more… “The dreams I mentioned - the ones he wrote about? He had the same one over and over, always about a girl. A starving, lost girl in the desert. He mentioned that his masters were worried about how fixated he was on this vision, but he was so sure she was real, and needed help.”

Rey swallowed back what was decidedly more whiskey than tea at this point. “Ben wasn’t alone. I had dreams about what I now realize was him, too. Ages before Takodana. We’ve been having visions of each other for years.”

Leia nodded slowly, as though this seemed to confirm something she had suspected. “So what you’re saying… You and Ben…?”

“I - I think it’s called a Force Bond. Whatever we are… was meant to happen.” Swallowing tightly, Rey struggled to get the next words out, looking at her lap, the hot tears coming back to cloud her vision once again. “Leia - General - I completely understand if you don’t want me around. If you need me to l-leave the Resistance, I’ll - I’ll go. I know I’m a huge liability because of the Force, because of my connection with Ben-”

At some point, Leia had risen to her feet, and quickly pulled Rey from her seat and into her arms. Rey bonelessly staggered into the embrace, stunned for the first few silent moments as Leia’s arms tightened around her. Slowly, she returned the hug, somehow feeling very small in the tiny General’s arms.

“Rey, you have no idea what you - everything you told me - means to me. I learned my lesson years ago, and I am not letting you go. I don’t care what the Force is making you or Ben do; both of you will always have a home here.” Leia pulled away from Rey, slowly guiding her back into her seat with a beatific smile.

“Oh - ok.” Rey sniffed, wiping at her eyes with the back of her hand.

“Besides, what do you think this ragged old group would do without you, Rey? What you’ve
accomplished for the Resistance, for me - is monumental. You’ve given everyone here desperately-needed hope in a war that’s dragged on far too long. You’ve taken on a massive task without a whisper of complaint. You’ve become a symbol-”

“General! This is - oh, hi, Rey.”

Poe Dameron burst into the room, his disposition distinctly frazzled. Rey instinctually snatched the journal off the table, putting it out of sight into her lap.

“What is it, Poe?”

He eyed Rey nervously, clearly unsure of how to proceed.

“Anything you have to say, you can say in front of Rey. I trust her completely.” Leia said carefully, looking less than pleased with Poe’s reaction.

“General - it’s the contracts with the weapons manufacturers. They were supposed to start coming in for initial signatures this morning - but we haven’t heard a word from any of the companies. Some even sent condolences…”?

Leia leaned forward on her desk, steepling her fingers against her lips as her brows slightly drew together. “He would make this difficult, wouldn’t he?” she murmured.

“General?”

She gave a dismissive wave of her hand. “It doesn’t matter. Renegotiations are going to happen on Scipio. Rey has been requested as our sole representative, and I have the utmost confidence in her ability to get us what we need.”

Trying to keep her mouth from sagging open, Rey slowly turned to face the General. The smoothness and believability with which the half-truth fell from her lips… Ben had evidently learned from the master.

Nodding to herself, Leia continued. “Keep this under wraps, Dameron - don’t let anyone else know, just let them assume that contracts are underway as planned.”

“And what should I tell them when they ask about Ben Solo?”

Giving Poe a long, hard look, Leia seemed to consider her answer carefully. “Who else knows?”

“Just Finn. And Rey, of course.”

“Good. Keep it that way. If anyone asks, tell them he’s probably too scared to face me just yet after running away for so long. He has to prove himself.” Leia glanced over to Rey. “Am I wrong?”

Rey slowly shook her head, wide-eyed.

“That’s settled, then. Business as usual, Poe. Dismissed.”

As he left the room, Poe gave Rey a lingering stare that left her on edge.

Leia sighed, pulling herself to her feet to approach Rey once again. “You’ll always have a home
here, Rey, but it seems that where the Resistance needs you most on Scipio, if that’s alright with you?"

“Of course,” Rey replied automatically, still somewhat taken aback by everything that had just happened.

Leia pulled Rey to her feet, tightly grasping on to her hands. “I’m counting on you, Rey. Whatever this is between you, Ben, the Force - figure it out. If it’s something that could mean lasting peace for the galaxy, then it’s what we all need to be working toward. I’m not sure how long I can give you two, though. Especially…” Leia smirked, looking Rey up and down. “Especially after what I have planned for you. I’m sure Ben thinks he’s just going to be able to smuggle you into Scipio and keep you out of sight. But if he’s going to throw a hydrospanner in my plans, I’m doing the same to him.”

Rey wasn’t entirely sure how she felt about being trapped in the middle of all this inter-family scheming.

“After all Rey, you’re practically family now.”

Kriff, this was just more proof that the General really could read thoughts, after all. Wait, family?

Leia cupped Rey’s face with her hand, smiling with tears in her eyes. “There were a lot of things I thought were gone forever when I lost Han. I definitely never thought I’d get… Rey, you’re more than I could have ever asked for. Definitely more than my son deserves, but I’m so glad that you’ve found room in your heart for him and all of… well, Ben.”

Rey opened her mouth to say - well, she wasn’t even sure what. But Leia continued.

“And there’s no way I’m letting my son’s intended show up to Scipio, representing the Resistance, in anything less than the finest. We are not hiding who you are, and it’s up to Ben to decide if he’s ready to show the galaxy who the Supreme Leader really is.”

Leia chuckled with a decidedly... evil tinge to her laughter. “Either he has to keep playing at only being Ben Solo, and deny any connection to the First Order while he’s there, or he’ll have a lot of explaining to do about why Kylo Ren is being seen in public with the Resistance’s Jedi. Or, he can just come clean. Oh, I like this. We’ll start getting you ready right now, there’s preparations to be made - he said two days? Let’s get you there early, I really want to catch him off-guard.”

Practically with a spring in her step, Leia forcefully guided Rey from her office toward the area acting as private quarters. The whiskey must have hit Rey harder than she realized, because Leia’s use of the words “my son’s intended” just now registered in her mind.

Ben had been a blushing, stuttering mess last night, but he did manage to convey that the particular braids he made were for “whomever” the Princess of Alderaan would be.

So - that was it? That was his proposal? It had barely been a few days since Rey was certain Ben would want to kill her the next time he saw her. Kriff, was this some sort of posh thing where he felt like he had to marry her after what they did? Did I come on too hard? Did I scare him or something? Kriff, he was so nervous...
Leia Organa chose that moment to once again flaunt what were surely the most insidious partial-mind-reading powers Rey had ever encountered.

“He is moving a little fast with all of this, but I wouldn’t expect anything else from him, honestly. Ben was such a dramatic child, I can’t imagine where he gets it from. Of course, you’ll wear your hair down. Completely down, no braids or anything. It’ll drive him nuts.”

“Is - is that really a good idea?”

“Of course it is, it’s my idea. I’m not letting him get away with this half-assed, passive-aggressive proposal. If he was looking for my approval, he obviously has it, but you should settle for no less than a public spectacle of the Supreme Leader proposing to Rey of the Resistance, if you’ll have him, that is. You’re absolutely worth it, and maybe this’ll be what finally brings him back home.”

“So you’re leaving. Again.” General Hux bit out the words pithily.

It really, really wasn’t difficult being Kylo Ren once more when there were just so many damn irritants. He had barely been back for an hour, and he could already feel the return of his telltale eye twitch. Good thing he had the mask back on.

Kylo had just dismissed the other senior officers after an insufferably long briefing, where he laid out and instigated his plan for the immediate future. It was a bold declaration, which consisted of half winging-it improvisation, and half intuition based on what he picked up at the OWT galas and from the Resistance members.

The plan was to hire out every single one of the weapons and ship manufacturers currently being courted by the Resistance to take on massive, time-consuming reconstruction projects all across the galaxy. With a massive cash upfront offer, no company would be able to resist - nor would they want to cross the Supreme Leader and publicly admit to double-dealing; it just wasn’t good for business. The First Order would establish goodwill with occupied systems suffering destruction after skirmishes with the pathetic Resistance, rebuild their own damaged fleet, and, at the same time, keep the companies so incredibly busy they wouldn’t be able to fulfill or establish new contracts with the floundering, poorly-equipped Resistance.

It was brilliant. It was petty. But most of all, it allowed Kylo to advance the First Order’s cause without giving Rey (or his mother) more reason to be furious at him. Well, aside from the fact that he’d be essentially blackballing them from creating a new fleet for the Resistance. But by his standards, this was positively benign. Besides, if things went well over the next few days, they would finally see reason and not even need a fleet.

With the other officers dispatched to make offers to the companies, Kylo was now able to outline the rest of his current plan to General Hux - the only senior officer who knew about his dealings as
Ben Solo. He had just finished explaining that he urgently needed to visit Snoke’s vaults on Scipio, so that the First Order would have the liquid assets to deliver on their upfront offer.

“I suppose you have some better plan concerning our current financial situation?” Kylo hoped that his bored tone was conveyed through the mask as he idly spun a datapad on the smooth surface of the conference table where both he and Hux were seated.

Hux’s face twisted in some horrid attempt to display both disgust and shame. “Not… Precisely, as of yet. But surely you understand - the Supreme Leader - Snoke - never just went off like you’ve been doing. He would send an envoy, or hire a negotiator for these trivial matters.”

“Between hiring intermediaries to do every aspect his leadership for him and building - maintaining these ludicrous ships, is it really any wonder why we’re broke?”

“The First Order isn’t - we’re not - broke!” Hux retorted in purple-faced horror. “You’re the one who has insisted we not tax our currently held systems any further until we can assure their safety. We have secure assets on many planets; investments, bonds, stocks-”

“-and a whole lot of good those are doing for maintaining our fleet right now, and getting these projects started. What’s the saying? The only credits that matter are the ones in your hand, so long as you’ve got a blaster in the other?”

Hux’s lip curled in disgust. “What - is that some sort of smuggler phrase?”

Kylo shrugged with indifference. “Probably.”

Hux’s puzzled expression was one Kylo had never seen before. That wasn’t good. Kriff, he was slipping - he wasn’t entirely sure what - who - he was supposed to be acting like right now. It used to be that anything that could possibly connect him with his father would set him off in a fit of rage; but now, with the promise of a future with Rey, with Snoke’s voice out of his head, with the potential of what this could all mean in the Force… The lines between Ben Solo and Kylo Ren were becoming more blurred by the day. He wasn’t sure how to feel about that.

Which was not helpful when he was certain that Hux was planning to mutiny as soon as the opportune moment struck. He didn’t need to give the General probable cause to overthrow the Supreme Leader by acting insane - well, a different sort of insane. But Kylo was well aware that by providing all of this information that only he as Ben Solo could acquire, he was currently too useful to the First Order to be so easily discarded, even to Hux.

What would the mercurial, hot-blooded Supreme Leader do here to simultaneously establish his authority and assure his orders would be followed? Strangle Hux. It was practically a family tradition. But he could do better. He could be better. Besides, wouldn’t it be far more satisfying to have Hux do his bidding while thinking he had the upper hand, and the better end of the deal?

He’d look to family tradition after all. He could channel his mother’s expert political maneuvering. And his father’s… well, improvisation.

With a rattling sigh, Kylo steeled himself. “I suppose I may as well tell you the full plan, since I know you’ve got eyes and ears everywhere. You’ll find out eventually.” He reached for the clasps
on his helmet, pulling off the mask.

Now Hux looked positively dumbfounded. Kylo Ren had never unmasked voluntarily in front of him, and certainly never preferred a face-to-face talk with anyone. But Kylo wanted to be able to gauge Hux’s reactions firsthand, and really sell this plan that honestly wasn’t too far removed from the truth.

“This trip isn’t just for funds. I have a unique… Intelligence opportunity from within the ranks of the Resistance. I’ll be meeting up with her on Scipio, and I plan on bringing her back with me - I very nearly had her convinced on Coruscant.”

Hux’s sneer cut through the perplexion on his face. “Oh yes, I’ve heard all about your little ‘opportunity.’ You just couldn’t get your hands off of that filthy, _murdering_ desert ra-GGGKKK-”

Turns out Kylo wasn’t fully above strangling Hux.

“No. A. Word. About her. From you.” Kylo growled out, dropping the chokehold.

Hux seemed undeterred. “Ren, are you _insane_? That - that _Jedi_?! She’s - she’s the one who - you know what they call her, what she’s _done_ - you can’t be seen with her! It was one thing, you being _Prince Ben Solo_, simply getting information from her - but being seen as the Supreme Leader? _Bringing her back_?! So blatantly entertaining the-”

“‘Leaderslayer?’ Yes, I’ve heard. Poetic, isn’t it? The Supreme Leader and the Leaderslayer. The Jedi Killer and the Last Jedi.” Kylo sighed happily, glancing over to Hux’s horrified face. “General, don’t pretend like you had some great attachment to Snoke, we both knew one of us was going to take him down eventually. I just happened to be at the right place at the right time.”

At least Hux had the decency to not refute that last statement. “But - but the _optics_! What are you thinking this is going to look like to the galaxy, to those who pledged loyalty to Snoke?”

“An accordance. A peace treaty. The Resistance’s mistake was making Rey their symbol. When she willingly comes to me and stands by my side, the the galaxy will only assume that we’ve truly made amends and brought lasting peace. If her former comrades insist on continuing their terroristic actions, they will be ostracized, and find no support from a galaxy united.”

Hux’s eyes twitched back and forth, thinking rapidly. Kylo knew what he was doing - he was looking for his opportunity, the hole he’d be able to wiggle through and take over. Now it was time to pull out the stops, and really sell it.

“If _we_ achieve this... If the entire galaxy willingly unites under the First Order, the transition could be made. Move from a war machine to a legitimate empire. And, of course…”

Maybe he was being a _touch_ too dramatic, but Kylo was having more fun with this acting than he’d admit.

“A change of regime. It’s the only way we’d be accepted. A government shouldn’t be headed by a warrior, by a _knight_ - the Jedi and I would be relics of a war everyone wants to forget, and I know she has no interest in power. What we need is leadership. Experience. Someone willing to make the hard decisions for the greater good.” Kylo let his eyes drift across the table, looking pointedly at a positively _beaming_ Hux.

“Supreme Leader… You flatter me.”

“Prove it, Armitage. Show me, show the _galaxy_ that you can be trusted. See to it that I’m not
disrupted on Scipio, and that the First Order is making steps to legitimize - and not annihilate half
the galaxy. *Emperor Hux* could be the name everyone remembers as the one who maintained order
in a time too used to war.”

Hux stood to attention, a faraway look in his eyes and the slightest manic smile on his face.
“Consider it done, Supreme Leader.”

“Good. I trust you to handle the particulars while I’m away. I’ll be leaving several of my Knights
here with you, since communication in and out of Scipio is still unreliable at best - anything I need
to know, you tell them. Especially if the Resistance attempts to make any moves before we
anticipated them being able - the Jedi will be out of contact with them as well.”

With a salute that, for the first time, didn’t look like it pained him, Hux exited the room. Kylo
warily watched him leave - kriff, if *that* wasn’t a disaster waiting to happen… Shaking his head,
Kylo snatched up his datapad, impatiently punching in the codes to show him what he needed to
assure was still going on.

The screen displayed three live camera feeds, from three different rooms. Obaan Ren was in the
second room - she must have finished up in the first cell, where Enoch Ren was leaning against the
wall, distinctly bored. Not wanting to disrupt Obaan’s work, Kylo activated the audio in the first
cell.

“Has she gotten anything out of them yet?”

Enoch jumped slightly, clearly startled. “*Nothing. And it wasn’t for lack of trying, either - my ears
still hurt from this guy shrieking so long. I’m no Obaan, but even I can tell that someone did a
number on these humans before we ever got them - this guy’s mind is pretty much empty.*”

Kylo’s fist slammed into the table, narrowly missing the datapad. Much as the immediate threat to
Rey had been taken care of, the fact that someone completely unknown was out there pulling the
strings behind these assassination attempts *infuriated* Kylo. They had nothing to go off but *‘Mortis’*
and *‘Mother.’* Of course, Kylo had some knowledge of the Mortis gods, and this wouldn’t be the
first time he dealt with what was presumably a cult surrounding them - but he was certain Ben Solo
knew a lot more.

The journal practically *burned* where he had it in his cloak. It would be so easy to just crack it open
and start reading - but he had a point he wanted to make with Rey, after all. If *he* could resist the
temptation where she couldn’t… Well, at the very least it would be something to gloat about.

He would wait.

...waiting became *excruciating.*
For the past six hours, Kylo had attempted to distract himself in his personal quarters with packing and gathering what he needed on Scipio. He needed to be prepared for anything, since he truly hoped Rey would finally allow him to actually teach her. There was so much she didn’t know, so much knowledge of the Force and everything it meant that he was so eager to share, and he knew that her insights would be extremely valuable in figuring out the mystery Ben Solo was on to.

The mystery that was *sitting right there in his cloak*.

No, no, he was better than this. He could resist - but then it was as if he had no power over his body. He didn’t try to have control of his actions, just letting it happen as he pulled the book from his inner pocket.

Well, he promised himself not to read the journal. He didn’t say anything about the many, many other papers tucked and folded within the pages. Maybe - maybe if he just looked at *one*... Holding his breath, Kylo randomly grabbed the corner of a page sticking out a little further than all the others, telling himself he was just doing this to make sure it didn’t fall out. This was *purely* up to fate.

He quickly scanned the single scrap of paper. Surely, the Force would be kind, and grant him the exact knowledge and insight he knew was contained in these pages, and not-

*Kriff.*

He closed his eyes, slowly exhaling. Much as he wanted to, he wasn’t going to take out his frustrations on this particular page, and decimate it like it deserved - it was, however pathetically, part of him. This is what he got for leaving this up to luck - the Force - *whatever.*

This… *this* was some *classic* Ben Solo poetry.

Kylo cracked an eye open to read the first few words, and immediately winced hard enough to block his vision from the truly awful, *blatant* prose.

*I dream of rain*
*I dream of gardens in the desert sand*
*I wake in pain*
*I dream of love as time runs through my hand*
*I dream of fire*

*These dreams are tied to a horse that will never tire*
*And in the flames her shadows play in the shape of a man's desire*
*This desert rose, each of her veils, a secret promise*
*This desert flower, no sweet perfume ever tortured me more than this*
*And as she turns this way, she moves in the logic of all my dreams*
*This fire burns, and I realize that nothing's as it seems*
My desert flower, your rare perfume

Is the sweet intoxication of the fall

Methodically folding the paper into the smallest possible shape, Kylo kicked open a trunk, shoving the tiny folded square into the darkest, most clutter-filled corner. This would never be seeing the light of day if he could help it.

Force willing, Rey would never see this particularly revealing, painfully juvenile, and truly terrible poem. At least it was now safely in his possession - and there was no way there was anything else to be found as mortifying as this.

...Right?

Thousands of lightyears away, Rey once again found herself in a starship, and in a position of absolute temptation.

She had barely been with the Resistance for more than a day before Leia sent her packing to Scipio. Leia was apparently committed to making it as blatant as possible that this was the legendary Jedi Rey of the Resistance on her way to see the Supreme Leader, piloting the infamous Millenium Falcon, clothed in elegant, draped silks in Resistance orange and earthen browns, and a firebird circlet in her loose hair.

The journal of Rey’s current fixation was still clothed as well, wrapped in black cloth. It sat accusingly in the co-pilot’s chair, as though it was challenging her.

It was almost as though she had no control of her actions - her arm darted forward, unraveling the cloth from the tattered remains of the dress from that fateful night. Her actions turned more desperate as she unraveled the cloth faster and faster, causing a single sheet to snag on a loose thread. The page spiraled elegantly through the air, then landed primly on the Falcon’s controls, as though it was daring Rey to ignore it.

Who was she to ignore fate? Leaning forward, Rey squinted at rushed, somewhat sloppy writing that she still recognized, and had come to lo-

I want to set the universe on fire -

...what.

I want to set the universe on fire
Feel it burn tonight
I’ll set the universe on fire
There’s no end in sight

Bring me to the holy raging power
Where I find my destiny
We’ll set the universe on fire
You’re my guiding Light

WHAT.

This… This couldn’t be Ben’s. This… This was awful. Rey glanced toward the journal, where the final piece of cloth had finally fallen away to reveal-

This isn’t Ben’s journal!

Furious, Rey snatched up the book, glaring at its nondescript black cover that was clearly not an ancient Jedi text. She opened to a random page, empty save for a single sentence in the same messy yet familiar scrawl -

Armitage Hux is an idiot.

Rey snapped the book shut. There was now no doubt in her mind who, exactly, was responsible here.

Ben… Kylo - it didn’t matter. Someone was in trouble.

Chapter End Notes

I could have ended this sooner, but I wanted to end on a light note after all of that DRAMA. It's been too long since we've had AWFUL POETRY. Lyrics chopped and adapted from Sting’s Desert Rose, and Gloryhammer’s Universe on Fire. Because Ben Solo has never had any chill.

Do you know how difficult it was condensing the last 13 chapters into a future-mother-in-law-friendly version? Now imagine doing it as a socially awkward scavenger.
We have officially exited the calm before the storm. I’ve been dying to write these Scipio chapters since I outlined this mammoth on December 18th, and I’m so incredibly happy that each piece of lore that’s come out since then has only supported where I’m going with this. Particularly Rebels. Hint. Hint.

I am so incredibly sorry for this taking so long, I NEVER meant to have this go so long between updates, but as I’ve mentioned before - I’m a public school teacher, and it’s the end of the year - things are insane. Thank you so much to all of my loyal readers, and I promise you that this thing is going to update on the regular as we enter summer break. A good chunk of this next chapter is already written, but I felt like I needed to get this to y’all ASAP.

So many of my fellow authors are so good about writing these nice, consistent, polite-sized chapters that release regularly, then here I come staggering in drunkenly with Footnotes every month or so, and each chapter is like WHAM. 7.5K WORDS, BITCH. READ IT. I’ll try to get better - I plan to finish this monster soon.

Please keep the comments and kudos coming, I LOVE reading what you all think and where you think this is going!
Lessons in Trust

Chapter Summary

Quickly, before she could get distracted again, Rey broke away from him - “Ben Solo, you do not get to just… Just kiss me and act like you didn’t- mmmf!”

He sealed his mouth to hers, his hot tongue softly imploring she just… oh. This was so much easier than being mad at him. Ben groaned, and Rey could feel it vibrate through his whole massive body as he crushed his chest to hers.

Chapter Notes

Oh man, this chapter has 8.8k words of everything - new planets, fighting, forgiveness, smut, research, and y'all are either going to love me or hate me at the end of it. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Take me away with you - let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.” - Song of Solomon, 1:4

It was a sound he would know anywhere.

When he was a child, it was a sound he eagerly waited for. Minutes after he could no longer be considered a Jedi, it was a sound he begged for. As Supreme Leader of the Galaxy, it was a sound he never wanted to hear again because it filled him with hurt and regret, and yet another stab of betrayal in the long line of deceptions that was his life.

But on Scipio, Kylo Ren heard the distinct roar of the Millennium Falcon’s engine, and it was a sound that filled him with wide-eyed, sweaty-palmed panic.

He was in an upper tier that branched away from the Main Vault Fortress, closing up negotiations with a representative from the Czerka Corporation. The seventy billion credits he withdrew from Snoke’s vault had gone a long way in the last 36 hours, and in closing the Czerka deal, Kylo Ren effectively launched the most extensive set of public works projects the galaxy had ever seen.

To Kylo, in this moment, the galaxy was meaningless. Because if the Millennium Falcon was here, that meant Rey was here. And he was not ready.

Making his excuses, Kylo marched away from the Czerka Corp representative as fast as he could without actually sprinting. He had appearances to keep up after all. Scipio was in the neutral zone and, theoretically, beyond the influence of any galactic politics. But Kylo Ren - the man, the mask,
the voice - was an unmistakable figure *everyone* recognized. Besides, he was already seen as an eccentric enough Supreme Leader to be making these deals in person - it wouldn’t do for random stockbrokers and bankers to wonder why on earth the ruler of most of the known galaxy was running like an overeager schoolboy, chasing after his crush.

His company of stormtroopers followed him noisily, having difficulty keeping up with his long strides. Once again, Kylo had to spend entirely too much time convincing Hux that an entire platoon was unnecessary - they had negotiated down to an elite squad of ten, Kylo keeping four with him while stationing the other six in strategic points.

Kylo came to a halt in front of one of the massive glass panels overlooking the main docking area. His own *Upsilon*-class shuttle dominated the space at the furthest platform, its massive black wings standing out starkly against the snowy peaks of Scipio. And then - there it was, the worn, rusted piece of scrap that somehow refused to fall apart, swooping in to dock. Of *course* it ended up right next to the *Upsilon* shuttle that Kylo had hoped to have out of sight by the time Rey got here. Kylo gave Scipio’s flight security advance warning that a representative from the Resistance would be arriving during his stay, but he hardly expected her so *soon*, and in - *that*.

Kylo scrambled for his comm. “Enoch? Enoch Ren, report in. You had better not be ignoring me on purpose.”

“*I wasn’t - I mean, I would never-*” With a sigh, Enoch seemed to realize lying was useless. “*Fine. I may have been asleep. What do you need, Supreme Leader?*”

Rolling his eyes, Kylo pressed on. “Rey is here. I need you to keep her busy for a while, she just docked next to the shuttle, which is where I *assume* you’re napping.”

“Ahh, the places my mind went when you said to keep the girl busy for a while...”

“Do not touch her.” Kylo snarled, jealous fury taking him over.

“Kriff, Kylo, learn to take a joke. I’ll be a perfectly respectable Knight, no more, no less. How long do you need?”

Kylo looked himself up and down, realized he was wearing his mask and full Supreme Leader regalia, and that several hundred people had already seen him like this today. Just taking off the mask and ditching the stormtroopers was not an option - this particular ensemble was entirely too recognizable for it to be coincidence that Ben Solo just happened to be wearing the same thing. He made a vague noise of panic, knowing he would have to improvise, and quickly.

Glancing out the window, Kylo was able to see just far enough to catch Enoch Ren’s figure stretching dramatically outside the shuttle, thankfully with enough sense to wear regular clothes at the moment. Especially since-

Kylo’s mouth hung open dumbly. An absolute vision in orange, amber, and sepia silks stormed off the Millennium Falcon, her hair long and loose, a golden circlet glinting in Scipio’s weak winter sunlight. He couldn’t make out her face, but he was sure, if her walk was anything to go by, that Rey was _furious_. Why was it that, instead of being filled with with fear and concern over what, clearly, *he* must have done to make her feel like that, Kylo was instead… *incredibly aroused*?

“Give me fifteen minutes and get her things secured on the speeder.” Kylo muttered to Enoch, wondering how he was going to handle this situation.

He turned to face his guards, trying to keep his stance as authoritative as he could. “Secure the
docks, but stay out of sight. A representative from the Resistance will be meeting with Enoch Ren, who will be able to give further orders if you’re unable to contact me. Understood?”

The stormtroopers wordlessly saluted the command. Kylo stalked toward Scipio’s wing of private vaults, hearing the troopers noisily stomping their way toward the docks. There was no time to go to Snoke’s private retreat deep in the mountains of Scipio, where Kylo had other clothes, and was actually prepared for Rey’s arrival - he was going to have to figure something out in the vault.

Snoke’s vault - or, rather, the vault of the Supreme Leader, occupied the entire cellar floor in one of Scipio’s many spires off the central bank. Kylo entered the elevator, keying in and scanning the codes he had, of course, switched and re-secured in his own name, taking full ownership of Snoke’s assets and accounts. Certainly, Snoke was not lacking for credits; he played the post-Imperial market like a finely tuned instrument for making him money - but Snoke had also been old and wise enough to not place all of his faith and wealth in the banks.

The elevator door opened, revealing a short corridor with yet another secured door. Kylo ripped off his gloves for the print scans, entered a few other codes, and then finally, the large, cog-covered round door finally rolled back, then quickly closed behind the vault’s sole authorized user.

It was startling each time to see the vault, a glittering, hoarder’s paradise of art, antiques, and jewels. The previous day, when Kylo had gone on a more thorough search of the vault than he had done in years, he discovered that the entire back wall was lined with Hosnian brandies, bourbons, and ryes, along with rows upon rows of Alderaani wine - a morbid gathering of the literal spirits of dead planets. To the right buyer, this collection alone was probably worth as much as the entire seventy billion credit payout.

Yesterday, Kylo hadn’t been there for wine (though he took a few bottles); instead, he retrieved as many ancient texts, holocrons, and lightsaber parts as he could find. These were easy for him to find - after all, he was the one who was responsible for the majority of them even being in there. Because before he was Kylo Ren, he was the Jedi Killer, the Pirate Prince, Snoke’s Scavenger - finder and keeper of any artifacts related to users of the Force.

But now… He was Ben Solo. Not Prince Ben Solo, just… Ben Solo. Rey needed Ben Solo. Rey was mad at Ben Solo, but she could become furious beyond compromise if he showed up as Kylo Ren just now.

He ripped his helmet from his head, letting it fall to the ground with a resounding clang, pulling off his multilayered Supreme Leader garments as quickly as he could. He stripped off layer after layer until he was left with nothing but a loose, long-sleeved white thermal undershirt (that he evidently ripped the collar of in his haste to change), black thermal pants so tight they were barely more than leggings, and his boots.

Realizing he couldn’t leave his lightsaber in the vault, nor could he have such an easily identifiable weapon on him, Ben waded through the stacks of stuff in the vault, until he came upon a pile of weapons and armor. He slowly dug through the stack, careful not to set anything off, until he found a mostly-intact Republic era clonetrooper belt, complete with enough satchels and pockets that he could easily stash a lightsaber as large as his without it standing out. With a shrug, he grabbed a blaster, holstering it on the belt as well.

Carefully edging his way around the endless piles of miscellany, Ben tried to keep an eye out for something, anything that could act as a cloak or coat, but he had no such luck - kriff, he was going to freeze as soon as he was out of the climate controlled areas.
Finally back in the elevator, Ben glanced up at the reflective panel created by the closed golden doors, and nearly jumped back at the sight of his father.

The tattered white shirt, the entirely-too-tight pants, the belt - just throw an ill-fitting vest or jacket on him, and the look would be complete. But - it… It was him. Exhaling slowly, his hand automatically reached for his hair, pushing it back in a nervous affectation. He was natural to him, but he realized that, in this moment, only him made him look all the more like Han Solo.

Well, no one would be mistaking him for the Supreme Leader of the galaxy, that was for sure. In fact, he’d have to be more careful just walking around here; he couldn’t afford to be identified as both Kylo Ren and Ben Solo just yet. Moving quickly, Ben retrieved his comm from where he had stashed it in his belt - his damn pants were so tight, he wouldn’t be able to keep it in his pocket anymore.


“Yes. Don’t use my other name. Where are you?”

“As you wish. And you’ll thank me later for getting your girl to calm down a little, she was fit to be tied when I met her - though that’s probably how you like her, you perv-”

Ben felt his eye twitch at Enoch addressing her as “princess,” something he warned him a thousand times not to do (especially in front of Rey) on their way here, but this wasn’t the time to have that argument again. “Good. Return to the ship, I’ll comm if I need you later.”

“Heh. Fine. And you’d better get in touch with your dad soon. He was, um, worried.”

Ben practically smashed his comm to disconnect it. Of all his Knights, Ben had known Enoch the longest, and trusted him the most - but kiff if he wasn’t irritating. Feeling his way in the Force, Rey’s signature practically called to him like a beacon, even without him having to use their Bond.

He caught up with her just as Enoch had departed, Rey slowly wandering along one of the narrow golden hallways lined with hundreds of steel-blue personal vaults, some barely the size of a hand, others that spanned the entire wall with round, reinforced doors. Her intricate, warm, orange and brown silks trailed the floor behind her, making her stand out like a beacon in the cold metal hallway.

Hearing voices coming from behind him, Ben knew he had to act fast before someone wondered what the shabby-looking man was doing here. His eyes scanned the area - fortunately, Rey was approaching a darkened side hallway, where no casual passerby would notice anything.

Perfect.
“-I’m just glad that he and I got to pilot, otherwise things get awkward. When there’s a full platoon and we’ve got officers flying, there’s just those two seats in the cockpit, and one - yes, one seat down in the bay. I’ll give you one guess who gets that chair.”

“No…” Rey breathed in disbelief, fighting back hiccups through her laughter. Wiping at the tear that formed in the corner of her eye, Rey made note to get some more stories about Ben out of Enoch Ren in the future.

The sight of the familiar-faced Weequay waiting down by the docks had very much thrown Rey off from the moment she disembarked. She had been completely prepared to face down Kylo Ren about his most recent deception - she had a speech planned and everything. Seeing Enoch Ren waiting for her instead, then, was… Disarming.

Fortunately, Enoch quickly proved himself a charming companion, starting by escorting Rey away from the docks, reasoning that it was entirely too cold to wait for Ben outside - something the desert-dweller still in her appreciated. They had gotten talking about ships, and the conversation easily flowed between them as they wandered the austere halls of Scipio’s central vault area.

Rey was surprised to learn of Enoch’s own thoughts on Kylo, the First Order, everything - according to him, life under Supreme Leader Kylo Ren had been well-received by most of the senior officers and the vast majority of the younger recruits, his more hands-on approach to leadership surprising and encouraging many. The galaxy at large had initially been incredibly skeptical of the legendary Force-user coming to power, but his comparatively conservative and downright un-warlike moves so far had made him a popular leader even among non-First Order controlled space, emphasizing security and order over conquering and destroying.

Enoch, an orphan of war himself who had known Kylo since he was Ben, only had faith in the First Order under Kylo Ren - “I wasn’t in it for Snoke, the Dark side, the First Order, any of it - I’d follow him anywhere, though, I owe him my life.” Rey tried to press him to elaborate, but Enoch gave her nothing but a sad smile, and an assurance that it was Kylo’s story to tell, not his - and he wouldn’t betray his Master’s trust.

They had just been discussing the freedoms Enoch now had, since he no longer had to follow Snoke’s commands to track down and identify Force-users throughout the galaxy, when he excused himself to answer his comm.

Rey had just enough time to get lost in her thoughts, her eyes traveling over the hundreds of vaults, each containing wealth beyond anything she could have imagined as a scavenger on Jakku. She ran her hands across the panels as she approached an intersection in the corridor, vaguely wondering how easily she’d be able to spike into any of the smaller boxes.

She rounded the corner instead of going straight. Immediately, a hand clamped over her mouth, muffling the scream that attempted to come out as she was pulled down a side hallway. She moved to break her attacker’s hold by surging forward, but her assailant yanked back on the wrap that covered her arms, letting it drop to the floor. Just as she pulled back her lips, ready to bite down as hard as she could-

“Shhh. It’s just me,” a familiar voice whispered in her ear.

Ben! That idiot, she almost - wait… Whirling to face him, Rey almost didn’t recognize this
grinning, sloppily-dressed *scoundrel* in front of her. She was furious at him, and… Her eyes roamed across where his ripped shirt partially exposed his chest, and then down to - *kriff*, those *pants*!

“Miss me?” he asked cheekily, tucking some of her now disheveled hair behind an ear, straightening her circlet. His finger raised her chin to look up into his sparkling eyes as he leaned forward to press his lips to her forehead, then her nose, then her lips. A frisson fluttered in her stomach, and Rey was *almost* flustered enough to forget-

Quickly, before she could get distracted again, Rey broke away from him - “*Ben Solo, you do not get to just… Just kiss me and act like you didn’t- mmmf!*”

He sealed his mouth to hers, his hot tongue softly imploring she just… Oh. This was so much easier than being mad at him. Ben groaned, and Rey could feel it vibrate through his whole massive body as he crushed his chest to hers. He pressed her up against the closest wall in the dark corridor, holding her wrists to either side of her head as his thumbs idly stroked her pulse points, pulling away from her mouth.

“Didn’t what?”

Dazed, Rey struggled to focus. “What?”

Ben smirked, kissing his way down her neck, his hands tracing their way down her arms, coming to firmly grasp along her ribcage, his fingers nearly spanning the width of her. Rey’s hands felt their way up the sides of his neck, clawing their way up and into his hair, pressing his face closer to her body, where he gave her a bite just above the collarbone. Her shoulders surged forward, demanding his attention at her breasts - but his hands had other plans, apparently, lightly stroking along her sides until he found places that made her writhe. He licked his way down from her neck, finding a particular patch of freckles at the top of her breast that he decided to cover with his mouth and *suck* in a way that made Rey groan in remembrance of when he did *that* elsewhere.

But then his fingers found a place that made her *yelp*.

“No! *Ben!*” she giggled as Ben’s exploring fingers tried to tickle out yet more spots to make Rey squirm. “No! I - I am *mad* at you.”

“You laughed, you can’t be mad at me.” Ben managed to slip a hand within the many folds of her outfit, finally finding bare skin to ghost his fingers over, coaxing yet more undignified squeaks out of Rey.

“B-Ben - stop it!” Rey stated with the most serious face she could muster. She braced Ben’s shoulders with her hands, a smile twitching about her mouth and her cheeks pink in arousal. “I am mad. You - you lied to me. *You switched the journals!*”

There was a brief moment where Ben looked genuinely guilty. “I did. But I’ve said it before - I have never been anything other than honest with you.” Ben stated simply, apparently deciding to change up his technique now that his hands had found her skin. His strokes switched from feather-light to near- *groping*. “I told you to take my journal, and you did just that. I may have *misled* you, but I would never *lie* to you.”

Rey had to bite her lip to hold back a moan. “*Ben*, that’s not the *point*! I thought you - I thought we decided to trust each other. That what’s between us is… something important.”

Ben paused in his salacious attentions, considering her words. “Rey, I don’t think you understand. I
But...” his thumbs worried small circles on her hips, his expression darkening. “The people in my life - the worst betrayals I’ve experienced came at the hands of the people who loved me the most, the people who I expected to be able to trust with anything - my family. That kind of betrayal… That’s not an easy thing to forget, Rey. And I’m sorry - I’m sorry to you, more than anything, because you don’t deserve to have to deal with this, with me. Honestly, at this point in my life, I expect that the more someone says that - that I matter to them, the sooner I expect them to-”

Rey moved her hands to brace Ben’s increasingly broken-looking face, pulling until his lips met hers again. Perhaps his solution of kissing his way through high tension and conflicting feelings had some merit to it after all.

“Trust me, Ben. Trust us. Please.” Rey asked softly.

“I’m trying. And I truly am sorry, Rey - it’s… It’s instinct at this point, not to trust anyone. But I’m learning.” Ben exhaled raggedly as his hands returned to Rey’s waist, thumbs gently moving along the bottom of her ribs. “However…” a small smile started at the corner of his mouth, his eyes crinkling. “It’s a little hard to fully trust someone who just can’t seem to have a little self-control when it comes to my journals - wouldn’t you agree?”

“I - I -!” Rey spluttered, indignation and, yes, a touch of guilt, rising right to the surface. “I cannot - that isn’t remotely the same, you took the whole journal that our entire - everything has been based on, I looked at one page - I trusted you, and-”

“Shh, Rey, I was teasing. I know I messed up.” Ben sighed, seeming to take in Rey’s freshly re-angered expression. “Look, would it make you feel better if you took my lightsaber and smashed some horrible sculptures? Snoke’s private collection is breathtakingly awful. I’ve been looking forward to dispatching of it myself, but... ”

“That’s not what I’m-” Rey paused, reconsidering this offer. Maybe a little bit of physically working out her frustrations could help. And destroying some of Snoke’s presumably treasured collection did sound therapeutic. “Actually… Yes. Yes, I think that might do it.”

“This-” Rey gasped, steadying the lightsaber in her hands before she prepared to make another thrust “-doesn’t seem to be working!” she finished with a growl, pushing the lightsaber deep into the chest of yet another gilded marble sculpture.

The once-spotless chalet of the former Supreme Leader, tucked deep in a snowy Scipio mountainside, was now a sight of wreck and ruin, the floors covered in the crumbling ruins of what was once a massive collection of horrendous, tacky, gold-accented stone and porcelain sculptures. Rey was surrounded by piles of dust and stone, stripped down to nothing but an underskirt and a small, cropped, short-sleeved top.

Rey still felt fury running through her veins. If anything, using Ben’s - Kylo’s - whomever’s lightsaber to destroy this “art” seemed to only be fueling her anger; somewhere amid the destruction, she had escalated from lingering annoyance to channeling full-on wrath. There was just something not satisfying about the ease of running a massive lightsaber through yet another carving of a scantily clad, blank-eyed Twilek twisted into a lewd pose. There was no fight here, no resistance to her unbridled rage.
“Um…” Ben coughed, looking around the room, adjusting his belt uncomfortably. “Maybe we can try something else.”

He pushed aside a pile of debris, retrieving a long, narrow plastic tube that had been acting as an armature for one of the larger-than-life sized porcelain sculptures. Without warning, he gave a flick of his fingers, pulling his lightsaber from Rey’s grip and into his hand, where he gave it a quick, casual spin, cutting the tube into two more reasonably-sized poles. He pocketed the lightsaber, and tossed one of the poles to Rey, gripping the other in a defensive position.

She caught it in an easy, confident twirl, her anger turning to intrigue. “Really, Ben - staves? Against me?”

“So this should be easy for you. Let’s make it interesting. Name your terms.”

“Best of three. No using the Force, no improvising extra weapons. If - when I win, you have to clean all of this up. Without the Force.”

“Is that all? That doesn’t sound like the bet of someone who’s sure she’s going to win.” Ben replied delicately, his words laced with implication as he tested the weight of the pole in his hand.

“And… and…” Rey changed her grip on her own staff, adjusting to a more aggressive position, her cheeks pinkening. “…you have to do what you did on Coruscant. T-to me. For… an hour.”

A savage grin took over Ben’s face. “And what, exactly, would that be, Rey? We’ve discussed how you need to be specific.”

Frustration and heat welled in Rey, and it needed to get it out. Growling, she charged at Ben, going low to the ground at the last minute to swing deep and wide at his unguarded legs. With a grace and finesse she wholly didn’t expect, he snapped his staff in a sharp, precise arc down to cross with her own. The crash of the weapons was harsh, reverberating up Rey’s arms almost to the point that they felt numb. She was completely unprepared for his staff to move away from hers so quickly after such an impact, stumbling past him to regain her footing - but not quickly enough to stop where his staff gave a precise pivot and spin to land softly on her shoulder.

“My point. Yield.” Ben commanded quietly from behind her. “And I believe you’re yet to name the terms if I win.”

Rey whirled, immediately knocking his staff hard enough that he had to re-grip and go on the defensive. She let a flurry of attacks fly, channeling her frustration and tension into each strike.

“If-” crash “-you-” crash “win-” woosh and a jab that made Ben have to dodge awkwardly, losing his footing, “-and that’s a big ‘if’-” Rey choked her grip up on her staff so she could grasp it in a position to swing, knocking Ben’s clean out of his hands. Holding the staff like a spear, she jabbed straight at Ben’s gut enough to knock the wind out of him, then bent to swing at the backs of his knees, clearing his legs out from under him, dropping him to the floor in a resounding thud. “‘I’ll do whatever you want.” She pointed her staff at his neck in triumph. “My point. Yield.”
Ben’s eyes appeared almost completely black as he looked up with a sort of desperate hunger. Deceptively calm, he rose to his feet smoothly, gathering up his staff to once again take a defensive stance. He closed his eyes, seeming to center himself, and a sense of overwhelming nothing occupied the air around him.

Suddenly unsure after her decisive victory, Rey switched her stance to a defensive one as well, backing up slowly. She’d learned her lesson about being too aggressive in the first round, and this sudden air of seriousness and concentration had her nervous - the sweat on her back was no longer just from exertion. This was a man changed, with something to fight for. Ben’s eyes opened to meet hers, his gaze penetrating in its intensity.

Then he charged.

This was unlike any aggression Rey had seen from him before. His every movement was precise and harsh, no step or strike out of place or unnecessary. He was not moving to disarm her, or to strike at her body - it was too late by the time Rey realized he was herding her.

Panting, Rey tried to regain her footing, change up the way she responded to his strikes, anything to keep the slow, inevitable move backwards. But her movements were becoming desperate, her swings sloppy, her breathing harsh as she tried to keep up, sweat stinging at her eyes. Suddenly, her grip was just a hair too loose, and her staff was yanked from her hands. Ben tossed it to the side unceremoniously, still advancing on Rey with singleminded determination.

She had run out of places to retreat. Her back to the wall, Rey’s eyes darted around in panic, looking for something, anything to help her. There was nothing here. Either she was too confident, or Ben had finally found the motivation he needed.

“I yield!”

Ben’s face remained oddly unchanged, his head tilted slightly to the side as he seemed to consider her surrender. He now stood directly in front of her, eyes trailing her form. “You do?”

“Yes, it’s your point. You win. Congratulations.” Rey huffed, avoiding his gaze. “All right, what horrible thing are you going to have me...” Rey trailed off, suddenly very much distracted by what he was doing.

Ben was using his staff to press on her leg, gently moving it to the side until her legs were spread rather far apart. Satisfied with where he put her, he dropped the staff to the ground with a startling clatter. “Stay like that.”

“W-what are you - kriff!” Rey yelped as he fell to his knees in front of her, hastily rucking up her slip around her waist, running an appreciative hand up her thighs.

“Ben! This isn’t - you don’t have to - look, you won, ok?” Rey stuttered, trying not to let her knees tremble at the sensations he was creating.

“I know.”

“Then what are you - ohhh...” Rey sighed as he dragged his thumb across the front of her panties, using his other hand to slowly edge them down. He left wet, open-mouthed kisses along her legs, pausing to occasionally suck at the skin.

“You just assumed that I didn’t want the same thing as you, Rey. The only difference is that I
won’t do anything until you ask me.” Ben said softly, pulling the underwear from her feet.

Rey trembled, practically already defeated. “But - Ben, I’m all… Sweaty…” she mumbled, unable to stop herself from running her fingers across his scalp, tugging at his hair.

“Don’t care. You taste amazing. Ask me, Rey.” Ben punctuated his words with a soft bite to the thigh that made her throb.

“Please,” Rey whined, desperate.

Ben’s right hand gave her ass a particularly strong grope, his fingers sinking deep into her flesh. “Use your words. Say it.”

“You think I don’t enjoy this?” he glanced up at her through his hair, looking somewhat disbelieving. “You think I don’t enjoy this?”

“Well, I mean-”

With a growl, Ben scooped up Rey, carrying her to the sitting room, where he deposited her on one of the sofas. “Move forward. Ass at the edge - there we go.”

He sank to his knees, then seized her legs, pushing them up until her knees were almost next to her ears. At first, Rey was unsure of what he was attempting to accomplish here - until she realized that, with her thighs in his hands and her hips at this angle, she was utterly exposed, and at the mercy of his mouth.

“If you think I don’t enjoy-” he flicked her clit with his tongue- “-watching how even my slightest movements-” he dragged a finger along the outside of her lips- “-makes you shudder-” He pinched just above her clit with the smallest, most agonizing amount of pressure- “you have no idea what you do to me.” Continuing to hold her clit just there, his other hand came to slowly push a single, long digit into her, curling up and pressing into her. And then-

He just stopped. A dam of pressure was about to burst in Rey, and he just held her right there, looking into her eyes, refusing to move. Rey felt tears form at the corners of her eyes as she
clenched down, bucking up - of course she wanted this, but she wanted more -

“Ask me, Rey.”

“Fuck me. Please.”

Ben’s eyes bulged, his fingers twitching on and within her. “What - I - I didn’t - Rey -”

“Please, Ben. I just want you. Please.”

Breathing slowly, Ben closed his eyes and began a slow, steady rhythm with his hand, his fingers tightening around her clit as he dragged in and out of her pussy. “Rey, sweetheart, we’re both - I don’t want you to feel like you-”

“You - you don’t want me?” It was hard for the stab of sadness to penetrate the building tension in her belly, but Rey still felt the sting of rejection.

“Kriff, no, Rey, I want you more than anything for my first time, your first time - I just don’t want you to-”

“Please.”

Rey reached for his chin, tilting his face up to look more fully at her. She needed him to understand, in this moment, she wanted him more than anything - but she was getting desperate. She’d need to be blunt. “I want you to make me come, Ben. With your cock inside me. Does that need clearing up?”

Groaning, Ben rose to his feet as his shaking hands pulled his pants down. He palmed his cock, looking down at Rey with a combination of intense desire and a hint of worry. “Rey, you’re a - I’m - I don’t want you to- kriff!”

Unable to restrain herself, Rey hooked her ankles behind his legs, knocking him to his knees once again. She pulled his shoulders up toward hers, working his massive body between her legs as she licked her way to his mouth, tasting a distinct hint of her own fluids still on his lips. Ben groaned into her mouth, palming a breast with one hand while the other found her hip, angling her towards him. Rey could now feel his length between her folds, their bodies finding a natural thrusting rhythm together. Licking her way into his mouth, Ben’s hips gave a particular shudder - and Rey felt the distinct, alien sensation of something huge pressing at her slick entrance.

“Rey - please, I - I need you-” for all of his vocal misgivings, Ben’s hands gave over to instinct, tilting her hips even higher, the head of his cock slipping just inside her as his other hand gave her nipple a pinch. Shuddering, Rey’s head cleared as her cunt clenched in anticipation, knowing precisely what she needed to say here.

“Ben. I love you.”
The moan that issued from Ben was animalistic, his hips moving inexorably forward. His cock was slick with her fluids, but the stretch was something Rey wasn’t fully prepared for, gasping as she writhed under him, her body trying to accommodate his size and movement. Finally, he was fully hilted in her, and had gone completely still. Rey could feel his every breath, where his arms shuddered in barely-held-back restraint, his reactions to her throbs that vacillated between pleasure and pain. Tentatively, she reached out to him in the Force—

-she could tell the very second they connected, because she was suddenly overwhelmed with enormous feelings of inadequacy, an irrational fear of disappointing her, of her *leaving*, a certain obsessing focus on her words *'I love you'* - but overriding those powerful thoughts was an impossible to ignore, primal urge to thrust, to pound, to *come*.

“Ben. I’m right here. You haven’t - I’m not going anywhere. I’m - oh!”

Ben’s hand moved to her clit, the thumb pressing up and into her with frenzied movements. His head was buried in her shoulder, but his words were distinct- “Say it again, Rey. *Please* - I’m - I’m not going to last.”

“I love you, Ben.”

*“Thank you.”* was not what Rey expected to hear in this moment, but her mind was very quickly occupied with the massive man thrusting into her.

With feelings flowing between them, Rey could sense Ben’s indescribable pleasure at simply being aware *he* was *in* her, let alone the physicality of the tightest, hottest sensation he had ever felt. He must have sensed what she was feeling, because after a few deep thrusts, Ben grabbed her hips and re-angled her once again, until he was thrusting *up* against her , and *oh-*

*“Ben...”* Rey groaned, a deep, heady sensation unlike anything she had ever felt building in her. This didn’t feel like preludes to orgasms she had before, this feeling was all-encompassing and *everything*, her mind blissfully blank as she could only focus on Ben moving in her. She opened her eyes, pulling on his hair, this was it, she was suddenly *desperate* to see him, to connect with him-

He met her eyes, looking positively feral in this moment. Suddenly, he plunged deeper and harder than before, his hips shuddering-

*“Rey!”*

She wasn’t able to even manage his name, a long, satisfied groan coming from deep within her as she rode him for the last few thrusts, desperate to pull as much of him to her, *in* her as possible. Distantly, she was aware that there was a massive mess pooling where they remained connected, but a deep sense of satisfaction and exhaustion was quickly taking her over as she continued to throb and clench.

*“Rey...I- I-”* his eyes were shining as he looked at her in amazement, the words there in his head where his tongue couldn’t form them. Rey smiled, holding his face in her hands.

“I know, Ben.”
Rey blinked her eyes open groggily to the sound of distant, murmuring voices. Glancing around in the darkened room, she found herself wholly disoriented as she tried to piece together where, exactly, she was.

Earlier - yesterday - whenever that was (it was impossible to tell on this Force-forsaken planet of eternal winter), Rey had come here with Ben. She got a little carried away in destroying some things, then they both got a little carried away in - Rey gave a small, involuntary shiver of delight as she remembered what, exactly, she and Ben had been doing. They had finally… *Fucked* seemed entirely too crass. Rey was sure there was a term for what they had done, but she couldn’t quite place her finger on it - everything she knew was either scientific or lewd.

Her memory after *that* was a little hazy, a sort of post-orgasmic blur of half-recollected, sleepy snippets - Ben carrying her to the bedroom, pulling an inordinate number of blankets up around her, then curling up behind her, his hands lazily stroking her hair as the burning heat of his body warmed her in the cold room.

Staggering out of the bed and into the inordinately large bathroom, Rey caught a glance of herself in the mirror as she freshened up. She was still clothed in the slip and underclothes from yesterday, and apparently, Ben’s hands had not been idly running through her hair last night, but had been gathering it into a long, loose side braid, each twist of it consisting of many smaller braids. Running her hand over it, she wondered what this one could possibly mean after what they had done last night.

On now extremely-cold feet, Rey shuffled toward where someone - presumably Ben - had very helpfully deposited her baggage. She quickly pulled out a simple grey tunic and leggings, but had to search a lot longer to find some socks and boots appropriate for this frigid climate. Still cold, she took one of the blankets from the bed and wrapped it around herself, leaving the bedroom in pursuit of where she could still hear distant conversation.

It didn’t take long to find Ben and, to her surprise, Enoch Ren, who were seated in a cleared-out area in the middle of the sitting room. Piles of rubble from Rey’s earlier dispatching of Snokes’ sculpture collection lined the circumference, and the entire center area was a grid consisting of meticulously stacked piles of papers, books, and datapads.

“H-hello.” Rey stuttered awkwardly, worrying at the hem of her blanket.

“Hi.” Ben said quietly as he looked up, his cheeks flushing pink.

“Oh good, you’re awake. That means I can leave.” Enoch cut in brusquely, rising to his feet. “You humans have no idea how easy you have it with your noses, it smells like a brothel in here.”

“Enoch!” Ben reprimanded sharply, his face horrified.

“Look, I’m not judging. You two clearly have this amazing thing, and I will happily leave you to continue figuring out each other and all of-” Enoch gestured vaguely at all of the papers. “-*this.*” Sighing, Enoch turned to Ben. “And I suppose you have *homework* for me, ‘Professor?’”

“Yes,” was Ben’s only terse reply as began gathering up several of the piles of books, and a single stack of papers, dropping the solid stack into Enoch’s arms. “You’ll be needing all of this.
Remember, Mortis. Just concentrate on anything about Mortis.”

Enoch begrudgingly accepted the massive pile, carefully toeing his way around the rubble. “I’ll leave you two to it, then. Supreme Leader,” -he gave the slightest of head dips to Ben- “Princess.” he bowed to Rey deeply with a wink and a smirk, quickly exiting the room before Ben could lecture him once again.

“Rey,” Ben breathed, quickly making his way across the minefield of broken stone to pull her into his arms. He kissed her briefly, then moved to kiss the crown of her head, and seemed to be just taking a moment to breathe her in.

“Well, um. Good morning? I’m not sure what time it is.”

“It’s morning. For another hour or so, anyway. Did you sleep well?”

“Yes - ah, I think better than I can ever remember.” Rey said it with casual nonchalance, but Ben’s reaction of blushing crimson surely meant she must have said something a little… off. Quick to distract him, Rey turned in his arms to face the books and papers on the floor. “I hope you got some sleep - this looks… involved.”

“I got started on the journal this morning, I hope you don’t mind. I haven’t even been able to do much actual reading yet, there was a lot of… categorizing to be done.” Ben took Rey’s hand, guiding her over the destruction and into the cleared-out circle. “As you know, I kept a lot of different types of writings in that book.”

“The poems, yes. And - porn?” Rey added innocently.

Ben huffed, avoiding her eyes. “I believe that when I wrote those, I preferred to categorize them as erotica, but that’s beside the point. This-” Ben gestured at the largest stack of loose papers, which contained the most varied sizes. “Is the “other” stack. There’s… Some useful things in there, but most of it is not important to what we’re figuring out right now. I gave Enoch everything I had written about Mortis - and there was a lot. But this-” Ben moved them to stand in front of another stack of paper, this one with several open books already open around it. “-is everything I ever wrote about battle meditation.”

“Oh! That’s...what’s battle meditation?”

Judging from his reaction, Rey felt that this was much like when she failed to know what a holocron was - clearly, something her minimal training had completely neglected to mention. “Battle meditation is - was a technique used by the Jedi, where they could simultaneously reach hundreds of minds, either linking minds of allies to help them work together better as a unit, or causing doubt and deception among enemies.” Ben’s face darkened, and his head tilted down. “I think this is it, Rey. From what I’ve been able to tell… The more I researched battle meditation, the more I forgot.”

Ben kneeled, gesturing for Rey to join him. He handed her the most disparate, messiest stack yet. “I think the key is somewhere in these. They’re almost all from the last few years I was at the Academy, and I was definitely on to something - some sort of variant on battle meditation, from what I can tell. The only problem is - well, I’ll let you read through a few.”

Most of the pages were ripped, smaller sheets, others were tiny scraps of paper that were absolutely
packed with words, as though the writer was desperate to get as many words down as quickly and unnoticeably as possible. Rey picked up the first sheet, written in a shaking hand:

1. med, 1 = many, did they try with 2? 1=r conditional on Bond. Master/apprentice bond [GM], but Sith may have figured out more. Check 12th index for number of b. med practitioners by 2nd civil war. If S (sith) = constant, which they should be, [GM] is indeterminate.

The note was barely comprehensible to Rey, but maybe it made more sense to Ben. She looked at some of the other pages, all of them varying wildly in terms of how understandable they were.

I know I’ve tried this before, but I can’t seem to remember. I reach the plateau, I see the lines, but something is missing, then everything is taken from me again, I’m already forgetting it now. Will continue recording observations in hopes that I can piece something together. Wish I could draw.

\[ \frac{1}{1-r} = r(s) \quad \text{(2GM/c)} \]

Impossible with one. Cannot be done. Strain on the mind is too much, records of legendary Jedi masters even going insane, this is why it was wiped out. They erased it all because of the connection needed, attachments forbidden. I thought someone was doing this to me, but maybe it’s attempts of the technique itself.

What is your name?

DB/00107, reference CHEBI:7872. C 43 H 66 N 12 O 12 S 2  PN:  It was dumb to think I could replicate this, I realize that now.

I’m starting to forget other things too, not just what I’ve tried to retain about battle meditation. More and more of my notes don’t make any sense, when I know they were perfectly logical when I wrote them. I’m going to stay awake as long as I can, maybe I won’t have the chance to forget. But the voices are always louder then.

Trembling, Rey set down the stack of paper. This was what he wanted her to see, and why he seemed less than hopeful - so many of Ben Solo’s writings were simply those of a man clinging to what he knew, trying to maintain his sanity with his writings. She looked to Ben, who was staring at her with solemn eyes. “Oh… Ben. What - what happened to you?” she whispered, pulling him toward her. He went slightly boneless, collapsing until his head was in her lap.

“You don’t know what happened. That’s the problem. All of this makes about as much sense to me as
it does to you. I’ll read some of it, and I’ll get flashes, but none of it has amounted to anything. It’s always been easy for me to look back and blame Snoke, but this… This is more than that. Something, someone was actively working against me figuring this out.”

“How do you know it wasn’t Snoke?” Rey ran her fingers through his hair, a thought slowly forming in the back of her mind.

“I just… Do. The energy around this is - I don’t know, different somehow. Snoke had been in my head since I was an infant, this was… Something else. Something more recent.”

“I wish… I wish there was a way we could see.”

Ben went very still. “Wait - what did you just say?”

“Nothing, just that it would be nice if we could see your memories, even with the gaps, like when you interrogated me - the only problem is that we don’t know what we’re looking for. Maybe something would stand out-”

Pulling himself up to his hands and knees, Ben desperately crawled toward a particular book, snatching it into his hands as he quickly leafed through the pages. Rey had a peculiar sense of deja-vu, recalling that this was not the first time she had crawled around on a dusty floor, looking through books with the Supreme Leader.

“Yes - that’s it, Rey. Hang on to that thought. We’re - you’re on to something.” Ben squinted, pounding a closed fist against his head. “I’ve almost got it, it’s - I need…”

“Calm down, Ben. What can I do to help?” Rey offered.

“Just - stay there. Stay right there, and get ready to meditate. Lodestones… Where did I put those?”

“Lodestones?”

“They’re - well, they’re really just rocks that failed to grow kyber crystals, but they’re excellent conduits for the Force. They can assist - ah, found them.”

Ben sat across from Rey, seven rocks floating toward him. He gestured toward each one, repositioning them until all seven of the lodestones simultaneously settled to the floor with a collective thump. Rey could already feel the vibration of peaceful nothingness they seemed to give off, somehow both unnoticeable as well as all-encompassing, powerfully neutral in their presence.

“Do you mind letting me in on what the plan is here?”

“Of course. Sorry, it’s just - old habit, I guess. I wanted to get this set up before I forgot where we were going with this. We’re going to meditate. I want you to focus on absolutely nothing, then find me in the nothing - does that make sense?”

“… sort of?”

“We’ve done this before, but the key is to let go before we connect. This isn’t like an interrogation - ideally, you’ll see all of my memories, but it’s just like you said - something should stand out. Just focus on that for right now, Rey. Find nothing, then you’ll find me, then, hopefully, you’ll find what we’re looking for.” Ben shuffled himself into a cross-legged position, and Rey could already sense him peeling away the layers of his consciousness far more efficiently than she had
She was supposed to concentrate - to meditate as she had done countless times before. Yet - between Ben, the lodestones, everything she had seen so far - it was all oddly... pressuring.

“Don’t think of it as anything unusual, Rey. It’s just you, me, and the space in between us. Nothing else matters, none of this holds any meaning. This is just letting go, then simple communication in the Force. Try to grasp the borders of the energy between us, you’ll find that it’s impossible and infinite, its very energy and possibility surrounding and penetrating.”

Ben’s words became increasingly difficult to make out, a soft silence closing in around every syllable. At first, she found herself lulled in a complacent, safe feeling - but when she realized she could no longer sense Ben’s presence, a pit of unease settled in her stomach. She was supposed to find him in the nothing, not lose him-

Rey opened her eyes to find herself in a quiet, dark, all-encompassing space, with lines of blinding white stretching out in the distance all around her.

Some of the lines fell in neat circles, while others wound and overlapped throughout the space. There was a distinct path of parallel white lines set before her. Looking beyond where she stood at its very inception, Rey could see where the path was dotted with occasional divergences, borders formed by circles or triangles of light. The trail itself was long and winding, hundreds of these smaller circular or triangular portals stemming off from where the path would sometimes wind and split. No matter how many times the road of light split, every path seemed to lead to a large arch, far from where Rey was currently situated.

It was unlike anything she had ever seen or experienced in her life. She was almost certain that this vision a product of her imagination - until her reverie was broken by the distant, plaintive cries of a child.

Where… What is this?
...well, I went there, both with the virgin sex and the literal World Between Worlds. This is your only warning: the next chapter is possibly the most dramatic, sad, scary, and weirdest thing I’ve ever written. And its possibility is all kinds of canon, if Rebels is to be believed.

Anyway, on to the regular footnotes of Footnotes:

For those of you who like visuals, here's what Rey looked like in my head BEFORE she stripped off everything:
https://78.media.tumblr.com/521150575a90c80d17cf28f7aa2436e4/tumblr_paqrr8sl2m1w5hdpoo1
I originally wanted to stick her in something very similar to my MIL's wedding sari
that I wore to my rehearsal dinner, but it's rather difficult to get bright pink and green to realistically read as orange and brown, even in Photodshop.

I chose Scipio as the planet for this chapter for a number of plot-related reasons, but all I could remember about it from Clone Wars was that it was snowy and cold looking, it’s where the banking clans were, and it’s where some serious Anakin cuckholding nearly went down. So when I was imagining these scenes during outlining, I thought “Ok, Star Wars version of Noveria from Mass Effect, even if that’s not exactly what it might look like. Got it.” So color me surprised when I went back and watched the Scipio episodes while actually writing this and… Yep, it’s Star Wars Noveria.

Most of the next chapter is already written, as it and the following chapter were things I pretty much had to work on from the very beginning of writing this to make sure everything fell into place.

I’m going to ruminate on it a bit longer, probably do another chapter of filth, AKA my palate cleanser and therapy, Alternative Methods, then post chapter 17 sometime next week. Sound good?

Please, keep up with the lovely comments and kudos, I realize that I publish massive, ridiculous chapters, but I really do appreciate every bit of feedback Footnotes has gotten! Thank you all SO much!
“A World Between You and Me

Chapter Summary

“Stay here. They’ll come back for you.” the lie was like ash in his mouth, his voice dead as he delivered the damning words. The words that would trap her here for years of struggle and starvation. The words she would repeat to herself over and over until they lost their context and meaning, twisting them until they came from her parents, not some stranger in the desert. She would forget who said them, and convince herself that somewhere, she had parents who loved her.

Chapter Notes

Ten days between updates? That's teacher summer for you! Warning on this chapter for some canon-level amounts of horror and gore, and some intense childhood trauma and possible neglect, though I don't think it's anything update-the-tags worthy. Just consider yourself warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Each has its twin; not one of them is alone.” - Song of Solomon, 4:2

Ben opened his eyes to find himself in a quiet, dark, all-encompassing space, with lines of blinding white stretching out in the distance all around him.

Some of the lines fell in neat circles, while others wound and overlapped throughout the space. There was a distinct path of parallel white lines set before him. Looking beyond where he stood at its very inception, Ben could see where the path was dotted with occasional divergences, borders formed by circles or triangles of light. The trail itself was long and winding, hundreds of these smaller circular or triangular portals stemming off from where the path would sometimes wind and split. No matter how many times the road of light split, every path seemed to lead to a large arch, far from where Ben was currently situated.

He knew this place. Theoretically, at least. The question he had was - why, how am I here?

As a student in Luke’s Jedi school, he had discovered several texts offhandedly referencing what could only be translated as the World Between Worlds, a plane that existed both as a conduit and relay of the Force. Many times, he unsuccessfully attempted to reach the space in meditations, before his memory loss took away both the methods and the very concept of the plane altogether.
But now that he was here… More of his research came back to him. This was much smaller than ancient Jedi writings described it; this was not an infinite space of hundreds of paths, some intersecting, some forever out of reach. There was just the one road before him, and while it had splits and turns and many portals, it had a very definite beginning and end. All around him, Ben could hear faint, indiscernible whispers that seemed to follow him as he slowly walked forward. This was not the World Between Worlds - this was a specific world, a specific time, and a specific path.

He shouldn’t be here. Ben wasn’t entirely sure where he was supposed to be as Rey was theoretically examining his memories, but he was positive that this particular aspect of the Force wasn’t where he was supposed to end up. Still, though, the experience was altogether fascinating as he looked around him, noticing that while he could feel the Force all around him, he was unable to command it in this space. He could feel sensations and hear his very footsteps, indicating that this was more than just a dream - perhaps-

- his reverie was broken by the distant, plaintive cries of a child.

Ben stood very still. That sound… He knew these screams. They had haunted his dreams for half of his life. Ben turned to face one of the portals, noticing the noise growing louder as he approached it.

Initially, the portal appeared to open to nothing but the black space behind it, dotted with twinkling stars. But as he drew nearer, a bright, hazy fog blurred in from the edges, becoming more and more defined.

“No!”

The agonized scream left his heart in his throat as he closed his eyes. He knew where he was now. He knew what he would see here. He knew there was nothing he could do.

“Come back!”

He sank to his knees directly before the portal, forcing himself to watch where the scene now came into full focus, so clear he’d swear he could reach forward and gather the sand into his hand.

A tiny girl, dressed in rags with her hair gathered into three small buns, stumbled in the sand, craning her neck as she struggled against the fat fingers that harshly gripped her arm. In the distance, a silver ship grew smaller and smaller as tears streamed down the girl’s face.

It was her. Of course it was her. It was always her.

“No! Come back!” Rey begged again, trying to pull away.

“Quiet, girl!” A massive Crolute now came into focus, yanking the girl toward him.

“No!” she sobbed, straining as she continued to wail.

The Crolute was unmoved, releasing her with a shove to the sand. “You won’t work off that debt by crying. Move along, girl.” He trudged toward a distant outpost, seeming assured that she would eventually follow. After all, it wasn’t as though she had anywhere else to go in this miserable desert.
Ben felt his hands shaking at the sight of Rey, so small, helpless, and utterly alone in this moment. He had seen this during his interrogation on Starkiller - but something was off. He was certain that there had been someone there for her - someone who at least gave her a pleasant lie, told her the words that she would cling to for ages. Words that gave her hope, but cursed her to stay on this forsaken planet for years.

Her sobs receded somewhat, turning to small, hiccuping gasps. In the distance, the Crolute continued his slow plod forward, and Ben swore he could feel the hot desert breeze that swept sand across the dunes. Ben looked up to find Rey-

-staring directly at him.

“Who are you?” she sniffled, wiping at her confused eyes.

He couldn’t stop himself from instinctually looking behind him, around the portal - anywhere other than where he sat directly before Rey. But she continued meeting his eyes, her curiosity seeming to win out over her crippling sorrow.

No. No. This - this wasn’t happening. This couldn’t happen. Because if there was no one else here, and Rey could see him… That meant - no. He couldn’t do it. But as Rey slowly approached him, as though he were a wild animal, Ben knew what had to be done. If the Force had led him here, it seemed that it was also determined to paint him as the villain.

It was him. It had always been him. She stayed on Jakku, waiting, hoping, begging for anything to end her loneliness - because of what she heard, what he would say here and now. If he didn’t… Well, he knew he would do it. It was in her memory after all, and time didn’t work that way in the World Between Worlds - all of this had already happened. Besides, even if he could change her future, he was too greedy - too selfish to allow Rey’s path to divert from the one where she would meet him.

He was a monster, after all.

Ben moved as close to the edge of the portal as he could, swearing he could feel the heat of the desert as he crouched before the tiny Rey, trying to make himself as small as possible.

“Stay here. They’ll come back for you.” the lie was like ash in his mouth, his voice dead as he delivered the damning words. The words that would trap her here for years of struggle and starvation. The words she would repeat to herself over and over until they lost their context and meaning, twisting them until they came from her parents, not some stranger in the desert. She would forget who said them, and convince herself that somewhere, she had parents who loved her.

Rey’s tiny chin trembled as she nodded, her eyes looking far more brave and resolute than any four-year-old should ever have to be. She struggled to her feet, clutching her thin arms to her torso, her gaze dipping down in defeat.

Ben couldn’t stop himself. He crawled toward her, uncaring of the scalding desert sands on his palms. It didn’t matter to him that he had apparently transcended the barrier between their worlds and times, all that mattered was the scared, lonely child before him. Lifting a hand toward her, he met her eyes once again.

“I’ll come back for you, sweetheart. I promise.”

Rey blinked back tears as she nodded once again, tentatively reaching toward his hand-
A blinding fog closed in around Ben’s vision, and an unseen force propelled him backwards, skidding into the astral plane once again. A soft, gut-wrenching, whispered “No” was the last trace of anything that escaped from that place. The portal filled in with white before slowly fading back to reveal the space behind it once again.

Shaking, he rose to his feet. He knew precisely where he was now, and what each of these portals represented. This was Rey’s life, her memories. As he walked along the path, his eyes traveled from portal to portal, occasionally catching glimpses of the visions they offered. This wasn’t anything new, he knew Rey’s past - but each portal seemed to exclusively show a time she had felt desperately alone. Why these specific visions of her past was a mystery to him.

But more importantly, Ben was beginning to remember… Her. Just fragments of memories, but more than he had retained in years. But it wasn’t this struggling little girl before him - he remembered the incredible woman she would become, and seeing glimpses of her throughout his life. It was more than just dreams after all - she had been his guardian angel who saved him as a child, but more often than not, was just a comforting presence, a vague outline that gave him hope amid his own crushing loneliness.

A vague outline - perhaps that’s what he was to her right now, Ben wondered as a sharp-eyed, waist-high Rey seemingly peered at him through one of the portals. But she had no memories of Ben Solo - she was always, always alone.

Maybe… Just maybe, he could be something for Rey. She had no specific memories of him saving her, so he knew he never would approach her - but perhaps he could still find a way to help. The sand on his hand already proved that he was able to traverse the portals and affect what was there - it was time to be the hero she needed.

So Ben did just that. Always just beyond her field of vision, always dodging out of sight in time, he found ways to help little Rey in her moments of loneliness. She was fiercely independent, a true survivor on this world… But that didn’t mean there weren’t moments that he could make her life easier - especially when she was young, and still very much under the thumb of the Crolute.

When she hadn’t scavenged well enough to eat for days, he would move aside steel plates that a little girl would have never managed on her own, exposing treasure troves of parts and machinery untouched by the desert sands. Sometimes, he would just simply be a watchful eye, making sure she was safe during her hazardous climbs. Other times, he took a more active role in making sure Rey was going to survive another day, a menacing presence just behind her that assured she wouldn’t be taken advantage of in her bartering. But as she grew older, the threats to her life and livelihood became more… problematic.

At perhaps eight or nine, a fellow scavenger took advantage of her distraction at one of the cleaning stations, stealing the remainder of her daily haul that she was counting on to feed her for the rest of the week. Ben, grateful for his cold weather gear, pulled his hood over his head, then proceeded to relocate several parts of the thief’s face with his fist before returning the parts, leaving a bloody trail that led back to Rey, still blissfully oblivious at her station.

She was perhaps twelve when he noticed the first group that had plans for more than her scavenge. She was alone and exhausted, trudging home from the outpost. While Rey was already a fierce fighter, who had proven herself more than capable of defending herself - these were several full-grown men. When they followed her, they whispered among themselves their plan for who would
hold her down, who would keep watch, who would get first-

It was then that Ben discovered that he could use the Force in this space, after their apparent leader suddenly collapsed, scrambling at his throat. His death was too quick, Ben reasoned - he didn’t need the Force to beat these men within an inch of their lives, only sparing them because someone needed to spread the tale of what happened to men who attempted to abuse Rey.

Perhaps the message was received, because Ben’s more… Aggressive negotiations weren’t needed again until she was perhaps fifteen or sixteen. She was holed up in her AT-AT, feverish and sick - evidently, drinking from an ancient coolant tank had been a mistake she was paying for in dividends. Certainly, she was feeling lonely - the ever-present feeling that seemed to connect these memories - but Ben could feel a threat on the air, as he did before.

A lone figure approached her walker, staggering slightly through either a limp or intoxication. Perhaps if he only carried the threat of burglary, if he only planned to steal from Rey, Ben would have let him off lightly, sent him back to the outpost with a few broken bones and a story to tell. But the moment the man’s hand went to loosen his belt, Ben was able to sense his true intent - he knew that Rey wouldn’t be able to fight him off as she had done so many others.

Ben unearthed one of Rey’s less effective spike traps, spearing the man’s body and leaving it just beyond the perimeter of what was considered “her” area. He didn’t stick around in this vision long enough to see the results, but judging from the fact that it was one of the last portals left, he assumed the message was received.

Finally, he walked up to the last portal before the main archway. Cautiously, Ben approached, noticing that this portal did not clear to a burning desert sun, or to the lonely interior of her AT-AT. The dark sky of Jakku by night dominated most of the space here. He approached slowly as he adjusted to the light, his eyes eventually making out a tiny glow-lamp illuminating Rey and - that droid.

He swallowed thickly. If the BB unit was here, that meant... Rey had no way of knowing that this would be her last night on this horrible planet. He had to see her one last time, to truly cement the vision of this lonely girl who he tried to save in his memory.

Edging closer to her, Ben could now make out that Rey and the droid were on top of her AT-AT. She had turned out all of the lights inside, and was using a pair of binoculars to scan the horizon. He could hear her softly talking to the droid, but was unable to make out her words. He crept closer, the pair still focused on something far away.

“Looks like Tuanul. The blaze is so high, though, it must have been going since last night - that was more than just a local raid. I’m sure you wouldn’t know anything about it, would you?”

For a brief, stupid moment, Ben thought she was talking to him, before the droid sputtered out an indignant response.

“Right. Classified. Of course.”

She sounded… Right. This was his Rey, at last. All the other times he saw her, he felt nothing but the need to protect her, to save her from this horrible existence in any way he could. But hearing her voice - Ben felt his cheeks burn in remembering the words that would eventually come out of
that mouth. He kept creeping forward, unable to help himself - he had to see her, to see her face before Kylo Ren ruined everything.

He wasn’t as cautious as he thought, an errant footfall causing the dune to shift unexpectedly under his foot. The droid whirled to face him, letting out a series of shrill warnings. Rey scrambled to her feet, turning her glowlamp to its highest setting as she quickly snatched up her staff, holding it in a defensive position, squinting out into the dark. She whispered something down to the droid, which immediately dropped down a hatch next to her, hiding itself in the depths of the AT-AT.

“Who goes there? Don’t get any ideas, I’ve got this place rigged to kill you in more ways than you can imagine!” Ben couldn’t stop his smile as he detected her bluster - since he was here last, she may have, at best, added had a couple of mines, maybe a tripwire. But not where he was standing - and she knew it. “You should have seen what happened to Unceem Bess!”

So that was the man’s name. Ben wondered how long she left the body there. “I’m not here to make trouble. I’m just… Lost. Trying to find Niima Outpost.” Ben’s voice was scratchy from disuse - how long had he been in her memories, anyway?

“…come into the light.”

Ben took a step toward her, making sure his face remained in shadow, thankful as ever for his hood. He had been so careful all these other times - he couldn’t risk her seeing his face here at the end, he’d have to-

“I guess you really are lost. Good thing it’s night; anyone wearing dark clothing on Jakku by day is either suicidal or an idiot.” She leaned forward, trying to get a better look at him from her high post on top of the AT-AT, a slightly wicked grin on her face.

“Besides, around these parts, only monsters wear a black hood that covers their face - that’s what they say in town, anyway. So tell me, traveller - are you the elusive Creature of Niima Outpost?”

Ben sidestepped the light, trying to evade her piercing gaze. “Maybe I am?”

“Seems you should know your way around here, then. Let me see your face, Creature. I’ll decide for myself, and send you on your way.” She replied with humor in her voice, and a twinkle in her eye as she crouched down to look at him more closely.

As always, her voice compelled him to move forward. He knew he shouldn’t do this. But… With shaking fingers he couldn’t stop, Ben lowered his hood, staring up at her through his hair. They were no more than an arm’s length apart now.

Rey looked somewhat taken aback, appraising him in a whole new light. Her gaze roamed his form appreciatively, then she met his eyes. She stared straight back at him, her mind clearly trying to place where she had seen this man before. Leaning forward, her arm twitched toward him, seeming to want to reach for him before she froze, looking like she was wondering what came over her.

“…Well, you’re no monster, that’s for sure.” she said softly. Collecting herself, Rey gestured away from her home. “Niima Outpost is that way, if you keep that canyon on your left, you’ll be there by sunup.”

“Thank you. And… I’m sorry.”

“What for?”
She had seen his face. And, after all, he still had to be her villain.

With a wave of his hand, Ben pushed through Rey’s mind, which felt almost alien to him with how pliable and defenseless she was. Her eyes glazed over, her expression placid and dull. There was no resistance. It made him feel sick.

“I’m sorry that you’ll forget ever meeting me here. I was just an anonymous traveller you’d never seen. My face is just one you’ve seen somewhere, in a dream, in a distant memory.”

“I never met you here. I’ve seen your face before, but only in a dream.”

She was still under his thrall when Ben felt the fog of the memory begin to close in around him, and before he could stop himself, he called out to her-

“I love you, Rey. Just give me time.”

Staggering backwards out of the memory, Ben turned to face the final portal, right next to the one he came out of - where all these paths ended. He knew it would lead here. But he wasn’t sure if he was going to be able to stomach reliving this particular experience.

“There’s been an awakening…”

Ben froze at those words. That voice. Those words should not have been here, these were Rey’s memories. Unless… What he just did…? No. Their connection began on Starkiller, he was sure of it - but perhaps that little trick with her memory… That tiny brush with the Force - perhaps he was the spark she needed to light the fire that woke her abilities, her potential, who she is in the Force.

Maybe he wasn’t the villain after all. Maybe-

“Get out of my head!”

Oh.

“I’m not giving you anything.”

Of course. He still had to be the monster in a mask for her, after all.

The child was still crying.

Rey wandered the paths of this strange place, trying to pinpoint the location of the noise. There were portals here and there, but none of them seemed to be the where the sound was coming from. It was definitely growing louder and more defined as she travelled, so it couldn’t have been very far away.

“Put that down this instant!”

She startled at the clear, robotic words that issued from the portal ahead of her and to the right. The crying started up again, this time even more plaintive and desperate. Approaching the portal, Rey was reminded of the mirror cave on Ach-To, its circular form beckoning her as she the sounds
became clearer.

“This will never do.”

The sobs amplified as she stood directly before the portal, where, like a clearing sandstorm, the blackness gave way to a blurry view of the interior of a dwelling.

Facing away from her point of view, there was a messy-haired toddler sitting alone on the floor, heaving massive, mournful sobs, wiping his curly black hair from his eyes. A power drill lay next to him, evidently discarded. A kitchen droid of some sort hovered directly in front of her perspective, seeming to contemplate the child before it. Before she could even begin to comprehend what she was seeing, the droid unfolded a long, serrated knife, and slowly approached the child.

Its intent was clear.

“No!”

She was unable to stop the word from coming out of her as she reached forward, knowing she was helpless in this situation. The tiny child turned, tears still running down his round cheeks as he directly met Rey’s eyes.

She’d know those eyes anywhere.

“Ben?!” Rey gasped, her arm still outstretched.

He raised his hand as though he intended to wave at her before a bright, searing light exploded between them, knocking her backwards and back into the black space. The portal began to blur, and she was just able to make out the droid disarming itself while Ben’s sobs reduced to hiccuping sniffles.

Rey was shaken. She was not a gambler, but she’d bet her life that she just witnessed a very young Ben Solo nearly murdered by a kitchen droid. And, apparently, she was able to interact with him in these memories - perhaps with the very events themselves. Shakily regathering herself, Rey retraced her steps, going back to earlier portals, this time approaching some of them enough to make out the scenes behind them. It was clear now that the path was chronological, Ben growing younger as she moved closer to where she started. Toddler Ben with a house droid. Baby Ben with a nanny droid. Infant Ben with a doula droid. In every vision, crying - always crying. Why... how was this even a possibility? If these were his memories - was this all he remembered? Where was Leia? Where was Han?

This couldn’t be all of his memories. She seemed to only be seeing... His loneliness. When... When he felt that he was all alone, that he had no one. There had to be more - this couldn’t be the only thing the Force willed.

Sure that she was doing something wrong, Rey went further along the path, going to a portal just beyond the murder attempt. There was no droid here, but Ben Solo was once again alone. He was perhaps four or five, sitting at an adult-sized table in an adult-sized chair, his feet dangling a good foot off the ground. His face was screwed up in concentration, his left hand pinning down a piece
of paper while his right hand firmly gripped a blue crayon. Cocking his head slightly, he seemed to consider his work for a moment, before his bottom lip began to quiver, tears welling in his eyes.

“It’s wrong,” he said quietly to himself in the empty room. “Stupid.” He collapsed at the table, burrowing his face into his arms, muffling his sobs with the sleeve of his shirt.

Quietly walking forward, Rey found that, just as she had done before, she was able to transcend the portal and enter his space. She took a tentative step forward, unsure if Ben would be able to see or hear her-

He sat up suddenly, wiping at his eyes as he looked straight at her, the tiniest spark of recognition flaring up, then extinguishing. His eyebrows furrowed, as though he was trying to figure her out.

“Are you my new nanny?”

“No. I’m - I’m no one.” She hadn’t prepared for this. It was now very clear that this was something more than simply seeing memories - she was becoming part of them. “Um, where are your parents?”

“Oh. Sorry. My mom will be home later.” Ben gave a great sniff, his legs swinging under him slightly as his oddly piercing gaze continued to bore right into her eyes, finally nodding to himself.

“A lot later. She’s at work.”

“Are you all alone here?”

“I have CZ-7. But…” Ben bit his lip, a small, devious smile creeping over his face. He gestured to Rey, beckoning her to come closer. “I turned him off,” he whispered with a note of pride. “I’m not supposed to do that. Mama put a bunch of passwords on him. But I figured them out.”

Rey couldn’t stop the grin on her face. “You’re pretty smart, kid. What are you working on there?” She gestured toward his paper and crayons, trying to get a better look.

Ben’s face, previously beaming with pride, cracked in shame, his hands going to cover his work.

“Oh… Nothing. CZ-7 says it’s not important. I’m bad at it.”

“I bet you aren’t. Can you show me?”

Ben chewed on the inside of his mouth, his eyes large and trusting. “Promise you won’t laugh?”

“Promise.”

He pulled his hands away from the paper, revealing scribbles, doodles - but mostly shaky, wobbly attempts, in both Aurebesh and High Galactic, to write his own name.

“I can read all the letters and numbers. Both alphabets,” he boasted, a little confidence back in his voice. “But it’s- I can’t - it doesn’t look like when Mama does it. It’s bad.” His posture seemed to deflate as he kicked at the rungs on the chair. “I’m bad. CZ-7 told me to give up because no one writes anymore, so I turned him off.”

Rey felt tension boiling over in this little boy - so full of feelings, emotions, all of them threatening to spill out at any second - he was willing to open up to this complete stranger, he was so desperate for attention, for validation. He just needed someone - anyone.

“You’re not bad, you just need to keep working at it. Want to know a secret?” Rey leaned forward to whisper. “You’re way better than I am. I didn’t learn to write until I was ten.”
His face lit up with a huge smile that showed off every one of his missing teeth. “Really?”

“Really. Besides, I like your writing, Ben. Can you show me how you do it?”

His tiny chest puffed up, and Ben re-adjusted his posture, grasping his crayon with new confidence. Biting his tongue in utmost concentration, he kept a steady hand as he formed the straight lines and curves of High Galactic, B - E - N. His eyes alight, he kept going, his hand following the harsh angles of Aurebesh.

He looked to Rey, his face delighted. “What’s your name?”

And just like that, she was once again rudely booted from the portal.

Rey slowly rose to her feet, still processing what she just saw. In the first vision, Ben was alone, and she was removed after that explosion of light - had that been her? The droid? Ben? The Force itself? There was no way of knowing. This time, though, it very much seemed like the Force was at work - Rey had been allowed to stay there just long enough to help Ben, but apparently him knowing her name was too much. Was this genuinely changing the past? Did present-day Ben remember her? It was possible, but he may have just been too young - perhaps it was one of these partial memories, where Ben could see an object or a certain phrase that would re-spark the memory.

This wasn’t why she was here, though. She knew she was supposed to be examining his memories to look anything that would help them understand his notes about battle meditation, not potentially meddling with the fabric of time. Battle meditation certainly wasn’t something from his childhood, she should be moving much further along. But… It seemed like this was important. Letting the Force guide her steps, Rey peered through a few more portals, but didn’t enter them.

Ben was already powerful in the Force - every time she passed a portal, he seemed to know exactly when to look up. He’d smile, sometimes waving enthusiastically. He must have been about eight when there was the time he gestured for her to come closer, checking his surroundings first. The Force nudged her, indicating that she should move along, but Rey couldn’t stop herself, smiling as she ran toward him. He held his finger to his lips, and offered her a folded slip of paper. Tentative, Rey reached forward, not sure if this would work, and plucked the paper from his grasp before, once again, she was hurtled backwards.

She still had the paper. With trembling fingers, she unfolded it, her eyes misting over as she saw written in beautiful, familiar, carefully-scripted High Galactic -

What’s your name?

It felt heavy in her hands, as though the Force knew it wasn’t supposed to be here, that she had taken something out if its place in space and time. But she swore that she had just seen this paper in her time - though it was far more worn and faded, tattered with being held and read a thousand times. Shaking herself, Rey moved on.

Ben Solo was growing up. His days, while still lonely, were filled with reading, writing, and
drawing, counting down the time until he’d see his father, researching the planet they were going to move to next. But his nights… Something was still there with him at night, causing him to whimper and scream. At one point, she caught a piece of a whispered conversation, the speaker unmistakable - “I wouldn’t know, but it just doesn’t seem normal for a nine-year-old to have imaginary friends, Leia. At his age - talking to himself? It was one thing when he talked about that girl all the time, that seemed harmless, but this man-”

Rey gave a shudder. Snoke was already in Ben’s mind - perhaps he had been all along. The Force continued to push her along, but she heard a desperate “Come back!” come from one of the entryways she had just passed.

A preteen Ben stood at the edge of the portal, his eyes wild. He was gangly and awkward, already almost as tall as her, but thin as a rail, his messy hair unable to cover his massive ears and acne. His eyes looked more familiar - massive, purple bags stained the areas under them, making him look far older than his years. But for the first time, a slight blush stained his features upon seeing Rey, and he was unable to meet her eyes directly at first.

“Um, Miss. I - I think you might be real. Not here, but somewhere .”

Rey cocked her head, curious. “What makes you think that?”

“I always thought you were in my imagination, because I couldn’t feel you in the Force when I couldn’t see you. Not all the time, not like…” Ben looked momentarily haunted, but pressed on. “But a little while ago, before Life Day, I felt something in the Force, just like you feel when I see you here. Was it - is that you? Could I find you?”

Staggering backwards, she was stunned. If Ben was around ten, that would mean she-

“I… I…”

“Please, just tell me!” His desperate, croaking voice was the last thing that made it through the portal, which quickly shut down around the vision.

Her heart was beating out of control, and she could feel an urgency to her steps now. She was getting close to something important - she had passed a few places where the road had diverged and led to nothing, seemingly the first evidence of completely lost memories.

“Wait! Please!”

The voice came from an intact gate among dozens of broken paths. Ben was now perhaps in his late teens, seated at a desk littered with scrolls, books, and papers. It was dark around him, but she could just make out the features of a familiar structure of stone and wood. Rey swallowed thickly - she had seen this dwelling, he was at Luke’s Jedi school now. He staggered to his feet, disbelief etched into his features. Even with his slouched posture, he was now taller than Rey, but somehow looked even thinner.

“It is you. I - I forgot you. Until just now. Who are you?”
“I’m - I’m no one.” Rey replied automatically.

“You said that before.” Ben paced, looking cross. “I used to see you every couple of years or so - the last time I saw you…” he blinked slowly, seeming to have difficulty in trying to recall.

The portal was already beginning to fog over. Quickly, Rey thrust her hand forward, handing him his own words from years ago. He accepted it slowly, their fingers almost, but not quite brushing against each other. “I am real, Ben. You’ll find me.”

If it was possible, the main space now seemed darker. Rey noticed that more portals were missing than intact around here, evidence of more and more broken memories. But when she heard a painfully familiar echo of words from a portal far ahead, she knew she had to hurry.

“Ben, no!”

She sprinted far forward, and the portal already seemed ready for her, the vision already in motion. But she didn’t enter immediately - this was something she needed to let happen as it was intended to, so she could see what happened.

A still-skeletally thin, but much older Ben staggered out of the rubble of a collapsed hut, still clutching his lightsaber as rain fell heavily from the night sky. Other figures approached him, obviously alerted by the sudden noise and disturbance in the Force.

“Solo. What happened?”

“He - he tried to kill me.” Ben replied in a hoarse monotone, his eyes vacant as he stared ahead. He extinguished his lightsaber, the only light now coming from the glowlamps dotting the paths between the huts.

The other students immediately broke into hushed whispers, some disbelieving, some accusatory, some furious.

“Well, that’s no surprise after the news today. Guess it finally broke him, keeping it from us all these years.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything else from his son.”

“Your whole family is a bunch of Empire-glorifying murderers, Solo. You’re no better than the rest of them.”

Ben seemed shaken from his reverie - “Wait, what?”

“Don’t pretend like you didn’t know.”

“How could do that to me, Ben? You know what that monster did to my family!”

Backing up defensively, he looked truly lost. “I - I honestly don’t know what you’re talking about.”
“You guys, I don’t think - Ben doesn’t lie.”

“No, he just sits there writing and talking to himself like a freak all the time.”

“Ben - it’s - it’s all over the news. Your mother-”

“Darth Vader was your grandfather!”

Dropping to his knees, Ben’s chin trembled as he breathed rapidly. “No - that… That can’t be true. Because if that’s true…”

“It’s definitely true. They’ve got everything - your mother’s real father was Anakin Skywalker, alias Darth Vader. It lost her the election.”

“No, you don’t understand - if that’s true, that means Luke - my whole family - they're the ones who lied.”

“Yeah, we established that, Solo.”

“Shut up, Taytoo. Luke has been lying, but Snoke has been telling me the truth. I never wanted to believe him, but...” Ben glanced around, desperate. “Well? I know I’m not the only one he’s been talking to. He said he would help us. He's helped me before.”

Taytoo - Rey now recognized a young Enoch Ren - came to stand beside Ben, and three others edged closer to him, showing their support. Ben glanced around at the other students, his stance beseeching.

“Look, it’s true - I had no idea about this. Luke tried to kill me-”

“And good riddance,” sneered one of the others. “What did I tell you, Keyn? If anyone went Dark, it was going to be one of those four.”

“Yeah, who is this Snoke anyway?”

“Everyone, please, let’s all just calm down-”

In the driving rain and pitch of night, it was impossible to tell who lit their lightsaber first, but within seconds, it was chaos. Dark swirled everywhere as former friends broke out into vicious fights, fellow students becoming enemies to the death. A couple fell quickly, others ran, spreading the fight throughout the compound. Seemingly within minutes, all hell had broken loose, fire now giving full light to the destruction left behind. In the end, seven of them were left - Ben, the original four who stood beside him, and two others who stayed out of the fight.

Rey, still on the other side of the portal, had fallen to her knees, covering her mouth as tears streamed down her face. How? How did so much go so wrong? And so quickly? She was not privy to Ben’s emotions and thoughts - she only saw what was in front of her.

The other students gathered around Ben, seemingly looking to him for guidance. He was once
again staring blankly, seemingly overwhelmed by what just happened.

“Hold on, I’ll - I’m going to get us out of here,” he whispered, walking toward Rey’s view on stiff-seeming legs.

He was in better focus now, far away from the others as he sorted through the rubble around where his hut had collapsed, Luke was still presumably underneath it all somewhere. His arms were shaking as he dug desperately, finally calling on the Force to bring a small communicator to his hand, his trembling fingers barely able to hold down the call button.

“Dad… Please, please come get me. This - this isn’t like the other times I asked you to pick me up. Please, I’ve - I’ve made a huge mistake.”

Shakily, he dropped the communicator, falling to his knees once again as he buried his face in his hands, sobbing.

Finally unable to watch anymore, Rey stepped through the portal, reaching a tentative hand toward Ben’s shuddering back. Instantly aware of her presence, he looked over his shoulder to see her, his teary eyes filling up with hope - but then breaking once again, crushed.

“I don’t deserve this. I don’t deserve you. After what I’ve done... I know you’re just a hallucination. I’m just going to forget this anyway. Please, just… go.”

Rey withdrew her hand slightly, confused. “What do you mean you’re going to forget? You can see me right now, you remember me.”

“Because it happens every time. She makes me forget, every time. And not just you - my notes, my studies, everything. The only way I ever remember everything is when you come back. When you're with me.”

“Who, Ben? Who makes you forget?”

“The Mother, of course.”

The black fog dropped immediately, and Rey was unceremoniously dumped from the vision, falling flat on her back. She backed away, tears in her eyes as she heard Ben’s echoing words from the future - “You feel like he’s the father you never had. He would’ve disappointed you.” Oh, Ben… If anyone knew what it felt like to so desperately hope for your parents to come back, only for it to never happen… Obviously, Han didn't come, or didn't make it in time. It must have been… Snoke must have been planning on this. Rey wiped at her tears with the palm of her hand, sniffling pathetically as she sat there, thinking on everything she had just seen and heard. So much more made sense now, except -

The Mother. The Mother. Rey didn’t know much beyond fairy tales - the Mortis research went with Enoch, after all. But it had been the name whispered by her would-be assassins. There was enough here to form a solid connection between Ben’s lost memories and the current plan to eliminate her; maybe all Ben needed was to remember, once again, what happened to him. After all, he said that when Rey was with him, he could remember everything. This information seemed critical; she needed to find her way out of here as soon as possible.
Struggling up to her feet, she sprinted toward the largest portal, passing many doorways on her way there. As though the portals sensed her intention of passing them by, the images projecting through them were clearer and clearer the faster she ran. She heard and saw glimpses of… Horrible things.

She paused when she saw a particularly skeletal-looking Ben kneeling at the entryway, sobbing as he begged something, someone to help him once more, that he was ready to do whatever it said, that he had the strength to carry out its mission, to finish what it started. He looked up suddenly, seemingly staring right into her eyes.

“It is you!” he rasped in a broken voice, his eyes wide in disbelief. “The girl… The girl from - where have you been? I needed your help - I needed… I haven’t seen you-” he screamed, sinking to his knees and clutching his head just as Rey made a move to run toward him in the portal. He flinched away from her, his eyes crazed - “Get out of here, before she sees you!”

Backing away, Rey tried to focus her thoughts on what she just saw, this completely unhinged version of Ben, what it could possibly mean, the vision slowly clouding to black much as all the others had. But then it started doing something… Different.

A low humming came from the blackened portal, the remaining wisps of the vision condensing to a single point of light, surrounded by total blackness. The light then stretched with a vibrating, droning noise, forming a thin white line. Then, the line rotated, creating a flat circle in its wake, which intermittently flipped from dark to light, black to white, faster and faster. It seemed to settle on black as the circle now pushing forth into a dimensional shape. The black sphere gained more detail as it continued to extrude, reflecting the light around it as though a dripping wetness was issuing from its sleek form. Finally, it gave a nauseating roll forward into the space, and a white iris within it opened to stare directly at her.

It blinked.

Rey was filled with an impossible sort of fear, scrambling to stand and run faster than she had ever run in her life toward the largest portal. She was tempted to see if that… Thing was following her, but the terror it had instilled in her kept her eyes forward, her instincts telling her it’s right behind you. Adrenaline filled her, causing her run to be staggering and awkward, her breaths short and gasping as the humming from the thing transformed into a deafening silence. The silence grew louder and louder, Rey’s pounding footfalls now barely audible soft pats, her panting reduced to nothing but whispers.

“Don’t be afraid. I feel it too.”

Kylo’s words rang out, his gentle voice slicing through the suffocating quiet. Unlike the first time she heard those words, they filled her heart with hope and joy - she was almost there, she was going to make it-

The largest portal’s image grew clearer and clearer, and Rey smiled between panting breaths - of course it was all leading to this. She could feel the blackness closing in behind her, her legs now more wobbly than ever as she launched herself as hard as she could toward the portal, the darkness closing in around her vision - would it be enough?

“We’ll see.”
…I know I promised to not do cliffhangers, but I couldn’t resist.

So welcome to a taste of my older writing, where I used to dabble in horror! Drama! Angst! And there ain’t no angst like personal angst, and ooh boy, did I use a lot for Kid Ben.

I was a bit of a Problem Child myself, but I’ve also worked a lot with kids with emotional/behavioral disorders. I didn’t expect to pull so much from my year of working as an art therapist at a psychoed school for a fanfiction, but here we are. If you’ve never been around EBD kids, the way Ben acts with Rey, complete stranger, may seem unbelievable to you. But let me tell you - these kids are usually so desperate for attention, company, understanding - they will talk to ANYONE. And oh boy, sometimes they will tell you EVERYTHING. And sometimes, they will also stab you with safety scissors when they don’t want to take their benchmark tests, but that’s a different story.

Anyway, this was a rough chapter to write. It’s one I’ve worked on in bits and pieces since the beginning, and it’s my way of probably-way-too-neatly trying to tie a lot of things together. Hope it worked out all right, and I should have the next chapter out in another week or so. Such is the life of a teacher on summer break.

I sincerely apologize for inserting my token at-least-one-Arrested-Development-reference-per-fic line in an extremely dramatic moment. I couldn’t resist.

Thank you all so much, as always, for your wonderful comments - they really are what fuel this story, so please let me know what you think!
The Return of a Certain Jedi

Chapter Summary

“Wait - Rey, I don’t understand - you called me-”

“Kylo? I know. His - your voice guided me.” She raked her fingers through his hair, holding his gaze as though imploring that he understand. “Ben Solo, Kylo Ren - it doesn’t matter. It was you. It was always you, wasn’t it?”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go.” - Song of Solomon, 3:4

Silence. Nothingness.

Then… light. Hazy, blurry light, and the soft sound of distant conversation.

“Mom, you’ve always said the biggest problem in this universe is that no one helps each other.”

“I want to stay with you - I don’t want things to change.”

“Will I ever see you again?”

The light shone on, oblivious to the strong, dark shadow it cast.

“You’re the closest thing I have to a father. I love you - I don’t want to cause you any pain.”

“Don’t be afraid.”

A black bolt ripped through the quiet, upending everything as the opportune moment finally came.

“Do it.”

Then… darkness. The shadow behind the light split in two, the dark quickly consuming the light.

“Love won’t save you.”

“I can overthrow him! And together, you and I can rule the galaxy! We can make things the way we want them to be!”

“You will not take her from me!”
The light was now nearly gone; a handful of tiny candles in an all-encompassing Dark.

“The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force.”

“When I left you, I was but the learner; now I have become the Master.”

“The Force is strong with this one.”

One after the other, the tiny lights extinguished. But two burned brighter and brighter.

“With our combined strength, we can end this destructive conflict and bring order to the galaxy.”

“Father…”

Powerful light seared through the dark - “I won’t leave you here, I’ve got to save you!”

The light became blinding, deafening, all-encompassing. Then, a tiny wisp of darkness breathed into existence, like smoke from a flame. It curled pleasantly through the white, its grey-to blackness making the light less overpowering as it danced through the space. It had no voice, so overshadowed it was by the brilliant light that came before it, surrounding it. It had no voice - but it was known.

An unnatural voice like cracking glass stabbed through, disrupting what had been, and irrevocably changing what would be.

“Oh, but he is beautiful. It will take time, but he will be perfect.”

The tendril of dark grew bolder. The aberrant voice grew more confident.

“Why doesn’t your family want you to use the Force, Ben?”

Splitting, the dark curled inside of itself, weaving ever-more complex patterns, but keeping within its tiny confines, its movements ever more violent. It seemed desperate, but no help came - for it still had no voice.

“My child, what did your family tell you about your grandfather? Such a shame, a boy growing up without knowing his lineage. I wouldn’t lie to you. I’ll give you everything.”

The darkness was still small, but now it was completely opaque.

“Ben, NO!”

The small tangle of darkness magnified unnaturally, practically screaming as it did so. Something new whispered-

“I will finish... What you started.”

The crush of Dark was tangible. The splintered voice was wise, and reigned supreme, tampering
with the interplay of dark and light unnaturally.

“It was neither poor strategy nor arrogance that brought down the Empire. You know too well what did... Had the father killed the son, the Empire would have prevailed.”

“He means nothing to me.”

The web of darkness was now so dense, so thoroughly tangled that only the tiniest pinpricks of light were still visible. Those few remaining points of light grew smaller and dimmer and smaller and dimmer-


“You’re so lonely.”

“So afraid to leave.”

“You’re afraid you’ll never be as strong as Darth Vader!”

Light shot through the dark, opening a great chasm as the space completely changed. The darkness receded, wrapping itself around the light. They warred, angrily battling for domination as the voices echoed louder and louder-

“REY!”

-a deeper, more desperate voice. A present voice. Warmth and safety surrounded it; it resonated and felt right.

“Please, Rey. I need you to wake up.”

...wake up? But...

“We’re not done yet.”

Clashing, the light and dark splintered violently as they traded blows, diminishing each other as they fought for dominance.

“It’s just us now.”

This was it. Everything depended on this moment. The fate of the galaxy stood on shaky legs upon a crumbling cliff.

“I can show you the ways of the Force!”
The resonant voice returned, shaking and terrified. “I don’t know - I - I can’t… not now, Rey. Come back. Please. Not after everything, not after we’ve - I need you - please come back. I - I love you.”

“...The Force?”

Help me.

All at once, it was as though everything locked into place. The dark and light no longer warred, but flowed together peacefully, like a gentle, constant flame.

Wake up.

Wake up.

WAKE UP.

She gasped.

“Rey?! Rey! Oh thank the-”

Her eyelids fluttered, adjusting to the dark space illuminated by streaks of light. She was held aloft, braced against a wide chest and secured by strong arms. Slowly, the face in front of her came into focus.

“...Kylo?”

He flinched slightly at the name, sinking to his knees as he continued to hold her in his arms. Bewilderment overtook his previous look of overwhelmed relief.

“Rey? Rey, it’s - no, please-” his voice trembled as his grip tightened, his eyes swimming with unshed tears. “Why - what happened, where did you - what do you remember?”

She reached for him, cupping his face in her hands.

“Everything.”

Rey kissed him passionately, messy in her desperation. She yearned for closeness, using her body to fully show her aching need as she turned in his arms, straddling his lap. He was here. She was here. Wherever here was, it didn’t matter - they were together, and they would never be alone again. The kiss was initially returned with enthusiasm before he pulled away, shaking his head.

“Wait - Rey, I don’t understand - you called me-”

“Kylo? I know. His - your voice guided me.” She raked her fingers through his hair, holding his gaze as though imploring that he understand. “Ben Solo, Kylo Ren - it doesn’t matter. It was you. It was always you, wasn’t it?”

“I - I don’t - what do you mean?”

“I saw your memories, and I found your past - I talked to you. And you - you found me. I remember now, you helped me - that’s why I always dreamed of you.”
His face was still troubled, his eyes hurt. “I saw your past, Rey, and I tried to help you, and then I ended up here a few hours ago. But my past - you talked to me? I don’t - I don’t - what did you see?”

“But they were your memories, Ben, and I was there. Do you mean - you still don’t-” Rey’s face lit up in understanding as she suddenly seized his face with her hands, pressing her forehead to his. She stared into his eyes, unblinking. “Of course. They’re gone. You just need to remember again. It’s not everything, but take it from me, Ben. Take back what you lost.”

With trembling hands, he braced the back of Rey’s head, his fingers lacing through her hair, carefully gripping around the braids that he had put there what felt like a lifetime ago. Her mind was laid open and vulnerable as she practically pushed the memories of everything she had seen and done back to him, all of it as a rapid blur of tangled emotions and recollections -

“What’s your name?”

“Could I find you?”

“I forgot you.”

“I don’t deserve you.”

“Get out of here - before she sees you!”

Ben broke away from her, gasping as he leaned back on his hands to steady himself. His eyes darted side to side, as though he were reading something as fast as possible, his breaths quickening as his mind was clearly racing. “That’s - that’s it. I - you-” He stared up at her in wonder, his mouth hanging open slightly as his eyes lit up. The softest of smiles crossed his face, his countenance practically serene. “I know what we have to do.”

“Ben? What is- mmf!”

She was taken completely off-guard as he captured her lips with his own, moaning as he leaned closer into her. He kissed her desperately, his hands going to her waist as he slowly guided her toward him, getting her to straddle his lap once again.

“Gods, Rey. You’re perfect. You’re beautiful. You’re strong. You’re brilliant. And I very much want to make love to you right now.”

“Ben!” she blushed, looking around them as he continued to adjust her on his lap. Sure, she had just been pawing at him a minute ago - but to do… that? Here? “Not now! I don’t even know where we are, we can’t-”

“The hell we can’t.” He kissed his way down her neck, pulling her tunic loose at the collar to expose the tops of her breasts. “We have both spent too long waiting. Loneliness may have been what bound us, but I will not go another second without you knowing exactly what you mean to me.”

His licks and bites were very convincing. Rey moaned, Ben’s affections leaving her more and more devoid of rational thought as he hastily pulled at her leggings. He pressed his fingers into her spine, forcing her back to arch and her pelvis to grind directly into where his other hand waited, cupping
her still-clothed mound. Pulling at her tunic with his teeth, he bared a breast to the cool air, immediately wrapping his mouth around a nipple as Rey felt heat build in her at an uncontrollable rate.

They had no need for the Force, for the Bond. This moment was primal, animalistic, *instinctual*. Rey’s hands once again tangled in his hair, pressing his face further into her small but incredibly sensitive breast, shrieking in delight as he teased her nipple with his teeth. Her hips canted against his hand, bucking out a rhythm that his own hips surged up to respond to.

“*Kriff*, Rey. You taste so *good.*” Ben groaned, his mouth barely removed enough from her breast to speak. “But I need to hear you.”

“W-what?” she panted, wholly distracted by the intense, teasing pressure of his thumb *just* where she wanted him.

“I need to hear you come.” Ben stated blatantly, finally pulling her panties to the side.

Rey gasped at his words, and at the realization that, with her leggings only partially pulled down and still sitting astride him, she was utterly at Ben’s mercy. He swirled two fingers in her pussy, dragging them up and down with featherlight pressure before he settled them - almost - *exactly* -

Letting out a pathetic whine, Rey tried desperately to move. With his fingers there - *kriff*, she was already so close, and he was barely doing *anything* -

“That’s right, sweetheart. I’ve got you right where I want you. I need to see your face when you come, I need to see your face when I tell you-” his fingers pressed in further, merciless in their teasing - “*when I tell you that I love you.*”

“*BEN!*”

He covered her mouth with his, swallowing down her cries as she came harder than she ever had in her life. Tears gathered at the corners of her eyes as he drew it out longer and longer. Her bucking hips only intensified the sensations - between his arms and her own clothes, she was trapped, the throbs building and building until they were almost *too much* -

Suddenly his hand was gone, leaving her bereft and throbbing. His kisses re-intensified, his tongue tracing hers as Rey’s fuzzy mind dimly registered that his hands were busy re-adjusting their clothes, pulling her leggings past her knees. Then - a shift, a tilt - *hot*, blunt pressure at her entrance-

“Let me love you, Rey. Ride me, and let me make you come again.”

“Ben, I-”

“It’s okay, you can take it slowly, I know- *KRIFF!*”

Rey sank down on him in one forceful thrust of her hips, practically laughing in delight at the sensation, the *fullness*. This - this was *wholly* different from how they had done this before. She gave an experimental wiggle of her hips that had Ben’s eyes practically bulge out as he clutched at her hip, not even bothering to suppress his moan, his face flushed with embarrassment. Rey grinned, pressing his shoulders to the ground as she felt the angle of his cock change in her -

“Oh!” she squeaked suddenly, wholly aware of where, exactly, he was pressing inside of her. A cocky grin returned to Ben’s face once again as he bucked up into her. How - *how* was he - *he did it again*, making Rey gasp in delight as she leaned forward, planting her hands to his shoulders. Now,
at this angle - she stilled herself, sure that even if he thrusted up again, he wouldn’t have the upper hand *quite* so easily-

And then the bastard had to press his thumb to her clit. Rey saw *stars*.

Evidently encouraged by whatever beastial noise just escaped from her lips, Ben used his other hand to seize her hips, bracing her as he pounded up into her, his thumb still pressing at her clit as she rode out every wave. Rey’s mind was going blissfully blank, no room in it for anything other than pure sensation - she almost didn’t even notice just how hard Ben was biting his own shoulder, or the strained look on his face. She supposed she could gather some wherewithal to help him out.

“Ben - please - *please* come inside me.”

He tore his mouth from his own shoulder to gape up at her openmouthedly. “I love you.”

His hand went from her clit to the back of her head, his fingers threading through her braids to pull them looser and looser, until finally, her hair hung around her shoulders freely, swinging with their thrusts. Ben pulled her face down to look directly into her eyes as his hips bucked erratically. “I love you - I love - *Rey!”*

She kissed him desperately, feeling his every word as he throbbed up into her. “*I love you too.*”

A somewhat undignified noise came from deep within him, and Rey found herself wishing more than anything that they had the time or presence of mind to really do this properly; she wanted contact with every bit of his skin she could reach. But for now, she could settle for slowly grinding out the last of the shockwaves of pleasure, smiling triumphantly as she watched and felt Ben twitch with her every movement.

Rey was exceptionally proud, really congratulating herself on the noises she had managed to wring out of him - before she saw tears in his eyes.

“Ben? Ben, what’s - are you-” she asked worriedly, her hand going to his cheek.

“It’s nothing. It’s just-” Ben smiled, lifting her off his lap with a somewhat lewd sound. He shook his head, still grinning as he pulled her into his massive arms in an embrace, stroking her head reverently. “*Thank you.*”

“…thank you?” she mumbled against the cloth of his shirt.

“For… for everything, Rey. For letting me into your life, for everything you’ve done, for letting me love you-”

“You don’t need to thank me, Ben.” Rey looked into his eyes imploringly. “I’ve told you before, I’m not going anywhere.”

“I - I know. But I still want you to know that. I do love you, Rey. I - I didn’t think it was possible. That I could, that I would be worthy of such a feeling-”

Using her now favorite tactic of interrupting Ben’s spiral of self-hate, Rey silenced him with a long, passionate kiss. “*I love you, Ben. But I think we need to continue this… Somewhere else.*”

Glancing around their surroundings as though he was seeing them for the first time, Ben seemed to come back to himself somewhat. “Right. We’re - ah - we’re still here, aren’t we.”
With a giggle, Rey pulled up her leggings, watching Ben unsuccessfully try to tame his sex-teased hair before giving up, adjusting his clothing as he looked along the pathways in front of them.

“So I may have… done some exploring before you showed up. I honestly didn’t know you even were going to show up until you fell through the portal.” Ben shifted uncomfortably as he pulled his pants back on, gesturing toward one of the gateways. “We can’t go through them anymore. I think it’s sealed off somehow, though… some things might still go through.”

Rey stretched, her fuzzy mind piecing together what he said. “‘Might?’ How would you know that?”

“Look, I didn’t know… When I saw the end of our fight on Starkiller - I - I may have…” He opened and closed his mouth a few times, looking somewhat guilty. “I may have been having some complicated thoughts after having to see the memory of me killing m-my father. And some of those thoughts… may have slipped through to you.”

Pausing halfway through pulling the sleeves of her tunic back on, Rey went wide-eyed at the memory. There had been a voice. A dark, pressing suggestion, urging her to finish the job, that he was better off dead after what he had done-

“Oh, Ben… Why? Why would you do that - to yourself, or to me?”

“I didn’t know! I didn’t know we could still influence things, I didn’t see an immediate cause and effect. Not until…” Ben swallowed, his guilty look shifting somewhat. Troubled as he was, he managed to seem smug. “Not until you nearly left Ach-To without the Jedi texts.”

“That was you?! Ben, this - this is…” Rey rubbed at her temples, lost in the tumult of emotion. “This can’t be normal, what we’re doing here. This - this is altering time.”

“It is… and it isn’t. This space doesn’t quite work that way. Our pasts are set, nothing we do here will change them - this has all already happened.” Ben offered Rey an arm up, gracefully pulling her to her feet as they walked forward together hand-in-hand, passing several shimmering portals as they went. “You could find the memory of us on the Supremacy, and try to influence what happened - but we already know that it won’t work. What’s done is done.”

“So… what about-” Rey nodded at the path ahead of them and the paths surrounding them, all reaching out seemingly into infinite space.

“Ah. Well, that’s where we need to be careful.” Ben brought them to pause before a particularly tumultuous portal, swirling in a bright blur. “I think this is us right now. Beyond here… That’s our future.”

“Oh.” Rey breathed, memories of a rainy, firelit night coming back to her. She knew what they would see, or at least part of it. It was incredibly tempting to confirm what she saw so long ago, to see if they would truly- “Can we…?”

Ben smiled sadly, shaking his head. “We could. But historically, it’s a bad idea. I think it’s best if we get back, and start saving the galaxy, don’t you think?”

Looking longingly at the hundreds of portals ahead of them, Rey supposed that, once again, she could wait. “So how do we return? It’s hardly like we can get on a ship.”

“We could meditate, since that worked well enough to get us here - but I have a theory I’d like to test out.” Ben guided them forward, toward the blurry, unclear portal. “Shall we?”
Rey nodded, sharing a small smile with Ben as they crossed the portal together.

The space was neverending and white, all evidence of where they had come from completely gone. An overwhelming silence filled the area, much as it did when she had run for her life - but Rey wasn’t frightened; she had the comforting warmth of Ben’s hand in her own grounding her. There was no need for words between them as they simultaneously reached out in the Force, trying to make sense of this space. Inquiring and demanding, their combined power wove perfectly through the Light and Dark. It spiraled out, calling out to await the echoing response-

“Hey, kids.”

The words were as soft as a whisper, but as startling as a shout. It was a familiar voice, one that gave Rey pause - but she was immediately more concerned with Ben, who suddenly seemed rooted to where he stood. A tremble passed through his body, and she saw a corner of his eye twitch in a way she hadn’t seen in ages as he stared ahead, wide-eyed and blank-faced.

Giving him a reassuring squeeze, Rey reached out once again in the Force, seeking out where the words came from.

“Good to know you’ve gotten better at that, but look - I’m not trying to be obtuse here. Just turn around.”

Whipping her head around so fast her hair hit her, Rey found herself standing face-to-face with her former Master. Ben’s former master. Luke Skywalker.

He sat cross-legged upon seemingly nothing, his expression somewhat guarded as he appeared to take in the couple in front of him. Ben immediately moved to push Rey behind him, his entire body trembling as he caged her in his arms.

“There’s no need for that. I’m here to offer some advice, maybe answer a few questions, and nothing more.”

“Of course that’s what you’d say. Ever the wise, detached Master, aren’t you?” Ben snarled, attempting to completely hide Rey from view. “This - somehow this is all your doing. This deception. We shouldn’t be here, we can’t get out - you’ve - you’ve trapped us here.”

Luke’s eyebrows shot up in a skeptical expression that was eerily reminiscent of his sister. “Trapped? My, my, someone clearly has quite the opinion of my abilities from beyond the grave. I’m not even here, unlike you two.”

Frustrated, Rey, finally bullied her way to stand in front of the still-shaking Ben. “So where is ‘here,’ exactly, Master Luke?”

“What, he didn’t tell you? I’m not surprised. He always did get a little carried away when it came to research.” Luke sighed, steepling his fingers.

“You’re at a crossroads. A sort of gateway between all things in the Force. When you meditated to
enter each other’s minds, you opened the door - and when you found your Bond, you blew it wide open. Good job on that, by the way. You two did more in ten minutes than some Jedi Masters managed in their entire lives.” Luke paused to scratch at his beard, his eyes sparking in humor. “Though I suppose you two have managed to do several things in ten minutes that some Jedi Masters never did in their whole lives.”

Rey’s was puzzled by the chiding, suggestive tone in Luke’s voice, even more so when she heard Ben mutter “He did not just say that…” from somewhere behind her.

Luke pointedly cleared his throat, his hand still at his beard. “Well, at least you two were wise enough to not look beyond your own timeline. The future is always changing - remember that. More experienced Force-users than you two have withered away from dwelling on their own potential, and gone mad when things didn’t go the way they wanted.”

“Enough with the lessons. Why are you here - why now?” Ben practically barked. Concerned, Rey’s hand sought out his, and his fingers gratefully laced together with hers.

“Because this is where I needed to be.”

Rey gave Ben’s hand a reassuring squeeze and covered it with her own, hoping to abate his rush of emotions that came at those words. Fury, frustration, betrayal, hurt. He breathed in shakily, his thumb repeatedly running over her hand as he clenched and released his other fist several times. By the time he had calmed himself somewhat, his words were barely a whisper. “Where - where you needed - so where were you after Crait?”

“With your mother, of course.”

Ben released Rey’s hand to sit on the ground heavily, his eyes glazed over and mired in thought. A tremble ran through his body that Rey could practically feel in her own.

“...how long?”

“Since she asked.”

Rey looked back and forth between the two men, utterly lost. “I’m sorry, but what?”

“Of course. I should have known. Even with you dead… This was all just a bit too convenient, wasn’t it? Every bit of this - everything - has just has her written all over it.”

“On that, you and I can agree. Your mother has never been one for subtlety. I don’t think she’d be happy in a galaxy where she can’t stir the pot somehow.”

“So is - is this it? You two finally came up with your clever little solution to the family problem, by trapping me here? Eliminating that little Dark problem once and for all? You didn’t have to get Rey involved, though I suppose you think I’ve tainted her.”

Luke rolled his eyes dramatically. “I already told you I’m not trapping you. I’m not here to start anything, end anything, or accuse you of anything. I just want to talk.”

“Oh, I’m sure. You just want to talk about how I’m just too Dark to be handled, and something about the balance of the Galaxy being disrupted from my very existence. It’s why you tried to eliminate the problem all those years ago, isn’t it? But Darth Vader was good enough to be saved, wasn’t he?”
These were clearly words that he had been keeping inside for a long, long time. Ben was practically in tears as his shoulders shook in repressed fury, Rey’s powerful presence in the Force the only thing keeping him from breaking down completely.

“Your power is Dark enough, strong enough to disrupt the Force-“ Ben opened his mouth to angrily retort, but Luke pressed on. “-so it’s a good thing you’re being “handled,” as you put it. After Crait, your mother and I knew that we weren’t going to be the ones to help you. But there was someone who most definitely could.” Luke gave a pointed look in Rey’s direction.

“...are you… me?” she whispered.

He nodded sagely. “Powerful Dark, powerful Light. Anyone who tries to eliminate either is foolish - and that was where I was wrong. Apparently it’s where Snoke was wrong, too. Ben didn’t need to have the Dark in him eliminated, he needed someone to balance it. To make him see that he could still do the right things. To make him crave the Light - and apparently in ways I’d really rather not think about.”

There was a long silence, and Rey could feel Ben’s emotions in utter turmoil as he seemed to close in on himself. She knelt beside him, once again taking his hand as he looked up at her, his eyes swimming with tears - she didn’t know how such a large man could suddenly look so small. “Rey - please - please tell me… Please tell me that they didn’t pressure you into this. Into being with - that you weren’t - gods, it’s what I feared all along - that you felt obligated-”

“Ben Solo, after what we have shared, I am furious that you would even consider that my love for you is out of obligation.” Rey snapped, but she still held tight to his hand. “All I want is a future with you. I told your mother that, and I’ve told you that. I still haven’t the faintest idea about half of what you two have been saying, so I would very much like if someone would let me in on this.”

“It was them, Rey. My mother - him - they’ve been pulling the strings. Because apparently no one has ever trusted me to run my own life for even a second. Snoke’s body wasn’t even cold before they-”

“All I did was let your mother know where you were. She made sure the transmission came through where you would pick it up, so you would go to Rey instead of back to the First Order. The rest - everything else? That has been entirely you two. You just needed a nudge, to see that your future was with Rey. Oh, and apparently there was something about braids. I won’t pretend I had the slightest idea what she was doing there, but evidently, it worked.” Luke gave a long, pointed stare at where Rey and Ben still clutched at each others hands.
Ben’s shoulders slumped as he shook his head slowly. “So why now? Why here, why the unsolicited visit, the advice - why now?”

“Because you were right earlier. You know what you two need to do. But you have to be careful. There are forces at work that do not want you to succeed.”

Rey perked up, seeing the connection at last. “The - the Mother.”

Luke nodded gravely, pulling at his beard once more. “Tread carefully. The Force only grants me so much foresight, and my vision is completely clouded the moment anything about Mortis comes up.”

Suddenly, Ben clutched at his head. “Yavin - Mortis -” he leaned toward Luke, his eyes pleading and bright. “Tell me you remember what happened when we went to Yavin IV. I was - I don’t know, fifteen? Please.”

“Now you’re asking the right questions. Unfortunately… I do and I don’t.”

“I swear, if you tell me again that there are certain things I’m better off not knowing-”

“It’s not that. There are things I can tell you. There are things I wish I could tell you, but the fact is I’m not sure how trustworthy my own memories are. What do you remember about what we found there?”

“Not much. I had a vision of the past when I was there searching the base, though - something seemed to possess me, and someone asked if you needed someone’s memories erased.”

“And then I proceeded to find out why you shouldn’t trust cultists farther than you can throw a bantha.” Luke exhaled warily, shifting uncomfortably. “There was a compound. Reports said that a Force-worshipping group had lost its leader, and there was unrest in the ranks that had them destroying artifacts and relics in the Massassi temple. I thought you and I may be able to help resolve the conflict peacefully, and hopefully return any of the damaged artifacts to their rightful places. I didn’t know… I didn’t know it was the Clan of Mortis, or we would have never gone.”

Ben nodded gravely, and Rey once again found herself completely out of the loop. “Can someone explain why this was such a big deal?”

Luke smiled in a way that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “Seeing as you’re practically family now, you’ll need to know about this. Anakin Skywalker, Darth Vader - my and Leia’s father - was a child of the Force itself. So, naturally, he had a tendency to draw in all kinds of trouble that come with being one of the most powerful beings to have ever existed. And that included drawing the attention of the Mortis Gods. And, by proxy, their worshippers.”

“The Father, the Son, and the Daughter - they were in one of your fairy tales, you know their story.” Ben whispered, leaning closer to Rey.

“Correct. The embodiments of the Balance, Dark, and Light of the Force, respectively. Their story lives on in legend, but a key player has always been left out, whose story we can only attempt to guess at. The Mother.”

“So what do the Mortis Gods have to do with your family? With Ben?”
“That’s just the thing - I don’t know.” Luke sighed, seeming to settle himself in for a long story.

“I’ve had to do a lot of my own research and speculation, but I believe that the Mortis Gods had chosen my father to replace the Father, to act as the representative of balance in the Force. As far as I know, he rejected this - he had no wish to live in the fulcrum of the Force, because he wanted to be with the one he loved, my mother.

The avatar of Light, the Sister, chose a scion in Ahsoka Tano, but with her passing in the real world, that position became vacant, and the Light went unchecked in the galaxy. At one point, she came to me… But I knew my work wasn’t done. I needed to be there for my own family, for the galaxy.

The avatar of Dark, the Brother, has tried and failed several times to find an avatar in the real world as well, and from what I can guess, his last failed host was dispatched of by you two.” At this, Luke gave a genuine smirk. “It’s probably not very Jedi of me to say this, but I would have given all the credits in the galaxy to see what you two did to Snoke. Well done.”

“Now, the Mother… The Mother is a separate matter altogether. If the Mortis Gods are legends, she’s barely even a myth. There’s almost no information about her that exists in any translatable language. Being the avatar of chaos itself has made tracking her impossible - all I know is that she is somewhere in reality. But I believe Rey has had a few close calls at this point?”

“You mean the assassination attempts?”

“There were those, but I was referring to your most recent encounter.”

Ben turned to face her, his eyes full of worry. “Rey?”

Rey’s eyes widen as her heart began to pound. After everything that had happened in the last few hours, she had been more than grateful to write off what had happened to her in Ben’s memories as a nightmare, a horrifying product of her imagination, and not something that actually happened. But - what - what was it that… that happened?

“There it is. I know that face. It’s already slipping from you, isn’t it? Quickly, tell us everything you can, while you still remember some of it.”

“Ben - Ben warned me. In the memory, that is. Though I think he was more Kylo Ren at that point, he still warned me - he seemed desperate.” At those words, Ben pulled Rey to his side fiercely, bracing her shoulders in comfort as she was overtaken by memory.

“And there - there was a terrible silence. Light, dark - everything was falling away. But mostly - there was the eye. I was so scared, it followed me, it nearly had me-”

“It’s all right, Rey. You’re safe now.” Ben assured her, tucking her head under his chin.

“Is that a threat?” Ben accused angrily.

“No, it’s a warning. If you go through with what you’ve seen in your mind, it’ll mean peace in the galaxy the likes of which hasn’t been seen in thousands of years. But, peace like that? Balance? The Mother, chaos will not stand for that, and I can guarantee you that something will retaliate. You need to be careful.”

“Well maybe you need to have faith in Ben.” Rey whispered, her eyes still haunted.
“I do.”

At those words, Ben looked Luke Skywalker as though he had never seen him before in his life. There was no anger in his eyes, and a sort of determined resignation emanated from him as he slowly nodded, acknowledging his former Master.

“I have faith in both of you. You need each other. Help each other, leave nothing out - the galaxy is depending on this.”

“But what - what is it that we have to do?” Rey asked, genuinely lost.

“I’ll let Ben explain that one, seeing as it was his idea. But I will tell you this - you two were right about the Jedi. You’re mediators, not warriors or politicians - remember that.”

Ben looked somewhat horrified. “Did you just call me a Jed-”

“It looks like our time here is about up anyway.” Luke interrupted as he glanced down at his hand, which was slowly starting to blur into the light. “I have to get back to Leia, tell her to go ahead and send a few of her people your way - if you’re sticking to your plan, that is, Ben.”

“I am. We need FN- we need Finn. The others can come if they insist, but we need Finn.” Ben stated with confidence as Rey looked to him in genuine confusion.

Luke’s face was proud. “You really are doing this properly, aren’t you? I’ll see what I can do.”

“Ben, what are you-”

“Oh, and - kids?”

Luke was nothing more than a ghostly image now, but his crinkled eyes were still visible, caught somewhere between amusement and wincing embarrassment. He was clearly trying to hide his smile under his beard.

“Try not to desecrate the sacred spaces of the Force next time, will you? I’m not ready to be a great-Uncle just yet.”

And with that, Luke Skywalker fully vanished.

Rey clapped her hand to her mouth, blushing crimson at the implication, just now registering every one of her Master’s not-so-subtle comments. She looked to Ben - only to gasp as she realized that he was fading away at the edges, just as Luke had done.

“Don’t be frightened, Rey. We’re just waking up. We’ll be back on Scipio, and I can explain everything.

I know what we have to do.”

Chapter End Notes
I AM A MONSTER AND I AM SO SORRY I LEFT THIS FOR SO LONG!!!!

Thank you all SO much for being patient, you have no idea how much it means to me to get comments on this even when it’s been forever since I’ve updated. Since last update, I’ve had a beginning of a school year, a hurricane, illnesses, allergies - the works. But I’m settling into the school year, Dr. Mr. Camucia will be on night float for the next month (pout) - so here’s hoping I get this behemoth finished by Christmas.

This was another difficult chapter. I feel like there was a lot of PLOT and BACKSTORY, but rest assured, the gang is getting back together next chapter(s), and I am a hell of a lot faster at writing conversational dialogue than I am EXTREMELY PLOTTY EXPOSITION.

I have so much loved your wonderful comments, and it's truly delightful to see how many of you have stuck it out with me since I started this last December. Thank you, thank you, thank you - and PLEASE keep it up! Nothing makes me happier than seeing I have comments on the latest chapter, even if I'm horribly ungrateful and sometimes don't respond for a month!!!
Resistance is Peace, Chaos is Order

Chapter Summary

"Ben, knowing the full scope and potential of their power here, insisted that they command the Force in bringing varying minds together, making them agree and come to a consensus. Rey was adamant that they take a more passive role, merely showing the path and letting people decide for themselves how, or even if, they wanted to find compassion in their enemy’s soul. Ben’s counterargument was that some people were too stupid to know what was best for them, and Rey found that difficult to argue with when she was reminded that people like General Hux existed in the galaxy."

Chapter Notes

Just so you know, I wrote and deleted this chapter like four times in the last two months. Then I stayed up until 4AM on my first night of winter break and rewrote the whole thing almost from scratch. There may be some edits whenever I actually wake up, but I wanted to get this out FINALLY.

Finally. Yes, this chapter is hella long. And something happens that I’ve been literally waiting for 16 chapters to do. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"You have stolen my heart, my dove, by bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace."

Song of Solomon, 4:9

The frigid winds of Scipio whipped up around an imposing observation tower, which sat at the end of the docking platforms at the Main Vault Fortress. The docking platforms, fortress, and city below were the only signs of civilization here, the tower standing out like a dark, dominating spike amid the sea of white that was the snowy peaks of the Muun-dominated planet. At the very edge of its sole balcony, two figures watched the steady flow of arriving and departing ships.

Rey shivered a little, wrapping her arms tighter to herself - perhaps insisting on waiting outside wasn’t the wisest decision. As beautiful as the gauzy, star-blue and white dress with sleeves dangling well past her fingers was, it was, like all of the dresses Leia packed for her, not meant for Scipio’s below-freezing temperatures.

Immediately, Ben looked down at her in concern, loosening his cape (which was already far too
ostentatious for the occasion), wrapping it around Rey’s shoulders and letting the hem trail on the
ground. Rey gratefully burrowed into the warmth of the extra layer, and leaned into Ben’s chest,
where he automatically braced his arm around her shoulders, pulling her even closer to him. He
bent to kiss the top of her head, running his fingers along the low crown of braids he had insisted
on doing before they returned to the Main Vault Fortress that morning.

Ben dropped his hand to lace their fingers together as his mind gently tugged on hers, inquisitive. It
had been like this since… that place, their thoughts and feelings a steady flow between them,
though the thoughts themselves were abstract - more like colors and impressions than they were
anything definite.

“Nervous?” Ben quietly asked.

Rey shifted her weight slightly, her eyes trained on the horizon. “A little.”

“Why is that? They’re your friends.”

“I know, it’s just…” she sighed, her fingers worrying the spaces between his knuckles. “It’s so
much, not to mention more than a little hard to believe. What if they don’t understand?”

“We’ll make them understand.”

“Ben! We are not having that conversation again!”

“You know what I mean.”

Upon returning to Scipio after their… journey, Ben had to spend some time patiently explaining to
Rey what, exactly, had happened - and what would happen because of it.

There was now no doubt that what they had between them was a Force Bond. But what they found,
what they rediscovered - what Ben Solo had figured out all those years ago - was something much
bigger. In finding each other in the World Between Worlds, *they had found the way to bridge
minds together*. Where Battle Meditation had long been vaunted as the ultimate tool of the Jedi,
what they discovered was… more.

Instead of encouraging allies while disparaging your foes as Battle Meditation was capable of
doing, Ben had assured Rey that what they could do was take even a mind completely dull to the
Force, unmoving in any of its thoughts - and *inspire* it. They would find common ground in the
most disparate of souls, and create *understanding* between even the bitterest of enemies.
Theoretically, all they would have to do as Force-wielders was as act as guides as they mediated
souls through the plane, letting the two minds discover their own similarities.

This was how they were going to win the war. Stopping it dead in its tracks by removing the very
crus of war itself, turning into conflict into compassion.

They started small - *too* small. In their initial experiment, Ben and Rey asked two of the
Stormtroopers from Ben’s elite retinue if they would be willing to assist in an experiment in the
Force. Seemingly confused but game, the Stormtroopers agreed to sit down and meditate as Ben
and Rey attempted to bridge their minds.
It was almost immediate. Because of their shared life experiences, lifestyles, conditioning, and all of the other things that Hux’s stormtrooper program had instilled in these people, the two troopers - SD-2498 and RN-1212 - immediately found compassion and understanding in each other. Their bond strengthened them in the Force, their minds more open and eager to learn more about each other and the world around them.

Clearly, connecting similar minds was not a problem. Ben had apparently suspected this from the beginning. His message to Leia via Luke had thankfully gotten through; Finn, along with a handful of other Resistance members, were already on their way to Scipio within hours of Ben and Rey returning from the World Between Worlds. Between the Resistance, the stormtroopers, and Enoch Ren, there were more than enough wildly differing minds to work with.

Of course, there were still points of contention between Ben and Rey.

Ben, knowing the full scope and potential of their power here, insisted that they command the Force in bringing varying minds together, making them agree and come to a consensus. Rey was adamant that they take a more passive role, merely showing the path and letting people decide for themselves how, or even if, they wanted to find compassion in their enemy’s soul. Ben’s counterargument was that some people were too stupid to know what was best for them, and Rey found that difficult to argue with when she was reminded that people like General Hux existed in the galaxy.

So, for now, they would work with what they had. The Resistance members were due any minute, and Rey had wanted to assure that she and Ben were there to greet them, ready to whisk them away to the Supreme Leader’s chalet before someone started getting suspicious about what, exactly, was going down on Scipio between random Resistance members, Ben Solo, and the last Jedi.

They had been watching ships come and go for some time now, but Rey leaned forward, squinting as a peculiar flash of light caught her eye. “That’s not… what is that?”

Ben shielded his eyes, following her gaze. Rey could register the moment he saw - and presumably recognized - the massive, glistening ship in the distance.

“That’s them.” he grumbled unenthusiastically, shaking his head slowly. “Of course she’d send the Lord Junn.”

It was an obnoxiously overpolished ship, its gleaming, chrome surface reflecting the snowy white peaks and light grey sky of Scipio in a manner that was positively blinding. As the ship drew closer, it became apparent that the majority of the ship’s tail was covered in a massive, orange, Rebellion-era firebird. It landed with a graceful finesse that made Rey suspect that Poe Dameron had come along for the trip as well. Rey recalled some of Leia’s wise words about making an entrance - even without being physically present, General Organa had made her statement.

Ben took her arm in his hand to escort her into the waiting turbolift at the top of the observation tower. “We need to get down there quickly, before one of the slack-jawed yokels starts talking too much,” he grumbled, punching the lift buttons with more force than was really necessary.

Rey scowled up at him, somewhat offended. “They’re not that oblivious. I’m sure I was much
“Yes, but you’re stunningly beautiful. Everyone was too busy admiring you to notice how interested you were in the safety deposit boxes.”

Blushing slightly, she elbowed Ben in the ribs as she smiled bashfully. “I’ll have you know that I could get into any of those, anytime.” Rey’s knees bent under her slightly as the turbolift slowed to a halt, its descent to the docks complete.

The door opened with a hiss as Ben once again took her arm in his, walking alongside her. Already, Rey could see the usual gang of suspects in the distance - Finn, Rose, and Poe Dameron. Rey could practically feel a wave of smugness radiate from Ben as Rose pointed at something in the distance excitedly, apparently trying to engage a defensively-postured Finn. Poe looked similarly on edge, as though he expected someone to start shooting at any minute.

Rey glanced up toward Ben, worrying her lip between her teeth. “Do you think… do you think Leia told them why they’re coming here?”

He opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it when he apparently decided to rethink his response. “If I know my mother, she will have opted for the most melodramatic option possible. So I’m thinking-”

“Rey?!” Finn exclaimed, his previously troubled face breaking into a wide grin as he jogged toward them.

“-no.” Ben finished quietly with a sigh.

“Finn!” Rey replied happily, dropping Ben’s hand to pull Finn into an embrace.

“Prince Ben!” Rose shrieked, evidently completely surprised by her own volume as her hand muffled her mouth.

“Rose. Finn.” Ben replied somberly, though the slightest of smiles teased at the corners of his mouth.

“Rose!” Rey squeaked, taken off-guard by the surprise hug.

“Rey,” Ben warned, looking around at how much attention this particularly noisy reunion was drawing on the docks.

“Poe!” exclaimed Poe Dameron.

“Rey, I never thought - oh wow, you look - you look- your dress, your hair-” Rose pulled away from Rey to give her an appreciable look up and down, her face bursting into a beaming smile. “You look like a princess!” Somewhere behind her, Ben began coughing wildly.

“Aww, Rose - you look great too! I guess the General got all of you fixed up before she sent you, huh?”

“Of course she did. At least all of the coats make sense now - this planet is so cold! I’ve never seen
anything like it!” Rose looked out at the mountains in wonder, her grin almost infectious enough to keep Rey from catching the underlying message.

“Wait, so she didn’t tell you all where you were going? Or-”

“We were told information on a need-to-know basis,” cut in Poe with a grumble. “And apparently we didn’t need to know much, since all I knew is that we were coming here for Rey. And these are hardly the circumstances I imagined.”

“And what exactly did you expect, Dameron?” Ben said in a voice dangerously close to a growl.

“Oh, I don’t know. I assumed it was going to be a rescue, your classic damsel-in-distress situation. Maybe an assassination, a firing squad - there’s all sorts of possibilities.”

Ben took a threatening step toward “I’m glad you had fun with your imagination, because that’s the only place that you’re ever going to get to-”

“Why don’t we take this discussion somewhere a little warmer? And a little less needlessly confrontational?” Rey asked loudly, hoping against hope that Rose was still distracted enough with the scenery to not register the pissing contest going on in the background.

“A marvelous plan, Miss Rey,” called a voice from somewhere behind them. Rey spun on her heel to see Enoch Ren - Taytoo, she reminded herself that Rose was here - giving a wave from the small covered skiff that would take them back out to the chalet.

Enoch approached the group with a leering grin. “Ah, our esteemed Resistance guests. Delighted, I’m-”

“This is Taytoo. We go way back.” Ben cut in quickly, giving Enoch a pleading look that seemed to say please, for the love of the Force, play along for now.

Enoch cleared his throat in what sounded like stifled laughing. “Yeah, we sure do. Almost as far back as Finn here goes with his pals… Essde and Arren.”

“Huh?” Finn asked, mystified.

“Oh, trust me. You’ll know them when you see them.”

Rey’s head whipped around to give her own panicked, pleading look to Enoch, who was clearly having too much fun with adding more difficulty to this situation. Did he just… Give names to SD-2498 and RN-1212?? She supposed it made enough sense with Rose here, but she sincerely hoped they had at least some input in the matter of their own names. Ben didn’t seem too surprised, more just furious that Enoch kept very-nearly-giving-away the whole First Order in Disguise business to Rose and anyone else who overheard them on the Main Vault Fortress’ busy dock.

Rey exchanged a concerned look with Ben, who merely shook his head slowly with a shrug, following after Enoch, Finn, Rose, and Poe.

If nothing else, this would be interesting.

“So you see, what it really comes down to is not attaining the proposed end, but the virtue of the
volition itself. Light in itself could be esteemed much higher than the sum total of all inclinations of the Force, but in the end, it’s only because of the very nature of the Force itself that Light and Dark can even begin to work in this way, much less achieve the synchronization we’re hoping to achieve.”

A messy-haired Ben stood before a wall that, until approximately two hours ago, was pristine white. It was now completely covered in diagrams, formulas, charts, and bulleted lists all done in a beautiful, calligraphed inkbrush that would probably never come off the wall. It was very impressive, to be certain, but even Rey - who had experienced the very thing Ben was trying to explain - was completely baffled.

“...you lost me,” breathed Finn, looking bewildered as he rubbed his temples.

Ben squinted up at his wall with a small pout. “Where? Point at the diagram, and I’ll restart from there-”

“No. No. I refuse to sit through this again. Ben, sit down.”

Enoch Ren prodded at Ben until he finally sunk into a seat beside Rey with a huff, crossing his arms.

“Right. Here’s how this works. Two of us will meditate. Ben and Rey will use their magic in the Force to bring our minds together. Once we’re together, Ben and Rey - huh, do we actually need both of you?"

“Did no one pay attention to my presentation? Technically, no, we do not both need to participate, but-“

“-so Ben or Rey will not actually be there in your mind, but they act as a kind of battery that charges the connection. With them there, our minds will naturally seek each other out, and find commonalities. It’s up to us if we want to act upon digging deeper into that connection or not. Then we wake up, and hopefully everyone understands each other a little better. Done.”

“While that was a gross oversimplification… Taytoo is, essentially, correct in his summary.” Ben gritted out through clenched teeth.

“All right, where do we start?” Finn now looked much more confident, rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

“With you, if you don’t mind. With what should be an easy one. Finn, if you could sit here on the ground, between those two rocks, and begin clearing your mind. Taytoo, could you grab-”

“On it. ESDEE!”

“-yes, clearly I meant ‘shout directly in my ear,’ moron. “

Rey looked up to see SD-2498 - evidently, Esdee now - tentatively step into the room. He was young, with close-shorn brown hair and skin so pale it was practically pink. He looked around the room, shifting his shoulders in a way that showed he was still not accustomed to wearing casual clothes of any kind.

“Rep- uh, I mean, hi?”

“Erm, Esdee, if you could sit directly across from Finn here, we can get started.” Ben said, awkwardly directing the stormtrooper to the middle of the floor.
Finn looked up at Esdee curiously, his eyes clearly assessing the other man. He shrugged, closed his eyes, and resumed meditation.

Rey could feel Ben’s presence tug at her mind, ready to begin the process. She wound her Force signature around his, seeking out the open minds before them, their similarities already blazingly obvious-

There was barely more than a couple seconds’ silence, before a ragged gasp broke the tension.

“FN-2187?! I can’t - oh my-”

“That’s it! I can’t believe-” Finn looked up at Rey, his eyes sparking in excitement. “That’s what we’re doing?! Rey? Rey. This is… this is amazing.”

“What? What just happened?” Asked Rose, looking back and forth between the two men rapidly.

“He’s - we’re -”

“Rose Tico, meet SD-2498, or as he decided to be called, Esdee - he’s a Stormtrooper.” Enoch Ren supplied, seeming to tense slightly waiting for Rose’s reaction.

“So they’re both - oh, I see - so that’s why they connected so quickly! But-” Rose gasped, her eyes widening. “He’s a stormtrooper! What’s - are we safe? This is Prince Ben’s house, right? Why is there a stormtrooper here?”

Ever since her friends arrived, Rey had felt an odd sense of guilt wrapped around Ben, and it amplified tenfold with Rose’s question. She shared a quick look with him, then nodded in agreement.

“Rose, would you like to go next? And if you don’t mind… Rey is going to try doing the bridging on her own. Because we’re going to try this together, if that’s all right?”

“Oh, of course!” Rose replied excitedly, bustling Finn out of the way between the stones as Ben took his seat across from her, his trepidation practically palpable to Rey.

This time, it was more difficult - both because Ben wasn’t there to help her, and the fact that this was the first time there were two such different minds. Rey merely acted as the fulcrum; she felt a whole range of thoughts and emotions pass between the two, but the exact contents were unknown to her. It was almost dizzying, supporting this rapidfire exchange of information as connections were forged, realizations were made-

SLAP

Ben didn’t even flinch as Rose woke him up from their meditation with an open-palmed smack
across his jaw.

“How - how are you - what are you?” Rose promptly burst into tears, then wrapped her arms around Ben, sobbing.

“I - I know it means nothing, but - I - I’m so sorry,” Ben’s voice cracked in despair around the words, one of his massive hands coming up to cradle the back of Rose’s head.

“So I take it she knows who he is now. Still doesn’t explain the hugging, though,” mumbled Poe, looking uncomfortable.

Ben continued to awkwardly pat Rose on the back as she continued sobbing things like “How could he do that to you,” and “Why did you do it, Ben,” and “What you two have is so beautiful.”

“All right, pretty boy, I think I’ve heard enough out of you. I think it’s time for us to dance.” Enoch said toward Poe with a crack of his knuckles and neck.

“Not yet,” said Ben in a thick voice, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. “It’s Rey’s turn.”

“I’d like to try, if that’s alright with you,” asked a soft voice from the shadows. RN-1212, a truly massive man, stepped forward into the light. He was older than Rey thought most of the stormtroopers were, and had a less scared look to him than Esdee.

Rey nodded in agreement, taking a seat between the lodestones as Arren sat across from her, closing his eyes.

Ben took his place between them, looking mildly uncomfortable as he wiped his eyes. “Right. So I’ll… I’ll be right here. Just focus on everything and nothing, find the space where nothing’s there-

And reach for it.”

Silence that could have been a few seconds or hours. Then-

_That’s why your father left, you know. He couldn’t stand you either._

_You would have never amounted to anything more than the 200 credits I got for you on this planet. Now go on, follow Mr. Brendol, you’re his now._

_Strength and purpose. You’ll find both here, if you’re the right fit._

_Normally I would say that these character scores aren’t correct for a stormtrooper, but there is occasionally need of grunts who can think, and know better than to talk. You know better than to talk, right, son?_

_I’m aware some of you may have reservations in abducting children, but there’s no room for those sorts of thoughts. It’s all for the greater good._

_This mission is of the highest secrecy. Be warned that the subjects may be volatile, but it is the_
Supreme Leader’s command that they are brought back completely unharmed.

Kylo Ren, huh? Good luck with that basket case.

I don’t care what you say, apparently he got beat by some girl, twice! It’s pathetic!

I had my doubts, but I guess you were right about him. Snoke would have never let us do this.

I need to let go of my past. I care about him too. I’m glad he has you.

Rey gasped raggedly, as though she had just surfaced from deep underwater. She met Arren’s eyes, and saw him. Here he was, this man almost old enough to be her father, but he still carried the scars of his childhood, just like she did. He saw Ben as more than a monster of the First Order, just like she did. They were both people who tried to see the best in others, and were optimistic about where this whole plan was going. Rey and Arren shared a small smile. They understood.

“Now can I get Mr. Hotshot here? I really think this is where your plan might fall through.” Enoch whined.

“Rey, are you ready to go again?” asked Ben, sounding concerned.

She wiped the tears at the corner of her eye, nodding her assent.

“All right. Dameron, Enoch. Take your seats. Rey, we probably both need to be in on this one.”

By the time all four of them were seated and situated, the air practically crackled. These were by far the most dissimilar minds yet. They even had to be guided through the meditation itself, as neither man trusted the other to let their mind open up unassisted.

Finally, the moment came when they fused together. There was definitely a certain amount of effort Rey and Ben had to put into maintaining the connection and balance between the warring thoughts and minds, but somewhere amid the chaos, Rey’s hand sought out Ben’s. Their fingers knitted together, and suddenly… It was like the eye of the storm had been found.

Enoch and Poe opened their eyes simultaneously, both breathing heavily as though they had just finished sprinting. There were several long, drawn-out seconds where nothing could be heard other than the two men breathing.

“I - I - stars, we really don’t know-”

“So many dead, so so many, and it’s all my-”

Poe looked up at Ben, his eyes haunted. “Kriff, Ben, I’m - I - I didn’t know…”

Enoch also looked to Ben, oddly pleading in his body language. “How did we let it happen, Kylo? We should have - so many of them, so many-”
“Do you see why we have to do it, now?” Ben asked Enoch delicately.

Enoch nodded mutely, sitting back as he stared into space. Poe looked at him in concern before questioning Ben, “Wait, do what?”

“We’re going to do exactly what we all just did here. But…” Ben seemed to steel himself, appearing to take on the tone and confidence of a Supreme Leader. “With as many people as possible. As many leaders as possible, all at the same time. If we can create even a slight bit of compassion among people in positions of power…” Ben shrugged; even Rey could feel his confidence slipping away-

“…then maybe we have a shot at ending this whole thing. The war, the conflict - Ben did the research ages ago - it can be done, and we can do it.”

“All right, I never thought I’d say this but Ben… has a pretty good plan here.” Poe ran his hand through his hair, looking as though he was thinking as fast as he could. “The big question now is how do we get all the Resistance and First Order brass, not to mention as many politicians and influencers as we can manage, in the same place without someone trying to kill someone else?”

“I… had an idea,” Ben said quietly.

Rey peered over at him, puzzled. His presence in the Force was suddenly clouded with self-doubt, worry, and more than a little terror. But he strode toward her with purpose that belied his inner thoughts.

Ben sank to one knee before her, reaching to take her hand in his.

Rose gasped and covered her mouth. Poe rolled his eyes. Enoch sighed. Esdee and Arren shared a smile. Finn looked as confused as Rey felt. Ben looked up at her, vulnerable and beseeching.

“Rey. There’s nothing I can say that you don’t already know. But I think that everyone here - I - I think that the entire galaxy needs to know what you mean to me. Despite who I am… Despite everything I’ve done, you stood up for me. You didn’t give up on me. You were willing to understand and connect with me in a way that no other being will ever know. You let me know that even in my darkest times, I was never truly alone. You fought against the most horrible and unimaginable of enemies for me. You showed me that I could love, and love more deeply than I ever knew possible. You made me want to be a better person for you, Rey, and while I still don’t think I’m anywhere near worthy of your-”

“B-Ben - what - what are you-”

“Rey. Would you do me the incredible honor of marrying me? ...please?”

Rey gave the smallest of gasps as she finally, finally caught on to what, exactly was going on here. Tears sprang to her eyes and fell down her cheeks.

“Ben - I - of course, I-mmf!”
The rest of her response was muffled by Ben’s lips as they caressed hers chastely, but passionately. Somewhere, Rey registered gasping sobs (Rose), a lewd whistle (Esdee?), and a somewhat exasperated sigh (most definitely Poe).

“Give her the ring, you idiot!” Enoch called out.

Ben pulled away from her, looking flustered as he dug through his pocket, procuring a small black box that he worried between his fingers. “Rey - I - are you sure? I mean, you don’t have to. You can turn me down and I’ll - I’ll walk away, I don’t want you to feel-”

“Ben…” Rey warned, still grasping his hand. “If we’re doing this properly, I think it’s only fair that I get to tell everyone here what you mean to me.”

She slid from her chair and on to her knees before him, the two of them now looking each other in the eye equally. Rey’s eyes shone as she smiled, watching the realization dawn on Ben of what she was doing.

“I - oh.”

“You told me I was powerful when I had a lifetime of everyone telling me the opposite. You wanted to teach me, and not use me. You said I could be stronger, and I believed you - and believed that you could make me that way. You told me that my past didn’t have to define who I was, and that I had a place in your future, at your side. Ben - Kylo - whatever name you choose, I’ve seen your entire life up until now, and I’ll always know it’s you. I love you, and I’ll always - always choose you.”

This time, the kiss was not chaste. Rey pounced forward and practically devoured his mouth as she knocked him to his back, clearly taking him off-guard.

“Ow ow! Get it, girl!”

“I think we should leave…”

“Kriff, can’t you two get a room?”

Rey broke away from his mouth with a laugh, looking up at her friends as she found herself feeling somewhat awkward for straddling Ben in the middle of the floor in front of all these people. “Sorry, it was - it just felt right.”

Ben groaned beneath her, giving her a slight nudge. “So improper. Go on, stand up so we can finish this the right way.”

“I don’t think I want to see finishing of any kind right now, thank you,” Poe muttered.

“Not that kind of finishing, you nerf herder. He meant the ring!”

He fumbled with the box in his hand, finally managing to get it open after a couple of trembling tries. “It’s - it’s silly, but I - it’s a piece of my Kyber crystal, from when I - I-”

Rey gently caressed his face, smiling. “I know.”

He kissed her palm, then rose to his feet, slowly sliding the ring on her finger. “So you have another piece of me, wherever you go,” he whispered in her ear.
“All right, kids, I think this calls for a *celebration!*”

Festivities weren’t at all something Ben had anticipated for when initially planning for this occasion, but it felt… right.

By now, they had all gone deep into Snoke’s liquor cabinet. Ben had broken into the Alderaani wine, someone had found a delicious sparkling drink that briefly gave everyone hiccups, and the stormtroopers proved quite quickly that they were the true lightweights among this group.

But all Ben could look at, listen to, and think about was Rey. He was still in disbelief as he watched Rose demand that Rey show her the blood-red ring for what had to be the hundredth time that night, Rey’s smile lighting up her face as it always did. He didn’t fully believe her when she said he was worthy of her love, but he was willing to let her live that delusion as long as she wanted.

She laughed, the sound carrying across the room as she met his eyes, that small, secret smile on her face. He had never been so content, so happy in his entire life.

He didn’t get more than a few moments of that complete bliss before everything went wrong.

His breath hitch as a wave of something… awful transpired out of nowhere. And then… pain, unimaginable pain happening to someone - someone nearby, someone he knew - pain he knew-

Rey was suddenly at his side, clutching at his arm as her eyes went wide. “I felt it too.”

“Something’s wrong - something right here - who are we - where’s Enoch?!”

“He went to go contact one of the Knights of Ren, sir. I believe he’s in the study, trying to get the long-range comm working.” Essde piped up from behind the counter.

Ben took off at a sprint, reaching out for Enoch in the Force, finding only pain and panic.

The door to the study burst open. Ben almost missed Enoch, who was crouched on the ground next to the desk with the comm, clutching at his head as he rocked back and forth. Tremors seemed to be running down his back, and his head kept giving small, almost mechanical tics. Ben rushed to his side, imploring the Force to help him, to help his friend-

Suddenly, Enoch went very still. His hand shot forward to grasp Ben’s wrist as tiny convulsions ran all over his body. His lips barely parted, and his eyes squinted open in obvious pain-

“It’s… *her! The - the Mother!*”
And then it was as though he collapsed in himself, his body going still. Ben’s hands clutched at Enoch’s shoulders, scrabbling as they looked for any signs of life. A thrumming pulse echoed darkly in the Force, and it felt wrong.

“Enoch? Stay with me, you-you can’t… Kriff, Taytoo, d-don’t do this…” Ben stammered miserably, trying desperately to grasp at the Force, at the Light, using it to surround and bind him. There was something else at work here, but Ben was not going to let it win - he poured everything he had into keeping Enoch here.

Suddenly, he felt Rey’s strength join his own. What was a tug-of-war over Enoch’s very being became a decisive shove, the other power skittering away, overwhelmed. Together, they had overcome... whatever it was.

Ben sat back heavily, exhausted. Rey brushed past him to lean over Enoch, her fingers at his neck and her ear near his mouth. An incredibly tense few seconds passed, then-

“He’s still breathing, Ben. He’s alive. His presence is weak in the Force, but stabilized. You saved him.”

Ben met her eyes, once again amazed at the fact that she even existed, let alone had just agreed to marry him. It was as though he was seeing her for the first time all over again. He felt his lip tremble as he held her gaze. “It was you too, Rey. I couldn’t have done it without you.”

She smiled sadly. “Ben, I-”

“What happened?” called Finn from the hallway, with Poe, Rose, Arren and Esdee skidding in behind him.

“I - I don’t know. Something in the Force… Enoch was having some sort of seizure, I think,” Rey replied quietly, her hand on Enoch’s chest. “I think Ben and I got him stabilized, but we need to get him to a hospital.”

“Yes ma’am.” Arren quickly crossed the room to bend in front of Enoch. Esdee followed, the two of them clearly falling into some sort of memorized Stormtrooper protocol for moving bodies as they easily supported and lifted Enoch, carrying him out of the room.

“Rose - can you go to the main communications array for the whole house, and see if you can get this terminal to reconnect with whoever Enoch called? Finn can help with First Order transmission codes if you need them. Maybe they’ll know something.” Ben asked in an exhausted voice.

“Of-of course,” Rose replied, tugging on Finn’s hand.

“I’ll help them,” Poe offered, following along as Ben found himself alone at last with Rey, though hardly in the circumstances he wanted.

Rey sat back beside him, wiping her brow as she let out a slow exhale. “So what do you think that was, exactly?”

“You mean besides another painful reminder that we’re essentially working against Chaos itself
here? I have no idea. But it - the Mother - seems to be getting pretty desperate. But I just feel - *kriff*, it’s all my fault. I mean, I haven’t seen Enoch do that -” Ben gestured vaguely toward where Enoch had been carried away “*stars, it’s been since we were kids.*”

“You mean… those seizures? Is it something to do with the Force?” Rey asked timidly.

“No… and yes.” Ben sighed, propping his knees on his elbows as he ran his fingers through his hair, staring blankly at the ground. “When Luke and I found Enoch - Taytoo - he was just a kid, but one of the strongest beings in the Force, in the Dark side that we ever encountered. And he was dying.”

She must have felt the distress radiating off him in waves, because Rey crouched to sit beside him, taking his hand in hers. He gave her fingers a grateful squeeze, steeling himself.

“Luke said he was too far gone, that we wouldn’t be able to save him. That we should just - just leave him to die. But I… I recognized the pain he felt. And it was the first time I had ever seen someone use pain the way he did - of course he was strong in the Dark side, it was the only thing that was keeping him alive!”

He could hear old arguments, old wounds in the way that he said those words. But he pressed on.

“I snuck away from Luke that night, and found Taytoo again. And I showed him - I showed him that he wasn’t alone. That he wasn’t the only one who had unimaginable pain in his head. But where his was physical pain, mine was… different.”

“Snoke?”

“Yes,” Ben breathed quietly, shaking his head. “But I could help him. I had been researching healing with the Force, something Luke never really pursued. I asked Taytoo to trust me - and - and even as deep in the Dark as he was, he did.”

“So you healed him, right?”

“I did - but barely. It was the first time I ever tried it, but it was enough to relieve him of his pain for even a few seconds. He asked me if I could teach him how to do that, how use the Light, and I promised him that I would try to convince Luke to bring him back with us. But I didn’t have to.” Ben pulled his mouth in a tight line, looking as though he didn’t know whether to smile or frown. “Uncle Luke had followed me. He wanted to see what I did, and apparently I passed whatever ‘test’ it was, because he let Taytoo come back with us.”

“And you cured him?”

“It wasn’t that simple. Taytoo has some extremely rare condition specific to Weequay. He essentially has tumors constantly growing inside his skull, and when we didn’t heal them well enough, he’d seize up like he just did there.” Ben’s eyes shimmered with held-back tears, guilt tearing at him in the Force. “I should have paid closer attention, realized that it’s been so long since I’ve seen him heal himself, but with everything that’s been happening…”

“Ben. You can’t blame yourself. There’s no way that what we just saw was just tumors. You said it before - we’re fighting against chaos, and I think we made a pretty good team against it just now,” Rey said with a small smile.

“I suppose so…” Ben said with doubt.
“Uh, Ben? I - I think Rose got the comm connected. It should be linked to the communications room on the Finalizer.” Finn called from the hallway.

Ben rose to his feet immediately, glad for the distraction from wallowing in his own miserable guilt regarding Enoch. He sank into the chair in front of the communications array, patching the transmission through, expecting to see a blank-faced First Order officer.

“Hux?”

“Supreme Leader?” The General looked just as surprised as Ben felt to see the General instead of a communications officer.

“What’s going on over there? We just had a-” Always suspicious, Ben realized that he shouldn’t give too much away. Hux answering the comm was odd enough, and with everything that was happening, it was entirely likely that he was up to something uncouth at best. “Just... give me an update of what, exactly, is happening over there, General.”

“Supreme Leader, I was just about to contact you. It seems that your Knights have… vanished.”

“What?!”

“Shartom and Obaan Ren. They haven’t been seen in over a cycle, and there is no evidence of their movements on any of the security cameras. It’s… it’s as though they vanished into thin air.”

Ben sat back heavily, his mind racing. Vanished? Certainly, it was something Luke had once said was a possibility in the Force, and that a Jedi who was truly at peace would become one with the Force and disappear upon death. But Shartom? Obaan? They were no Jedi. This all seemed to point, once again, to Mortis, to the Mother, to the World Between Worlds - and everything else that seemed to haunt Ben’s every step.

“I… I was using this comm to reconnect the last transmission. Enoch Ren was using this terminal just minutes ago, and he suddenly collapsed and started having fits - if Rey and I hadn’t been here…”

“Are you implying that something is affecting your Knights, Supreme Leader?”

“I don’t know. But I’m going to find out,” Ben growled, running his fingers through his hair.

“Supreme Leader, if you don’t mind my asking - why, exactly, was Enoch Ren attempting to contact the Finalizer?”


Hux pursed his lips, arching an eyebrow slightly. “I suppose congratulations are in order. And... this engagement - is it in line with what we had previously discussed?”

“It’s… complicated, Hux. There’s a lot at stake here, and with what just happened with Enoch… With the other Knights… There are disturbances in the Force that are something Rey and I will
need to handle. It may be some time before we can discuss - ah… transfers of power.”

“...I see.”

“I know it’s not ideal. I don’t like this situation anymore than you do, but I think it’s for the best right now. What I need from you more than anything right now is to help us plan this wedding. It’ll need to happen in a week.”

“A week? My, my, Supreme Leader. You have been busy. I suppose this means someone has a shotgun to your back - when’s she due?”

“What? I - oh, kriff off, Armitage. It’s not like that.” But Ben blushed hotly all the same - Force, is that what this was going to look like to the galaxy?

“I’d rather not know all the sordid details. I assume you plan on the full might of the First Order’s leadership being in attendance at this event?”

“Yes, and they’ll need to assemble quickly. While I’ve only just now proposed, I’ve… I’ve been thinking about this for some time, and I believe Naboo would be an ideal location for the ceremony.”

“...indeed. Whatever is your desire, Supreme Leader.”

“I’ll contact you again when we’re off Scipio, and have some more details, but for now… just - just keep a sharp eye, would you, Armitage?”

“I shall endeavor to do as you command, sir.”

“Thank you. And - look, I truly am sorry that this isn’t going exactly according to what we discussed, but I really think Rey and I are on to something here. If this wedding goes as planned, it could mean peace for the galaxy and in the Force that hasn’t been seen in millennia.”

Hux coughed, and straightened his shoulders. “Well, at least some good will come of all this. I will begin making arrangements with the rest of the fleet immediately. Keep me updated on Enoch Ren’s status, and I will plan to meet you with the fleet over Naboo within the week, Supreme Leader.”

“Excellent. And let me know if you hear anything about Shartom or Obaan, and I’ll see if any of the other Knights know anything about what’s happening. May the Force be with you.”

Hux’s face looked oddly pained as he gave a slight nod in acknowledgement, his image blinking out as the transmission ended.

Ben sighed, looking to Rey for comfort, not expecting the sly smile on her face.

“So… just how long have you been planning for this wedding?”

With a trembling finger, General Armitage Hux disconnected the transmission. Out of habit, he
straightened his uniform and patted down his hair, feeling the cold sweat that had broken out all across his body. “Was that convincing enough for you?”

“It’ll suffice,” snapped the ashen voice from behind him.

Hux gave an involuntary shudder as a pair of delicate, bony hands grasped at his shoulder with surprising strength, running across his collarbones as he found himself frozen in his seat. His eyes wandered to Shartom Ren’s corpse, wondering at what, exactly, would come of all this.

“Don’t you see now, Armitage? Everything I told you was right. He just wants to create a dynasty for himself and his filthy Jedi whore, there’s no room for a lowly, genocidal maniac in their perfect, peaceful galaxy.”

This… this was unnatural, this power she held over him. The longer she was in his presence, the more he felt as though his vision was tunneling as ice slid down his spine, and his thoughts - his memories - everything was just becoming… blurred.

Anger shot through him. Dammit, he was stronger than this, he had resisted Kylo Ren’s powers on enough occasions. Hux closed his eyes and imagined the slow, painful death of every Force-user he had ever known, starting with her.

“Oh, that is beautiful, Armitage. Such lovely fury you have. It’s a shame you have the Force-sensitivity of a rock, you may well have been a contender. Unlike him,” she snapped at the limp body of Shartom Ren as her fingers clutched deeper into his collarbone.

“Now then. Be a good boy, and do as I say. Summon the others.”

Unable to stop himself, Hux’s fingers began tapping in the transmission codes. Parthian Ren, Devral Ren, Jataar Ren…

“Very good, Armitage. You’re doing so well, I knew I’d find a use for what’s in your pathetic little mind in some way or another.”

He gritted his teeth as he continued putting in codes, working through dozens of layers of security to simultaneously contact the remaining Knights of Ren. “What… what are you planning on having them do?” He managed to grit out, still struggling against the crushing pressure that felt like it was pushing on his eyes from inside his skull.

“Having them do? Oh, it’s much simpler than that, my boy. This body is too weak to take on that… that harlot, especially if she’s poisoned Kylo Ren against me. No, I’ll need more. It’s a shame I couldn’t get Enoch Ren, but those three should suffice. They’ll be a worthy sacrifice to the cause; they’ll serve the Dark in one way or another, giving my Son the galaxy he deserves.”

Hux felt something stir in him, a strength that he couldn’t explain, but desperately needed. Giving the galaxy - to someone else? After all he had done? He turned his head to face her, his body twisting in agony as he fought. “Your… son?”
All he could see beneath her hood was the way her milky, glowing eyes narrowed in mirth. “Oh, well done, you do have a spark of it after all. You’re almost good enough to eat, pet. But you’re too useful to me right now.”

“But… you said-”

“My dear, we’re going to have a very troublesome relationship if you assume that I care in the slightest bit about giving you what you want. I only told you what you needed to hear so you could get Kylo back to me, it’s as simple as that. He will take his rightful place, and he will thank me for bringing him home and back to his senses.”

The spark in Hux ignited, his fury fueling the power he felt rushing through him. For a brief moment, he had control of his own hand again. He would have to act quickly, before she noticed-

“Yes, good boy. Send them to me.”

“Devral, Jataar, and Parthian Ren, this is General Armitage Hux aboard the Finalizer, advising-”

“You don’t advise, you demand, you stupid child.”

“-commanding that you fulfill your duties as the Knights of Ren by following the order of your master, Supreme Leader Kylo Ren. The Supreme Leader…” Hux swallowed tightly, steeling himself- “The Supreme Leader commands that you immediately - immediately go into hiding, and whatever you do, do not listen to-”

The terminal exploded, and Hux found himself held aloft by a thin, sinewy hand. Gasping for breath as an enormous pressure closed in around his mind, he found himself transfixed by the odd, geometric nature of her black veins that ran down her skeletal, snow-white arm. How had he never noticed it before?

“That… was not a wise decision, General,” she gasped, her strength waning, but it was still enough to hold on to him.

Hux was not one unaccustomed to being strangled - he even managed a smirk. “You should have never crossed me, witch. I may die, but now your plans are for nothing, and by the time Kylo finds out-”

“I’m not going to kill you, idiot boy. All you’ve done is assure that I will make you watch every second of my son’s glorious reign, as the galaxy only knows of your failure.”

“You’re… weak. They’ll kill you in an instant once they know what you’ve done.”

“...Weak?”

Hux was dropped to the floor as she stood over him, and what little strength he had in him started slowly trickling away from him.

“It’s ironic. Your fury over your own incompetence, your own weakness was what gave you that
smallest touch of the Force just now. And it’s that very same touch-” her fingers clenched together as Hux writhed on the ground “-that will give me enough strength to see this through.”

He flinched as he felt the last of it come away from him, leaving him feeling oddly… hollow, as though a piece of his very being had been severed from him. She tilted her head up to observe the movements of her hand, her hood tipping back just enough to reveal her lined, wrinkled mouth set in a permanent grimace.

“Hmm, it was less than I thought, but it’ll do. I only need to stay alive long enough to come in contact with a Force user of decent strength. I’ll take everything they have and live on. Perhaps it’ll be Enoch, maybe even one of those Stormtroopers you think I don’t know about.”

A chill passed over Hux - no one, aside from him and Captian Phasma, knew about that particular program, left over from his days of planning to usurp Snoke.

“Or maybe…” she gave a hacking cough that may have been laughter, if she was capable of it. “Oh, that would be poetic, wouldn’t it? For that, I could make this body hang on for another nine months.”

Hux had no idea what the insane old bat was raving about now. He was just so tired. He dully registered where he had been thoroughly kicked in the side as she walked over his body, heading out of the communications room door and toward the main bridge.

“Pull yourself together, boy, you’re an embarrassment to your own Order. You will bring me to Kylo Ren and the Jedi girl, and we will see this through. Is that understood?”

He gave a drawn-out groan, but managed a “Yes.”

“Oh, you can do better than that. We need to keep up appearances, after all. Get up, and address me properly.”

Hux stood on shaking legs, his mind growing fainter and foggier by the second. He was alive, but he wasn’t sure how much longer his mind or his memories would be his own.

“Yes… Obaan Ren.”

Chapter End Notes

I HAVE BEEN WAITING TO DROP THAT BOMB SINCE CHAPTER FIVE. Was it too “gotcha?” Too ludicrous? Oh well, It Is Written, and she has only just STARTED to show how horrible she is.

Oh god, you might see why this one took me a while. So many rewrites. I wanted it to move along quickly, but not too quick, cover plot, but not too boring-ly - does that make sense? It’s 4:15 AM on my first night of winter break, and I just finished writing roughly 7k words since I started around 8PM.

Of course, continued bomb threats at school have NOT helped my sanity, but hey! It's
break! I proved tonight that I'm currently on a roll, so let's see where this roll takes me. We're looking at two more chapters probably about this size, and 22 will be more of an epilogue.

Thank you all SO much for sticking this out with me. The 18th marked the 1-year anniversary of Footnotes, so an especially HUGE thank you to those of you who've been here since the beginning. I love every single one of your wonderful comments that have gotten me through some pretty awful times in these last couple of months.
Chapter Summary

“So,” Luke continued, “let’s say that this works. You save Rey from whatever you’ve seen, you save the galaxy - but from what you’ve told me, that still leaves you dead. Something tells me you’re not going to leave it like that. I don’t want you leaving it like that. And if your mother found out I was even remotely responsible for anything bad happening to you again, she’d figure out a way to bring me back to life just to kill me again.”

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SORRY. I feel like I say this every time, but I really, REALLY didn't mean to take this long. SO many notes at the end.

Note the additional tags.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me."

Song of Solomon, 7:10

“What... what have you done?”

“You - you promised me -”

“No, no, Ben, PLEASE!”

“Ben? Ben?! It’s me, it’s Rey - can you...? no... NO!”

As he had for the past several mornings, Ben was woken by the shivering of his own body.

It wasn’t for lack of warmth. Like so many other aspects of the planet, Naboo was mild, as temperate as it was peaceful. A cool predawn breeze wafted in through the open window, stirring the gauzy curtains of the bedroom. Rey slept on peacefully beside him - and it was only because of her presence that the dreams weren’t worse.

For the first couple days here, they stayed in separate rooms of the royal palace’s guest quarters, at the behest of both propriety and several vaguely threatening comments from his mother. Ben and Rey’s days were spent together, planning for a wedding that was bordering on absurd in its scale,
cost, and opulence. But by night, his dreams... he hadn’t had ones like these since he was a child.

The first night, he actually thrashed himself awake, then bolted down the hall to break into Rey’s room, holding her mercifully alive body (not ashen-faced, bleeding, dead as she had been in his dream) tightly in his arms until the sun rose. When she quietly asked him what he had seen, he only shuddered, holding her that much closer.

On the second night, it was somehow worse. He was paralyzed, a prisoner in his own flesh, unable to stop the darkening horror that slowly overtook his body, a lattice of black, geometric shapes eating away at his vision and suffocating him. His soul was being torn, his eyes wide open and frozen in place, staring at the ever-expanding maw of blackness as he was slowly unmade. This time, it was Rey who rushed to him, shaking him, begging him to wake - it wasn’t until he felt her tears fall on his face that he managed to pull himself from what he saw.

The third night was what broke them. Now, the dreams were strong enough to reach Rey through their bond. She had felt his emotions, his terror before - but now she was treated to the same front row seat to horror that Ben had the previous nights. They watched, helpless, as he died in her arms, or she died in his. A cold-faced Ben threw Rey’s limp body to the ground, and a yellow-eyed Rey choked the last light out of Ben’s eyes. The entire galaxy fell into darkness, and it was all their fault, their fault, their fault the blackness screamed.

So they gave up any pretense of acting proper.

Each night, after all the day’s endless amounts of planning and meetings for arranging this massive wedding, one of them would sneak into the quarters of the other. They would meditate together, slowly closing off the world around them until it was nothing but them and their bond, and it all felt right. It was better - much better, but a sleeping mind was a vulnerable one (as Ben knew well). Just before the sun rose each morning, he was still treated to as many horrifying possibilities as he could imagine, and then some even his pessimistic mind hadn’t considered. They weren’t as overwhelming, as palpable as they were before Rey was at his side, but there was still… power to them.

After all, Ben knew they weren’t just dreams. And unlike when he was a child, tormented by visions of his fall at the hands of Snoke, or his many glimpses of Rey’s painful loneliness, he knew that he could do something about them. So he did.

It had now been a full week since they arrived. All of the representatives from the Resistance had arrived days ago, and the First Order was nearly fully assembled. Their wedding was the next day, and Ben hoped desperately that he was doing the right thing here. With a shaky hand, he reached for the journal at his bedside table. As quietly as he could, he slipped off the mattress, making for the balcony in hopes of clearing his mind as he took stock of what he saw in the dreams. He thumbed through the dozens of pages he had already written on, some in a half-awake scrawl, others in his more careful, deliberate script. Each night, there were fewer pages. Each night, there were fewer possibilities. He was getting close.

A gentle roar of the many waterfalls cascading away from Theed palace greeted him. The sky was just starting to lighten to a navy blue, the three moons taking on a pinkish hue as another gentle breeze stirred the hydenock trees. It seemed too easy to be calm now, surrounded by such
tranquility. Tense, Ben sat at the end of one of the overstuffed lounge chairs. He let out a breath slowly, centering himself, desperate to not wake Rey as he started his notes.

*It was finally just me this time. While I still don’t fully accept that I’m fine with what happens to Rey, it’s all working. Considering that the initial dreams ended in both of us dead, and the entire galaxy in chaos, I’ll consider this progress, and that my death is an acceptable -*

“I warned you about this, Ben. And I know what you’re doing.”

It was impossible for Ben not to jump when he heard that voice. He glanced up from his writing, forcing himself once again to calm down at the sight before him.

Luke Skywalker, casually seated across from him in another ridiculously chintzy chair on the balcony, as though he had been waiting there for hours. But… he wasn’t, obviously he wasn’t actually there. By the darkness of still-night, the ethereal glow of the Force around him gave away what Ben was actually seeing. Luke as a Force ghost, for the first time that he deemed Ben worthy enough to grace with his presence in the world of the living.

“And what is it that you think I’m doing, exactly?” Ben growled hoarsely, trying desperately to keep his emotions in check.

Luke shook his head slowly, but there was a hint of a smile under his beard. “I told you that you were going to face repercussions for trying to bring peace to the galaxy, for trying to oppose chaos itself - and I can’t fault you for what you’re trying to do. But you’re focusing on what could happen, and this is exactly what I warned you about.”

Teeth clenched, Ben was just able to stop himself from exploding. “So I’m supposed to just back off? Just because of what I’ve seen - I should drop everything, let everything bad I’ve seen just happen, not try to change anything, and abandon everyone and everything? Like you did?”

Luke gazed on with endless patience, as though he was expecting that particular jab. “That’s not what I’m saying. But these dreams, what you’ve been seeing? You can’t fixate on visions again, Ben, what’s only possibilities. The future is always in motion, always changing. Your sort of thinking is what led your grandfather down the path that killed your grandmother. It’s what nearly got both me and your father killed when I made the same mistake—”

“This is all pretty rich, coming from you.” Ben snarled, his hand grasped around the pen starting to shake. “I ignored visions of Rey’s suffering my entire life because you told me that I couldn’t dwell on things I couldn’t control. But maybe if you had ever learned to consider some other ‘possibilities,’ I wouldn’t have had to wake up to you standing over me with a lightsaber in my face!”

“I know,” Luke agreed, his face plaintive. “I know that no amount of apologizing on my half is going to be enough for you, but please - as someone who has been in your situation, someone who’s made your mistakes, take my advice. Focus on where you are now, what you’re doing now, not what could be.”

Ben unclenched his fists, a realization slowly coming to him. “...how much have you seen?”

Clearly, that was not the question Luke was expecting. Looking slightly taken aback, he blinked before answering - “Enough to know that dwelling on the possible deaths of everyone you care about is not the answer to your current problem.”
Ben’s eyes sparked, a thrill shooting through him. *Luke didn’t know.* And if he *- as a part of the living Force - didn’t know…* Maybe this would all work out, after all. ‘I’m not ‘dwelling.’ *I’m planning.*”

Luke went very still. “What are you implying?”

Holding up his journal in triumph, Ben stood to his feet. “I’ve been recording every single one. Every single vision, *every* part of a dream I’ve had these last few days. Just like I did when I was a kid. And each time, I’ve meditated on a way to avoid that particular fate, or found some way to prevent it. And *it’s working.*”

“Ben, you can’t—”

“I *can.* What I’ve planned already assures that Rey will live, that the galaxy won’t fall into chaos, and there will be minimal casualties. Now, ideally, I just have to improvise a way to not actually die while doing it, but even as it stands right now, I’ll consider what I’ve done so far an acceptable solution.”

“You can’t just… *alter* your fate like that, Ben! That’s not how the Force works! Those who presume to change the future, to control the Force like that - Ben, that’s—”

“*Dark?* Yes, I’m aware. But, as you decided all those years ago, that was always my fate. I’ll do *anything* to make sure Rey makes it out alive, and that the galaxy is in balance by the end of all of this.” Luke opened his mouth to interrupt, his eyes full of a sort of furious concern that Ben remembered all too well. He pressed on - “*Here’s where it’s different - I refuse* to manipulate the future to save myself. I’ve already accepted my death, and that’s how *I know* this will work. Because controlling the Force to *save others* - an inherently *selfless* action like that—”

“-is antithetical to the Dark side.” Luke finished, stunned. “*That’s* why the Force has been going out of its way to order itself around you and Rey - and here I was, thinking you were the one bending it.”

“I *am* manipulating the Force,” Ben retorted hotly, his voice sounding far more childish than he wanted it to.

Chuckling, Luke shook his head. “No, you’re not. Trust me, now that I’m—” Luke gestured at his incorporeal body - “*this, I know* that the Force has a will of its own. You’re apparently just doing an *excellent* job of aligning yourself with what it wants. This means you’re on the right path.”

Ben wasn’t sure how he felt about that. He *very* much was in charge of his own actions and decisions here, dammit, and didn’t like the thought that the Force was somehow in the driver’s seat. After all, it had hardly treated him well before he met Rey.

“So,” Luke continued, “let’s say that this works. You save Rey from whatever you’ve seen, you save the galaxy - but from what you’ve told me, that still leaves you dead. Something tells me you’re not going to leave it like that. *I don’t want you leaving* it like that. And if your mother found out I was even *remotely* responsible for anything bad happening to you again, she’d figure out a way to bring me back to life just to kill me again.”

"I have a plan. Sort of."

Luke furrowed his brow. “You sound just like your father,” he grumbled. “I just don’t see how you’re going to manage this without completely relying on the Dark, Ben. *Dangerous*” barely begins to cover the degree of what you’re already talking about. How do you intend to get around
your own death, if you've already seen it in the Force?"

“Oh, I still plan on dying, from a certain point of view. I’m pretty sure I have to.”

“...what?”

Just at the edge of his perception, Ben felt Luke in the Force, tentatively prodding his thoughts - not an intrusion, but a question. In an act he never thought he’d consent to (much less act on of his own accord), Ben completely threw his mind open to his uncle, letting him see the plan without having to speak a word of it. After all, he was part of the Force, and not exactly able to accidentally compromise Ben’s still-mostly-improvised plan.

Luke’s eyes raced back and forth, as though reading as fast as humanly possible. By the time Ben felt him pull away from his mind, Luke ironically looked as though he had seen a ghost.

“I changed my mind. This - this - what you’re thinking of isn’t just dangerous, Ben - it’s insane.”

“But could it work?”

Letting out a long-winded exhale, Luke seemed to collapse forward, his elbows on his knees. “I guess? I don’t know, you’re the one counting on the... the semantics of your vision. But to pull this off, you’ll need perfect timing, you’re going to need decoys, not to mention an incredible amount of power—"

“-for instance, the amount of power I’d have available while holding a few thousand minds together during a ceremony, like Rey and I were already planning on doing?”

Luke’s mouth hung open for a few seconds before he seemed to recollect himself. “First off, I wasn’t done yet. Second, the ethics of using yours and Rey’s wedding ceremony - which was already being co-opted as part of your plan to create unity and empathy in the leaders of the galaxy - for - for this, is—”

“I’m well aware of the ethics. And I don’t care. Get to your third point, you always had three.”

“Third, if you bring this up to Rey, she will never let you do it.”

Ben sank back onto the chaise, sighing. Luke had him there. “You’re right.”

“Never thought I’d hear that out of you. So what are you going to do?”

Ben templed his fingers, thinking quickly. This was where he had planned the least, and was actually slightly glad Luke was here to test out his ideas. “Like you said, set up some decoys, and not tell Rey the entirety of the plan. It’s crucial that she doesn’t know, since I can’t guarantee that her own knowledge wouldn’t be used against her. And if everything goes right, she won’t even know what happened.”

“... and if - when - something goes wrong, and Rey finds out that you lied to her as part of some stupid, noble, self-sacrificing plan that could backfire in about a million different ways, I’m pretty sure she’ll find some uniquely creative way to punish you for it.”

Ben shrugged. “One can only hope I’ll be alive for it.”

Luke rubbed at his temples, a gesture that struck Ben as odd. Could Force ghosts even have
headaches? “Right. I can already tell that there’s nothing I can say that’ll divert you from this… ludicrou$s plan of yours. And I want you to know that in no way do I endorse the vast majority of what you’ve told me here. But…”

“But?” Ben said, an almost childish feeling of hope blooming in his chest.

“I will help you,” Luke sighed, looking almost wistful. "I've got a bad feeling about this..."

“They’re up to something.”

Leia didn’t even need to expand on that statement. Between the weight of how she emphasized ‘they,’ and the tension Rey felt in her hands as Leia continued absentmindedly braiding her hair, she knew that the General could only be referring to Ben, and somehow, Luke. Rey had her suspicions about the curiously-closed-off Ben the last couple of days, but hearing Leia echo her fears was concerning.

While the wedding planning was almost continuous, Leia found plenty of opportunities to steal Rey away for little talks like these. They were almost always clandestine, as far away from prying ears as one could get with seemingly all of Naboo roped into this wedding. Today, Rey found herself in the General’s opulent quarters, the apartments in the Royal Palace that belonged to her biological mother, Padme Nabirre - or as she was known and venerated here in Theed, Queen Amidala. They had made quite a mess of the place, the floor strewn with rejected dresses, Rey’s notes and Jedi texts, lightsaber parts, datapads full of braid schematics, and more lengths of intricate lace than Rey could count. Leia had parked Rey in a low chair before a vanity mirror, both to have better access to her hair and so their words couldn't possibly be overheard by the almost constant foot traffic in the hall outside.

Of course, there was still plenty of talk concerning wedding planning - and it was all coming to a head, with the ceremony the next day. But there was also what Rey could only define as scheming, which is what it sounded like Leia wanted to delve into this afternoon.

“What makes you say that?” Rey wasn’t sure how much Leia knew about what had happened between herself, Ben, and Luke what seemed like a lifetime ago, but was in reality less than a week.

“Call it a mother’s intuition. And a twin sister’s, for that matter. The thought of those two being on the same page about something, when this much is at stake…” Leia drifted off with a shudder.

“But Luke… How does that even work?” Rey asked as she leafed through meaningless fabric swatches for what must have been the thousandth time. After all, when she last saw Luke, it was decidedly not in the plane of the living.

Giving a dismissive shrug, Leia tucked the braid she had been working on into the bun on the back of Rey’s head, methodically moving to start the next one. “He has his ways. Some nonsense with the Force, I guess - he’s basically a ghost, and it lets him slip around and talk to whoever he wants, as long as they’re Force sensitive as well. It's annoying, but useful.”

“Are he and Ben even on normal speaking terms? I mean, have you actually talked with Ben? Any time I’ve seen you two in the same room, he’s all… Kylo Ren.”
The few occasions the three of them had to all be in the same room… tense hadn’t begun to cover it. Ben insisted on keeping up his cover, his persona thoroughly Kylo Ren, and his mask remaining on in all public spaces. Leia, on the other hand, seemed to be taking cruel pleasure in continually testing the patience of the Supreme Leader of the First Order with her endless suggestions and demands concerning the wedding. It got to the point where Rey actually had to dismiss herself from the room a few times when their clearly heavily-loaded, sniping wordplay was getting to be too much for her. Part of her was sure they were actually enjoying themselves, in some strange way.

Leia sighed, pausing in her braiding. “We talked. Briefly. I told him there was too much for us to hope to unpack when we’ve got to get this wedding done. Besides, I’ve had to learn over the years that the second you tell someone that you forgive them and love them, they have a tendency to go off and do something stupid, and most likely die in the process. We keep things unresolved between us -” she shrugged, not looking wholly convinced as she took up Rey’s braid again - “- maybe the Force lets us survive to see how this all ends.”

That seemed awfully fatalistic to Rey, but she supposed she didn’t have the perspective of someone who had lost their parents, home planet, brother, and husband. After all, until about a year ago, she had no one, and she would do anything to hold on to what she had gained. She couldn’t imagine leaving things unsaid, or not immediately forgiving someone who loved you. The thought of Leia and Ben choosing to leave their relationship in such a state made her uneasy, particularly given Ben’s state of mind lately, and the potential danger in what they were hoping to accomplish with this wedding.

“Well, if Ben is up to something with Luke, I think…” Rey swallowed nervously, working up her courage. Was it betraying Ben’s trust to talk about something like this with his mother? To go behind his back and confess her suspicions? Not if it’s something that can help him, she reasoned. “I think it’s something to do with the dreams he’s been having.”

Leia’s eyes bore into Rey’s in the reflection of the mirror. Her face was calm, but Rey could feel her falter in the Force. “What dreams?”

“Ever since Scipio, he’s been having nightmares. They were… they were awful at first. Even I was experiencing some of them through our bond, but I know he was seeing worse. So for the last few days, we’ve been…” Rey faltered, blushing a little. “We’ve been meditating together before bed. It’s helped some, but I know he’s still having terrible dreams just before he wakes up.”

“Is that what you kids are calling it these days?” Leia muttered, resuming braiding while Rey felt her cheeks pinken.

“I - erm, I think they’re not just dreams, too. Ben has had dreams that came true before - he used to have those visions of me before he knew me, after all. And from what I’ve seen, from the… sounds he’s made - if these dreams are any indication of what could happen…”

Leia looked troubled, clearly mulling over Rey’s words. “Ben having nightmares is nothing new. Even when he was a baby, he woke up screaming more often than not. It’s a big part of why we sent him off to Luke, since we figured that with some guidance in the Force, he would fixate less on what was in his head and more on the world around him. We didn’t know that his nightmare problem was… more than just bad dreams.”
Shaking her head with a sigh, Leia continued. “We had no idea about Snoke until it was way too late. There we were, telling him his whole life that it was all in his imagination, when…” Leia looked away, her eyes shimmering. “I should have listened to him. I should have known.”

“It wasn’t just Snoke,” Rey blurted.

Leia went very still. “What?”

“Snoke was - we think Snoke was just part of something much bigger.” Rey’s heart raced, thinking back to what she saw in the World Between Worlds. “There’s a Dark part of the Force that’s been targeting Ben since… well, since he was a baby, I think. It didn’t die with Snoke, it’s still out there, and it’s trying to stop us now. I think that’s what’s in his dreams - he’s having visions of what it wants.”

Grasping the chair Rey was sitting in, Leia seemed to swoon slightly. “I knew it. I knew it.” She steadied herself, her eyes more furious than Rey had ever seen them. “I felt it when I was pregnant. Even then, I knew something terrible wanted him - and it hated me. Luke tried to train me in the Force to help with what I was feeling, but the more connected I felt to the Force, the more power that… thing seemed to have over me. I wasn’t strong enough. I learned how to meditate, how to block it all out, but Ben, I guess he was… stars, he must have been completely vulnerable, I didn’t know, I didn’t know-”

The room seemed to tremble, and the vanity mirror in front of Rey cracked and splintered. She sprang to her feet to face Leia. The tiny woman’s face was etched with fury as tears ran down her cheeks, her fists clenched tightly to her side as the room continued to shake more and more.

Rey did the only thing she could think of. She threw her arms around Leia’s shoulders, embracing her both physically and through the Force. Gently, she reached out to her mind, which felt just like Ben’s had in his darker moments - powerful, fearful, angry - so angry, both at what had been done to her son and herself. Rey’s presence seemed to calm her mind somewhat, but the anger, the rage remained - though it now seemed focused, honed like a sharp weapon.

“This… thing that’s been targeting Ben. Does it physically exist, or is it just some blasted abstract part of the Force that doesn’t have a neck can wrap my hands around?”

Rey hadn’t expected that. “Er, we’re not positive, but Ben seems to think it’s in a physical body right now for it to be doing the things we’ve seen.”

Leia looked up to meet Rey’s eyes, her glare harsh. “Does it have a name?”

Rey felt her heart hammering. It was one thing, when she had talked about all of this with Ben and Luke in such a strange, abstract space. It was something else entirely speaking with Leia, who suddenly was able to make this massive threat feel like something that could be targeted and eliminated. “It’s… it’s the concept of chaos itself, but the Mortis legend calls it… calls it the Mother.”

Leia raised a single eyebrow, a trace of her smirk coming back. “Oh good, I was afraid this whole wedding fiasco wasn’t meta enough as it is.”

Rey was completely taken off-guard by Leia’s seemingly cavalier attitude. “I - I’m sorry?”

“Of course Ben’s been having nightmares, then. This thing, this ‘Mother’ is obviously hellbent on stopping you two from bringing peace to the galaxy, and it wants Ben back. It’s probably wanted you dead since Coruscant, that explains those assassination attempts pretty neatly. It’ll make its
move at the wedding, mark my words.” Leia let out a bark of a laugh, shaking her head. “If ‘she’ has the balls to actually show up, I’ll kill her myself.”

Sometimes, it was easy for Rey to forget that Leia Organa was the biological daughter of Darth Vader. “Leia, I - I don’t know if you can-”

“I will find a way,” Leia bit out through gritted teeth. “That thing stole my son, my family from me, and I am not letting it get away with it.” She gave a sharp exhale, seeming to re-center herself. “Now act normal, he’ll be here any second.”

“What?”

The door burst open to reveal a wild-eyed Ben with his lightsaber was in hand, ignited and sputtering furiously. He frantically scanned the room, Rey noting him pause when he saw the cracked mirror. Rey had been so focused on Leia, she neglected to feel Ben’s rising concern through their Bond, which had reached levels of near-panic until a second ago. Lowering his defenses somewhat, he looked slightly abashed as he extinguished his saber.

“Is - um - is everything all right in here?”

Leia primly rose to her feet, smoothing her clothing in a clear effort to avoid her son’s eyes. “Everything is fine. I was just telling Rey that I need to oversee the final wardrobe decisions, and I’m sure the two of you have some of the finer points of the ceremony to work out before tomorrow, since you keep insisting on secrecy. Now, if you’ll excuse me-”

“Wait, Mom. Please.”

Freezing on her way to the door, Leia let out a shuddering sigh, still pointedly looking beyond her son’s gaze.

“I - I know you said you didn’t want to talk until after the wedding. But-”

She raised a single hand, silencing her son. “I can’t do this right now. We need to focus-”

“This is about the ceremony. It’s something I need you to do.”

Leia turned slowly from the doorway, her eyes briefly darting up to meet Ben’s before quickly looking away once again. “If this is that ludicrously dramatic plan of yours where you insist on revealing your identity as part of the ceremony, I already agreed to play my role.”

“It’s more than that. It’s… It’s a Jedi thing, I guess, that was suggested to me to make part of the ceremony. They called it the Concordance of Fealty.”

She turned slightly to face Rey, both of her eyebrows raised in such a way that she was practically saying ‘I told you he and Luke were up to something.’

“And what does this involve?”

“After I take off my mask, I give you my lightsaber. You keep it safe. Simple as that.”

Leia let out a slight *hrmph* at this suggestion. “I don’t like the thought of both of you unarmed.”

“We won’t be. I can keep a blaster or two on me, and I’m sure Rey’s dress will be extravagant enough to hide a turbocannon, if it’s half as elaborate as everything else I’ve seen.” Ben’s eyes
flicked to Rey. “Besides, I know she’s nearly got grandfather’s lightsaber repaired.”

“I would not trust it in an emergency situation,” Rey chimed in. “You got me the parts I needed on Scipio, but I’m not sure if it’ll even turn on.”

Ben waved his hand dismissively. “It’ll work. Ideally, we won’t need it.” He stepped closer to Leia, practically forcing her to look at him. “Will you do this for me?”

Leia looked up, exhaling softly before once again turning away. “Of course. Anything you need.”

“Thank you,” Ben replied softly, watching his mother gather a couple datapads on her way out the door.

“Right. Well, you two get… whatever it is you need done. Lightsabers, concordances, ceremonies - I don’t care, just make sure you’ve got whatever script you want the Chief Justice of Theed to read delivered to him by tonight. This does still need to be a proper wedding, after all, and you two don’t get to see each after tonight. It’s tradition.”

“We’ll be ready,” Rey said with as much confidence as she could convey.

“You better be. And careful with all that meditating, you need to save something for your wedding night.”

Despite her cautions that left both Rey and Ben blushing, Leia shut the door behind her, leaving them in complete privacy for the first time outside their bedroom in what felt like ages.

“So…” Rey started awkwardly as she sat on the floor, trying to gather up some of the mess she and Leia had created. “This ceremony…”

“I know,” Ben sighed, sitting beside her as he helped, shuffling the braid patterns together and scooping up lightsaber parts to sit in a neat pile. “The last count we had for attendance puts it close to eight thousand, and the thought of trying to get that many people to pay attention to a wedding, much less enter a meditative state together…”

Rey bit her lip slightly to hide her small smile. She was curious to see what Ben may have figured out. “What have you got planned?”

Ben sighed, running his fingers through his hair. “The best solution is the one I’ve got in place right now. I sent some crews to the remains of Starkiller Base to gather as many lodestones as they can. There’s dozens of them just floating out in the asteroid field that’s there now, and if we station them in a few strategic places around Theed, we should be able to use them as a larger scale of what we did in the guided meditations, and they’ll assist in focusing the crowd.” His eyes seemed to lose focus as Rey could feel stress emanating off of him in waves. “Now, actually getting thousands of different minds to go through something as… as esoteric as a guided meditation together, without threatening them into compliance, as you told me we couldn’t do-”

“Erm, I’ve… I’ve been doing some thinking too.” Rey interrupted with a proud smile. “And research. Your journal wasn’t the only ancient text I had, after all.”

Ben looked up, his eyes suddenly alight like an eager student. “And?”

“I think I might have found something a bit more… elegant than having giant lodestone chunks all over Theed.”
“Well, it’s a little late for that, but I’m sure your idea is better anyway.”

Rey reached over to drag her small, unassuming leather bag that contained the books she had stolen from Ach-to. Delicately, she procured one of the larger volumes. While it was in better condition than some of the books that were barely holding their spines together, its worn cover felt uncannily like ancient, leathery human skin, sure to crumble at the slightest provocation. Rey looked up to see Ben giving the book a skeptical raised brow.

“That’s no Jedi text,” he mumbled warily.

“It’s not,” Rey agreed. “But it was definitely written by Force-users. It’s one of the ones I had fewer difficulties initially translating, but a much harder time actually figuring out its purpose.”

Rey began carefully leafing through the pages, allowing Ben to see the format of the writings. Instead of blocks of text, each page was filled with smaller phrases, the groupings of words making distinct patterns across the pages as the text flowed from page to page.

“At first, I wasn’t sure if it was poetry or spells, or even if someone was just making some interesting designs with the words. But then it turns out it doesn’t matter - there’s power in the actual structure of how these were written.”

Ben scooted closer to her, tracing his finger across the words. “And what does that power let you do?”

“Suggest things,” Rey said with a grin. “From what I can tell, this an early form of a mind trick. And if my other readings are right, it’s one the Witches of Dathomir pretty much perfected in this form, and can even create massive illusions. It’s not as quick or simple as a Jedi mind trick, but it allows you to reach far more minds, and it keeps the suggestions abstract and open to individual interpretation. Really, it’s not too different from what you were already doing on Scipio when you guided me and Arren with your words - this structure just gives it a bit of a power boost.”

A slow smile crept across Ben’s face, and Rey could feel pride surging from him. “So you found a way to pull everyone into our ceremony without taking away their choice of how to act on it. Stars, you’re brilliant.”

Rey grinned, blushing at the praise. “It’s like poetry, but it doesn’t even have to actually rhyme. As long as you follow the pattern, it works, and it should resonate with everyone who hears it.”

“Have you tried it on anyone?”

“I may have tried a couple of things. Small ones, nothing big,” Rey assured him.

She had never seen Ben look so intrigued. “Do it. Do something to me, I want to see it.”

Rey chuckled, pulling out a sheet of paper and a pen from her bag. “All right, but you’re putting me on the spot here. Let me see…”

Her mind raced, counting out words and syllables on her fingers, sometimes nodding to herself as she wrote a word or two down. Ben seemed to be practically vibrating with excitement, watching her as she softly sounded out words. After a few minutes, she tapped on the sheet in front of her, where she had written down a series of short stanzas in High Galactic (distantly, she could feel Ben’s silent judgment of her terrible handwriting).
“All right, I haven’t tried this on an actual person yet, but this should work. If you interpret it totally literally, you should be able to see what I see.”

Ben’s brow furrowed. “Like what we’ve done in the Force?”

“No, I mean like actually seeing out of my eyes.”

“Oh,” he breathed, as though suddenly understanding what was possible here.

Rey cleared her throat, smoothing out the paper in front of her.

“How do you see me?” he asked softly.

Looking across to him, Rey saw Ben’s body completely still, his eyes glazed-over and stare seemingly vacant. “What do you mean?”

“I’m - I’m… different,” a shiver passed through his statue-still body, and his voice seemed to both come from his body and within her. “I look-”

“Handsome?” Rey suggested cheekily, unsure how to interpret his reaction.

“Strong,” Ben emphasized, a tear running down his cheek as his gaze remained empty, still seeing himself through Rey’s eyes. “You see me as this… powerful, smart, capable, beautiful - thing, you put me up on this pedestal I’m not worthy of, and Rey, that’s you, I’m not - I’m not who you-”

“You are,” she assured him, feeling her heart clench.

With a shudder, he seemed to break from the hypnotic hold that Rey’s words had over him, his eyes focusing as more tears pooled in his eyes. “I’m really not. I’ve done terrible things - and I still do terrible terrible things, even now.”

Rey seized his hands, pulling him toward her. “I don’t care. I’ve told you that before - everything you’ve done, every name you’ve had - it’s all what makes you you. And if ‘terrible things’ you’ve done are what you’re so worried about, just know I’d do even worse to keep you. I’ve held on to hope for people who never even gave me a fraction of what you have. And I love you, Ben. All of you.”

Shaking his head, Ben continued. “And I love you. But I don’t deserve it, or any of your - your endless forgiveness of me and what I’ve done. What I continue to do. Even now, I - I-”
“Is this something to do with what you and Luke have been planning?”

Ben went as still as he had been seeing through Rey’s eyes. “What - when - how do you know?”

“Even if I couldn’t tell something was wrong through our bond, you’ve been distracted enough that even Leia knows that you’ve been planning something you’re not telling us about. Plus, I’m pretty sure a Concordance of Fealty wasn’t something you would have thought of on your own.” Rey sighed, worrying his thumb in her hands. “Can I ask about it?”

He was visibly uncomfortable. “…yes.”

Rey cocked her head slightly. “Why don’t you want me asking about it?”

“But I just said-!”

“I can tell you don’t want to tell me, even though it’s obviously something important. Tell me what you can, Ben. I trust you.”

Somehow, those words made him look even more crushed. “It’s… It has to do with the dreams I’ve been having. The visions. You know what we’re up against with what we’re doing.”

Nodding, she tried to look as encouraging as she could, even while dread seemed to creep up in the back of her throat. “The Mother,” she whispered.

“And that’s why I can’t tell you everything, Rey. You know better than anyone but me how easily she’s able to enter minds and destroy or uncover whatever she wants. The less you know, the smaller the target on your back.”

Rey furrowed her brow. “That’s not fair, Ben. By your own logic, you’re the one she’ll come after the hardest, and so it should be me protecting you-”

“No,” Ben growled, his eyes with a fire in them she hadn’t seen in some time. “You don’t - you don’t know what it’s like to be… unmade, to have someone claw through your thoughts and memories - your soul, and just tear out the parts they don’t want. And I will not allow it to happen to you.”

She felt genuine anger now - and not just because of the tendrils of Dark pouring off of Ben. “By letting it to happen to you? Again? That’s not fair-”

“It isn’t. And I don’t care.” Ben took her hands, his gaze imploring. “I won’t lose you, Rey.”

Rey clutched his fingers, staring right back at him. “And I won’t lose you.”

“You won’t, I promise,” he emphasized. “You know I’ve seen things. I’m doing whatever I can to ensure the best possible future for you. Even Luke agreed to help-”

“Wait, Luke is helping? Leia and I thought you might be discussing with him, and I assumed the Concordance was his suggestion - but Luke Skywalker is actually helping you with this - this loosewired plan you’ve got?”

“Yes.”

Rey released Ben’s hands, exhaling slowly as she tried to tamp down what remained of the anger in her. “All right. All right - assuming I go along with this - this potentially awful plan of yours, I’m on a need-to-know basis, correct?”
“Correct,” Ben replied, crossing his arms defensively.

“Well? Go on, tell me everything you can.”

He chewed on the inside of his mouth, looking very much put upon the spot. “I’ve seen many different outcomes of how everything could happen tomorrow. While I have taken about every precaution I can to save you and everyone I can, there’s only so much I can plan for.”

“So tell me what I can do. Surely, whatever bad outcomes you’ve seen - you’re already pushing yourself too far as it is, I can tell. Let me help.”

“I just need you to do what you’ve been doing all along, Rey.” With that, Ben reached into his tunic, procuring his old journal. “I need you to keep this safe.”

All of Rey’s previous anger and indignation vanished in a cloud of confusion. She reached out a tentative hand, accepting the journal, before clutching it to her chest. He had asked his mother to do the same with his lightsaber, after all. “Why - what aren’t you telling me, Ben?”

He had a small, sad smile. “Well, that sort of defeats the purpose of a need-to-know basis, Rey. All you need to know is that I’m trusting you with that, and I need you to guard it. It has to do with the ceremony, and it’s there as backup if something goes wrong.”

“How will I know?”

“Oh, you’ll know. Trust me.”

Rey felt her face scrunch up in indignation. “So before I asked you about this, you were just - just not going to tell me about any of this?”

“If it were up to me, I would have had that journal strapped to your garter belt tomorrow morning and not even let you know it was there.”

Her mouth fell open in shock. “Ben!”

“You’re right, I wouldn’t have let someone else do it. I would have tied it on there myself.” He reached a gloved hand toward her leg, giving it a slight grope. “Can’t let anyone else know what you’re packing under all those wrappings.”

“Ben!”

“My plans and your thighs are secrets only I get to know about.”

Rey swatted at his arm with the journal, trying very hard to keep an irritated facial expression through the smile she was fighting down. “Just for that, I’m going to let us use my favorite source of prose for us to write out this ceremony.”

Ben looked momentarily confused, then horrified. “Rey, you’re not - no-”

“Oh, yes,” Rey breathed, opening Ben’s journal as she methodically started to pull out the many slips of paper embedded between its pages. “And if you don’t watch it, I’ll only use the oldest, lewdest, most melodramatic stuff I find here.”

Giving a sigh of defeat, Ben seized the paper and pen she had been using. “Fine, I guess we have to base it on something. But I get to write it.”
Rey didn’t know much about weddings. About brides, grooms, flowers - growing up on Jakku hardly afforded her many opportunities to find out. And she was certain that everything they had planned and done in preparation for this particular wedding was far more than usual - after all, Leia Organa was involved, not to mention the Supreme Leader of the First Order. Thousands of guests, an entire capital city being locked down, a wedding gown embedded with thousands of perfectly cut crystals, a ceremony written with the intent to bring peace to the galaxy - none of this was normal, Rey was sure of that. But she did know that a wedding was supposed to be one of the most memorable moments of a person’s life.

She would always remember this day. Of that, there was no doubt.

She would remember the second the chronometer pronounced it her wedding day. They were all together then, the group who had been brought together when they initially experimented with the limits of what Ben and Rey could do with disparate minds. Rose had shrieked with tipsy laughter the moment the chrom changed over, covering Rey’s eyes with her hands, pronouncing it bad luck for her to see Ben until the ceremony. Neither Rey nor Ben slept that night - from nerves, from excitement, from fear of further visions they couldn’t plan for anymore, neither one could say.

She would remember the few odd moments of quiet and calm that she had to herself, when she was practically sewn into her dress by tailor droids. The white, strapless bodice clung to her breasts and hips before flaring out into a long, heavy train that Leia assured wouldn’t get in her way. As promised, she had a blaster strapped to one leg, Ben’s journal on the other, and the tentatively repaired Skywalker lightsaber on her hip, all buried by layers of tulle. The crystals lining the dress faded from a pure white on her torso to a pitch black by the end of the nearly-10-foot-long train, with the occasional touch of red scattered throughout the base. Rey had actually been heavily consulted in its design, since it needed to appease both Leia Organa and the Supreme Leader of the First Order - both of whom had a hard time saying no to any of her suggestions.

She would remember loading into an ornate, open speeder with Finn and Leia at her side, each with a reassuring arm wrapped around hers. Poe drove while Rose followed them behind with the stormtroopers, the core group leaving nothing to chance at Ben’s behest. Every one of them had specific orders, places to be stationed, and times to do certain things. After what they had all been through, no one questioned him, something Rey was immensely grateful for, considering how they had all started back on Coruscant.

She would remember the tremble of fear she felt down her spine as she exited the speeder and proceeded down the seemingly endless aisle toward Theed Palace, thousands of eyes watching her every confident step. In this moment, she was incredibly grateful for her long dress that just scraped the grey stones beneath her feet in the front, the train following her just behind with Finn and Leia in its wake. It let her hide the fact that she was wearing wholly unflattering, comfortable, flat boots that were the only thing that kept her from stumbling and falling on her face, as she would have in heels. It was another one of those odd details Ben insisted on, but knowing the implications of his demands, it was an easy one to follow.

She would remember the shock at seeing Kylo Ren at the altar. Of course, she knew that Ben
would still be assuming this particular identity for this part of the ceremony, but she hadn’t quite been prepared for… *this.* She hadn’t seen him in the full black outfit, the lightsaber, the helmet - *kriff,* the *cape* - in ages. The extraordinarily pale, peaky looking redhead in a First Order uniform next to him had to be General Hux, though Rey wouldn’t know if it wasn’t. He looked positively ill - though, she supposed, this may have to do with merely having to be in the presence of this many members of the Resistance, much less having General Leia Organa approaching him in these circumstances.

She would remember the moment the Supreme Leader of the First Order kneeled before his mother, removing his helmet. The gasp through the audience was practically palpable, as the well-known face of Ben Solo was revealed. This was the man who was Snoke’s successor, who, in his brief time as Supreme Leader, had already done so much to establish peace. He was willingly marrying his predecessor's alleged murderer in the name of unity, and had practically bankrupted the First Order in rebuilding efforts - *of course,* the murmur in the crowd went, *he was the son of Leia Organa after all.* He offered Leia his lightsaber, the hilt pointed toward his heart. There was an almost-too-long moment between them as mother and son held each others’ gazes. Rey could feel… *something* between them, perhaps a bond that only a Force-sensitive mother and child could know. Leia gave him a barely-perceptible nod, tears brimming in her eyes as she accepted Kylo Ren’s lightsaber.

She would remember how startled she was at the speed of the ceremony. Before she knew it, she and Ben were saying their vows, not so different from the ones they had said what felt like a lifetime ago on Scipio, in a moment that felt far more intimate than this one witnessed by thousands of strangers. With trembling fingers, she took Ben’s hand, slipping a simple golden ring onto his hand as he nestled a thin, elegant band next to her engagement ring.

She would remember their kiss. *Kriff,* she’d remember that kiss. When his warm fingers cupped at her jaw and waist to pull her forward, she couldn’t stop her smile as his lips descended on what had to be mostly teeth, sure that she had ruined the moment. But then he kept *going,* his fingers pushing into her hair as he deepened the kiss, tipping her back slightly. She felt a groan that seemed to start in his body, traveling through hers and somehow all around them as she was lost to the moment. By the time his hand gripped at her thigh, fumbling around the journal there, she opened her mouth to him, completely uncaring of what had surely become entirely too lewd for thousands to witness. They were wrapped together in that moment, both physically and in the Force. Rey felt his presence pulse through her as his kiss turned possessive. He practically snarled as she pulled away slightly, his fingers running through her scalp. Rey was briefly brought out of the moment, fearing what her hair looked like - until she saw the red petals scattered on the ground between them, her braids unwinding through his questing fingers. Her hair now hung completely free and loose; she was somewhat grateful for it, as it helped disguise her blush from being so thoroughly, publicly debauched. It had to be something Alderaani, because by the time she met his eyes, he looked wolfish - his eyes alight with pride at what he had done.

She would remember Leia rubbing at her temple while shaking her head, but smiling all the same as a massive cheer went up among the thousands. The Supreme Leader and the Last Jedi now stood as one.

But more than anything, she would remember her husband’s eyes - pleading, *desperate* for her to understand something - as the Chief Justice of Theed declared that the couple before him had a message of peace that they wished for all those gathered to take part in. Maybe if she had more time with him, maybe if she hadn’t grown up in utter isolation, maybe if she hadn’t been so alone, maybe, *maybe* she could have prevented what eventually happened - or perhaps what had already happened, too late for either of them to prevent.
“If all gathered here can join me in quiet contemplation as the Last Jedi of the Resistance and the Supreme Leader of the First Order deliver their message of unity,” the Chief Justice’s voice boomed out over the gathered crowd as every face focused upon the newly married couple.

Ben was still holding her gaze as they joined hands, his eyes boring into hers, as though trying to memorize her face before they closed their eyes in unison. They squeezed their fingers together gently, the signal to begin their connection as they reached out in the Force, feeling the thousands of disparate minds as one. They were all so noisy, as Rey and Ben drew slightly on the lodestones to help them gather minds that felt like sand in their hands. A breath later, and they loosely held the attention of every soul there. Another squeeze of their hands, and they began to recite the words they wrote together on a piece of paper now tucked safely into Ben’s journal.

“Black,
White
They are…
All we see,
When our minds are closed
But greys and colors are there too
They reach out to us,
Let us feel

There is
Light
And
Dark too,
But seek out
What is in between -
Infinite possibilities

Surrounding and binding us, throughout all in the Force
Beyond any lines we follow
Push reality
Watch it bend

Feeling the Force, opening up, separate the body from the mind.
Trust in your feelings and reach out, leave no opportunities behind.

Feed our will to feel this moment urging us to cross the lines.
Reaching out to embrace the future
Reaching out to embrace whatever may come.
We embrace the desire to…”

The power was overwhelming, their collective breath hitching at the feeling. They were somehow both a conduit and a focus of the Force, power simultaneously flowing through them and seemingly gathering between them. Rey felt panic start to rise in her at the sheer scope of what they were doing. This was too much, too much for someone like her. But Ben enveloped her, his presence surrounding, binding, and pushing through her more thoroughly than she had ever felt. Suddenly… she was calmer, powered with more than just her own strength, ready. Confidence rose anew in her, his presence adding to hers as they inhaled, continuing as they resumed holding all of Theed in their collective thrall.

“We embrace the desire to feel the rhythm, to feel connected
Enough to step aside and weep like a broken mother  
To be inspired, to fathom the power,  
To witness the beauty, to bathe in the fountain,  
To be one with the Force, and Beyond as well  

_To become one with the Force while still being alive._  

With our feet upon the ground  
We lose ourselves between the Worlds  
And open wide to draw it in.  
We feel it move across our minds.  

We’re reaching up and reaching out.  
We’re reaching for the chances, or whatever will inspire us.  
Whatever will bring compassion.  

And following our will and paths  
We may just go where no one’s been.  
We'll follow the lines to the end  
And then we’ll find there’s more to us.  

Feel the Force.  
Be as one.  
Spiral out,  
Endless paths.  
Embrace it,  
See the choice  
Make the leap,  
_Compassion_  
Through it all-  

Rey opened her eyes to find Ben staring at her unblinkingly. He nodded slightly as they exerted their power _just_ enough to compel every voice to join theirs as they finished-  

_“May the Force be with you.”_  

Together, they released the minds that suddenly buzzed with new awareness. Rey practically staggered at the power released from her, though she could practically still feel its weight in her soul. Ben steadied her, his grip tight as he scanned the crowd, seemingly distracted.  

The chief justice of Theed attempted to wrest the attention of the crowd to move along to the reception as whispers grew. Ben drew Rey into his arms, holding her tightly to his side as he guided them toward the palace and away from the ceremony as the chief justice now yelled out from the podium for everyone to _just please listen_ and go to the reception instead of just standing around talking. His pleas turned into a distant echo as Ben hurried them along, seemingly wanting to get away as quickly as possible.  

_“Ben, slow down, I can’t move that fast in this-”_  

He bent to scoop her into his arms, her head almost flopping backwards at the suddenness of the action. _“Ben! What’s-”_
“Hush,” he muttered with irritation, his eyes glancing all around as though expecting something. Cautionly, he pushed them through a slightly ajar door and into the throne room of the Royal Palace. Rey sat up as much as she could in his arms, suddenly aware of how very wrong everything felt.

Then she saw the bodies.

“Ben! What’s - what happened here?” her voice trembled as she counted the bodies of Stormtroopers - at least five that she could already see.

“Exactly what he expected,” he muttered darkly, his eyes still searching the room.

Rey wriggled her way out of his arms, kneeling beside one of the troopers, her fingers going to remove the helmet. “But this - this is awful, how - surely there’s something we can do-”

“You’ve done enough already, Jedi.”

The ashen whisper through her mind coincided with Rey’s successful removal of the trooper’s helmet, revealing a desiccated, dry, sunken face that caused her to recoil in horror. Standing shakily to her feet as she backed away from the corpse, she retreated to the safety of Ben’s stock-still body, clutching to his side. She looked around the room, real fear taking hold of her as everything felt more and more... off.

“Ben, do you - do you feel that? Do you feel-”

She looked to Ben, who seemed unnaturally frozen, as though something was holding him in place. Rey tried to reach for him, but then staggered as sudden, overwhelming pain lanced through her head. Her vision narrowed to a single black tunnel as pressure came from all sides, her very existence feeling simultaneously stretched and crushed as pinpoints of light were prodded and yanked at-

“Oh, you clever boy. But your faith was misplaced, I’m afraid. Did you really think she saw you as anything other than a means to an end? That she would actually want you - as broken as this?”

Rey screamed as the pressure spiked-

“See how weak she is. She was never good enough for you, and you were never going to be what she actually wanted.”

“No, no - Ben, PLEASE!” -but he remained silent beside her, his hand clutched at her shoulder as he shuddered.

“It’s no matter. I’ll put you back together, just as I always have. I’m the only one who knows how to fix a mind as broken as yours.”

Blood filled her mouth as she bit at her cheek, feeding on the pain to concentrate on pulling herself away from this - this hold on her. Rey opened her eyes to see the throne room cloaked in almost complete darkness, despite the fact that it was still the middle of the day outside. Then, in its darkest depths, she saw a reflective glint as a human form pushed forth in an nauseatingly familiar way, glistening unnaturally.
The Mother was making her entrance into this plane.

The form shed some of its pitch blackness as it stepped forward, taking on details as it went. But this was not some abstract horror of black and white, eyes and formless tentacles. A cloak, a withered hand - details that didn’t make sense, yet were ones she had seen-

“Obaan Ren?” Rey whispered, squinting at the woman as her heart raced.

It couldn’t be - yet… She had always been there, hadn’t she? Each assassination attempt, Ben’s desperate questions to Luke about what happened on Yavin IV, an offhanded mention in his journal - and even in Luke’s school, where Ben was supposed to be the safest. So casually, Ben had referred to her power, her strength over minds that even exceeded his own. One of his most trusted Knights.

Her eyes were obscured by the cloak, but the snarl on her mouth was evident. “I’ve waited a long time for this,” she said with a guttural hiss, her bony fingers flicking toward Rey. She painfully ripped the blaster from the holster on Rey’s leg and into her hand.

“You,” Rey breathed with fury, darkness of an entirely different kind surrounding her. “I won’t let you-”

Obaan jerked her empty hand, and the anger was snatched from Rey as easily as the blaster had been pulled from her leg. “You will not speak, whore.” She seemed to sigh in relief, standing a little straighter. “You can’t even handle the Light without tainting it, much less my prize.”

Rey opened her mouth to object, but found her jaw clamped firmly shut in the Force.

“You’ve done well enough bringing him to me though. Though I thoroughly question his thought process here; perhaps being in your presence so long has made him as stupid as you, Jedi. To think I’d be deceived by such… tricks.”

Obaan Ren - the Mother - pulled the trigger on the blaster.

At first, Rey didn’t even register anything. The shot hadn’t been lethal, it was aimed too low. For half a breath, she felt a spike of fear that the shot had hit Ben -

Maybe, in a way, it did.

She now felt the burning in her thigh, pain radiating out from where the black burn on her wedding dress stood out like ink on parchment. With trembling fingers, Rey reached down to gingerly pull up the hem -

Ben’s journal - or what remained of it - fell softly to the floor, the remaining edges of pages crumbling among the ashes. Rey’s mouth formed the word no as she fell to her knees, but no sound actually escaped her lips. Ben had trusted her with it, there was something important, he said that she needed to keep it safe in case something went wrong -

She whirled around to face him, to beg him to say that somehow, this was part of his plan -

Those were not the eyes of Ben Solo.
His face was utterly impassive as he stared down at her. Obaan Ren strode forth, her wrinkled mouth forming a slanted grin of victory.

“Fools, both of you. He trusted you, and you thought you were strong enough to protect him. This is why every last trace of Ben Solo must be eradicated, such weakness shall not be allowed to persist. Though I must hand it to him - giving you only a piece of his soul means that he still didn’t trust you entirely, now did he? As he shouldn’t. But he’s still here somehow, I can feel him. The idiot must have given the other piece to his even weaker - that traitor - Organa. Didn’t he?”

Another dagger of pain quickly went through Rey’s mind as the Mother seemingly tore through her mind to confirm her suspicion. “What… what have you done?” she croaked out in horror.

“I have done nothing wrong, girl. Merely saved my boy from your… your filth. I nearly lost him, but deep down, he knows what’s best. Don’t you, Kylo?”

“Yes, Mother.”

Rey rose to her feet to grasp Ben’s shoulders, trying to meet his eyes. “Ben? Ben?! It’s me, it’s Rey - can you…?”

He looked down his long nose at her, the slightest hint of derision about his eyes. “That name has no meaning to me, Scavenger.”

She staggered backwards, her knee buckling on her injured leg. “No… NO!” Despair rolled off her in waves as it slowly dawned on her what, exactly, had happened here. “You - you promised me -”

“Empty words, now that you utterly betrayed Ben Solo’s trust.” Obaan interrupted, sounding almost bored. “Now then, we have some time before Organa figures out what’s happened here. While I originally had every intention of killing you, Jedi, I have something far greater planned, something far more… poetic.”

Rey glared up at her - but once again, her fury was lifted away from her.

“By all means, girl, keep feeding me your hate. I’ll leave you your sorrow, but a Jedi’s anger has always had a particular… flavor I can’t get enough of. But you’re not what I need.” She snapped her fingers as Ben - Kylo - immediately came to her side. “Be a good boy and do what you were made for. Children should always respect and give back to their elders. I made you, gave you everything, after all.”

“No, no, Ben, PLEASE!” Rey’s legs were shaking too much to hold her own weight, causing her to collapse on the floor as charred pieces of Ben’s journal scattered away from her.

“Thank you, Mother,” Kylo murmured, bowing his head before her. He staggered slightly, his skin taking on an even more pale hue than usual. The Mother ran her fingers through his hair possessively, gasping in pleasure before she kissed the crown of his head.

“Good boy. You’ve done so well, I’ll let you have a reward. Would you like that?”

“Yes, Mother.”

For the first time, Rey was able to see the Mother’s eyes. Fathomless and black, the pits still gave the very distinct impression of being watched as she focused her gaze on Rey, a cruel smile taking over her face.
“Get somewhere safe. Take… *that* with you. Use her for the only thing she’s good for.” Her long fingers stroked Kylo’s face, and Rey swore that she saw the slightest twitch in his eye before the Mother’s next words shook her to her very core - “*Give me a child.*”

Chapter End Notes

All right, first I will take this time to reassure you of my happy ending policy. Believe it or not, this DOES have a happy ending, and my eagle-eyed readers probably already saw how it’s going to go down. I had to put you through some of the most horrific, heart-clenching writing I’ve done first though - parts of this physically made me wince to write, and I think my cold, black, public school teacher heart kind of hurts.

And before anyone starts getting any misinterpretations - I have a fantastic relationship with my mother and mother-in-law! I’m pulling a lot from some things I’ve seen students' parents do, and some things that happened with a very creepy abusive ex and his very creepy mother. You know those types on Facebook who post those twee, disgustingly obsessive, jpeg-y as hell images about how a mother’s love for her son is the most important and precious thing in the world, and we all need to know how devoted-to-the-point-of-creepy it is? She was one of those. And boy did she ever hate me, despite the fact that her son was the anger-issues control freak in the relationship, BUT I DIGRESS.

As always, I had to do some lifting from actual songs to get their writings out - though, just like Rey and Ben, I more stole the structure of Tool’s Lateralus than I did the lyrics, but some remained. The song and its rhythms/structure/content is Jungian as hell and wholly appropriate for any application in Star Wars, and I’d suggest if you’re not aware of it, and if the idea of a song written on a golden spiral is intriguing to you, look into any of the massive amount written about that song or entire album.

So yeah. Next chapter is effectively The End, but there will be a brief (by the standards of these last two chapters) epilogue that will tie some things together in probably too-neat a package, but I honestly don’t care. There will also be the eponymous footnotes of Footnotes, cause I got some shit to say at the end of all of this that I need to get off my chest before TROS.

Thank you, my readers, for being so patient with me. Never did I think that I’d ever go this long between updates on here, but last school year was probably the second-worst in my 8 years of teaching (we had FOUR MORE BOMB/SHOOTING THREATS as of that last update), and I’m counting the year I taught at a psychoed school and got shanked with safety scissors. Here’s to a new school year that starts in a week, and to me hopefully getting this finished ASAP. Thank you again!
Rey stood to her feet, furious as the Dark swirled around her. The pain from her leg was easy to harness as her anger fueled her, drove her to protect and fight for what was hers. But at the same time, Light pulsed through her, as she realized what she would have to sacrifice, if the voice spoke true. She would do it - she would do it for him every time.

“No. I will not kill Kylo Ren. He is part of Ben Solo, and to eliminate his existence is to deny that part of him. He is mine and I love him.”

Her world had become a horrible, chaotic blur. Once again, she had been hauled into the arms of her husband - Kylo Ren, the thought was a fresh stab of pain all over. Rey’s now-constant tears obscured her vision, and Kylo Ren seemed to take her through every possible turn and winding corridor in Theed Palace, proceeding ever-further deeper and down, as far from prying eyes as possible. She didn’t even have it in her to fight just then. Her leg throbbed from the blaster shot, and her mind was solely focused on how everything had gone just so wrong.

The ceremony - it happened correctly, hadn’t it? Yet Ben already seemed agitated by the end of it, cautious and on-edge even then. Something must have been off at that point, something he wasn’t prepared for. She was so stupid, she should have known from that desperate look in his eyes that something was wrong, she should have done something, anything. But he promised. Ben swore to her that everything would be all right, that he would come back to her, and she trusted him. And now, now...
You stupid girl. You knew this would happen. No one ever stays, no one ever comes back, especially not for a worthless, dirty desert rat like you.

Did it even matter if that voice in her head was hers or something else? It was right.

You’re meaningless garbage, and this is what you deserve.

Just then, Kylo Ren’s arms tightened a little closer around her, his fingers clutching a little firmer. Did he…? Instinctively, she wanted to feel for him in their Bond, but then recoiled - no, it was a foolish thought. Even if their bond was still intact, it was only because a fragment of Ben Solo was still somewhere, hopefully safe with Leia as the Mother suspected. Reaching out could mean compromising Ben’s safety, risking exposing whatever was left of him. Rey had to accept the cold, hard truth - she was with Kylo Ren. To him, she was nothing.

Seemingly satisfied with how deep into the palace they were, Kylo pushed his way through a door into a dimly-lit, tastefully decorated guest room. Rey found herself unceremoniously dumped on a bed. Her mind suddenly became very aware of the final imperative from the Mother. What she had demanded of him, what that would imply, what he would do - no, no, she couldn’t bear it - the thought of the man she had come to love, that face, that body, forcing-

The door slammed shut. Kylo was gone.

Rey propped herself up on her elbows, blinking slowly. Her mind had springboarded from a depressive gloom to sheer terror and now to utter confusion in a matter of seconds. She had been thoroughly convinced that Kylo Ren was completely under the thrall of the Mother, and would not have hesitated a second in following her directive. What - what just happened?

Tentatively, she reached out through the bond. Not to open herself or communicate with him, but just to test its feel. It was there, still intact, but… different. The parts that felt like Ben were somewhere seemingly just beyond her grasp, but her bond with the man outside her door was very much still there. She could sense him, just like always. Tumultuous but cold, angry but confused. The bond itself felt tight and fragile, as though it could shatter at the slightest provocation. An echo of pain lanced up her arm in conjunction with a foundation-shaking, real-life tremor - evidently, Kylo had just nearly punched through the wall outside the bedroom.

That’s all that’s left of him. Anger, hatred, fear, nothing but the Dark Side. He’s just a monster now, the voice in her head whispered. You may still be able to save Ben Solo, but you must kill Kylo Ren. You have the power to bring Ben Solo back.

Mindlessly, Rey’s fingers went to the lightsaber under her dress, on her hip.

Yes, good. It’ll be so easy, so quick. Ignite the blade through the wall. Kill Kylo Ren, and you can have the family you always wanted. Erase the very memory of him from this galaxy. You’ll be the one who saved Ben Solo’s soul, you’ll have a family, you’ll have your child-

“No!” Rey gasped, her withdrawing her hand from the lightsaber as though it burned her. A child? What… what was this voice, and what could it possibly know that she didn’t?

Why would you refuse to do what is right? Killing Kylo Ren will do the galaxy a favor. You know what you saw when you touched Ben Solo’s hand, this is the only way you can assure that future. Eliminate Kylo Ren, save Ben Solo’s soul and let it live on through you, and you will be a hero, erase his legacy-
“Shut up, shut up!” Rey screamed, clutching at her own head. “The galaxy - everyone already knows -” her mind raced, suddenly realizing what was happening. “You don’t want me to kill Kylo Ren. You want me to kill Ben Solo. Because that man outside the door is Kylo Ren, but he is also Ben Solo.”

_Idiot girl. Kill him, and everything will be set right. You will bring balance to the Force, and have the family you always wanted, that he never deserved._

Rey stood to her feet, furious as the Dark swirled around her. The pain from her leg was easy to harness as her anger fueled her, drove her to protect and fight for what was hers. But at the same time, Light pulsed through her, as she realized what she would have to sacrifice, if the voice spoke true. She would do it - she would do it for him _every time._

“No. I will not kill Kylo Ren. He is part of Ben Solo, and to eliminate his existence is to deny that part of him. _He is mine and I love him._”

_Ben Solo lied to you. Who’s to say he didn’t lie about his love for you, a meaningless scavenger? How do you know that he hasn’t just left you with deceit and an empty promise, just like your parents?_

Once, those words would have broken her. But even Kylo Ren once said she was stronger than she knew. Steeling her spine, Rey pushed back as hard as she could. “I have faith in Ben Solo, _and_ in Kylo Ren. He wouldn’t lie to me. I trust him.”

_So you would sacrifice the future you saw? You would deny your hopes and dreams? Where you have a family, where, for once in your life, you are wanted and loved?_

“If killing Kylo is what that future costs, I would sacrifice my dreams _every time._”

_You would sacrifice your child with him?_

Rey’s heart faltered, her confidence shaken-

_“Don’t listen to it!”_

Kylo Ren had apparently punched the rest of the way through the wall.

Stumbling backwards, Rey fell back on the bed, thoroughly startled at the sight of Kylo Ren using his fists and the Force to tear down what remained of the wall between them. Glancing around the room, he pulled his fingers together in a crushing grip, yanking out every internal wire, light, and terminal in the room. It was now shrouded in complete darkness, except the single beam of light from where he broke through the wall. He stalked forward to kneel before her. Raising a gloved hand, his fingers shook as they ghosted just over her temple, never fully touching her.

_“Don’t listen to it,”_ he repeated in a trembling whisper. His mind skirted around the edges of her own, tentatively probing without fully intruding. _“She’ll say anything to break you.”_

_“B-Ben?”_ Rey stuttered, trying to meet his eyes.

He closed his eyes firmly, shaking his head. _“I don’t deserve that name. You know what I am.”_ Reaching toward her injured thigh, his fingers trembled for a moment before his fist clenched,
defeated. “I - I can’t even…”

Rey reached for him with the Light, trying to let it into him, but he flinched away. “Don’t… don’t waste your power on me. Try to heal it yourself, but don’t push too hard.”

“But-”

“It doesn’t matter right now. I need you to focus on where you are right now. It’s the only way the voice won’t gain control over you.”

Concentrating as best as she could, Rey focused as Ben once showed her. *Emotions*, he had said, *emotions* let them use the Force like this. She knew she loved him, even like this, and the power of that sentiment let her push the slightest tendril of Light into herself, knitting the flesh together. Doubt still echoed in her mind, but she continued to center herself in the Force, slowly muffling the power the voice tried to hold over her.

Suddenly, it was like she could breathe clearly again. Shaken by what just happened, Rey shivered, trying to meet his gaze. “How did you know?”

His eyes opened, meeting hers for the briefest of seconds before very purposefully looking away. “We’re still connected, however weak it may be right now. And I know that voice.”

“Is it - is it the Mother?”

“All of it. Some of it’s the Dark. But it’s mostly just you.” His fingers skimmed her hair with the utmost caution, a shudder seeming to pass through him. “She finds the cracks in you, the places you’ve already opened up to the Dark or Light. She uses your own words, your own insecurities, your own thoughts and logic to reorder your mind.”

Rey reached up to where his hand now nearly cupped her face, pressing it fully to her skin as she laced their fingers together. “Is that what she did to you?”

His head bowed forward, their foreheads nearly touching skin-to-skin as he nodded. “Yes,” he whispered brokenly. “She took every moment I doubted my parents’ love, every time they left and said they’d come back, every moment I was alone with no one but Snoke, and repeated them over and over-” finally, he looked up to meet her eyes, his gaze hard and knowing, “-and then I found you, Rey.”

Gasping, Rey clutched his fingers all the tighter as her heart soared - “You - you do *remember*, Ben, you’re-”

He shook his head, immediately cutting off that thought. “I only have fragments after that, from the few moments he - I was trying to separate myself from my actions. Ben Solo, that part of… of *me* is still locked away. But the more I’m with you, the more I feel *right*, the more I feel like I - I might be able to remember what he - what *I* did now.”

Her face fell only a little, Kylo Ren’s assurances still giving her much-needed hope. He had done that before, after all. His hands reached for her hair, while shaking fingers twined through the loose strands. He sectioned off the hair, then froze, trembling - he couldn’t - he didn’t know how to continue the braid. She barely heard his next words, so soft and desperate.

“Did - did you mean what you said? That you love - that you love *me*, even as I am now? Even if I - I can’t- I c-can’t come back all the way-”
Rey’s heart broke a little all over again. He still couldn’t believe that he was loved? But this was Kylo Ren, who apparently was not privy to the knowledge and memories of Ben Solo. After all, the only way she had finally broken through her own doubts about being abandoned once again was because she remembered his own love for her and trusted him - all of him, even Kylo Ren. Rey now understood what was important - that Ben Solo and Kylo Ren truly had to become one, acknowledging both aspects of him.

They wouldn’t make the mistakes of the past. Treating Anakin Skywalker and Darth Vader as two separate entities had already torn apart a galaxy and a family. It was up to them to get it right this time.

“I love you.” Rey assured him as she seized his face in her hands, kissing him firmly on the lips.

After a beat of stunned silence, Kylo recovered quickly, groaning into her mouth as he kissed back hungrily. He was urgent and needy as he pressed into her, his hands tangling in her loose hair as he pushed her further back on the bed.

“Again - please,” he groaned, mouthing kisses down her neck.

“I love you,” she panted, feeling thoroughly consumed by Kylo Ren’s affections.

“Say you’re mine,” Kylo begged as he dug his fingers into her hips.

Dark encased both of them, its tendrils practically tangible as Rey felt it wrap around her. “I’m yours. I’m yours-” the Dark grew ever stronger, but Rey knew how to master it - “And you’re mine.”

With that declaration, she gave a great shove to Kylo’s shoulders, pushing him underneath her on the bed. Little by little, she felt him surrender control, his muscles losing their tension as she pinned his wrists under her hands. His eyes seemed to roll to the back of his head a little as he panted openmouthedly, his pelvis tilting up to grind against her.

“Rey,” he breathed reverently. “Kriff, yes, I’m yours, please-”

“No,” Rey chided, using her thighs and hips to trap him beneath her and halt his thrusting. “Not yet, anyway.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m going to help you first. And you’re going to let me.”

His pout was positively Ben. Rey knew she was on the right track now. “You had a plan. It doesn’t matter if you blocked it from your memory, or if you see yourself as Kylo Ren right now. You said it yourself - you might be able to remember. Somewhere in that head of yours is what we need to do,” Rey released his wrists, sitting up a little straighter - “and I’m going to find it.”

The shudder through his body was concerning - was it fear? Arousal? Either one was mildly disturbing.

“Don’t hold back,” he groaned. Arousal, then. “I trust you.”

Rey nodded to herself, her hand cautiously reaching toward his face in a gesture not dissimilar to one he had done to her so long ago. He closed his eyes as if in bliss, and she felt his mind open wide to her prodding.
Together, they gasped. Once again, their minds were fully shared.

Already, Rey was lost. The mind of Kylo Ren was drastically different from Ben Solo’s, lacking all of its restraint - a whirlwind of sharp emotions, dark doubts, and smothering feelings of inadequacy. While he seemed relatively calm on the surface, a constant tumult of pain and anger raged just underneath. The overwhelming sensation of internal pressure, the desperate need to please that dominated everything and felt terrifyingly familiar. In Ben’s head, she was so easily able to pull out a dream, a memory, a fantasy - here, there was nothing but dark anger and self loathing.

Quickly, she realized her mistake - to help him in this regard was too similar to what had already been done to him - Luke, Snoke, the Mother, all of them wanting to master him. While his trust in her was unique, it was not something to be exploited, but she was so close. She could almost see the gateway to his memories, the shining path that she had explored in that strange, abstract space, but there was just so much, so much-

Gasping, Rey pulled back, drenched in sweat from her efforts. When she could see again, his face was sad and contemplative, his large hands rubbing soothing circles into her side.

“I - I couldn’t - I shouldn’t - the dark…”

“It’s all right, Rey. I think - I think this is something I need to do, after all.”

Rey nodded in wary agreement as he sat up from beneath her, pulling off his gloves as he went. She still sat perched on his lap, shoulders sagging in hurt confusion. “So what are you going to do?”

Chewing the inside of his mouth, he looked up at her through his lashes. “Do you trust me?”

“Yes?”

“Even after everything today? Even knowing who I am?”

Rey reached out to cup his face, a slight shiver running through her at the skin contact. “Always.”

He clasped his hand with hers, continuing to cradle his jaw. “I… I think I know what B-what I did. And defeating the Mother, taking her out of the equation is crucial. I know what I have to do. But I don’t know if I - if I have the strength to do it. Will you help me?”

“Of course.”

He gently moved her aside and rose to his feet, pacing as he clenched and unclenched his fists. “We have to confront her. Now, as soon as possible. Rey, I - I’m going to say some things… horrible things. Things that are not true, but you have to trust me. We need the Mother to let her guard down for this to work, but still think she has won. That she’s free to safely use up all of her energy. She has to be completely vulnerable.”

“Vulnerable to what? You saw how she just… phased into reality. What hope do we have of defeating something that can do that?”
“We take her somewhere the Force doesn’t matter. You and I - even diminished as I am - we can do it.” His eyes burned bright in confidence as he reached toward her.

Without hesitation, she accepted his proffered hand. “What do I need to do?”

He pulled her to his side, worrying her knuckles with his thumb as his other hand stroked her arm. “We’ll both need to let her in our minds for this to work, but you can fight her - she’ll be expecting it. I’ll… I’ll just have to take it.” Shuddering, he continued. “And I… I need you to look defeated. I need you acting as though - as though I did the worst when I brought you down here.”

Rey swallowed tightly. This was going to be difficult, especially now that she saw that even Kylo Ren had never truly been a threat to her. That even at his darkest, left only with his worst parts, he still tried to protect her, and was actively trying to salvage this situation. To act as though he… it was no matter, she trusted him. She glanced down at her massive, elaborate wedding dress. “Well, I’ll hardly be convincing looking like this.”

He nodded slowly, his eyes hungry as his hands took on a possessive grip. “Let’s see what we can do to get you a bit… disheveled.”

General Leia Organa was not happy.

Between Luke’s mysterious absence, Rey’s trepidation around her just before the wedding, and her son’s absolutely cryptic gestures of late, she already had more than enough to be concerned about going into today. And that was all before this disaster.

She already had a suspicion that Ben and Rey were going to do something drastic in the Force during the ceremony, but if she knew that their actions were going to cause her own Force sensitivity to become that much more apparent and… annoying, she would have stopped them before they even tried. Even now, the voices still echoed and buzzed in her head; she couldn’t understand how anyone could deal with this much noise.

And a fat lot of good all that mystical mumbo-jumbo was doing her right now. She couldn’t even find Ben or Rey in all this din. And it didn’t take the Force, much less her own apparently amplified sensitivity after that ceremony, for her to know something was terribly wrong.

The fact that the wedding had seemingly gone off without a hitch made this entire predicament that much more frustrating. Luke had filled her in somewhat on what her son and Rey were attempting to do - and even if he hadn’t, she would have felt the results of their actions if she had the Force sensitivity of a Hutt. Being the daughter of… who she was, the result of Ben and Rey’s union practically unmade her for a moment, as thousands of disparate thoughts and voices passed through her mind.

Perhaps it was because of her proximity to Armitage Hux during the ceremony, but she certainly came away from it more than a little nauseated at the implications of what she and everyone else here had done to each other. Not to mention that it opened up her mind that much more to the possibilities of just how much worse everything could get if this blasted Mother had her way.

Well, that certainly wouldn’t happen. Not under her watch, dammit. As quickly as she could in this forsaken mother-of-the-groom’s gown, she rounded up the ones who were supposed to be keeping Rey safe. It took nothing more than a few threatening gestures that had them all scrambling to her side from the reception where the rest of the proletariat carried on, mindless and amicable. Finn, Poe, Rose, the two stormtroopers who joined them on Scipio, and - inexplicably - Armitage Hux, all stood together in a tightly-knit huddle, eyeing Leia warily.
“You all know why I’ve brought you here. This wasn’t supposed to happen.”

Only Rose looked confused. Poe and Finn already looked grave, and the stormtroopers… well, they were harder to get a read on. Hux looked nauseated, though it was difficult to tell if that was his default expression or not.

“General, what do you mean?”

“My son! Rey! Gone!” She jabbed at them to emphasize each name as she sighed warily. “I’ve got a bad feeling about this…”

“I - I’m sure they just needed a moment after what they just did, ma’am,” Rose offered, though she sounded less than convinced.

Finn shook his head gravely. “This is something else. I don’t like it either, General.”

Her hands shook with anger. “How did we just… lose them? Rey is wearing what was by design the most attention-grabbing dress possible, and my son is gigantic. People don’t just disappear like that.” Leia spun on her heel to face the slightly-horrified looking group. “Well??”

“General - ma’am - could you stop-”

“Stop what?”

“Pointing that at us.”

Leia looked to her hand to see where she held her son’s lightsaber, which she had evidently been gesturing with wildly as she spoke. Rolling her eyes, she tucked the saber into her belt. “Better?”

The gathered group nodded in wide-eyed unison. There was a sickly sound of one attempting to clear their throat to draw attention, but at the price of genuinely sounding ill.

“Princess? I may be of some assistance in this regard.”

Only one person here would have the nerve to call her princess. Rounding on tall yet general of the First Order, Leia’s eyes narrowed. “Yes? Spit it out.”

“I - I couldn’t help but - overhear? - your concerns during the ceremony. I - I know where she is. O - the - the Mother. And if we find her, we’ll find the Supreme Leader.”

“What the hell is he talking about? General, we have no reason to listen to a word Hugs here has to say-”

Leia pointed a threatening finger to silence Poe, drawing closer to the visibly clammy Hux. “How do you know that name?”

“The Mother - she’s - she’s one of the Knights of Ren. I’ve seen her. She’s the one behind it all - Snoke, perhaps even Palpatine. Chaos itself. And she wants Kylo Ren back more than anything.”

The silence in the group was deafening.

“She told me everything. I - I think she tried to wipe it away, but she’s weak. Weak enough that when Ren - your son and… that girl did - well, whatever they did, I remember now.” With shaking hands, he procured a small tracking device from his pocket. “I’ve had them - the Knights - all
chipped for years. S-she’s strong with the Force, but wouldn’t think to do something as simple as removing a belt buckle.”

Leia took the offered device, quickly assessing the state of things by its small, simple readout. They were close. She looked back up at Armitage Hux, triumphant. “General, I could kiss you.”

Everyone, Hux included, seemed to blanch at this, but Leia pressed on. “You all will have to take my word on this. We need to act, quickly and quietly. Ben and Rey are in trouble, and there are powers at work that can’t be allowed to go on. Hopefully, we can help them before things get out of hand. Who’s with me?”

Hux was the first to step up, his gaunt eyes holding the smallest spark of hope. The others quickly fell in line, Poe shouldering his way to stand at the front. Leia gave the group a curt nod, glancing down at the tracking device in her hand.

“Right. May the Force be with us. We certainly need it now.”

It was sometimes difficult to ignore how parts of her life just seemed to keep repeating, Rey thought to herself as Kylo Ren marched her down the hall toward the throne room of Naboo. They moved quickly, and Rey was grateful that they had decided to completely do away with her dress, leaving her only in a slightly ripped knee-length white slip. The Skywalker saber was once again in Kylo Ren’s firm grip, just as it had been on the Finalizer. Rey hoped against hope that it wouldn’t come down to using it, she was less than confident in her ability to fully repair the legacy saber to its original state.

Kylo’s firm grip on her arm appeared threatening, but the small, barely noticeable strokes of his thumb were reassuring.

She had been too confident when he brought her before Snoke, utterly assured of her victory and ability to sway Ben Solo to her side. Now… now she was wiser. She trusted Kylo, but knew that there were still so many ways this could go wrong.

As they came around the final corner and approached the door, he leaned down to whisper in her ear, “Trust me.”

And with that, he threw her to the floor, causing her to slide slightly into the throne room. Rey barely caught herself, staring back up at him in disbelief for the slightest moment before remembering her part to play. She let her shoulders fall as she collapsed in a heap, letting a not-entirely faked sob escape her lips.

The horrible droning nothingness approached. Rey didn’t allow herself to look up, but she could feel the Mother approach trepidatiously. “My son, you return so soon? I would hardly think it was long enough to assure your progeny. Or was this underfed piece of garbage as revolting to you as she is to me?”

She could practically feel his smirk. “That wasn’t the problem. The Scavenger is hiding something.”

A wave of awful pressure washed over Rey as the Mother seemed to take an initial analysis. She heard a shuddering gasp, and a barely breathed “No…”

“I’m afraid so. He got to her before I could. Ben Solo’s soul lives on in her as we speak.”
Rey’s heart clenched. What… what did that mean?

The Mother let out a snarl of disgust. “It figures that the desert rat would so easily fall pregnant. No matter. She may think her womb safe, but you know better than anyone that’s not the case. That child will be mine regardless, just like you.”

She trusted Kylo Ren. She trusted Kylo Ren. Her heart was shattering, but she trusted Kylo Ren. He told her that he would say horrible things. She trusted him, she loved him, she trusted him, she loved him-

There was no warning. Rey felt her mind torn open as she had never experienced before, but the Mother bypassed her thoughts and memories entirely, going deeper into her very soul. Then a second, far more crushing push of Dark pressed at her from the inside out, running through her every vein until it found her very core and pushed-

BAM

Light erupted from Rey, defending her from the onslaught. Gasping, she sat upright, feeling as though a massive weight had just been lifted from her chest. Reassuring warmth filled her from the inside out. Her hands still tingled with power, as though sparks ran through her nerves all the way to the tips of her fingers. With a sickening thud, the Mother hit the ground beside her, but she was quick to scramble to her feet. Rey quickly reminded herself of her role as she cowered before the thoroughly unsettled face of the Mother.

“No… It wasn’t - I - I don’t believe - Ben Solo… Ben Solo has ruined my vessel.” She shook her head fiercely, disgusted. “How… How did he have that much power? No matter. We’ll fix this, my son. You and I. Come, help your Mother, I’m not strong enough to do this as I am now.”

Kylo knelt before the Mother as she placed her hands on his shoulders, closing her eyes in ecstasy as she once again took in his power. Rey felt panic shoot up her spine - this wasn’t what was supposed to happen, none of this was right, they were supposed to weaken the Mother, not give her that much more power. She reached for him, but then her hand stopped halfway through the motion.

The ring. The engagement ring, his crystal, it was… white. Recoiling slightly, Rey looked up to Kylo-

He winked.

Her mouth hung open. He wouldn’t - Kylo Ren would never-

“You!” the Mother shrieked in surprise, staggering backwards as Ben Solo rose to his feet.

“Me,” he replied simply, leaning down to offer Rey his hand. Her bond with him practically sang in the Force as she took his hand. She could tell he was greatly weakened, but didn’t seem to matter to the Mother, who continued backing away from him.

With an unfathomably hideous snarl, she turned her attention to Rey. “This is all your doing, isn’t it, filth? You even managed to corrupt Kylo Ren. My child, who I alone cared for when he was left behind by his parents, I alone nurtured his desperate soul, I alone-”
White light burst through the Mother’s shoulder. With a hollow gasp, she fell to her knees once again as a long, steady blade lopped off her arm.

“You alone’ took my family, you miserable bitch.”

Leia Organa-Solo, daughter of Anakin Skywalker, mother of Ben Solo, held Kylo Ren’s lightsaber, her stance strong and self-assured as the Mother collapsed before her. Behind her, Poe, Finn, Rose, the stormtroopers and - Hux? - filed in, their weapons trained on the Mother.

“No,” she gasped desperately, attempting to scramble away from her attacker. “NO!”

She reached for Ben, who doubled over immediately, clutching at his chest as Rey felt him weaken in the Force. Leia took this as an invitation to slice off the offending hand with a double-handed swing. The Mother screamed.

“How dare you. How dare you use my son like that. You are a despicable leech, a drain on the Force and everything around you, and I will kill you for what you’ve done to my family.”

Hoarse, gasping chuckles emitted from the Mother. “You can’t kill me, you presumptive old bat. Destroy this body, and I will live on. This is merely a shell, a mortal vessel until I find another. It could be you. If I were able to stomach it, I could inhabit the piece of garbage your son saw fit to throw everything away for. It could even be that girl-” she glanced up at Rose, who was immediately shielded by Finn- “or it could be your first granddaughter. I cannot be defeated, I am chaos itself.”

Rey felt righteous fury and unimaginable power unlike anything she had ever experienced before roll off Leia in waves. Her eyes burned unnaturally bright as she advanced on the cowering Mother-

“Mom.”

It was as though Ben’s word broke the spell on her. She shook herself, and the power abated. Extinguishing the saber, she handed it to Ben. “You’re right, it’s - that would have been too dark, wouldn’t it? I just wanted… I just wanted to protect you from her, for once.”

Ben pulled his tiny mother into his arms, hooking his chin over her head. “You already have, Mom. I don’t want to lose you.”

“I’m here for you. And Rey of course - Rey?”

Rey stood alone, shivering as she looked down at the struggling, panting body that was the Mother. “It’s not over yet, is it?”

Ben grasped his mother’s shoulders before letting her go, pressing her to the safety of the Resistance. He turned to Rey, offering her the Skywalker lightsaber. “It can be. You can end this right now.”
Taking the saber from him, she pointed it toward the Mother. Much as she claimed that her body was merely a shell, the panic in her eyes was genuine. Shaking more and more, tears rose in Rey’s eyes as she shook her head. “I can’t - I can’t do it.”

“Are you sure?”

Shaking, Rey closed her tear-filled eyes as she handed the lightsaber back to Ben. “I - I don’t even know if it will work. And besides, I can’t - I just can’t - I mean, look at her. This - this isn’t right.”

“It’s all right Rey. I know that you did exactly what we needed to this saber. But I’ll do it, if it makes you feel any better.”

“Ben, wait no-”

“Listen to that deceitful girl. She thinks herself a Jedi, doesn’t she? Sparing her enemy, waiting until the very last second to stand up for the Light. She doesn’t realize that once you’ve let in the Dark, forever will it dominate your path-”

Ben ignited the saber, its blue light cast across his face. The Mother flinched.

“You won’t do it. Kill this body, and I will merely find another vessel. Strike me down, and I will only become more powerful-”

He swung the saber right through her middle. It passed through, harmless.

Rey’s heart fell into her stomach. No, what did she do wrong? She was so careful, she had tried so hard, but no matter what she did, she would never be enough, she was still not good enough-

Raspy laughter filled her ears as the Mother crowed triumphantly - “Idiot girl couldn’t even repair a lightsaber properly. Your genetics would have been wasted on her, my boy, wasted-”

“She repaired it just fine, actually. Enhanced it, even,” Ben commented mildly as he gave the saber a twirl, nodding to a point just behind the Mother.

Twisting from her position on the floor, the Mother turned enough to reveal a tiny tear in the very fabric of existence behind her. The crack continued to grow, spiraling out larger and larger until it stopped, a door-sized black void humming there just on the edge of consciousness. Its edges were lined in white light, and through it, Rey could see dots of light and lines in every direction. On a handleless arm, the Mother tried in vain to drag herself away from the void, but it seemed to have its own gravitational field, holding her right in place.

“What… what is that?” someone, probably Finn, gasped out in shock.

“Force business. We’ve got this from here.” Ben extinguished the saber, clipping it next to his own on his belt as he sagged slightly. “Rey? I - I really need your help here, she did take a lot from me.”

Still completely dumbfounded by what happened, Rey braced his arm with her hands. “Of course, anything. What do I need to do?”
“Push her in. Separate the mind from the body, and push.”

Rey’s mouth hung open, completely taken aback. “You want me to - Ben, if that’s what I think it is, she’ll be unstoppable in there! If she’s not in this body, she could go anywhere, anytime-”

“That’s why we have Luke on our side. How else do you think that saber managed to do what it just did?”

“Oh. Oh,” Rey repeated in sudden understanding. “So that’s why you-”

“Yes.”

“And why we-”

“Of course.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this was the plan?!“

“Look, we can argue all you want later, but let’s get this over with, shall we?” Ben braced his hands on her shoulders, letting their Bond flow freely between them. “It’s just a Force push. It’ll be the biggest Force push anyone has ever done, but it is possible, Luke said it can be done. Concentrate on her. Not moving her body, but moving her and everything she is. Breathe, Rey. Just breathe, and let me help you.”

Rey closed her eyes in concentration, holding out her hand in front of her. She steadied her breaths as she felt another, smaller hand close around her shoulder. “You can do this, Rey,” Leia said confidently as her power surged through Rey.

She felt another presence join them, as Ben’s arm had a new weight on it. “You two have got this,” Rose added with confidence, and Rey felt her strength add in as well.

“I believe in you, Rey. And you too, I guess, Solo,” Finn contributed with a smile in his voice, touching Rose’s shoulder as Rey felt his familiar presence join in.

The others soon joined, and the entire room hummed with power. Rey felt more connected to the Force than she ever had, with even more tendrils of power coming into her hands as she concentrated. Ben leaned forward, kissing the crown of her head. “Push, Rey. You’ve got this. I love you.”

Rey gasped as power surged out of her, slamming into the Mother as a constant, churning wave. For a moment, it didn’t seem to do anything other than physically move her body closer to the portal, but as she kept pushing, she saw viscous, shining points of black light siphoning out of Obaan Ren’s body.

There was an otherworldly scream as the formless black attempted to re-gather within the body, but Rey pressed on. The tendrils of dark kept trying to grasp at the body, at Rey, at Ben, at Leia, anywhere. She felt her strength wane as she drew that much more from everyone around her, it was just so much. She faltered. A few rogue strands managed to latch on to Rey, drawing strength from everyone pouring their energy into her, her vision tunneling - but suddenly, the pressure shifted. An enormous pull came from the other side of the void, its power undeniable. With a scream of effort, Rey spread her palm open wide, and pushed with the last of her strength-
A deafening silence. She felt the power of the Force fall away from her, one person at a time, until only Leia and Ben remained. When she opened her eyes, the white lines were once again laid out before her. Unlike her time here before though, there was far more than just a single path with many portals - branching out and twisting infinitely, Rey could see lines upon lines. This wasn’t just her own memories, or Ben’s - this had to be the World Between Worlds.

“It is. Well done, kids. You made it back.”

Rey turned to face the hardly unexpected Luke, accompanied by a taller man wearing similar robes to Luke, who she didn’t recognize. His eyes burned with an extremely familiar intensity; Rey couldn’t help but draw comparisons between him and Ben, with the scar over his eye and his slightly long, curling hair. She was suddenly aware of Ben and Leia still behind her - Ben reaching to clutch her shoulder in seeming complete disbelief, and Leia… Leia was furious.

“You brought him into this?”

“Leia, we needed his power - that was his lightsaber, after all. I know this is a sensitive issue-”

“ ‘Sensitive issue?’ That… That man destroyed my home planet! He killed my parents - my real parents! He tortured me, tortured Han, you-”

“Leia, come on, we have to-”

“I tried to protect my son from him. I tried everything to keep him and everything he stood for away from my family, but him, his legacy - it just keeps taking and taking from me, and I will not-”

“My daughter, please-”

“Grandfather?” Ben whispered.

“You do not get to call me that.” Leia hissed icily.

“We have other matters to attend to. And your rage is only fueling… that.”

What had previously been a diminished blob had reformed, a perfect black sphere hovering threateningly as it gave off a droning buzz that was far too familiar to Rey. She shivered, causing Ben to immediately draw her into his arms.

Snarling, Leia turned to very deliberately face away from the stranger. “I won’t pretend I have a clue about what’s going on here, or why you thought you had to bring him into this. Just tell me how we finish this.”

“It’s not up to any of us. Not anymore, that is. Once, it was supposed to be me. Then, it was Luke - though I think it was probably supposed to be both of you. Now… It’s up to them.”

“What kind of esoteric nonsense-”

“They’re the balance in the Force, Leia. The Chosen Ones, the Living Force and the Cosmic Force, Dark and Light, whatever you want to call it. They’re here to defeat the chaos and bring peace and balance back to the galaxy, we just never knew it would be this… literal.”
Leia crossed her arms in a great huff. “I don’t like this one bit. I have tried my hardest to keep Ben away from all of this, and now you’re telling me that he and Rey are… are some sort of prophesied thing?” She glared daggers up at the re-forming sphere of the Mother. “I don’t like it The Force has done nothing good for this family.”

“Maybe it’s because you kept trying to fight it. Perhaps if you had accepted your role in all of this, your son would have never-”

“Don’t. You. Dare.” Leia breathed, her voice shaking. “It’s because of you - what you did, what you chose to become, that I had to protect my son.”

“By denying his lineage? By not telling him that I-”

“-Darth Vader-”

“Leia, Father, please!” Luke held up his hands in exhausted surrender as Rey finally, finally put the pieces together.

That tall man whose gaze was so much like Ben’s - that was… Anakin Skywalker. Darth Vader. Now that Rey got a better look at him, she could see Luke’s chin, Leia’s eyes and lips. The hair, the scar, his general presence - that all just made her think of Ben.

“Grandfather, what… what do we need to do?”

For the first time, Anakin Skywalker turned to face both Rey and Ben, his mouth twitching just at the corner in a way that made her think of Ben trying to fight back a smile. “You tell me, this is your story now.”

“I don’t think we should kill her,” Rey found herself saying.

The silence was palpable as three generations of Skywalkers turned their attention to her. Rey felt Ben’s fingers seek out her own, giving her a reassuring squeeze as she nodded. “I mean, she was right, what she said - you can’t kill chaos, can you? It’s like trying to eliminate the Dark or the Light, all it’s going to do is come back worse and more unbalanced. But I - I don’t know-”


Rey looked to Ben, desperate for help. This was too big for her, she was no one, she wasn’t some legendary Skywalker, she had no place here, who was she to assume-

He leaned down, kissing the crown of her head to whisper words only she could hear. “You’re part of this family now, Rey, not that you weren’t amazing enough to be here before.”

She blushed a little, tilting her head up to meet his eyes. “Thanks, I suppose. But the fact is that I really don’t know what we can do here, other than that trying to eliminate her doesn’t just seem wrong, I don’t think it can be done.”

Luke exhaled slowly, scratching at his beard. “We were arrogant to assume that destroying her was the answer - I’m grateful we have you, Rey. If only we knew more about her, what she is, how she
functions-

“Well, considering that the Mother has been in my head for just about as long as I know, and I just spent a good amount of time in Rey-

“Oh good grief-

“When I preserved my spirit in her body, Uncle Luke - I know what nearly undid the Mother. It wasn’t injuring her body, or draining the Force from her - it was our wedding ceremony. That many disparate minds coming together in consensus, working together - that was the opposite of chaos. It won’t eliminate her, but it’ll make it less… concentrated. Chaos won’t have a will of its own anymore, it’ll simply exist - just like the Force.”

“Hate to break it to you, but the Force definitely has a will of its own, but I understand what you’re saying.” Anakin nodded. “So what you’re saying is if all of us here-

“Yes. You, me, Luke, Mom, Rey - if we can reach an accord, we can end this.” Ben looked to his mother, whose face was a perfectly still mask betraying no emotion. “Mom?”

“So you’re saying that we’re not killing the thing that unmade my family, and I have to reconcile with - with my biological father - for this to end.” She glared daggers at Anakin, but then nodded sharply. “I’ll do it. For you Ben, always.”

Rey’s hands sought out Ben’s, their fingers twining together. “Are you ready?

He nodded, closing his eyes. Their bond was now so easy to access, as natural as breathing. He was a part of her, and she a part of him.

Their energy constricted and flowed, inhaled and exhaled, reaching out to the other massively powerful beings in this space with them. Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa-Solo, Anakin Skywalker - each of their unique signatures in the Force added to their own, their single point of light that much stronger. They opened themselves up even to the concentrated chaos that was the Mother, the black void which immediately latched onto their souls, seeking to darken them. The chaos, the Dark was starved, and wanted to blacken everything. Slowly the light dimmed, but did not die. Rey and Ben stood as one, a single point of light amid the dark.

Rey knew nothing but the touch of Ben’s hands, and the warm reassurance his fingers between hers brought. The chaos was all-encompassing, suffocating, and powerful, but it was not enough.

They had everything they needed. Luke’s love for his father that saved him, and Anakin’s love for his children as well. Luke and Leia’s love for each other. Leia’s love for Han, and Han’s love for his son that stood as strong as Ben was now. Rey could even feel Leia’s love for her, the girl who was the spark of Light her son needed to save himself. But above everything, Rey felt Ben’s love for her. His compassion, his trust, the depth of devotion that he alone had toward her, and she for him.

She wasn’t alone. Not anymore - she never would be again. And neither would Ben. They had each other, they had their family, they had everyone who had brought them to this moment, this chance. That hope, that trust, that love, was all the Light needed to stand triumphant.

The second they opened their eyes, it was all over. Their brilliant pinpoint of Light penetrated the
darkness of chaos, shattering it and dispersing it. Soon, the vast space around them seemed to
darken ever so slightly, as the pitch of the galaxy’s sky gained that much more power. But the
points of white and light shone ever brighter.

Balance had been brought to the Force.

Chapter End Notes

*heavy breathing*

...please validate my headcanon that I know will never happen.
Endnotes

Chapter Summary

“It’s just…” she hugged her knees to her chest. “It felt so right, having her here. We had her here for so long, it was almost like-”

“I know,” Ben whispered, moving to sit beside her on the sofa, tentatively wrapping a long arm around her shoulders.

Chapter Notes

This is it, folks. It only took me two damn years. I have so many damn notes at the end of this that some of it will be included as part of the chapter, and I'll put the rest in the eponymous Endnotes.

Warning for all sorts of talk about babies, lack thereof, pregnancy, kids, etc.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Come out, and look, you daughters of Zion. Look on King Solomon wearing a crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.

Song of Solomon, 3:11

• THREE YEARS LATER •

New Alderaan (Nur Prime)

The third planet from the sun in the Vulpter system, originally called Nur, was renamed New Alderaan on the 30th anniversary of the destruction of Alderaan (see - Alderaan, Destruction, or Galactic Empire, Death Star I). Nur was chosen as the site for New Alderaan due to its extremely low population, caused by a rapidly changing environment that had left its precipitation-dependent native inhabitants looking to settle on a new planet (see - Nur Prime, native species and population growth). The shifting climate proved advantageous for the refugees of Alderaan, who were quickly able to re-establish many of the former planet’s traditional trades (see - Alderaan, Viniculture, Arts). Alderaani citizens were also drawn to the planet due to its relative isolation and protective asteroid belt (see - Vulpter’s Ruin) that required either direct guidance from the planet, or the piloting skills of a Force-sensitive individual to navigate (see - Skywalker School for the Gifted).
A37-44 ("Mystic Moon")

A37-44 is the only moon of the planet of New Alderaan. The planet was originally not thought to have a moon, which was seen as a great relief for the traumatized Alderaani citizens (see - Alderaan, Destruction, or Galactic Empire, Death Star I). However, after the first eclipse observed by the citizens (see - Panic of ABY 31), A37-44 became colloquially known as the Mystic Moon. The Mystic Moon has been recorded as a “hotspot” of Force activity (see - Force, Living and Force, Cosmic), allowing the moon the unique attribute of only being seen by Force-sensitive individuals whenever an eclipse is not taking place. This particular quirk of the Force also made the moon an ideal place for the foundation of the Skywalker Flight School for the Gifted.

Skywalker Flight School for the Gifted

Founded in 37 ABY by Princess Rey Organa-Solo (see - Rey of Jakku) and Prince Ben Organa-Solo (see - Kylo Ren, Skywalker family, Elder House - Organa), the Skywalker Flight School for the Gifted (SFSG) was created in response to the unusual rise in Force-sensitive individuals after the events of the Second Galactic War (see - The Infinite Union), and the demand for Force-sensitive pilots to navigate Vulpter’s Ruin. The School took a different approach from previous institutions for training Force-sensitive individuals (see - Jedi Order, Skywalker Academy), mandating that potential students stay with their families until well after adolescence. Force-sensitive children without families have been consistently identified and placed with families understanding of their unique abilities (see - Princess Rey Foundation). In the two years since its founding, the SFSG has produced -

“Still writing?” Rey’s voice echoed from the entryway, accompanied by the telltale soft thumps of her boots being shucked off and the clatter of her belt being dropped to the front bench.

Ben reached for the rag next to his desk, and started carefully cleaning off his pen. He had been completely absorbed in his task - how was it already so late? Dinner would have to be a thrown together affair tonight, not that Rey ever minded. “Not anymore, now that you’re home. Did Dejah pass?”

Rey leaned into his office, grinning as she shouldered off her flightsuit. “Handily. She’s now officially the youngest human to have ever cleared the Vulpter’s Ruin cargo trial on the first go. She’s out celebrating with the others right now, but those kids are a little too wild for their old teacher to join them.”

A slightly worried sound involuntarily escaped from Ben. “Are you sure she’ll be all right? I mean, she’s only fifteen...”

“Sixteen, Ben. She’s a smart kid, she promised me she’d be safe, and that she would be back by ten. And you know Sav would never let anything happen to her.”

“I still don’t like him.”

“Sav is perfectly sweet, Ben. You just don’t like any of the younger boys,” Rey said with a smile and a shake of her head.
“And some of the girls,” he added under his breath. “I still think she’s too young to have a ‘boyfriend,’ especially… him.” Kriff, Sav really was a punk. Ben couldn’t wait for him to do something stupid so that Dejah get her head straight and move on.

In her years both at the SFS and in the Princess Rey Foundation, Dejah had quickly become one of his and Rey’s favorite students. Her sharp wit and downright harrowing history before coming to the school made her seem years older than she actually was, and her particular strengths in the Force made her an obvious candidate for the SFS at a far earlier age than they usually accepted. Ben had never been terribly pleased about the fact that she spent so much time with students who were at least three years older than her, who were all far more likely to treat her like a peer than as the kid she actually was.

“You’ve got to let her live a little, Ben. I think it’s - it's normal, her wanting to hang out with the older kids. We can’t really use our teenage years as a basis for an average childhood, anyway.”

“I just… I don’t want her to feel like she has to grow up too soon,” Ben added quietly, his eyes dropping to his hands.

He felt Rey reach out in their bond as she physically reached out with her fingers, combing them through his hair like she always did when she felt him slip into one of his darker moods. Instantly, he felt calmed as he sensed Rey’s reasoning, but as always, she articulated her thoughts for him.

“We both know how hard it’s been for her, not to mention how many kids she’s had to see come and go since she got here - and I think she’s really starting to find her place here.” Rey gave a small, sad sigh. “It’s almost a shame that her name finally showed up on the candidate list this morning. I know she was thrilled, and - and of course I’m elated for her. But she’s my - she’s made such good friends with the older students, and of course us - I - I just know she’ll be happy to finally have a family, even if it’s only for a few years.”

The same darkness that just clouded Ben’s thoughts seemed to pass through Rey. He felt old, ugly memories stir within her - and just like she did for him, he pulled her troubled thoughts into his own, soothing them both. Ben cleared his throat delicately, hoping to redirect the conversation.

“Speaking of that, how did your meeting with the Alder family go?”

Rey collapsed in what had become “her” position on the sofa next to his desk in the office, exhaling harshly as she did so. “They seem… touchy about this subject in the past, and had already seemed moody that morning.

They always had extensive interviews with potential families that wanted to adopt through the Princess Rey Foundation, particularly with the youngest children. But when Dejah’s name finally passed the PRF board as being ready for a family… Well, Rey had been vetting her potential families with an inquisitive fervor she usually reserved for the ones trying to adopt toddlers.

“Rey, the Alders have been wanting children of their own to love and care for since I was a kid. They’ve been friends of the family for ages, you know that my mother wouldn’t have vouched for them otherwise. Kriff, they’re an Elder Family - any kid who ends up with them would practically be royalty.”

“It’s just…” she hugged her knees to her chest. “It felt so right, having her here. We had her here for so long, it was almost like-”

“I know,” Ben whispered, moving to sit beside her on the sofa, tentatively wrapping a long arm
around her shoulders.

Of course they had talked about this. The subject of starting a family was a well-tread topic in the Organa-Solo household, even when his mother wasn’t visiting. Ben knew that it was what Rey wanted more than anything, and it was what initially drove her to start the Princess Rey Foundation. But what was at first charitable work that fueled her now seemed to drain her more and more with every orphan who passed through their house on the way to find their new family.

And… that was just it. Rey and Ben were able to help so many, care for so many children, yet having one of their own had eluded them for over two years now. And it wasn’t for lack of trying. Much as Ben was initially wary of the prospect of being a parent (given his own history), being with Rey, working with the kids - in the end, she hardly needed to convince him. He was curious, eager, to start a family with Rey. He wanted so desperately for Rey to have what she always wanted, and he could practically see their child - his hair, her eyes, his mouth, her nose and ears, Force willing. But it just wasn’t… it hadn’t happened for them.

And every time another child left their house, every month that went by without issue - Ben knew it broke her heart all over again. Because it broke his, too. It went without saying that they were both fully aware of the toll Rey’s childhood had taken on her body. But it seemed so far away now, so hard to grasp, so difficult to equate with the perfectly healthy, perfectly perfect woman he knew Rey to be. Everything else about her seemed fine, except apparently the one part of her she needed, the one bodily process that would give her what she always wanted just… wasn’t happening.

But Ben Solo wasn’t a man to just let this pass. As always, he had a plan - well, at least the beginnings of one.

“Sweetheart, it’s been two years. I - I think at this point we might have to accept that this just might not happen for us-”

She practically growled as her eyes sparkled with tears - this was the exact reaction he was hoping to avoid. This was hardly the first time they had this discussion.

“No! I know what I saw, I know - I know, we can’t just give up-” Rey stopped herself, clearly wanting to avoid revisiting an old pain.

“Rey, I wasn’t done yet,” Ben said with careful calm. “I was just about to say that having a baby of our own might not happen for us, but that doesn’t mean we can’t submit our own names to the PRF.”

She slowly met his eyes, her barely-held-back tears now looking more hopeful. “You - you’d really be ok with that? Even if I can’t - if I can’t give you-” Rey stopped herself, clearly wanting to avoid revisiting an old pain.

“Of course I’m ok with that - kriff, Rey, remember you had to convince me to even start trying in the first place.”

The shining hope that was there for just a moment was quickly extinguished. “We can’t get our hopes up. By our own standards that we made, we’re terrible candidates for the Foundation. If I were interviewing either of us, I’d laugh us right out of the room.”

Ben cleared his throat awkwardly. In a way, he was always grateful for Rey’s somewhat oblivious nature. The fact that she hadn’t caught him during any of the many, many occasions when he had been making lists and planning for this moment… The Force worked in mysterious ways.
“Well, I suppose it’s a good thing that we happen to be held in high regard by several of the board members who were more than willing to expedite our application.”

“...expedite?”

“Let’s just say that Dejah doesn’t have to worry about moving away from all of her friends.”

Rey let out a tiny scream, clutching his arm almost to the point that it hurt. “WHAT?! Oh - oh my - wait, does she know??”

He smiled, slowly lifting her death grip off his arm as he laced their fingers together. “I told her this morning, right before she took the test. I offered her to break the news once she passed, but she knows - she knows it’s been hard for us. She wanted to make sure it came from me.”

Rey promptly burst into tears. Ben panicked.

“Sweetheart? Did I - was I too presumptive? I just thought-”

“N-no, y-you did everything right, stars, Ben, i-it’s perfect,” Rey sobbed, wiping a trail of snot from her nose with the back of her hand. Delicately, Ben used his free hand to pull out a handkerchief from his pocket, handing it to her as she continued weeping. “Is - is that why you’ve been-” she gestured vaguely to his writing desk.

“Yes. I figured if she’s joining this mess of a family, she needs the whole story. All of it, not just what they put in the holoshows.”

Rey dabbed at her nose, sniffing congestedly. “So you wrote her... an encyclopedia?”

He felt slightly miffed. “Well, no, just the facts that lead us to where we are. After all, tomorrow she’ll be family. Do you - do you think it’s too much?”

Smiling, she shook her head. “It’s perfect, Ben. I’m sure she’ll love it.” Rey tilted her head up to kiss him on the tip of his nose, her tear-filled eyes sparkling slightly. “But maybe start her off with a slightly less… dense version? I mean, she’s only sixteen, I don’t think reading an unabridged history of your family is usually something most kids her age are into.”

“I would have found it fascinating at her age,” Ben muttered. “But I’ll consider a… I don’t know, a synthesis or something. I don’t want to be anything other than honest with her.”

She smiled even wider. “A ‘synthesis.’ Certainly, ‘professor.’”

The lilt to Rey’s teasing comment made Ben raise a skeptical brow. When he met her gaze, she seemed to have nothing but mischief in mind, and the heat from her through the Bond only confirmed it. “‘Professor?’ I remember a time when you called me ‘Master.’”

Her mouth fell open in poorly-feigned shock. “Never,” she breathed, barely suppressing a giggle.

“Oh? Perhaps a reminder is in order, then,” Ben growled with as much intensity as he could muster while trying to contain his own mirth. “We’ve got a couple hours before you said Dejah gets back, let’s make the most of them,” he added in a hasty whisper.

Rey bit her lip with a grin, shooting to her feet and leaving him behind on the sofa. “Give me just a minute to freshen up, I still smell like cockpit.”

“Well, it only seems appropriate, seeing as you’re about to have all kinds of cock-”
“-Ben!” she giggled as she hastily retreated from the office. “You’re going to officially be a father to a teenage girl starting tomorrow, you can’t go saying things like that!” she shouted over her shoulder.

“We have both heard Dejah say way, way worse than that,” Ben called out over the sound of running water from the fresher.

He started idly cleaning up his work area. While he had gotten slightly better about not leaving scraps of paper everywhere, his desk was still an absolute mess. As he gathered the loose sheets into a singular stack, he started to see Rey’s point about this being a bit… much. At least it was a start.

Page after page, he gathered them into a neat stack. Maybe if he broke it into a few volumes - he could start with his grandfather’s background, perhaps? Or maybe Naboo, with his grandmother would be the better choice. Either option would be a murky place to begin, and would take far more research than he had done so far to parse out the truth from the haze of lies the Empire and Palpatine had left on that particular part of history. Starting with his parents seemed like a better option - he was sure his mother would be more than willing to give her own particular view of events, and maybe even Luke, Chewbacca, Uncle Lando-

Suddenly an icy shock ran through his body. He dropped his largest bottle of ink - open, of course - splattering its contents all over his chair, his hands, his face, his arms. But that wasn’t what concerned him. He was numb, paralyzed, at the absolutely overwhelming sensation that suddenly came over the bond, the Force absolutely rooting him in place.

His heart was frozen. Something must have been terribly wrong-

“BEN?!”

He wrenched himself out of his stupor, bolting down the hall- “Rey?! Rey, what happened-”

While the sight of his towel-wearing, slightly wet wife standing in the hall was a welcome one, it wasn’t one he was expecting. Nor were the tears running down her beaming face. Or what was in her hand-

“Ben - you’re - you’re officially going to be the father to a teenage girl starting tomorrow - and -

His legs gave out just as she stood before him. “And?” he whispered in disbelief, staring up into her tear-filled eyes from down on his knees.

With a shaking hand, Rey handed him the small, faintly beeping health monitor - a light he had never seen before was glowing steadily, and on it, her pulse, plus - two heartbeats. He stared back up at her and she nodded, her lip trembling for the barest second before she burst into full tears once again. “I - I didn’t tell you I was late last month, because I didn’t want to get our hopes up again. I blocked it out from you in the Bond, because I didn’t want you - but this time - eight weeks, Ben.”

A laughing sob escaped Ben’s lips as he wrapped his arms around Rey’s hips, pulling her even closer. “And - and I thought I was doing a good job keeping Dejah a secret from you- stars, when are we going to tell her- kriff, when are we going to tell my mom?”
Rey gave a hiccuping laugh, wiping at her eyes. “Let’s - let’s let this be our secret right now, ok? I - I don’t think I’m quite ready to tell anyone yet. I want this to be just for us.”

“Of course. Whatever you want,” Ben hastily agreed, rising to his feet on shaky legs. He kissed her head, her cheeks, her nose before finally tilting her head up to kiss her slowly on the lips, holding her tightly to him. They swayed slightly together as though they were dancing, a thousand thoughts passing between them in their Bond.

Perhaps catching a spare thought of his, Rey suddenly chuckled. “I guess you’re going to have to write a really ’synthesized’ version of that story now, aren’t you? Can’t expect a - a baby to read that, kriff, we’re having a baby-”

Ben felt his spine stiffen, his arms wrapping even more firmly around her. It felt just like writing poetry - suddenly, there were words in his head that were perfect. And somehow, like always, Rey was one step ahead of him.

“Maybe, I don’t know, some sort of fairy tale, so we can start telling it to them early… Then it’ll all just be something they know, they’ll never hear it ‘from a certain point of view,’ they’ll never have to find out the bad way-”

“Rey. I love you. I need you to go to the bedroom. I will join you in seconds, and we are going to make some very furious, very passionate, and celebratory love, but I need to write. Like, now.”

This was hardly the strangest request he ever made of her. Rey shrugged and kissed his chin as she pulled away from his arms. “I love you too. But I am not waiting up forever on you.” She sauntered toward the bedroom, dropping her towel and the health monitor on the way. “It’ll give you motivation to write faster,” she called over her shoulder as she shut the bedroom door.

He skidded into his office, grabbing his least-fancy pen to scrawl down a few words before they left him - or before Rey distracted him any further. He’d get the rest down later after he took care of her.

“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…”

**THE END**

Well, here they are, the final Footnotes of Footnotes. It only took me forever to get here, and I have so damn much to say that it won't fit in the notes field. Feel free to skip all of this - TLDR, this has been a trip, I love you all so much, and thank you for taking this crazy journey with me.

Footnotes is something I never expected to get as big as it has - both in sheer word count, and in popularity. I firstly want to thank my many loyal readers for sticking it out with me as I write these, the final, eponymous footnotes of Footnotes. I would have probably never seen this through if it
weren’t for ALL of you - this would have remained a bulleted outline on Google Docs for forever that maybe I’d go and tweak every now and then when we get new canon.

Star Wars is something very personal to me. I’ve been a fan literally since I was in utero - my mom worked on the NPR radio shows of Star Wars, so trust me, it was EVERYWHERE in my home, and I was a little kid obsessed in a time that Star Wars wasn’t super cool anymore (born in 1988). Of course, when you’re little, you’re just focused on the spectacle of it all - the ships, the explosions, the creatures - all of those surface-level things. It wasn’t until ROTS that I really thought about Star Wars, and what it means mostly because I found ROTS to be so damn frustrating, but at least I had ROTJ to come home to.

This fic really started as me trying to “solve” episode IX (HAH, here’s my first piece of evidence that I started writing the epilogue/endnotes AGES ago). Now, don’t get me wrong - I loved TLJ. It’s every bit the deep, multifaceted exploration of what it means to be a hero through the unique lens of Star Wars. And I thoroughly enjoyed the journey TLJ took us on.

However, I am what is known in the University of Georgia football fandom as an **aggressive pessimist**. I had a pit in my stomach after coming out of TLJ that I hadn’t felt since I came out of ROTS - and there was no comfy ROTJ rewatch for the thousandth time, like I did back in 2005. All I could think was - *where do they go from here?* What bland, design-by-committee resolution is Colin Treverrow going to throw at us that will be, at best, as utterly forgettable as Jurassic World?

I had visions of a BADASS REY™, the UNFLAWED FEMALE PROTAGONIST in a thoroughly over-choreographed fight against the EVIL and UNREDEEMABLE KYLO REN™, easily killing him with her SUPER SPECIAL LIGHTSABER. She would kill him in a moment that would be programmed to be BADASS and AWESOME. Then she would deliver some QUIPS, and join her ALL ALIVE AND UNPROBLEMATIC RAINBOW OF FRIENDS™ as they PLATONICALLY HOLD HANDS until the credits start. It would be *utterly unmemorable*, a by-the-numbers Marvel movie instead of the ludicrous space fairy tale Star Wars is supposed to be. All sorts of praise would be heaped on it by people who would watch the movie once, and legions of fanboys would only sink further and further into their pits of MRA and Mary Sue accusations.

Like I said. Aggressive pessimism.

So I went home, and started thinking. Like I do with a lot of things, I made a list of what I thought was established in TLJ that would be narratively necessary for IX - not even trying to focus on things like solving the Carrie Fisher/Leia problem, just the big themes. I wish I had the original, but here’s roughly what was on that list:

- Fighting/killing isn’t a solution
- The Force is not happy with how Kylo/Rey left things off
- Ben Solo is still redeemable
- The Republic-era Jedi were wrong in how they approached the Force
- Killing Kylo is like “killing” Vader, the legacy of mistakes remains
- The Skywalker legacy lightsaber, AKA “The Youngling Slayer,” still needs to be addressed
- Rey has the Jedi texts
- Maybe there’s a solution in there

And then… It was like fate. Here I was, idly scrolling through - I’ll admit it, most likely 4chan - and came across THIS:
I remember looking at that picture for a solid minute, my eyes bugging out. First off, because I had a crackpot theory waaaaaaay pre-TLJ that Kylo/Ben was the sort of person who wouldn’t trust anything not in his own handwriting and was therefore a bit of a calligraphy snob (see: my previous unfinished fic, It’s Arrested Development), so I felt pretty validated from that. But then my brain went on an extremely fast train of thought, and I had this series of scattered imaginings within, like, the space of a minute:

-Calligraphy
-Writing
-Studying Jedi texts
-What did he learn?
-Something important
-Holocrons? BIGGER
-Ancient, forgotten Force techniques
-Knights of the Old Republic
-Battle Meditation?
-COMMUNICATION
-What if you used battle meditation to make people empathize with each other?
-REY AND BEN ALREADY DID THIS WITH THEIR LONELINESS
-Is this how you solve the war?
-IS THIS WHAT ANAKIN MEANT IN AOTC when he said he’d MAKE people work together?
-I’LL FINISH WHAT YOU STARTED
-What if Ben LEFT NOTES?
-Half-Blood Prince
-Oh my god he is a half-blood prince
-Why hasn’t this been used yet?
-What if he can’t REMEMBER that he figured this out?
-Who doesn’t want him remembering?
-MORTIS
-If the Father is Balance of the Force
-THE MOTHER IS CHAOS
-She has probably been enjoying the hell out of the imbalance of the Force
-Every time Ben was on the path to figuring this out, she’d wipe him
-FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON IN SPACE
-This is how we find Ben Solo again
-YOU CAN’T JUST KILL KYLO REN
-Repeating the mistakes with Vader
-WHAT IF REY HAS ONE OF HIS BOOKS?

So, within a couple minutes of that revelation, I went and hammered out the first chapter of Footnotes, just to get my thoughts down. I had this vision of Ben Solo’s literal footnotes being like the Death Star - this is the superweapon that’s going to take down the First Order. But instead of killing millions all at once, the power of Ben and Rey working together can bring millions of minds
together, making them want to communicate rather than fight.

And thus begat Footnotes. My little piece of optimism that, if IX became a design-by-committee disaster, I’d at least have this under my belt. And as I wrote it, all sorts of fun things became canon in the process. You can even look at my notes in a couple of the chapters as the World Between Worlds happened in Rebels, and I started freaking out because I had already planned to use an almost-identical-in-both-description-and-function place for Ben and Rey to connect and the Mother to exist as some sort of abstract horror (eerily similar to what Sheev did in Rebels), and now not only did it canonically exist, it has a name.

MORE BELOW

Chapter End Notes

CONTINUED FROM ABOVE

Of course, halfway through writing this, I started thinking of the larger writing challenge - I ended up using Leia a lot in this fic, both because she and Kylo/Ben desperately needed resolution (Leia needed to be able to see her son through his heroic actions and not just his mistakes- she needs to accept that her father was Anakin/Vader, much as her son is Kylo/Ben), and because I chose to have the Mother as my main villain. I really wanted to play with the contrast of motherhood and family, how, even though she was present for so much of Ben’s life, the Mother was this toxic, manipulative thing that just wanted to reconstruct him and use him in resurrecting her Son, and even though she was absent for so much of Ben’s life, Leia was the one who always loved him, flaws and all, and didn’t lose hope until her darkest moment in TLJ. I think seeing Rey on the Falcon was really what made her believe that her son wasn’t lost, and when I wrote the scene of her seeing Rey with the Alderaani braids in her hair, that basically sealed the deal. Also, I’m pretty sure that the original story structure for the sequel trilogy was that TFA was supposed to be Finn and Han’s story, TLJ was supposed to be Rey and Luke’s story, and IX was supposed to be Leia and Ben’s story. Sadly, we know that won’t be the case for IX, and we know IX will feature unused footage, but there’s only so much you can do there.

Like I said a few paragraphs ago up there, I wrote most of these endnotes back in early 2018, when I thought this thing would be wrapped up well before any announcements about what we now know to be The Rise of Skywalker. If we get the Bad End that my aforementioned aggressive pessimism anticipates, rest assured I will be writing some sort of fix-it fic starring our boy Sheev. I am KICKING myself for not thinking about using him more explicitly in this, but in a way, I dealt with an aspect of him with the Mother and him as a part of the whole Skywalker family tragedy, so at least there’s that.

I’m going to use this space to once again apologize for this whole thing taking so long. If you’ve read the notes all along, you know by now that I’m a public school teacher at a more-than-troubled high school, and obviously that has greatly impacted what I’ve been able to do with this fic. Thank you so much to those of you who have followed me and this story through eight bomb threats, a shooting threat, an endometriosis
diagnosis, and no less than five student/teacher deaths - it truly has been a uniquely weird and horrible last couple of years, and writing this and the response I’ve gotten from it has really helped me more than any of you could ever know.

Again, thank you all so much, and MTFBWY!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!